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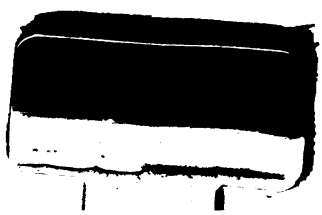
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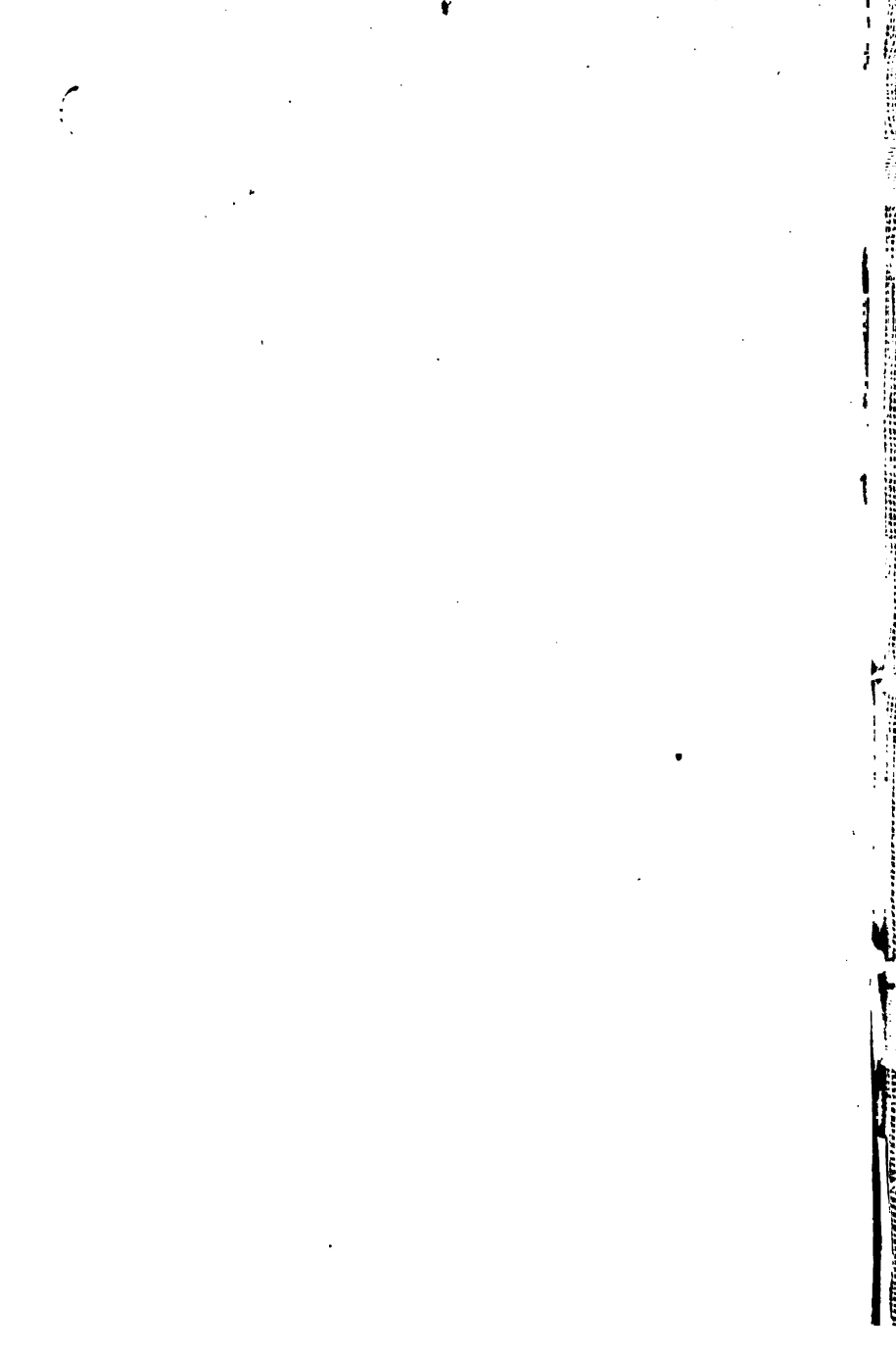


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THE GOOD-MORNING KISS.

Frontispiece.

THIS AND THAT

A TALE OF TWO TINIES

BY

MRS. MOLESWORTH

AUTHOR OF 'CARROTS,' 'CUCKOO CLOCK,' ETC.

ILLUSTRATED BY HUGH THOMSON

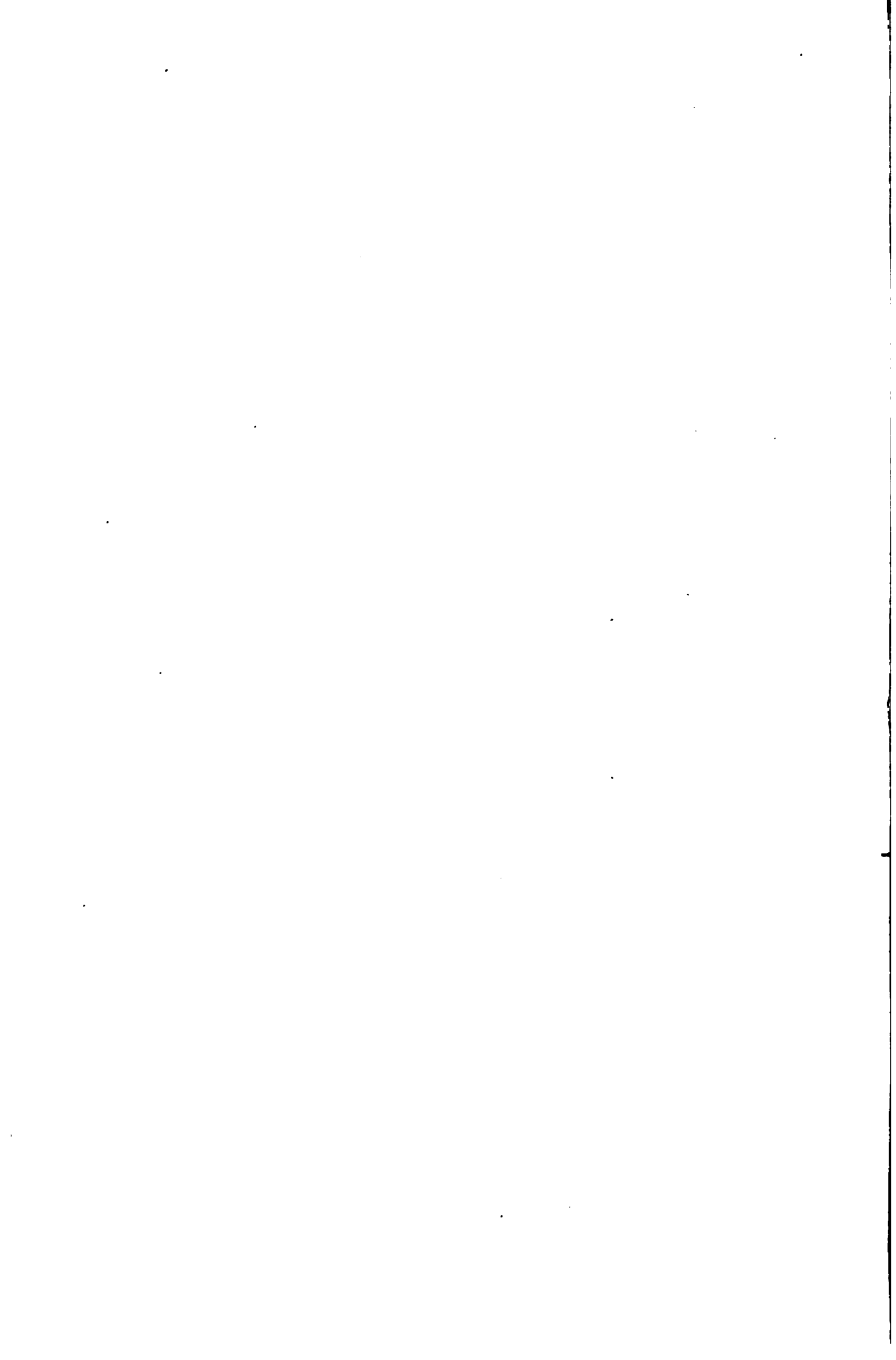
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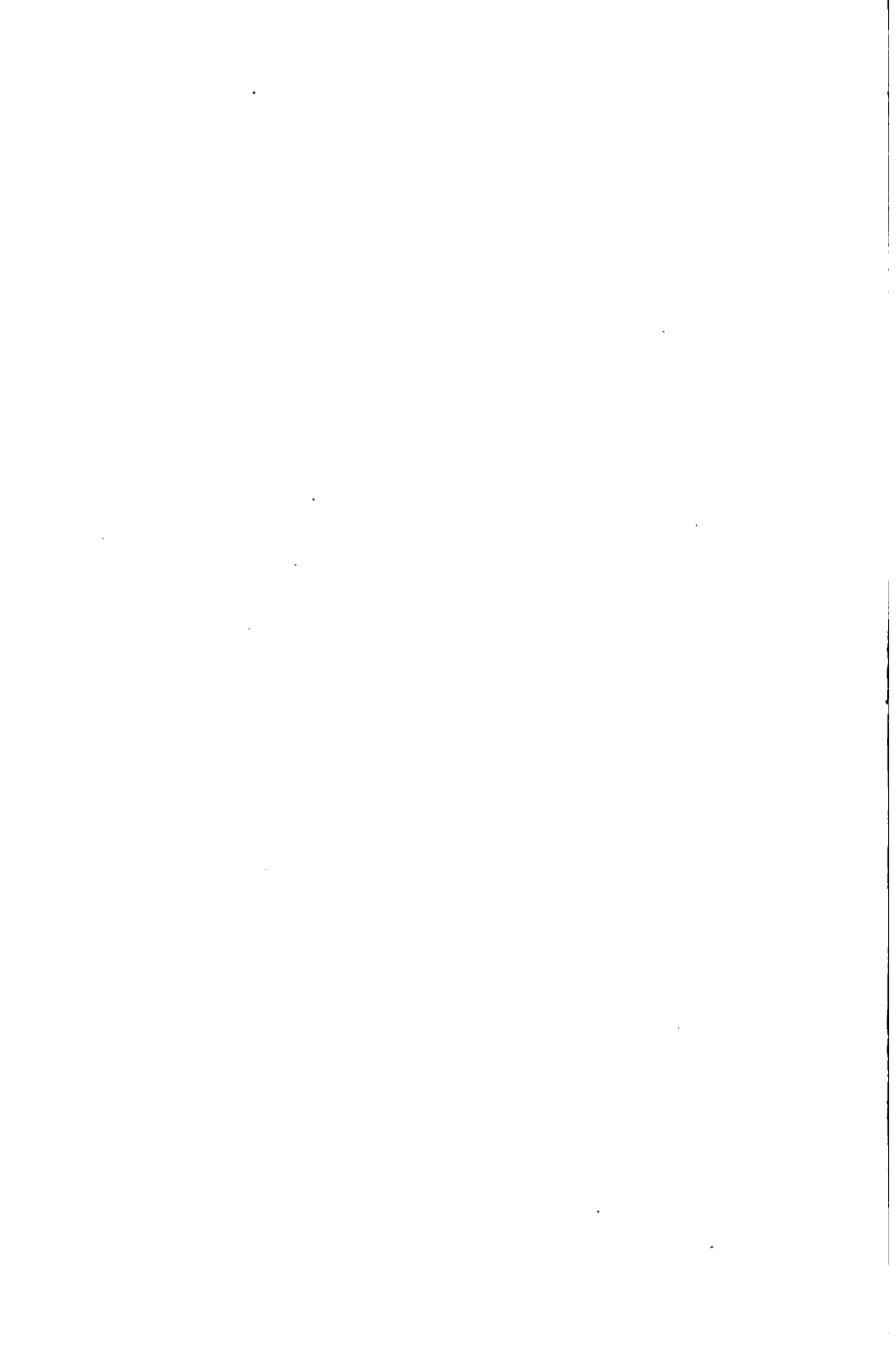
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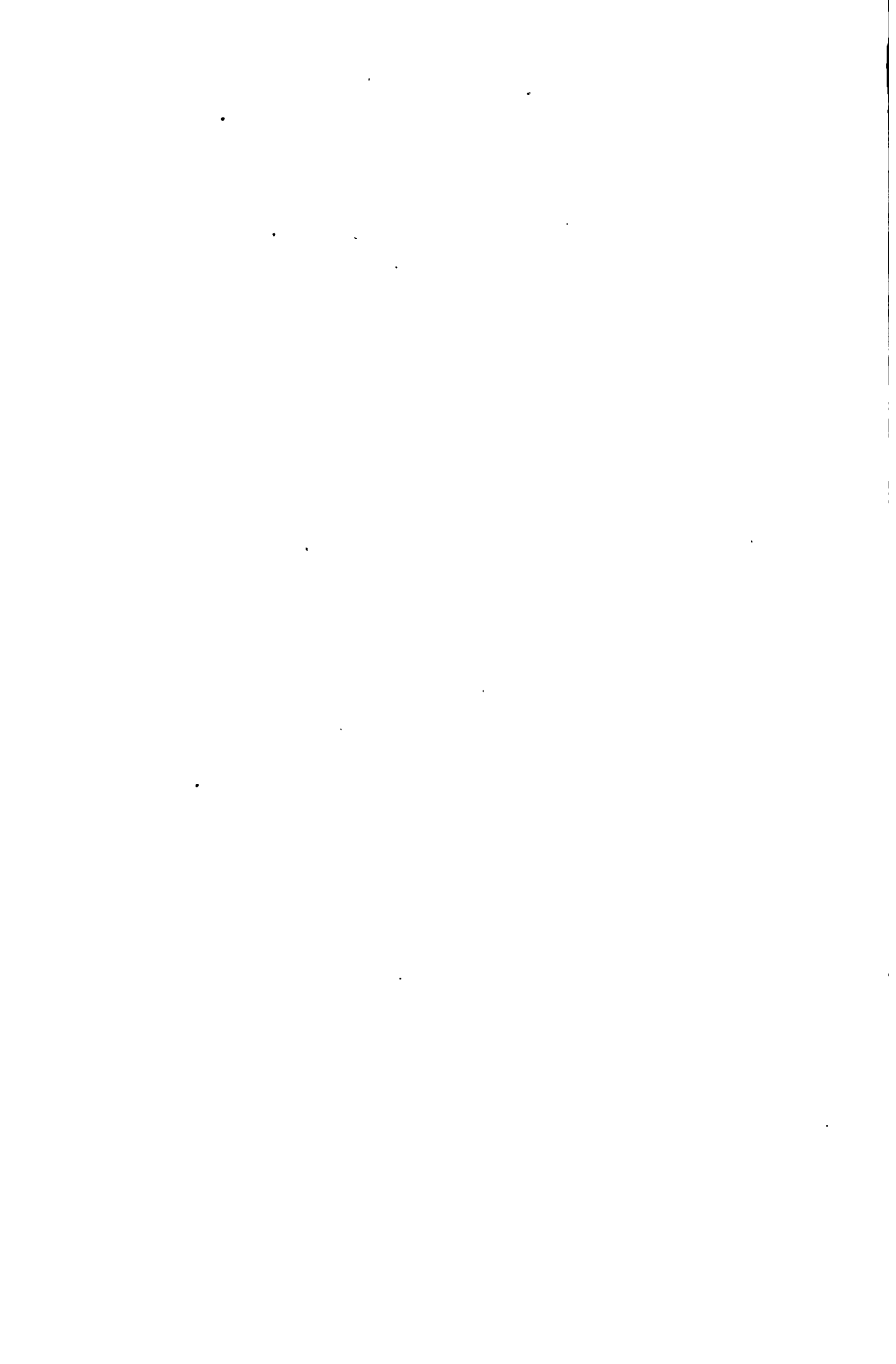
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THIS AND THAT
A TALE OF TWO TINIES

CHAPTER I

DOWN IN THE DRAWING-ROOM

For our world is our own world,
And nobody knows it as we do.—ANON.

‘WHAT *are* those two children saying?’ asked Auntie Winifred.

Auntie Winifred had only just come to Evergreens, and she had never before seen her little nephew and niece, whose names were Sandford and Cecilia, so of course she had to find out everything about them. Sandford was six and Cecilia was five, and though they talked plainly and distinctly on the whole, they had words and ways of their own of speaking which required explaining to a stranger,

especially if they were not talking *to* the stranger but to each other.

That was what they were doing just now, when Auntie Win turned to their mamma to ask the meaning of something she had heard them say. She and their mamma were sitting at one end of the drawing-room, at tea, and the two children, who always came downstairs very nicely dressed, to stay with mamma for an hour or so after they had had tea in the nursery, were playing with their toys at the other end of the room. They had downstairs' toys, as they called them, which were kept in one of mamma's pretty cupboards, on purpose for playing with in the drawing-room. These were the children's best and newest toys, and they were generally very careful with them; but if, as will happen *sometimes*, even when children are very careful, any of them got badly broken so that they could not be well mended, they were sent upstairs to the nursery to be played with as second-best or even third-best.

And though the children thought a great deal of their beautiful downstairs' toys, I am not sure but that, in the very bottom of their hearts, they loved some of the old half-broken ones most of all. That is the way with many children, and I think it is a

very nice way. It shows that little people have often faithful as well as loving hearts, and that they feel that old friends deserve to be cared for and kindly treated even when they are no longer pretty or even useful. And living friends as well as toys must come to be like that when they grow really old. We all must, if we live to be old, and it will make old age for ourselves much sweeter and happier if we can feel that when we were young and strong and merry, we were gentle and loving to the old and tired ones of that time.

Still, to tell you the truth, there were *some* very aged toys in the nursery that really seemed asking to be peacefully thrown away. There was a doll—no, I am afraid I cannot honestly call the poor thing a doll; it was just the last remains of what had once been a doll—which, as Nurse said, was now ugly enough to ‘frighten the French,’ and I suppose Nurse thought the French are not very easily frightened.

Cecilia had had this dolly since she was two, and she had slept in the little girl’s arms till only a short time ago, when mamma said she really must not be taken with them on a visit they were going to pay. For there was nothing left of her but half a leg, and two *quarter* arms, and the *back* of her head, still

covered with short flaxen curls. Face she had none, but Cecilia used to wrap her in a handkerchief and pretend she had a very bad cold and must be covered up from the air. And even now—though this was a secret—Miss Dolly—that-had-been was still reposing on a certain shelf, where she was not likely to be found by any one but the children themselves, in company with the head and body of an old horse of Sandford's, a china pig without any legs, and a few other aged treasures, which you will hear more about soon.

But I am forgetting that you will be wanting to hear the reason of Auntie Win's question and the answer to it.

'What *are* the children saying?' she repeated, for mamma did not at once reply. She was listening.

'No, That. This doesn't like a 'ouse builded that way. It's far too high, and it'll tumble down and hort the poor ladies and gemplemen. That, you mustn't not do it that way. This likes it all along ways, low down.'

'Then, This, you're very silly,' was the reply. 'It's no fun all along the ground. If it's high up, us can purtend there's a fire or a' earthquake and shout for the people to come out quick. And if some of them tumble down and get hort, they can be took

to the hospillan. See, This, I can make a hospillan over here to be all ready.'

There was a little silence. Then came Cecilia's voice again.

'I don't mind having a hospillan. But, That, you must let This help to builden it.'

'All right, This,' and then the children left off speaking for a minute or two.

Auntie Win stared at her sister. Her sister was the children's mamma.

'I never heard such a mixture of——'

Mamma began to laugh.

'Of pronouns, you mean, I suppose,' she interrupted. 'Yes, I should have explained. We are so used to it that we don't notice. But to strangers it must sound very funny. And now that the children are getting older and beginning to say "I" and "you," it sounds still funnier, no doubt. You don't understand, Winnie—how could you? "This" and "That" are their pet names for each other. And indeed we all use them. Even the servants often speak of "Master That" and "Miss This."'

'How *very* queer!' said Auntie Win. 'How did it ever come about?'

'It was natural enough,' said mamma. 'It was

Sandford who began it. You see, he called her "Sis," or meant to do so, but he had a lisp and could not say "S" at the beginning of a word; so it got into "This." And then, as *his* name began with an "S" too, it got into "Than," and one day their father was laughing at them and called them "This" and "That," and we all took it up.'

'Yes,' said Auntie Win, 'I quite see. But it is a funny idea all the same.'

Then she got up and crossed the room to where the children were playing.

'How is the hospital getting on?' she asked gravely. 'I hope you haven't had a fire or an earthquake before it was ready?'

That looked up in her face without speaking, and when This saw his look, she shut up her little mouth quite tight and did not speak either. She generally copied whatever That did, so by rights I think they should have been called 'That and This,' not 'This and That,' only it does not sound so well. This was very fond of talking, and she liked Auntie Win's face, so that she really had to keep her mouth very tight shut not to answer.

But she would never have thought of doing anything different from her brother.

The truth was, that for all her looking so grave, Sandford was not quite sure if their aunt was laughing at them or not. And he did not at all like being laughed at. Luckily Auntie Win was one of those people who are very quick at finding out, without being told, what other people are thinking. And she was most of all quick at finding out what children think. So she still looked grave and asked again about the hospital and the expected fire or earthquake, which made That feel that she understood about playing, and that pretended things should not be laughed at, or treated, while you *are* playing at them, as if they were not real.

For, of course, that would take away all the sense of pretending or "making up" play.

This time Auntie Win got an answer.

'The hospillan's all ready essept the roof,' said That, quite as gravely as his aunt. 'P'raps you'd like to put it on for us, while This and me make a smooth road for the poor burnt peoples to be carried along. None of the bricks is long enough for the roof, but p'raps you can find something.'

Auntie Win moved a little way across the floor to where the hospital was waiting to be finished. But for her, it would most likely never have been finished

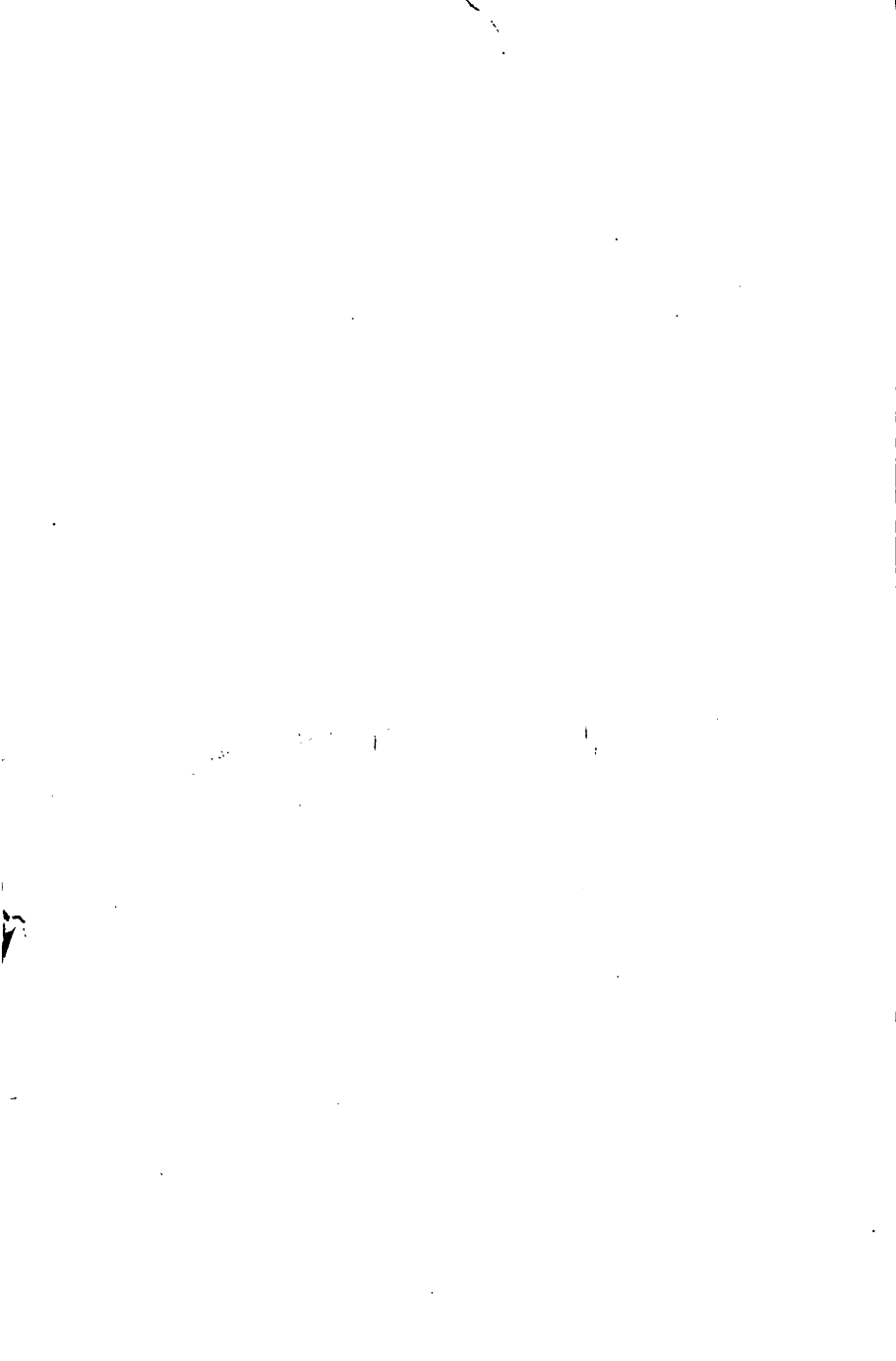
at all, and the earthquake of Nurse's knocking at the door to take Master Sandford and Miss Cecilia to bed, and all the houses being tumbled down and put to *their* bed in the big brick box would have happened before That had discovered a roof for it! As it was, however, things turned out better. Auntie looked at the hospital with her head a little on one side, which was a way of hers, and made That say to This afterwards that he thought she was rather like 'a very kind bird.' Then she put her hand in her pocket and drew out a little green leather case, from which she took a card—one of her own 'ladies' cards,' as the children called them—it had 'Mrs. Rochfort' printed on it, for that was Auntie Win's 'long name.' No, she took out *two* cards and laid them very neatly on the top bricks of the hospital, edging them round with a row of very tiny ones, to keep them steady, and placing a longer one upright in the middle as a chimney.

This stood close beside, watching her aunt with her mouth open in great admiration, and gradually That, who had at first appeared too busy working at the house to pay attention to the hospital, edged round too, and knelt at auntie's other side.

'You're a *spelendid* builder,' he burst out at last.



AUNTIE LOOKED AT THE HOSPITAL.—p. 8.



‘Yes,’ This agreed. ‘I never sawed such a’—with a great effort—‘spull-endid builder. Thattie, don’t you think muzzy would give us some of her ladies’ cards to keep in our brick box for woofs?’

‘I dunno,’ said That. ‘We can ask her.’

‘Well,’ said auntie, ‘to begin with, I’ll leave you these two of mine. But plain cards would do quite as well, or better. Calling-cards are too thin and fine to be much good.’

‘Calling-cards,’ repeated the children, adding, with a little pity for auntie’s not knowing better; ‘oh, you mean *ladies*’ cards. Yes, it would be nice to have *razer* thicker ones.’

‘Ladies’ fings are always fine and thin,’ observed This,—‘like ladies’ bread-and-butter. I do love ladies’ bread-and-butter,’ with a sigh.

Auntie smiled—quite a nice smile, not at all a laughing-at-you smile.

‘Well,’ said she again, ‘when you and Thattie come to stay with me you shall have ladies’ bread-and-butter. I am glad to know of something you like, and you must tell me more things to have for you.’

The children’s faces grew rosy. Going to stay with this new auntie! It was a wonderful idea.

They had never been to stay with any one, except once for a week with a grandmamma. And they did not like it much, for it was in London, and there were other people staying there, and grandmamma had parties and was very busy, and their room was at the top of the house, up "lotses and lotses" of stairs. But that was a *long* time ago. Cecilia could scarcely remember it, except for her brother telling her about it. It was more than a whole year ago, he said.

Auntie Winifred looked at the two faces; she was not quite sure what the rosiness meant.

'Wouldn't you like to come and stay with me?' she said.

This put out her hand and stroked auntie's feather 'pussy' that she wore round her neck, and looked at That.

'Where's your house?' he asked. 'Is it in streets?'

Auntie shook her head.

'No,' she answered. 'It's in a garden, and at the back of the garden there's a wall, and in the wall there's a door. And when you open the door there's a hill—a real high, big hill, all covered with short grass, and wee flowers here and there that you have to look closely to see: white eyebright and scarlet

pimpernel, besides yellow crow's-foot, and in some places heather, that you see more quickly than the tiny low-growing ones.'

'Yes,' said This, 'more stickin' out ones. But I'd like the littlest ones best—they'd be nice for dollies' nosegays. Tell us more please, auntie.'

'More about the hill,' said That. 'Does it go *awfly* high up, nearly to the sky? Has you ever been to the very top, auntie?'

'Oh dear, yes, often and often,' was auntie's answer. 'But I'm afraid you don't seem any nearer the sky when you do get there, even though it is a good bit of a climb,' and auntie gave a very little sigh, though she smiled too.

'That's a pity,' said That. 'When I'm a man I mean to climb up the very awfliest high mountings there are in the world, and then I'd *have* to get near the sky. Jack, in "Jack and the Beanstalk," got right through, you know—right through to the other side of the blue, and into the Giant's Castle.'

'Oh,' said auntie, '*that's* what you want to get up to the sky for, is it? But I don't think there are any giants' castles up in the skies now.'

'Aren't there?' said That. 'Well, I don't mind. There are other things I want to find out about that

are there, for we can see them. The moon and the stars. Not the sun—it'd be too awfly hot.'

'I want to see the angels,' said This, in a very low, grave voice.

Auntie patted her hand.

'That is a very nice "want,"' she replied. 'I should like to see the angels too, but I don't think climbing up hills would help us to do so.'

This opened her blue eyes very wide and gazed at auntie in disappointment.

'*Wouldn't it?*' she said slowly. 'I thought they'd be sure to be up there, if we could get high enough.'

'I've told you you couldn't get high enough—ever so often—not up to *heaven*,' said That, in a very superior tone. 'But sometimes angels come down here, don't they, auntie? I told you that, too, Thissie, but you forget so. Thissie hasn't a very good memory,' he added, turning to his aunt.

'I *didn't* forget,' said his sister; 'and I knowed it as well as you do, That, 'cos it's in the Bibell. But there's never any angels comes to see *us*, so I don't fiuk it's much good espectin' them.'

'They may be there though we don't see them,' said auntie softly, but just then mamma called from her end of the room to know if auntie wasn't

coming to speak to her a little more, as the time would so soon pass. Auntie had to drive back to the station in an hour or so; she was staying for two days with some friends near, so this wasn't a proper visit to Evergreens, you see.

The children went on with their play a little longer; there was time for one fire, not a *very* bad one—only two dollies got hurt, and they soon got better in the hospital—before Nurse came to fetch This and That. And then they had a grand idea. There was a big, over all earthquake, in which *nobody* was hurt, but all the houses, the hospital too, came tumbling down with a great bang. The bang was really caused by That's throwing the lid of the brick box down, and it did beautifully for a finish up. Then Nurse helped them to put away the bricks neatly as usual, and on the top of the box the two cards that auntie had given them for a roof. They were so thin and flat that they did not prevent the lid sliding on quite easily, and then, as This said, they would know where to find them the next time they played at building.

Cecilia was a very neat and careful little girl.

Then they both ran across the room to say good-night to mamma and auntie—to auntie, indeed, it was 'good-bye' as well as good-night.

‘Good-bye, darlings,’ she said as she kissed them, ‘and some day you will come to see auntie and her hill.’

‘I’d like to climb the hill,’ said That, which was not very polite, I’m afraid. At least, it would have been *more* polite if he had put auntie before her hill. But she did not seem to mind.

‘Well,’ she said, ‘I hope you will, before very long.’

‘And This will gaze the little tiny flowers while you and Thattie climb up to the top, won’t she?’ said the little girl, who still sometimes spoke of herself by her name, as all very young children do, before they learn the use of ‘I’ and ‘me.’

‘Yes, darling, you shall,’ said auntie.

Mamma turned to her with a smile.

‘My dear Winnie,’ she said, ‘you don’t know what you have brought upon poor me! It will be “Do tell us about auntie’s house and the hill behind it,” from morning to night now.’

‘No, no, it won’t,’ said auntie. ‘This and That would not like to tease poor mamma, would you, dears? I’ll tell you what—you must make a game of auntie’s hill, and think of stories about it, just as you do about the houses you build, and the fires, and

earthquakes, and hospital. Only up on my hill everything is pretty and nice—there are no earthquakes.’

‘Aren’t there no ogres or giants?’ asked That, his eyes sparkling. ‘We like giants and ogres.’

‘Ah well, tastes differ. If you *like* those gentlemen, have a few, by all means. I don’t mind. Only I hope you will remember some of the stories you make up, so as to tell them to me when you come to see the real hill. Nurse will help you to remember some of them, I daresay?’

And auntie looked at Nurse, for she had noticed that her face was bright and pleasant, seeming as if she understood little people’s ways and fancies.

Thissie caught hold of Nurse’s hand.

‘Oh yes,’ she said, ‘Nursie makes beautiful stories her own self, sometimes. Does you know any about hills, Nurse? It must be one just like auntie’s.’

Nurse got rather red.

‘Perhaps I can remember some,’ she said; ‘for when I was a little girl I once lived at a very hilly place.’

‘And was the hills very high, *very* high?’ asked That eagerly.

‘And wif lotses of very tiny little flowers among the grass?’ added This.

Nurse nodded her head.

‘Yes, I think so,’ she said; ‘and sometimes—some parts of the year—there were berries—bilberries or cloudberrries, I think they called them—growing down quite on the ground; we used to think it great fun looking for them and gathering them.’

‘Is there berries on *your* hill, auntie?’ asked the children eagerly.

‘Yes; I should have told you so,’ she said. ‘I see Nurse knows all about hills, so I shall expect you to have some lovely stories to tell me when you come.’

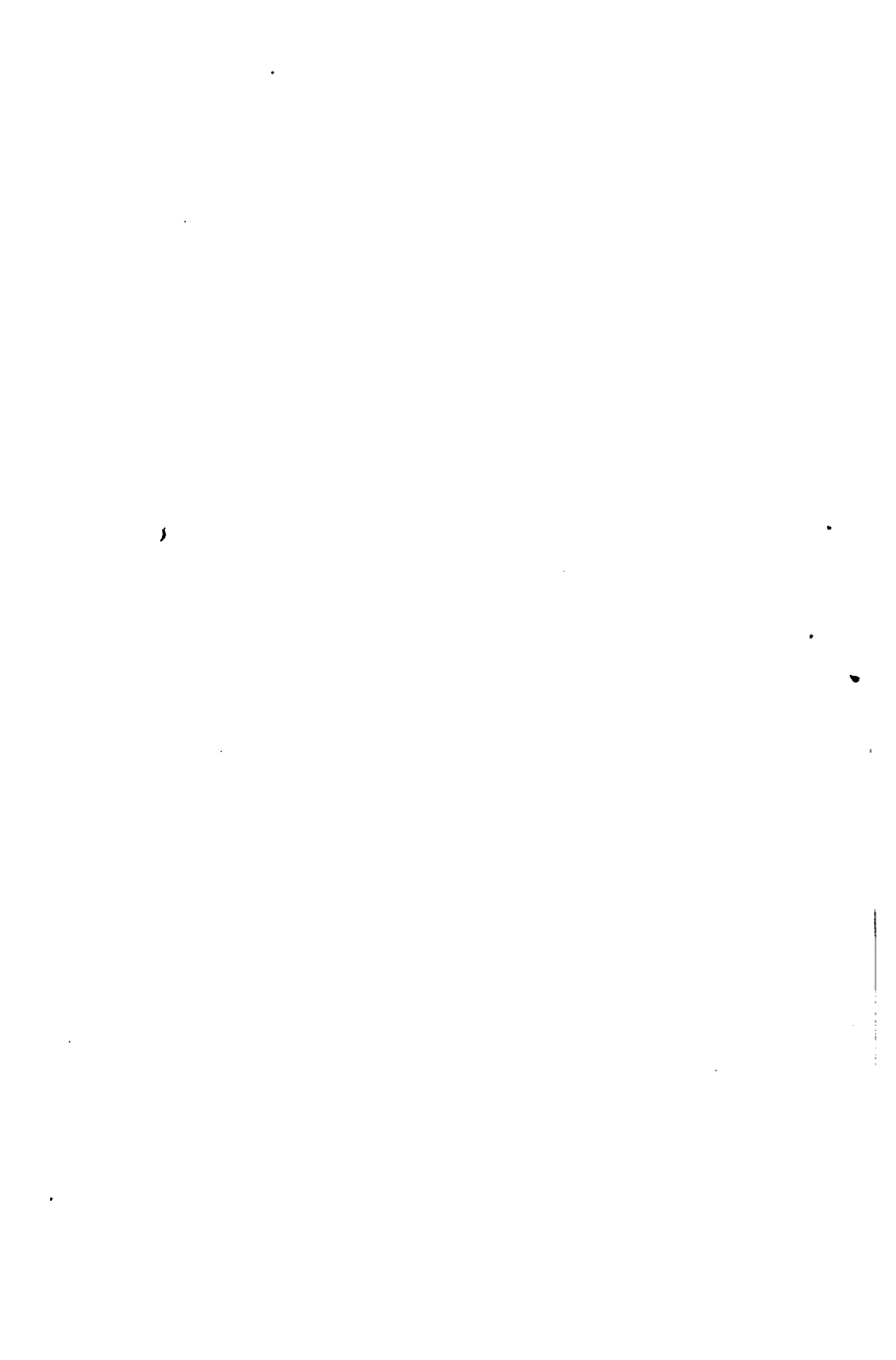
‘But, dears, you really must run off to bed,’ said mamma. ‘It is getting quite late. Another kiss to auntie. That’s right. Mummy will peep in and kiss you when you are in bed—asleep perhaps.’

They trotted off; one on each side of Nurse, chattering all the way upstairs. They had such a lot of things to think about to-night—the house-building that auntie had helped them with; auntie herself; and best of all, the thought of going to see her some day, and of the wonderful hill they were to make stories about already!

It was a good thing Nurse did understand her little people’s ways and fancies, otherwise her patience would have been rather tried while she



ONE ON EACH SIDE OF NURSE.—p. 16.



was undressing them. But at last she had to remind them that it was not a good thing to talk *too* much at bedtime ; it might prevent their getting to sleep.

‘And I’m in a hurry to get to sleep to-night,’ said Thattie. ‘I want to have nice dreams about auntie’s hill—to help me to make stories and games about it.’

CHAPTER II

UP IN THE NURSERY

Jack and Jill went up the hill.

Nursery Rhyme.

I DO not know if That's dreams were very interesting that night after all. I should think not, as he never said anything about them. Very likely he slept so soundly that he never dreamt at all.

But when he and This found themselves very wide awake, up and dressed, and sitting at breakfast with Nurse, they soon began talking again of their new auntie and all she had told them.

'I wonder how soon we shall go to stay with her and climb up the 'nill,' said That. 'How soon do you think, Nurse?'

'I can't say, I'm sure, Master That,' Nurse replied. 'No doubt your mamma will tell us in plenty of time, when it is all settled about.'

‘Yes,’ said This; ‘for there’ll be lotses of packing to do, won’t there, Nursie?’

And This gave a sigh and looked quite careworn about it. She was rather an anxious-minded little girl, and seemed to think all the business of the world was on her tiny shoulders.

‘I do hope mummy won’t forget to tell us a good while before,’ she said. ‘It’ll take ever so long to pack the dollies’ things, and then there’s all ours too.’

‘Now, Miss Thissie,’ said Nurse, ‘don’t you begin to worry your little head about it. It’ll take away all the pleasure of looking forward. I daresay it won’t be for a good while yet, that there will be anything settled. It’s not likely you would go till the fine warm weather comes, and we are only in March now.’

She spoke quite kindly but a *very* little sharply, which was sometimes a good thing for Cecilia. For though she was really a very sweet and gentle child, she was rather given to ‘worrying’ when there was no need whatever to do so, and this tired her and made her peevish and fretful.

Then Nurse, turning to Sandford, went on speaking.

‘And there’s something I want to say to you, Master That,’ she said. ‘Your mamma’s told me to correct you for dropping your “H’s,” and——’

‘Dropping *what?*’ asked Thattie, sitting bolt upright on his chair and looking very puzzled. He had never heard of ‘dropping H’s’ before.

‘Yes—don’t you understand? You’d say you were “’ot,” when you should say “hot,” and that’s not the way a young gentleman should speak. I never noticed it so much as yesterday when your auntie, Mrs. Rochfort, was here, and then I did feel ashamed to hear you speak of the “’nill.” Why, that’s worse than dropping the “H,”’ Nurse went on, as she thought it over. ‘It’s putting another letter in its place.’

‘Poor letter H,’ said Thissie with a twinkle in her eyes—Thissie had plenty of fun in her too. But Thattie looked grave. You will remember that he couldn’t bear being laughed at, and he was ready to feel very hurt indeed if his dear Thissie laughed at him.

Nurse was too much in earnest to notice That’s looks.

‘Now, listen, Master Sandford,’ she said, ‘say after me

‘Jack and Jill went up the hill,
To fetch a pail of water.’

‘Jack fell down, and broke his crown,
And Jill came tumbling after,’

said That, very solemnly.

‘No, no,’ said Nurse, shaking her head. ‘Say “Jack and Jill went up the hill.”’

‘“Jack and Jill went up the ’nill,”’ said That. ‘You did say “after me,” Nurse, and the pail of water comes next after what you said.’

‘Never mind. It’s the *first* line I want you to say, but not the ’*nill*—the h-*hill*. Now try again: “Jack and Jill went up the h-*hill*.”’

‘“Jack and Jill went up the—h-h-*he-ill*,”’ said That, with a great effort.

‘Yes, that’s better. But you needn’t make quite such a breathing about it. It’s quite easy——’

‘Say it like me, Thattie,’ said This. ‘Kite kietly—“Jack and Jill went up ze hill.”’

‘Not “ze,”’ That corrected. ‘*The*, Thissie,’ and rather comforted by having something to teach his sister, he set to work again, and this time Jack and Jill got up the hill without any mistakes.

‘That’s right,’ said Nurse; ‘nothing like “Try, try, try again” for little gentlemen and ladies who want to succeed at last—and for big people too,’ she added with a smile.

Then Cecilia said grace. She and Sandford said it turn about, and to-day was her turn. And while Nurse was clearing away the breakfast things, they

went to their toy cupboard, for once a week they had a spring cleaning of it and the dolls' house, and This was very particular—'very pertickler *indeed*,' she used to say—never to miss the right morning for doing it on.

That sighed a little as he set to work under his sister's orders. First of all, everything had to be cleared out, and That had to carry the carpets of the dolls' house, and the furry animals, and what This called 'stuffy things' that needed brushing or beating, to a tiny little balcony, on to which opened one window of the nursery. There he set them down, and then Thissie came and 'stood over him,' to see that the beating and brushing were properly done. Sometimes they pretended that That was the gardener or 'odd man' and Thissie the lady of the house, and sometimes they were both servants, preparing for 'the family's' return home. That liked this last plan best, for then he did not need to touch his pretence cap and keep saying, 'Yes, mum,' or 'No, mum,' which was another thing Cecilia was very strict about, but spoke to her as he had often heard old Larkins at the Lodge speak to Mrs. Larkins. 'Old woman' or 'Missus,' or 'Sally there' were Larkins's usual names for his wife, or *even* 'Old girl.'

Thattie had *once* ventured to call This 'Old girl,' but he never did it again, for the look she gave him was too frightening. You wouldn't have believed how Cecilia *could* look if she was really shocked.

In his heart, I am afraid, Sandford disliked the spring-cleaning days very much, but there was no getting out of them. Sometimes he used to ask This what she would do when he was a big boy and went away to school, but he never got a very clear answer from her as to this. And once or twice she began to cry when he spoke of it, so, as he was really a very kind brother, he said no more. For after all, he would have spring-cleaned every day instead of once a week rather than make his dear Thissie cry.

Still Fridays—Friday was the day—often made him rather cross, though he did not like to hurt This by putting it all down to the cleanings.

This morning he sighed a good deal in his journeys across the nursery, so that Cecilia at last felt obliged to ask him what was the matter.

'What is you sighin' so about, Thattie?' she said.

That replied that he wasn't 'sighin', only gruntin' a little.'

'What for?' asked This, who liked to get an answer.

‘Somethin’ I was thinkin’ about,’ said That.

This left off work for a moment and looked at her brother rather severely.

‘I b’lieve I know what it is, That,’ she said. ‘It’s not thinkin’s at all. It’s that you’re getting too fat.’

That was very much offended.

‘It *is* thinkin’s,’ he said indignantly, ‘and I’ll tell you what the thinkin’s is. It’s that I don’t want to go to that auntie’s where the ’nill is.’

‘*That!* What are you saying?’ said This reproachfully. ‘The *’nill.*’

‘Well, the h-hill,’ said That. ‘What does it matter? You knowed what I meant.’

‘But saying “’nill” isn’t talking like a gempelman. Nurse said so.’

‘Well, I’ve said “he-ill” now,’ said That. ‘But I don’t want to go there. I don’t think I want to go climbing and bothering, and I daresay she’d laugh at us.’

This turned away and went on collecting the kitchen pots and pans which needed to be rubbed up.

‘It’s just laziness,’ she said, ‘and it *is* that you’re getting too fat. It’d be very good for you to have a lot of climbing up and down.’

But seeing that That’s face was looking very

gloomy—that there was indeed rather a ‘black-dog-on-his-shoulders’ expression (I fancy all children know what that means) coming over him—her tender heart felt sorry, and she tried to think of something else to talk about which would send the cross feeling away.

And while she is hunting in her mind for the something else, let me say how much I wish that children would more often try to help each other in this way. Even good, kind children are often quite content if they can feel that they themselves have not been cross, or lost their temper, which, of course, is all right as far as it goes. But if it could go a little further! If they would help *others* not to be cross! It would make child-world a much happier place than it often is, and once they had got the habit of it, it would last on and grow as they grow, till they are men and women, and make the big people’s world a better and happier place too.

After a moment, This looked up brightly.

‘Thattie,’ she said, ‘I’ve got a plan’—she called it ‘pull-an’—‘in my head, for when we go to that new auntie’s. It’s about our dear “oldies”’—and Cecilia nodded her head mysteriously towards the opposite corner of the room, where there was another cup-

board. 'You see, Thattie, I'm always afraid, dedfully afraid, of them getting throwed away some time.'

That forgot all about the little black dog, he was so interested in what This was saying. His eyes grew very round and bright.

'Yes,' he replied; 'specially when we are away, and Nurse is away, and these other servints are cleaning. Nurse knows about the oldies, but the servints calls them rubbidge. And even mummy said one time that they must be throwed away, or they'd get those little flies that eat up things—what is it they're called?'

'Moffs,' said This, very gravely. 'Yes, I know her said that. It made me very unhappy, That, and I've thoughtened about it lotses.'

'But what can we do?' said That. 'You wouldn't like to throw them in the pond, Thissie? That would be nearly as bad as throwing them away, for most likely if they were throwed away they'd be burnt.'

Cecilia gave a shudder of horror.

'You see,' Sandford went on, 'they're too old to send to the children's hospillan. I wouldn't mind that so much.'

'I would,' said This. 'The children wouldn't be kind to them—they'd call them nugly, I'm sure. I

wouldn't mind some of the *new* old toys going to the hospillan, for the children would like them, I daresay.'

'Well, anyway, the oldies aren't going there,' said That. 'But what's your plan, Thissie?'

Cecilia looked well round her to be sure that no one was within hearing, but Nurse had not come upstairs again, and all was quite safe.

'It's this,' she said, speaking in a whisper, even though she and Sandford were quite close. 'Ap-
posin' we took them all wif us to auntie's house, and then we'd look for a nice, cosy place on the hill—among those dear little flowers and soft grass—and put them there as if they was going to bed, you know—we could tuck them in wif grass and leaves like the babies in the wood. And I daresay the birds would be kind and sing to them sometimes, when they saw how old and tired they were. And they might stay there for *always*, you see, Thattie. Nobody'd know, 'cept us, and it'd be nice to be sure they'd never be throwed away or burnt or anything defful like that.'

Thissie stopped, almost out of breath.

That was thinking deeply.

'Yes,' he said at last. 'I think it's a very good plan, if *they'd* like it.'

'We must ask them,' said Thissie in a solemn whisper. 'Not to-day, I don't fink, for it's nearly time to go downstairs, and p'raps we shan't be alone again here all day. And nobody mustn't see us going to the oldies' cupboard, Thattie—not Nurse or mummy or nobody. They'd say, "What is you children doin' in that cupboard?"—for the cupboard in the opposite corner was not supposed to be the children's. It held brushes and dust-pans and such things, and This and That had had some difficulty to get leave to keep their aged friends there for a time. 'I don't fink,' Cecilia went on, 'that I ever felt as if I didn't *kite* love mummy, 'cept that day that she said Bluebell was really too hijeous to keep. Fancy, Thattie, her calling Bluebell "hijeous."'

'Yes,' said That, 'it was a shame. It isn't *her* fault that she's got no eyes or face. And it isn't any of their faults that they're old and nugly. Racer was a splendid horse when he had legs—nobody can run without legs, and I'm sure *he* didn't want them to be all broken off the day the rocking-horse went over him.'

'I've never *really* liked the rocking-horse since then,' said Cecilia.

'I wouldn't mind so much if we might make a

—oh, I don't know how to say it—hang medals round his neck and things like they do to brave soldiers that get wounded and their legs cut off,' said Sandford.

'Only,' This objected, 'you see Racer didn't get wounded in a battle. Falling under the rocking-horse isn't like fighting.'

'No,' said That, 'but Racer was very brave. He didn't call out or anything, and *all* his legs were brokened.'

'Oh,' said This, 'I know he was very good, and so are all the oldies. That's why I can't bear for them to be thrown away. Well, then, we'll fix to ask them if they'd like to be took to the hill and settled in a nice warm grass place where they'd never be thrown away. And if they say they would, we'll pull-an it, won't we? There'll be a lot to settle.'

'All the packin' them up, and they'll make a big parcel, and then the plannin' for nobody to see them,' said That, looking very grave and important. 'We'll both have to think lots. I don't see that we'll have any time to make stories about the—h-hill.'

'It'd do for a story itself—the taking the oldies there,' said This. 'But, That, there's Nurse coming, and we must go downstairs and oh dear we haven't neely finished.'

They both looked rather in despair at the toys strewed about, and the cupboard not yet dusted. For they had been so busy talking that Cecilia had stood with her duster in her hand, like a very idle little housemaid indeed, and Sandford had forgotten all about the rugs and carpets waiting to be shaken and brushed on the balcony.

Nurse, however, was very kind. She promised to leave the contents of the cupboard just as they were till the children came upstairs again, and if in her own mind she thought that it would be a good chance of giving the cupboard itself a better cleaning than it got from Thissie, she did not say so, as she knew what an eager little housemaid Miss Cecilia was.

Papa and mamma had nearly finished breakfast when This and That came in.

‘How now, old woman?’ said papa, as Cecilia ran up to him for her good-morning kiss. ‘You are very lazy to-day? Poor father thought he would have to start for the station without seeing his little girl at all. What have you been about?’

‘Is you going away again to-day?’ said This. ‘Poor papa—I wish you hadn’t such a lot of bizi-nesses to do.’

‘It isn’t very hard business this time,’ said her

father. 'I'm only going to see a new horse I want to buy. But all the same, I must catch my train. Here's the top of my egg, my sweet. You see, father kept it for you, though you were so late.'

This set to work on the top of the egg with great satisfaction. Papa kept it for her every morning. That generally sat beside mamma at the breakfast table, and his particular tit-bit was a small piece of toast with marmalade. This did not care for marmalade.

'What made you both so late?' asked mamma in her turn; Cecilia had not yet answered papa's question.

'We was talkin' such a lot,' said That, when the first bite of toast and marmalade had disappeared, 'that we forgotten.'

'It's the day for cleaning the toy cupboard,' said Cecilia, 'and we mustn't stay down very long, 'cos all the toys is scattled about the floor.'

'Oh, that reminds me,' began mamma, 'I must look over the old——'

This's heart beat so fast that she felt as if she could scarcely breathe, and even That grew pale, though he was much less easily startled than his sister. But by great good luck, papa, though he was

much too polite to interrupt any one, had not heard mamma begin to speak, and just then he turned again to This.

‘What were you talking about?’ he asked.

Papa was rather fond of asking questions of the children, particularly of Cecilia, for her answers often seemed to amuse him very much. And This did not mind being laughed at half as much as That—especially not by papa!

This looked very grave. She did not want to talk of her plan for the oldies, and yet that was really the thing they had been so interested about in their talking.

‘I’m afraid,’ she said at last, ‘Thissie’s *afraid*, papa, that she can’t tell you.’

Papa wasn’t going to let her off so easily. She was a great pet of his, and she sometimes put on baby ways with him, though with most people she liked to be counted quite a big girl. And though she was such a pet of his, papa was rather fond of teasing. I think papas often are.

‘Dear me,’ he said, looking very solemn, ‘you don’t mean to say it’s a secret? Do you and old That over there have secrets from poor papa and mamma?’

Poor This’s face grew longer and longer, and the

corners of her mouth began to go down. Was papa only teasing or was he in earnest? She could not tell, but she felt very unhappy.

'It is quite a good secret, papa dear,' she said, her little face quivering. 'It's a *kind* secret—a pull-an of Thattie's and mine.'

And mamma, catching sight of the troubled face from her end of the table, saw that the tears were not very far off.

'Arthur, Arthur,' she exclaimed—papa's name was Arthur—'don't tease poor Thissie. Of course, darling, I am sure your secret is no harm. Thattie knows about it, doesn't he?' and she turned to Sandford.

Thattie was nearly crying himself. But he choked it down manfully.

'Yes, mamma,' he said. 'We've made it togevver.'

'Then you shall certainly keep it,' said mamma. 'I give you leave, and so does papa. Arthur,' she went on, 'do you hear? This and That have got our leave to have their secret, and nobody's to tease them about it. Does Nurse know about it, children? Would you like me to say anything to her?'

'No, thank you, mummy,' exclaimed both, looking radiant. And Thissie left her place to run round and kiss mamma and call her a 'dear, dear.' 'We don't

need to tell Nurse—at least I don't *finck* so; and it wouldn't be such a nice secret if her knowed.'

'Only,' said cautious That, 'if her was vexed—no, not vexed, for it's a *very* good secret—but if her found out a little bit, then, Thissie, we might say mummy had gave us leave.'

'All right,' said mamma. 'I'll speak to Nurse if you ask me to do so.'

And two very happy and contented little faces thanked her with a smile.

CHAPTER III

CONSULTING THE OLDIES

We've been such friends together, night and day,
That to let them take you, would take half of us away.

Old Doll Song.

'*ISN'T* it a good thing,' said Cecilia, as she made her way, one foot at a time, upstairs,— 'isn't it spull-endid, Thattie, to have got leave for the secret, and still to have it, you know? For we don't want Nursie to hear about it, do we?'

'Of course not,' Sandford replied. It was really much more This's good management than his that had got them leave for their secret, but he was very careful always to keep himself 'eldest'—he did not like when mamma told him he was only 'elder,' as there were but two of them, for it did not sound so important. 'Of course not. It'd scarcely be a secret then. You don't understand, Thissie. It's only that if Nurse saw us at the oldies' cupboard and

began saying we wasn't to, *then* we could say mummy had gave us leave.'

'Yes,' said This, very meekly, 'I do understand. But don't you think, Thattie, it'd be better not to leave them there any more? We could find some comfable place for them to live in till we pack them to take to the hill, and then it'd be far easier to get them out than if they was still in the cupboard in the nursery.'

'P'raps,' said That. He would not answer at once, as he liked to think things over, and This never interrupted him when he was thinking things over.

'The first thing to do,' he said, when they were up in the nursery, 'is to ask the oldies what *they* think.'

'Yes?' said This, looking very interested. 'How will you do it, Thattie?'

'We'll write them a letter, and let them think about it all night. I've read stories about toys getting like fairies in the night—p'raps the oldies are like that, and can talk and walk about when we're asleep. Any way, we'll write them the letter and slip it into the cupboard, and ask them to answer it. Let's write it now before Miss Wren comes.'

Miss Wren was their daily governess.

'Oh, but,' Cecilia exclaimed dolefully, as her glance fell on the toys on the floor, 'you forget, Thattie. We *must* finish the cleaning and putting away all these.'

And she sat down on the floor, looking rather disheartened.

Nurse just then came in from the next room.

'Come now,' Miss Thissie, she said good-naturedly; 'what are you looking so unhappy about? I'd have put away the toys for you and welcome, but you wanted me to leave them out as they were. It won't take you and Master That five minutes to put them all back.'

'But there's the shelves to clean,' sighed Cecilia, 'and the carpets and rugs must be shook out and brushed.'

She looked at her brother. He was standing with his hands in his pockets, not looking very energetic. To tell the truth, he was planning the letter to the oldies, which his head was full of.

'Oh, well,' said Nurse, 'as for that, I've cleaned the cupboard out nicely, and—I've shaken and brushed the dollies' carpets and all. I did not mean to tell you, for fear you would not like it. But it's just as well I did it, for now we'll have the toys back in no time.'

‘Oh, thank you, thank you, dear Nursie,’ said This. And even Sandford condescended to murmur ‘Thank you, Nurse.’ ‘You won’t need me, then, Thissie,’ he added, ‘p’raps I’ll have time to—you know what, before Miss Wren comes,’ and he stalked off to the other end of the room where stood the side-table at which lessons took place, and got out his slate and a sheet of ruled paper, on which the letter itself was to be written after he had made a first draft of it on the slate.

This did not mind. Nurse was a much better helper in putting back the toys neatly, especially the contents of the doll house, than Thattie, who had ideas of his own—such as turning the dining-room into the drawing-room, or the kitchen into the day-nursery, which did not at all suit Thissie’s neat little mind.

So by the time Miss Wren’s pleasant face appeared at the door, all was in order again, and Cecilia was able to jump up and run to meet her with a bright smile and an easy mind.

Sandford was not feeling so pleased, however, for he was vexed at not having been able to compose his letter before lessons began, in consequence of which lessons went rather badly with him this morning.

‘What is the matter with you, my dear boy?’

asked Miss Wren more than once, while Cecilia looked at him anxiously. She was never happy if her dear Thattie was in trouble. 'You are not giving your attention this morning.'

'Nuffin's the matter,' said he, rather sulkily, as he went on writing in his copy-book.

But matters grew worse when the writing lesson was over and Miss Wren told him to get out his slate for sums. The slate was all covered, and That looked as if he were on the point of tears at the idea of having to wash it clean.

Thisie was really a kind little girl. She was not only almost always gentle and good-tempered *herself*, but she did her best to help those about her to be so also. And there are not many children who think of this, or who understand how a word or even a look may smooth away unhappy feelings and *prevent* others from losing their tempers or getting still more out of sorts. For *preventing* wrong things is as much a duty—almost perhaps a higher and more beautiful one, because it so often is not noticed or admired—as doing good ones, and it needs a loving heart to be on the 'lookout' for this sort of help to others.

'Miss Wren, pull-ease,' she said in her coaxingest voice, '*would* you mind—might Thattie do his sums

this morning on the old slate, without a' edge to it? There's somesing wrote on his proper slate—somesing we're making up togevver.'

'Very well,' said Miss Wren, whose quick eyes had noticed that Sandford's face brightened at what his sister said,—'very well. I don't mind for once, That. But another time, remember, dear, to use the old slate for plays or games, and keep the good one clean and ready for lessons.'

'Thank you,' said Sandford, as he went to the book cupboard to fetch the old slate. And his tone was much pleasanter now.

After this lessons went better, and Miss Wren was able to put a 'good,' and even one or two 'very goods,' in the book of marks which was shown to mamma every afternoon.

And when their governess had left, and This and That went out to the garden to play till their dinner-time, Nurse let them take the slate with them, on condition that, before they sat down and began to write or talk quietly, they would first take a good run all round, 'to freshen them up a little.'

It was only early spring as yet—quite early spring—about the middle of March. But where Sandford and Cecilia lived the winters were never

very severe, and the spring often came quickly. To-day it was really mild, and the sunshine, though rather 'thin,' was clear and bright.

'Isn't it nice that it's getting to be summer soon?' said This, as the two children sauntered down the paths, on their way to the 'long lawn,' which the short grass and good stretch of ground without any flower-beds in the way, made their favourite racing place. 'See, Thattie, there's lots of little greenies coming out on the trees and bushes, and soon the old wall at the end will be kite all over with those bluey flowers. I don't 'amember the name—Nursie said it was the same as some tiny fishes.'

'Pennywinkles,' said That. 'It's quite easy to remember if you think of pennies and winkin''

'Let's start off running now,' said This, 'and see which gets first to the old wall, if you let me start in front, like you often do.'

'All right,' said That, and off they set. The first race was gained by him, which pleased him so much that he gave Cecilia a longer start the next time, and, thanks to this, *she* was first in the second. Then they were both so nearly equal that they couldn't quite settle which was the winner. And then—and then—I'm afraid I don't remember how things went.

But there was no quarrelling ; all was quite happy, and when they had run as much as would have pleased Nurse, they settled themselves down for a little in their favourite arbour, where That had already deposited the slate.

‘Now,’ he began, ‘listen, Thissie, to my letter.’

‘My dear Oldies——’

‘No,’ This interrupted, ‘not “My,” Thattie, “*Our*.” They’s as much mine as yourn.’

‘Wubbish,’ said That—there were some ‘R’ words which he still wobbled over, though he was ‘six past’—‘wubbish. Nobody begins letters like that “*Our* dear”—you can hear how silly it is.’

Thissie had been a very good little girl that morning. Not only patient and gentle—it was never very difficult for her to be patient and gentle—but bright and cheerful, which *was* more difficult. She had gone out of her way to please her brother and to keep him from getting into trouble, and now it really did seem rather hard that he should be so sharp and contemptuous to her. Not that she used that long word ; she would not even have understood what it meant ; she only said to herself that Thattie *was* ‘razer unkind’ and turned away her little head for him not to see the tears, in case

she could not wink them away, however hard she tried.

But That's heart was tender too, above all for This. So he gave her a little pull.

'I didn't mean to say wubbish,' he said, rather gruffly. 'I only meant it wasn't like big people write, to put "Our." But I will, if you want it, Thissie?'

Cecilia's face brightened.

'Zank you, Thattie,' she said; 'but I've thoughtened of somesing better. 'Apposin' we put just 'Dear Oldies,' and not mine or ourn or any of them words.'

'To be sure,' replied Thattie. 'That's the best way of all,' and he set to work on his slate again.

While he is busy composing the letter, I think it would be a good time to give you a list of the oldies, as this little story has to do with them.

First of all, I think, I must name Bluebell, though, as I told you before, she had neither face nor eyes, only a leg and a half, and very stumpy bits of arms. But then she *had* been a beauty, and as her head was always tied up in a handkerchief, you could *fancy* that her face was still there, and lovely. Then came Racer, or what remained of him. He made up for Bluebell in one way, for his head and mane and even

body were still quite complete and considered very handsome, though, as he had no legs at all, his name no longer suited him very well. He and Bluebell were great friends, and the children counted them the chief persons of the party.

Then there was a goat that once used to bleat, but all the voice had gone, as well as his horns and ears and nose and one leg. He had still a rather clever expression about him, however, and always seemed to look down on a fat china pig who had no legs at all, though his troubles had not made him grow any thinner. And there were two small black dolls, with still gleaming eyes and teeth, who, *between* them, had a couple of legs and arms.

These were all the old friends who represented living beings. But the children's affection did not stop at these. There was a wheelbarrow—now, alas! only a queerly-shaped box with one handle to it; a bucket for seaside business, with no bottom; the stick of one spade and the digging part of another, and two baskets without handles. All of these seemed to This and That *almost* as much friends as the dolls and the animals. For there were stories and 'rememberings' about them all—some had been birthday and Christmas presents, some had been

bought with their own carefully saved-up pennies. I daresay there were more "oldies," but I am afraid I cannot recollect any others. For it is getting to be a good while since This and That were little, and I do not see either of them as often as I should like.

It took some time and patience to finish the letter—that is to say, to have it neatly copied out on the ruled paper, folded, and addressed, and ready to be slipped into the corner cupboard late that evening.

I will copy it out for you to see.

'DEAR OLDIES,' it began, 'we has been unhapy about you, for fear you mite be throwed away or brunt. We will take you to auntie's hill and highd you in a nice corner, 'mong the flours, if you would like to so. If you woodent like, then you must tear up this letter and frow it out of the cubberd. . But if you wood like, then you must fold it up again neetly, and us will know.—Your luvving

'THIS AND THAT.'

'Yes,' said Cecilia, 'it's very nice. I wonder if they'll want to come. I'm sure *I* would.'

'I'm sure they will,' said Sandford.

This was before he had copied out the letter. He had read it off the slate to Thissie. In 'true reality'

both the children knew that the poor oldies, even if they had still been young and new, could not read or unfold the letter. The whole was one of their 'pretend' plays, you see, and of course the only pleasure of such plays *is* to pretend you are in earnest.

Then they took another good run, and went off to the side of the house where there were most trees and shrubs, to see if there were any birds' nests getting ready yet. And they stepped very softly, as Thissie was always very afraid of startling the little feathered creatures, so tenderly preparing cosy homes for the wee fledglings. But though they heard some tweeting and chirping among the branches, they did not see any building going on.

'P'raps it's too soon yet,' said Thattie. 'Papa says lotses has to fly a long, long way to get back here. Did you know, Thissie? Some of them comes right over the sea.'

'In boats?' asked Thissie.

'Of course not,' That replied in his lordly tone. 'You *are* silly sometimes, This. What'd be the good of having wings if they went in boats?'

'Well, then, I think God might have gave *us* wings too,' said Thissie.

'This,' replied That, very solemnly, 'I don't think



TO SEE IF THERE WERE ANY BIRDS' NESTS GETTING READY.—p. 46.

it's right to say that. God must know what's best for us to have. 'Asides——' he stopped and hesitated.

'Go on,' said Thissie.

'I'm not *sure*,' he said, lowering his voice, 'but I f-*think* we'll have wings some day—when we are kite good, you know, Thissie, and go to live in the sky.'

Cecilia did not at once answer. She sat quite still—for by this time they were taking another little rest—her blue eyes gazing up into the sky, where here and there behind the busy white clouds, scudding along in the wind, patches of lovely colour, very like those pretty eyes, were to be seen. And something in her face made That silent too. At last—

'Thissie likes to think of that,' she said softly. 'I hope our wings will be white ones,' she went on, 'and razer big—much bigger than birdses' ones.'

'Of course,' said That. 'They'll be very big, but quite fluffy and light too, so as we'll never get tired. Papa says birds do get tired sometimes, comin' all over the sea.'

'What do they go for, then?' asked Cecilia. 'It's very silly. They might stay here quite comfably.'

'It's for the warm, papa says,' Thattie explained. 'You see, birds can't have fires in the winter like we have. And there's no doors or windows you can shut

up in their nests. It's all open. And then there's very little to eat. The ground's so hard they can't peck at it for worms, and—I don't know for sure—but p'raps the worms goes dead in the winter.'

'Poor little birds,' said Thissie, 'I am glad they go away to warm countries. But,' for a sudden thought struck her, 'they *doesn't* all go away, Thattie. There's lotses stays. And we put out crumbs for them. Why don't they *all* go?' And now she was quite as ready to call the birds 'silly' for staying, as she had been a minute before for 'going.'

That considered.

'I don't know,' he replied. 'I 'ppose there's different kinds. Some has thicker feathers p'raps, and some doesn't mind being cold so much. Any way it's a good thing some stays; it'd be dreffly dull without any.'

'Yes,' This agreed. 'It'd be *dreffful* wifout robins. Robins couldn't go away, I don't think, 'cos they knows how much we love them. Thattie, be sure next winter never to let us forget to put out crumbs for them. I'll try to 'amember,' with a little sigh; 'but next winter's such a long while off, and you're older than me.'

'All right,' said That. He was always pleased when his sister treated him as older.

‘We’d better go in now,’ he said. ‘Nurse doesn’t like us to go in just the very last tick of a minute, for then there’s scarcely no time to wash our hands before dinner.’

He was not usually so anxious to be punctual, and Thissie guessed that the reason was certainly *partly* that he was in a hurry to copy-out the letter, though after all he only managed to get it begun.

It rained that afternoon—that is to say, it was very showery, making the ground too wet for a walk.

‘April must be in a hurry to come this year,’ said Nurse. It was too soon for showers, before poor March had got time to ‘go out like a lamb.’ The children had never heard the old saying about March, and it amused them very much.

‘Tell us some more funny things like that,’ said the two, for by this time Thattie had got his letter folded and addressed, and it was only about three o’clock, an hour and a half till tea! ‘Tell us a *story*,’ added Thissie. ‘You always say you keep stories for rainy days, and *this* is a rainy day.’

‘I think we might call Nurse’s stories “umberella stories,”’ said That, ‘’cos she only takes them out when it rains,’ and both Nurse and This thought his speech was very witty.

‘And,’ added Cecilia, ‘they’re like umberellas in another way. They keep off being dull from us—like umberellas keep off getting wet. And rain is a sort of being dull, isn’t it? It *comes* from dull things—clouds and dark.’

That, in his turn, thought this speech very clever.

‘Now, Nursie,’ he said, ‘you really must tell us a story.’

‘Yes,’ added This, ‘*do*, dear Nursie.’

‘You little coaxers,’ said Nurse, but there was yielding in her tone. ‘I am not clever like ladies—like your mamma,’ Nurse went on, ‘like your auntie, I daresay. I can’t *make* stories—I can only try to remember something I have been told myself, or something about when I was a little girl. And I don’t fancy my stories are very amusing.’

‘Yes, they are,’ said That. ‘You forget, Nurse. You have told us several, so we know. There was that one about the butter and the butter-cups—the little boy who didn’t understand. It made us laugh lots.’

Nurse smiled herself at the recollection.

‘I don’t think I know any other as funny as that one,’ she said.

‘Never mind—it needn’t be funny if it’s just

int——’ Thissie hesitated, ‘intristing,’ she got out at last.

‘But it must be about a hill,’ said That. ‘You’re forgetting, Thissie; all our stories are to be about hills, till we go to auntie. She said we were to have lots to tell her. We’re to make some ourselves, p’raps, but if Nurse tells us any, *we* could tell them again to auntie, you see. That would do just as well, I should think; don’t you think so, too, Nurse?’

But Nurse had scarcely heard his question. Her mind had been busily considering what story she could find to tell. Suddenly, she looked up with a smile.

‘Well, now, Master That,’ she exclaimed. ‘It *is* odd you should want a story about a hill, for the one I’ve just remembered *is* about a hill. It’s a little adventure that happened to—to two children I used to know long ago. Perhaps it will amuse you. I hope it will.’

‘What’s it called?’ asked This and That.

Nurse considered again for a moment.

‘It’s called,’ she said, ‘The——

CHAPTER IV

—THE BEACON ON THE HILL' (NURSE'S STORY)

Yet, courage, brothers! we trust the wave,
With God above us, our guiding chart;
So, whether to harbour or ocean-grave,
Be it still with a cheery heart!

BAYARD TAYLOR.

'WAIT just one minute, Nurse,' said That, seeing that Nurse's lips were opening to begin. 'Tell us first about the children—were they boys or girls, and are they still children, or are they grewed up big people?'

'One was a boy and one was a girl,' Nurse replied; 'and it was a good while ago—nearly twenty years ago.'

'So they must both be big now—quite big,' said That.

Nurse did not answer at once.

'Nursie,' he repeated, 'don't you hear? They're *quite* big now, aren't they?'

‘One is,’ she said. ‘The little girl is quite big—grown-up—able to take care of children as little as she was then.’

‘And the other—the boy? Isn’t he big too?’ That persisted.

Nurse’s face was turned away for a moment.

‘I don’t know, dear,’ she said, with a little catch in her voice. ‘We can’t tell—not exactly—how things are where that dear little boy is now. He did not stay here long enough to grow big in our way. But he was a very dear boy—a very brave and loving boy, as the story will show you. So we may be sure he is happy now——’

The children understood.

‘Yes,’ Thissie said after a little silence, ‘it’s only kite *really* good peoples that’s kite *really* happy.’

‘Happy-to-stay happy,’ added That. ‘I’ve sometimes been very happy when I wasn’t good—when I was really rather naughty—playin’ in the brook once when I’d promised mummy I wouldn’t. But it soon wented away—the being happy. And after, it was awffle—when I was in bed and it got dark. Oh, my! It *was* awffle. I had to get up and go and tell mummy.’

And That gave a little wriggle; it wasn’t pleasant

even to remember, though it had happened *such* a long time ago, nearly a year ago!

Thissie patted his hand consolingly.

‘Never mind, now, Thattie dear,’ she said. ‘I dessay you’ll *never* be kite as naughty as that again. Now pull-ease, Nurse, will you begin?’

‘Yes, please, do,’ said That.

Nurse gave a tiny cough—just to clear her throat, or *perhaps* she was feeling a very little bit shy about telling a story! But she was really very kind.

‘There was once,’ she said, ‘a village, a good way off in the country. It was even a good way from a railway station. It wasn’t a very pretty village though, for there were two or three big, big houses, with high chimneys, out of which for many hours of the day smoke came pouring. I don’t think you, Master That and Miss This, have ever seen houses and chimneys like those, for there aren’t any in this part of the country. They were ironworks—places where iron is melted down, and for this, very, very, tremendously big hot fires—furnaces, they are called—are needed.’

‘Like Gibbs’s fire at the smithy?’ asked That.

‘Yes, only much, much bigger of course,’ said Nurse.

‘Oh,’ exclaimed Thattie, ‘I did see awffly big fires

once. It was in the railway—comin' from Northsea with papa and mummy. Thissie was too little to remember, and she was asleep, I think. Don't you remember, Nurse, or was it before you comed? It was getting dark at night, and they flamed and they flamed like'—he looked about him for something to compare the fires with, and his eyes fell on a picture book lying on the side-table—'like Mount Vuz——'

'I know,' said Thissie's clear little voice, 'and I b'lieve I do 'amember that time in the railway. It was when old Nurse was wif us. And that burning hill is called Mount Vuvius.'

She looked round in triumph.

'Join the two bits together, and then you'll have got it right,' said Nurse. For Nurse was fond of reading and had a good memory for what she read. 'Mount Vesuvius,' she repeated, and both the children said it after her. 'But I must get on with my story, or it will be tea-time before you have heard it. You see it isn't only flames that come from those great furnaces, but smoke which rises up through the chimneys, and though they are so high, still it blackens the air, and even the trees and the grass in those places look dull and dirty—smoke-begrimed, they call it.

‘And in the village I am thinking of, it was rather extra bad, because it lay low—in a valley, so to say. On one side, or on two sides, you might say, there were high hills—one hill in particular, which was called West Peak, and on the very top point of that hill there was a mound of stones, and on the top of the mound a big wooden pole, firmly fixed among the stones, which was called the “Beacon.” It had been there, I can’t tell you how many years, and it could be seen from so far round that it was counted a sort of old friend in many a farmhouse and village besides the one I was telling you of. And up there where the Beacon was, there was a fine view—not only of the other hills and valleys between, and trees and fields and villages and churches dotted about, but of something much more wonderful, ’specially for those who’ve never seen it—a view of the sea.’

‘*I’ve* seen the sea,’ interrupted Sandford.

‘And so’ve I,’ echoed Cecilia.

Nurse nodded.

‘I know you have,’ she said ; ‘don’t you remember you were staying at the seaside when I first came to you? Getting on for two years now. But the boy and girl who lived in the Valley village had never seen the sea. Their cottage was at the end of the

village, and its windows looked towards the West Peak Hill, and ever since they were old enough to notice anything, the Beacon on the top was the first thing they looked at when the sun rose in the morning, and the last thing they said good-night to when he went to bed behind the hills in the evening. They got to think there was something wonderful about that beacon. Most children, it seems to me, have fancies of their own, though they forget them when they grow up to be men and women, and have other things to think of, 'specially if they have to work hard. For I'm thinking of poor children too, not only of little gentlemen and ladies, who have pretty stories about fairies to read, and pretty verses to learn, which might help on the fancies. But many a child you wouldn't think it of has fancies too. These children—we will call them Bob and Mattie—had, I know, though they had scarcely any story-books, and their mother was mostly too busy to tell them tales of any kind.

'But she was a good mother, and very understanding with children. And she was always kind about answering their questions.

"Why is that sticking-up pole on the top of the hill called a 'beacon'?" little Mattie asked one day,

when she was still quite a tot of a girl. "What does 'beacon' mean, mammy?"

"It's a word that means some kind of a mark or a signal, I take it," her mother answered. And then she was in for explaining what 'signal' meant! In the end Mattie and Bob too, for he was listening, got to understand pretty well. Their mother told them that *she* had been told by her grandfather, for the children's people had lived many, many years in that village,—long before the tall chimneys had come to spoil it,—that in his childhood there used now and then to be great fires lighted up there, in war time when a battle had been gained, or for some reason like that.

"Such big bonfires," said the mother, "that they could be seen flaming away by ships quite out at sea."

"Ships—ships on the sea," cried Bob. He was always a boy for the sea. And this notion of seeing it, she went on, 'took a great hold of Bob and Mattie. When their mother told them how clearly the great ocean could be seen from the Beacon, and how, sometimes in stormy weather, the waves would rise to such a height and the foam look like piles of snow, and how, in fine weather, the

water looked all blue and sparkling in the sun, they felt as if they could make pictures of it in their own minds, and from this time they were never tired of talking of it to each other. You can't call "sea," "land," Nurse smiled as she said this; 'otherwise I would say the sea became a sort of fairy-land to the two children. And as they grew bigger and thought more, the feelings and fancies about it grew too.

"If only we could see it," Mattie would sigh.

And sometimes Bob would grow a bit cross with her.

"If only you were a boy," he'd say, "a big strong boy like me, we could climb up the hill and see it for ourselves. It's not more'n four miles to the Beacon, father says, but a good stiff pull most of the way," and Bob straightened himself, as if he thought *he* could quite manage it.

"But you'd never go without me, Bob," Mattie said. "Promise me you won't, and I'll grow as fast as I can to be a big strong girl—there's girls nearly as strong as boys, mammy says."

'Bob promised; he was very good to his little sister. But as time went on, the idea of climbing the West Peak Hill took more and more hold on them

both. Somehow they never spoke of it except to each other; it would have been better if they had. And it wasn't that they meant to be deceiving or secret about it exactly. Children often get into trouble without at all meaning to be naughty. It was partly, I daresay, that they thought their father and mother might make fun of their thinking they could walk so far, and partly that they felt rather shy of speaking of their fancies—and partly, a good deal partly, I expect, that they were afraid of being stopped going altogether. Any way, they never did talk about the plan that was growing up in their minds except to each other, though Bob, who was rather a considering sort of boy, took care to ask all the questions he could about the way up to the Beacon, and how long it would take to get there and back, and just how much you could see when you got there.

'One thing he grew to be pretty sure of: it would be no good going—only trouble for nothing—if the weather wasn't clear. So for several months—it was late one autumn when they first began to think of it seriously—they waited and waited. For it was but seldom in the winter of course that there was a clear bright day, unless in a sharp frost, and even such

young children as they were had sense to know you couldn't start off to climb up a mountain in such weather as that—to say nothing of the short time of daylight there would be.

'But by degrees the days grew longer and the weather milder. March was over and April had begun; there were primroses peeping out in the lanes near about the Valley village, for the smoke of the tall chimneys had not yet got bad enough to frighten them away. And one day Bob said to Mattie, "I really think we might begin to plan about going up to the Beacon to see the sea."

"Oh, Bob!" exclaimed Mattie. She felt as if her breath was going away, and she couldn't say anything more.

"Saturday'd be the best day," Bob went on, "'cos it's a whole holiday to start with, and no lessons next day, and if we get rather tired we shan't need to get up so soon."

"Must we tell mammy?" asked Mattie in a sort of a whisper.

"If she asks us where we're going we can't tell a story," said Bob. "We'll have to tell her. But if she doesn't say nothing, I don't see as we need to say nothing either. We'll ask her to give us our dinner

to take with us, like she did sometimes last summer, 'cos we're going a good long walk. Like as not she'll say nothing, but p'raps if she did know us was going to climb to the Beacon, she'd be frightened when there's no need to be."

"Yes," said Mattie. She thought there was nobody so wise and sensible as Bob; still, deep down in her little heart I misdoubt me but that there was a kind of hope that mammy *would* ask where they were going. Somehow she felt as if it would be more 'comfortable-like' for mammy to know, though she did not say so to Bob. And the days went on till Saturday morning came, without any more being said, for when Mattie once or twice began to speak of the plan or to ask him something about it, he just told her to leave it all to him and not bother.

'Saturday was a very fine day. Nothing could be better, thought the children; the sky was very bright, and though there were a good many clouds at one side, they only made the blue look prettier. And everything seemed to help their plan. Soon after breakfast and when their father had gone out again to work, mother said to them—or to Bob, rather—

"What are you going to do with yourselves to-day,

children? I have to be very busy, though I try not to have big cleanings up of Saturdays, as it's your holiday and father home early. But this week I can't help it, with the kitchen having been white-washed. It's put me all out. Lucky it's a fine day, so as you two can be out a good bit."

"Oh yes," said Bob eagerly, "if you'd give us our dinner, mammy, I'd take Mattie a nice long walk and be out of your way till afternoon."

'Mother considered.

"You'd take good care of sister, wouldn't you?" she said. "Where'd you go?"

"Not so very far—we'd not get lost, for I'd keep home in sight," said Bob, quite meaning it; "but we've wanted a long while—all the winter—to go a reg'lar good walk, without you being frightened about us. And of course I'll take good care of Mattie—I always do, now don't I?"

'Mother could not say but what he did, and Bob's rather coaxing tone helped to persuade her, for Bob was a quiet, rather silent boy usually. So she smiled as she cut some slices of bread and butter and two or three of bacon, with a hunch of home-made cake for each child.

"You'll be getting thirsty too," she said. "I'll give

you a bottle of father's cold tea, with plenty of milk in it, and not much sugar." And this she did, packing it all up neatly in a little bag to be easier carried, and standing at the door to see the pair off.

"Children is children all the world over, I take it," she said to herself. "Most big folk would like a rest of a holiday, seeing they have their two miles there and two miles back from school every day,"—for there was no school in the village, only at Barkmoor—"but there—their bodies are light and their hearts light—bless 'em."

'The two children felt as happy and excited as could be once they were fairly started.

"And mother won't get worrying about us neither," said Bob, "so it's all right every way, d'ye see, Mattie? We'll have lots of time and no call to hurry. We can rest as much as we like going up, and coming down we'll not want to—coming down is only fun."

"Yes, of course; we could run all the way; and I don't believe we'll want to rest going up neither. I don't feel as if I *could* get tired to-day," said Mattie, jumping as she spoke. "And it's a good thing that mammy won't look for us back till late."

‘Still, for all she spoke so brightly and felt so happy, there was the feeling at the back of her heart of wishing that mother did know a little more—that Bob had told her exactly where they meant to go for their walk. And if, as he would have been sure to say, it was “all right” and no need to speak of the Beacon, then why not have talked it all over with her? Mattie did not say any of this just then to Bob. She did not want to spoil their pleasure by vexing him or having anything uncomfortable, but still, as I said, the disagreeable little prick was there.

‘They had a good bit to walk before any climbing began. But all this first part of the way was well known to them, and even when they had passed the last of the scattered cottages between their end of the village and the foot of the hill, and got over a stile into a sloping-up field which was really the start of West Peak, they were still walking where they had many a time been before. Mattie wanted to stop once or twice when she caught sight of some tiny early spring blossoms in the grass, but Bob would not let her.

“What’d be the good,” he said, “of carrying those stupid little flowers up to the Beacon? They’d be dead long before they got there,” which was quite

true. So Mattie thought in her own mind that she'd wait till they were on their way back and then gather a baby posy for mother, who loved all kinds of flowers—and the first tiny ones the best of all perhaps.

'After they had crossed a field or two, the climbing began—there was a sort of a track for some way—here and there it would go almost level for awhile, and here and there it was already steep. But they got on all right for a good bit, not noticing very sharply where they were going, as Bob had been told to keep to the track as long as he could and then steer for himself. "You can't go wrong," the big boy who told him this had said.

'But Bob knew nothing of climbing hills, and when, suddenly, the path came to an end, he was surprised and startled to find that the Beacon was no longer in sight, neither could he see much of the way down, up which they had come. They seemed somehow to have got on to some other hill—not the West Peak at all. He stood still, and Mattie's face grew rather long when he stared all round and said he couldn't make it out. Mattie was quickly frightened.

"Oh, Bobby," she exclaimed, "supposing us got lost!

Hadn't we better stay on this hill and eat our dinner and then go home? We could come again another day, and first you could ask Ned Stokes to tell you the way more pertickler. This is a very nice little hill, and we might stay here a bit after our dinner, so as we wouldn't get home too early."

"And give up all we've planned for so long," said Bob. "Not get to the Beacon, not see the sea! No, indeed. You may go home if you like, but *I* won't."

'And Mattie of course gave in, and begged Bob not to be vexed with her, and then to please her he agreed to stay where they were to eat their dinner, so as to be rested and refreshed before starting off again.

'They were in good spirits when they began climbing again. They could scarcely go wrong Ned Stokes had said if they kept mounting, and after a bit they were rewarded by the sight of the Beacon, though it looked farther off than they had expected. But they kept on bravely; it was not hot now, though they had felt it rather so the first part; the sun had gone in, and they were glad of it, poor children, not noticing how the clouds were growing and darkening, and a sudden breeze, which often goes before a storm, beginning to rise.

‘The last bit was really hard work—for there was a good stretch of slaty, shaly ground which Mattie’s little feet found very awkward—and Bob’s too for that matter, though he wouldn’t own to it. Once over this however, they found themselves on short thymy grass again, the Beacon near in view, and all their troubles—or so they hoped—at an end. It was not till they were close to it that a few big drops began to fall, and a great wave of mist to rise before them like a stretching-upwards curtain.

‘They hurried on however all the faster, and at last—at last—they stood on the top. But—I can’t really find words to tell you their disappointment—the mist, or clouds—were so close and thick on the farther off slope that *nothing* was to be seen—really nothing. Not one tiny glimpse of the ocean they had come so far to peer down at, and even while they stood there half hoping it might clear off again, things were growing worse. On their own side—the village side—the clouds were rolling up, as if some unkind spirit of the mountains had called them together just to spite the poor little couple.

“‘It’s maybe only a shower,” said Bob; “I’ve often heard father say there’s a shower up at the Beacon, when it’s quite fine down at home.”

‘ And Mattie said “ Maybe ” too, ‘ though her teeth were beginning to chatter with the cold, and her hands were all purpley-red, like in the middle of winter. But “ Oh, Bob,” she went on, with a choke in her voice, “ *won’t* we see the sea ? ”

‘ Bob did not answer at once. Then “ Of course we shall,” he said, “ if only it clears off a bit. We’re in for a shower, I’m afraid,” he went on in a big man tone, “ and no mistake. The first thing to do is to get shelter,” and he set to work to look about him for this.

‘ The Beacon stood on a pile of stones, or perhaps it’s more correct to say that loose stones were heaped round it. And here and there some of these had got loosened and rolled out, leaving little nooks and corners where they had been. The biggest of these was on the other side, and after tugging at the stones to make sure that none of them were likely to come tumbling down on their heads—for he was a sensible boy for his age—Bob squeezed Mattie into the hole so that she could be kept fairly dry, and managed to smuggle a part of himself in beside her, taking off his little coat to hold in front as a sort of umbrella.

‘ “ Oh, Bobby,” said Mattie, “ you’ll catch your death of cold.”

“Cold,” answered Bobby, “not a bit,” and he began to whistle—trying from time to time to cheer her up by saying it was “only a shower,” or he thought it was “clearing off a bit.” And Mattie, tired out, and fairly warm with Bob on one side and the rocks on the other, shut her eyes and fell fast asleep.

‘I don’t know how long she had slept—an hour or so perhaps ; to poor Bob, drenched to the skin on his outside side, I daresay it seemed much longer—when she was awakened by a voice in her ear.

“‘Mattie,” it said, “it’s no use waiting any longer. It’s raining as fast as ever, and it’s not going to clear, and it’ll be coming night before long, and if we stay here all night, you’ll never get over it. And—and”—choking—“I promised mother I’d take care of you, and I did mean to.”

“‘Oh, Bobby, dear Bobby,” Mattie sobbed, “what shall we do? How shall we ever get home all that long way and it pouring so?”

‘Bob was near crying himself, but he felt in his heart that he was to blame for this sad business, and that he must be a man and do all he could to cheer up poor Mattie.

“‘It’s downhill any way,” he said, “not like having to climb up. And you must have my coat on top of

you, Mattie. It'll not hurt me to get a wetting as it would you."

'He set to work to fasten his little coat on his sister as well as he could, she crying all the time, for she was stiff already with sleeping in a cramped position and half-stupid-like too. But when Bob kissed her and begged her to cheer up, she did her best, poor little thing, to stop crying, though the sobs still kept coming every moment or two. But oh, it was a dreary walk—I don't think if I—I mean if Mattie lives to ninety that she'll ever forget it! I don't know scarcely which was worst—the going down the steep slopes covered with the short grass which was so dreadfully slippery with the rain, or the shaly, slaty part, where, if you did fall, you'd be sure to hurt yourself pretty badly. And it was lucky for them that they got off with a slip or two and some scratches.

'At last—and a long at last it seemed—they got down to flat ground again, but it was still pouring, and by this time poor Mattie was too tired out and exhausted even to cry. Her face looked so blue and queer that Bob was frightened, and she seemed as if she could scarcely move her little legs. They went more and more slowly, as if she were going to stop altogether, and she did not speak a word. So at last

Bob picked her up in his arms—not very big ones, though strong and sturdy, and stumbled along with her as best he could. And it was like this that they arrived at home, where their mother was looking out for them in no little anxiety, the day having turned out so terribly wet—and growing dusk already, though it was not late really.

“Oh, children!” she began, “what *is* the matter? Has Mattie hurt herself?”

“Oh, mammy, mammy,” Bob exclaimed, “don’t be angry. No, no, Mattie’s only tired, not hurt,” and he put her down carefully near the nice bright fire, and then he could keep it back no longer, but burst into tears.

‘Mother couldn’t find it in her heart to scold. She just hugged them both, as she got off their wet clothes and set some milk to get nice and hot for them to drink. And when they were dry again and cheered up by the warmth and the kindness, bit by bit, they told the story of where they’d been, and how for a long time they had planned it and been unwilling to tell for fear it should be stopped.

“That was my fault,” said Bob; “Mattie wanted to tell.”

“Never mind that now,” said mother; “you’ll

know better another time. Father and me would have planned it with you if we'd known you wanted it so. You'll know now that it's always best for little folk to ask mother."

"Yes," said the two of them together.

'So after all no harm came of the great plan "of climbing up to see the sea."'

CHAPTER V

HOUSE-HUNTING

Come, come ! leave off play, and let us away
Till the morning appears in the skies.

Nurse's Song.—W. BLAKE.

NURSE stopped. This and That drew a deep breath.

‘Thank you *very* much. It’s a beeyoutiful story,’ they said. ‘But oh, Nursie,’ Thissie went on, ‘did poor Bob and Mattie never see the sea?’

Nurse turned her head away again as she had done once before—and the children caught the sound of a smothered sigh. But she smiled as she answered.

‘Oh dear, yes,’ she said. ‘Many and many a time. Mother told father all about it, and when the real fine weather came he took them up to the Beacon himself. Mother came too, and they had a sort of gypsy tea there, and saw the sea, beautiful. And that was only the first time. As they grew bigger they often went up there by themselves; they got to know

pretty well when there would be a good view, for it was always to see the sea they went. And sometimes it was smooth and clear like shiny blue glass, and sometimes rippling and dancing, and sometimes even dark and billowy, with white topped waves rolling in to break at the bottom of the cliffs, though that part they could not see from the Beacon. Oh dear, yes—see the sea they did, though now, her that was once little Mattie, and father and mother still living in the Valley village, can scarce bear the sight of it.'

'Why not?' asked This, but That touched her arm and whispered, 'Don't, Thissie.'

But Nurse had heard the question.

'Bob loved the sea more and more the older he grew,' she said quietly, 'and at last—they gave him leave to be a sailor. And he was very happy, for all it was a hard life, and getting on so well. But there came a last time of saying good-bye to them at home—he never came back from that voyage. We never knew quite how it was,' poor Nurse went on, 'but it was trying to save some one else that he was drowned. So—we mustn't think it was too sad.'

Thissie and That looked gravely up into Nurse's face.

‘Thank you, Nursie,’ they said again. But that was all.

‘And now,’ she said, ‘it must be close to tea-time—oh dear,’ as just then the stable clock outside struck five, ‘it’s later than I thought. I must hurry.’

‘Thattie,’ said Cecilia, when the two were alone, as Nurse had gone down to the kitchen to fetch the bread and butter and all the rest of it for tea,—‘Thattie, if the oldies fix that they *do* want to come to auntie’s hill, and it’s a secret, it won’t be naughty, will it, not to tell mummy?—not like Bob and Mattie not telling *their* mother, I mean?’

Sandford considered a little.

‘No,’ he said; ‘mummy’s gave us leave to have a secret, you see, and we know it’s quite a good one. But I’ll tell you what us’ll do, Thissie. When we get to auntie’s we’ll make her come up the n—the ‘h-hill with us the first time—she’s very kind, you know—and show us ‘xactly how far we may go by ourselves, and then we’ll be sure it’s all right.’

‘Yes,’ said Cecilia; ‘I think that’s a very good pull-an. Now, Thattie, mightn’t we look to see if the oldies have answered?’

‘Thissie!’ exclaimed That, ‘what are you thinking of? Of course not—we must leave it till to-morrow

morning. It's only in the night, you know, that toys—whether they're old or new, come quite awake among themselves, talking and walking about and doing whatever they like. In the daytime they're just toys, you see, b'longing to us for *us* to play with.'

'Yes,' said Thissie again, 'I s'pose so. I know it says so in some of our verses,' but she did not seem quite sure about it. 'I fink,' she went on, 'them must be part awake in the day too. They seem as if they were, and I don't fink they'd be so nice to play with if they weren't. Oh yes, Thattie,' and her voice grew quite eager, 'I'm sure that *people* toys—dollies and horses and real alive toys—*are* awake in the day too. Fink how *sweetly* they look at us sometimes, and I'm sure Bluebell seemed very unhappy in her eyes if ever I cried.'

'Well, she can't seem so now, for she hasn't got any eyes or even face,' replied That, rather cruelly.

'It isn't *her* fault,' said This, ready to cry herself. 'I p'omised I'd forgive you for always, but you shouldn't mock at poor darling Bluebell when you know the last bit of her face that was brokened off was when you said you'd be a doctor to mend it, and I didn't want you to. I knowed you couldn't make

it grow again, and that was the only fmg that could have been any good.'

Thattie felt sorry at once.

'I didn't mean to mock at her,' he said; 'and if you like, This, we'll fix that the oldies does come awake in the day too, when we play with them.'

'Us never does play wif them now,' said This dolefully. 'Us dursn't, 'cos they'd be took away. And Thattie,' brightening up again a little, 'if they settle that they do want to go to auntie's hill, we must find a hidey place for them here, 'afore it's time to pack them up for goin' away.'

'I know,' said That; 'I won't forget.'

Then came tea, for which they were both quite ready. It had seemed a long afternoon, even though Nurse's story had made a good part of it pass pleasantly. And after tea came dressing to go down to the drawing-room where, to their sorrow, there was no auntie to-day to help them with their houses and 'hospillans' building!

But mamma was always there.

'It would be drefful if you ever wented away, mummy,' said Thissie. 'You'll come wif us when we go to auntie's hill, won't you?'

'Of course,' said That. 'We couldn't go alone all

that long way in a railway. *I* wouldn't mind, but a girl is different; isn't girls different, mummy?'

Mamma did not answer at once, and when she did it was not exactly in reply to what That had said.

'I am so glad you have seen dear Auntie Win at last,' she said. 'She loves children so much, though she has not got any of her own.'

'She knows how to build houses and hospillans,' said Sandford. 'She teached us how to make the tops with cardses.'

'Not tops,' said Cecilia, 'you mean roofs. Isn't roofs the right word for the covers of houses, mummy?'

'Yes, dear,' said mamma smiling.

Thissie looked very pleased with herself. But she was a particularly honest little girl.

'Thissie wasn't *kite* sure,' she said, 'if it was roofs or *lids*. I'm so glad roofs is right.'

"Lids," repeated That, in his big boy tone, 'who'd ever be so silly as to call them houses' *lids*?'

'Come now, That,' said mamma; 'you yourself said "tops"—and remember, This is a year and a half younger than you. And it was nice of her to tell us she wasn't quite sure.'

Thisie's face brightened up at this. It had begun to look rather doleful at Thattie's tone.

'Mummy,' she said, 'may we have more cardses if we want them? Some of yours—auntie only gived us two, and sometimes us builds such lotses of houses—*streets* of houses nearly.'

'Yes, dear, of course I can give you some more—as many as you would like. Playing-cards would do the best, I think,' said mamma.

This and That considered.

'Plain cards,' they repeated; '*auntie's* wasn't quite like that, but p'raps they'd do as well.'—'If they're thick enough,' added That.

'Oh yes, they would be thicker than your auntie's ones—any way you can try. I think there are some in the little bookcase in the library. I will look,' said mamma.

And most likely she would have done so there and then, had not the door at that moment opened and the servant come in to announce the visit of an old lady, a neighbour, who was very fond of the children's mother, and of the children too.

She had not been to see them for a good long while, as she had had a very bad cold in the winter

and had not been able to go out. So mamma was greatly pleased to see her.

‘Dear Mrs. Lubin,’ she said, ‘how nice it is to have you here again at last!’

‘And how nice for me to be here,’ said Mrs. Lubin, as she kissed them all. She was a very pretty old lady, with what Thissie called ‘snow hair’ and kind blue eyes. ‘I have come at the right time—“the children’s hour,” to find them downstairs—just what I love.’

And what This and That loved too, for they had not forgotten Mrs. Lubin, though they had not seen her for some time. So they stayed beside the tea-table to hand her everything she could want—sugar and bread and butter and toast—and in return she begged mamma to let them have a little piece of cake each, ‘just as a treat you know.’ Better still, she said they must really fix a day for coming to have tea with her very soon, and mamma promised that they should go next Monday, which they were delighted to hear. For Mrs. Lubin’s teas were the very nicest you could imagine—in summer they were really *too* nice to describe—for her strawberries were the finest in the neighbourhood—and even in winter they were ‘lovely,’ thanks to the home-made cakes

and scones, and beautiful strawberry jam which was almost as delicious as the fresh fruit itself.

When the great question of the day for the visit had been settled, Mrs. Lubin began talking to the children's mother about Mrs. Rochfort—that was 'auntie,' you remember, and how she wished she had seen her the day she came over, and how she hoped auntie would like her new home, and would they all soon be going to stay with her, and several other questions, all in a breath.

Mamma answered one or two of them, and then she said to the children—

'This and That, dears, you had better go over now to your toys—you will not have much time to-night before Nurse comes to fetch you.'

And This and That trotted off at once, which was rather good of them I think, as they did want very much to hear more about auntie's house and about how soon mamma was planning for them all to go there. They did not say

'Why?' when mamma told them they had better go to play, or 'Oh, mummy, we don't want to get out our toys to-night,' or anything like that. They just simply went, when they saw that their mamma wished it. It would be a very good thing if children did like

this more often than they do. It would be much pleasanter for grown-up people, instead of having discussions and 'Mayn't we stay?' or '*Do* let us!' or tryings to get off what the children have been told. And it would be much pleasanter for themselves too in the end, as it would make the grown-up people more ready to have the little ones with them, if they knew that at any moment the little ones would run off or do exactly what they were told without any 'fuss.'

It was later than usual; there was not time for a really good building to-night—not even for one large house and 'hospillan' like the evening before. So they contented themselves with 'rip-rapping'—setting up tall bricks in a row, like soldiers, and then gently knocking over the end one who tipped over the next in its fall, till they all went down with a lovely rip-rap noise like fairy rockets.

There was not therefore very much putting away of toys to do to-night when the well-known tap came to the door, which Nurse was not sorry for. I think she had had rather a good share of that kind of thing for one day.

'To-morrow,' said That, as they went upstairs after saying good-night to mamma and Mrs. Lubin,

who was still sitting talking at the other end of the drawing-room,—‘to-morrow, This, we’ll have a reg’lar good building. You see we can make lots more houses now we don’t need to keep the long bricks for roofs.’

‘I hope mummy will ’amember to give us the plain cards,’ said Thissie.

‘Well, if she doesn’t, we can remind her, or even we could get them ourselves. She told us where they are—in the little bookcase in the libery,’ said That.

‘I’d razer she gaved us them herself,’ said This, ‘and then there couldn’t be no mistook. But oh, Thattie,’ she went on, ‘I wish it’d be to-morrow morning quick. I do so want to settle about the oldies, and where we’re to hide them till us goes to auntie’s.’

‘If they *want* to go. You forget that,’ said her brother.

‘No, I don’t. I know they’ll want to go. Anybody would. It’s much nicer than being frown away and p’raps burnt or drownded or somefin drefful like that. They’re sure to want to go. But, Thattie, us must fix too—about where to keep them till us can pack them up. I’ll fink a lot in the night, and so must you.’

‘There’s no big hurry,’ said That.

‘Yes, there is. Mummy began saying somefin about looking over the old—that was all she said, but I’m sure her was going to say the old toys—this morning at breakfast. And if the oldies was still in the corner cupboard I *know* they’d be frowed away. Even Nursie’d say they couldn’t be took to auntie’s.’

In his heart That felt that this was very likely; and he felt too even more strongly that the matter must certainly be decided about, when Thissie went on to say that it would be too ‘curruel’ to let the dear oldies be taken away to ‘somefin drefful,’ after ‘p’omising’ they should live out the rest of their lives on the peaceful hill among the sweet little flowers.

‘Well,’ he said, ‘we’ll both think, and then we’ll take them out of the cupboard as soon as ever we can.’

‘And if mummy says, “Where are the old toys gone?” and Nursie says, “They was in the brush cupboard,” what shall us say?’ asked Cecilia anxiously.

‘We’ll just say that’s a secret, and you said we might have a secret, mummy, and mummy’ll have to say to Nurse, “Yes, I did,” and then Nurse can’t say nothing more.’

This sounded very settled and clear, so This went

to bed comfortably, and to sleep, determined to dream of a good hiding-place for the homeless ones.

Both the children were rather silent the next morning while they were being 'bath'-ed and dressed—silent and grave, which made Nurse feel a little anxious.

'Are you quite well, dears?' she said. 'You haven't got headaches or anything the matter, I hope?'

'Oh no,' they replied together, 'we's quite well.' And—

'Us is only finking a good lot,' added Cecilia.

'Yes,' said Nurse, for she was rather curious to know what the 'finking' was about. 'You have got something very nice to think about.'

They looked up quickly—the same idea in both their minds. Was it settled about going to auntie's, and did Nurse know, though they had not yet been told?

Nurse saw the eagerness in the two pairs of eyes fixed upon her.

'Oh, it isn't a very great thing I meant,' she hastened to say. 'It was going to tea with Mrs. Lubin I was thinking of. It is nice to see the dear old lady about, like herself, again; and you always enjoy going to her house, I know.'

'Yes, we does,' said Sandford.

'Yes, us do,' said Cecilia.

But Nurse could not find out any more. Still her anxiety calmed down when breakfast-time came, and both This and That ate and drank quite as heartily as usual.

'There can't be much amiss,' she said to herself as she went downstairs on some nursery errand.

No sooner was she out of the room than Thissie turned to her brother.

'Thattie,' she said in a low voice, 'has you looked?'

'Yes,' he replied in the same tone. 'You didn't notish, but I looked just when Nursie was putting the table ready. It's all right, Thissie; they *does* want to go.'

'I knowed they would,' said This, nodding her head. 'Was the letter just where you said, Thattie?'

Thattie nodded.

'Yes, just where I said. Folded up all right, the way I told them. And they looked quite smiley and pleased—at least Racer and the blackey-boys did. Of course Bluebell was all covered up because of'—and Thattie gave a polite little cough—'cos of her cold, you know.'

Thissie quite understood. She liked Sandford to be kind and polite about poor Bluebell.

‘Then,’ she said quickly, ‘us *must* fix. Has you fought of any good place, Thattie?’

Thattie looked as wise as an owl.

‘Has *you*?’ he asked.

‘Yes, of sembral,’ said This. Though she looked up to her brother with great respect, in some ways she was quicker than he, and at the bottom of his heart he knew it.

‘What are they?’ he said.

Thisie sat down on the floor close to the corner cupboard and made That do the same. Then she held up her left hand with the little pink fingers well spread out, and touched them one by one, with the first finger of her other hand, as she mentioned the ‘hidey places’ that had come into her busy little brain.

‘First,’ she said, ‘there was the old tree in the garden that has a hole in it. It would be a very good place for not being found in, for I don’t fink anybody knows of it but you and me, That. But then I ’amembered that the hole isn’t very big; they’d not be very comfable, and if it rained they’d get wet, and us couldn’t dry them p’operly, and they’d be all sticky and messy—the ones at the outside of the hole, you know. So *that* wouldn’t do.’

‘No,’ said That, ‘it wouldn’t.’

‘Next,’ said This, touching her forefinger with its match of the right hand—she had begun with the left thumb—‘next, there was under our beds. I don’t mean on the floor, but ’atween the two matlasses. But *then* I ’amembered that Nurse turns them down-side up——’

‘No,’ That interrupted, ‘you’re saying it wrong—it’s “upside down.”’

‘But it *isn’t*,’ said This rather crossly. ‘It’s much more “downside up,” for all the downsides do come up—you can just look.’

‘Well, if they does,’ persisted That, ‘that makes the upsides go down. Any way people always *says* “upside down,” and not “downside up,” like you.’

‘It doesn’t matter,’ said Cecilia, ‘it’s bo’f, I suppose, and poor Bluebell and Racer and the blackey-boys and the pigs would be frown out the first morning. So *that* won’t do.’

‘No,’ said Sandford again, ‘it won’t.’

‘*Then*,’ Cecilia went on, ‘I fought of one of the ter-runks up in the box-room.’

‘Yes,’ said That quickly, ‘that’s the best yet.’

‘No,’ Thissie went on, calmly tapping the third left-hand finger, ‘it isn’t. The ter-runks will be

brought downstairs and packed when us goes away, and then the oldies would be turned out, as sure as sure. I'm comin' to the bestest now.'

'Well, do be quick,' said That, whose patience was getting to an end. 'Nothin's easier than to say things that *won't* do; I could say hunderds—the dinin'-room sideboard and the oven in the kitchen and'—as his eye suddenly fell on a ray of sunlight making its way in through the window—'the sun and the moon and the stars wouldn't do, 'cos we can't reach up to them.'

He thought that a very clever speech, but Thissie didn't laugh at it. She was too anxious to show her brother that her fourth thought *was* the best.

'It's somefin I've seen up in the box-room,' she said. 'It's been there such an awffly long time—since last year I should fink—that it must be going to stay there always. It's the old libery coal-box, Thattie. Do you 'amember it? It's very pretty still, 'cos there's a dog's head painted on the shiny black lid. And I know it's too old to use for coals, 'cos there's a hole inside. But I'm sure there's room for them all—for they're not as heavy as coals is. And we could put some nice clean paper inside and make them very comfable.'

'Well,' began That, after he had thought for a minute—he very often began with a 'well'—'I think it's a good place. I'll just have a look at it, This, and if Nurse comes up before I'm back again you can say it's all right—I'll be down d'rectly.'

And he ran off.

Nurse and he met each other on the landing as he was returning to the nursery, and she saw that he was coming from the swing door that shut off the staircase to the attics.

'Where have you been, my dear?' she said.

'Up to the big attic, Nursie,' he replied. 'There's something there I wanted to look at.'

'Not the window on to the roof, I hope?' she asked. 'You won't ever try to get out on to the roof, Master Thattie, my dear—not unless, of course, your papa was with you.'

'If papa was with me, it wouldn't be me trying to get out, it would be papa taking me,' said Sandford coolly. But hearing that this sounded rather rude, and as he was anxious not to be forbidden going up to the big attic, he went on in a friendly tone: 'Of course I wouldn't go out on the roof by my own self, Nursie; I'm not so silly.'

'All right then, my dear,' Nurse replied. 'There's

nothing in the big attic to do you any harm, except that you may get rather dusty if you get pulling about the old pieces of carpet in the corner.'

'I don't want to touch them,' said he. 'It's—it's only a sort of play of Thissie's and mine, and it won't make us dusty. So we may go up there sometimes, may we, Nursie?'

'Well, yes—if you'll not open the high window, or get yourselves dirty,' said Nurse.

'We won't,' said he, and Nurse knew she could trust Thattie when he promised.

So he ran back into the nursery in great spirits.

'Thissie,' he whispered, stooping down to where his sister still sat on the floor near the oldies' cupboard, with a kind of feeling, I think, that she was there to protect them. 'I've rarranged it all splendidly, and got leave for us to go up there whenever we like.'

'From mummy?' asked This. 'How quick you've been?'

'No, no, not from mummy. From Nurse,' said he, which, under the circumstances, Thissie thought even better.

'How clever of you?' she said admiringly. 'And you think the coal-box'll do, Thattie?'

'Couldn't be better,' he replied.

CHAPTER VI

A FLITTING

And very anxious moments
We passed till all were housed.

A Bee Song.

THERE was no time just then, of course, to do anything more, for Nurse had been downstairs rather later than usual, and now she had to hurry to send the children for their 'Good morning' visit to the dining-room.

'You look so bright, dears,' said mamma, as she kissed them. 'Is it looking forward to going to tea with Mrs. Lubin that is pleasing you?'

'It can't be the weather,' said their father, as he glanced out of the window. 'I'm afraid we're in for a regular wet day.'

'I don't mind,' said Thissie, edging herself as close up to papa's chair as she could. 'Us has lotses to do.'

'That's a sensible little woman,' said her father, carefully giving her the top of his egg as usual, and a nice 'finger' of toast to eat with it,—'that's a sensible little woman. Busy people haven't time to spare for grumbling at bad weather or anything else, have they? And what is it you are going to be so busy about?'

Thissie got rather red, but Thattie came to her help.

'It's got to do with our secret a little, please, papa,' he said. 'You know mummy's gave us leave to have a little quite good secret, that can't do any harm—not even dirty our pinafores if we are careful.'

Papa laughed.

'A dirty pinafore or two might be forgiven, I should think,' he said; 'but take care not to set yourselves on fire—it has nothing to do with matches, I hope?'

'No, nuffin' at all—not the leastest bit,' said Cecilia.

'And not even to do with gettin' wet,' added Sandford. 'It's not a' out-of-the-house secret—not just yet, at least.'

'I rather wish *I* had a not out-of-the-house day before me,' said papa, as he got up from the

table. 'It does look dreary this morning. However, "into all lives some rain must fall." Good-bye, my pets.'

Thissie's little face looked rather grave after he had gone.

'Mummy,' she said, after a minute or two's thinking to herself, 'what does these words mean that papa said? Rain doesn't fall *in*—it falls out-of-doors.'

Mamma smiled.

'He wasn't speaking of rain getting into houses, dear,' she said. 'It was a line of poetry papa was saying.'

'Oh, 'nymns,' said Thissie.

'"*Nymns*," Thissie,' repeated That. 'You means "*he-ymns*." That's quite as worse as me saying "'nills" for "*he-ills*."'

'H-ymns, then,' Cecilia corrected. 'Was it a h-ymn, mummy?'

'Yes, dear, a sort of hymn.'

'About the rain? I fink I've heard a hymn about the dewdrops, but I don't 'amember any about the rain.'

'It isn't about the real rain,' said mamma. She spoke slowly, for she wanted the children to under-

stand, and it was a little difficult to make it quite easy. 'It is a verse comparing real rain and clouds and dark dull days with people's lives, which have troubles and sorrows and being anxious times in them.'

'Oh yes,' exclaimed Thissie; 'and then when they is sorry and unhappy they cry, and that's tears—like dropses of rain.'

Mamma smiled again.

'And when happy times come again, it's like the sunshine,' she said. 'You can understand that, can't you.'

'Yes,' said That.

And 'Yes' said This. 'When you smile, mummy, it aminds me of the sun. But papa did mean real rain *too*, for it is real raining this morning,' and she glanced towards the window. 'I do under'tand kite well about being ankcher—what's that word?'

Thattie began to laugh.

'Thissie says it like a pocket-hankerwich, doesn't she, mamma?' and Cecilia's face grew rather doleful.

'Anxious,' mamma repeated slowly. 'And what makes you anxious, my pet?' she said, so kindly that Thissie brightened up again, though she shook her head and spoke very solemnly.

‘Somefin about our secret—our little good secret, you know, mamma. But it’s coming better now. Is *you* ever ank—anksheous, mummy?’

‘Of course mummy is sometimes, you silly girl,’ interrupted Thattie, who had felt rather out of the conversation. ‘Her was very anxshus,’ with great care, ‘when we had that fever, and when papa forgot to telegram when he went to Scotland. It’s very nonsensekal to think big people haven’t no troubles; I’ve found that out. At least most has, hasn’t they, mummy?’

‘*All*,’ I think, said mamma gravely. ‘And they are needed—to make our hearts soft and kind to others, and to keep us from caring too much for our life here, though there are so many pretty and good things in it. It isn’t troubles we should be afraid of so much as doing wrong things—that is what *makes* the worst troubles.’

‘Dear little mummy,’ said both This and That, squeezing themselves as close up to her as they could.

‘If Thattie and Thissie were always *kite* good, it would make you very happy, wouldn’t it?’

‘Yes, darlings,’ said mamma, as she kissed them. But Thissie looked rather grave after that kiss. I will tell you why presently.

‘And some day, you know, mummy,’ she whispered, ‘us’ll all be kite, *kite* good, and then it’ll be like the sun always shining, won’t it?’

Then it was time for them to go upstairs again—more than time indeed—they had stayed down later than usual.

‘I heard what you whipspered to mummy, This,’ said That on their way up. ‘You got it out of the Bibell.’

‘Well,’ Thissie replied, ‘I didnt say I didnt. And I said it to make her happy. I’ll tell you a secret, That; I’m afraid mummy’s got a trouble now. There was tearses on her face when she kissed us.’

‘I don’t believe there was,’ said That. ‘You’ve got such a fancyin’ mind, Thissie. It’s a good thing one way, for it made you think of the coal-box, but it’s a bad thing another way.’

‘Oh!’ exclaimed This, ‘I’d forgot about the coal-box and the poor oldies. And I fink that’s Miss Wren. Her always comes so early when it rains, to get out of the wet quick. Thattie, us won’t have time to carry even Bluebell and Racer upstairs ’fore lessons begins.’

‘Never mind,’ said Thattie. ‘I think it’s goin’ to rain all day, so there’ll be lotses of time. We’ll get

them out of the cupboard when Nurse goes down to the kitching after dinner, and then we can stay a good while up in the attic till they get quite becus-tomed to the coal-box.'

'Yes,' said This. 'It'll be like a new house to them, you see, Thattie. And *us* even would feel very strange in a new house all by ourselves.'

She quite cheered up at the idea of a long visit to the attic. And after all, the front door-bell ringing was *not* Miss Wren. Nor was any one to be seen when they ran in to the nursery. It was tidied up and clear for the morning's lessons ; the fire burning brightly and the side-table drawn out as usual, but Nurse was not there. So This and That hurried across to the corner cupboard and got out Bluebell and Racer and the blackey-boys and the fat pig. Between them they managed to carry them upstairs and hide them among the old carpets in the first place, whispering that they were not to be frightened, but take a nice sleep till their little friends came back again.

'And then we'll make you quite cosy in a new house till the time comes for us going to the 'nill,' added That, too excited to remember about his 'h's.' The oldies made no reply, but Thissie thought that

Racer *looked* as if he quite understood, and that one of the blackey-boys smiled.

So it was with lightened hearts that the two stumped downstairs again, just in time to meet Miss Wren as she came slowly up from the hall.

'It's all right, Thissie,' whispered That. 'You see, there's only the wheelbarrow and the buckets and those unalive things still.'

'And oh, Thattie, we forgottened the dear goat! He must have felled behind the wheelbarrow,' said This, in distress, and she seemed on the point of rushing off to rescue poor Billy, but Thattie pulled her back.

'He'll be all right—nobody's going to the cupboard this morning, you silly girl,' he said, so Thissie had to sit down quietly to lessons, though she did say 'g-o-a-t' by mistake, when Miss Wren asked her to spell 'cat.'

Lessons were over at last, however; there was not often much trouble about them, for Miss Wren was kind and patient and the children were not stupid, and generally tried to be attentive. And if this morning they were a little dreamy, their governess put it down to the weather.

'Dear me,' she said, as she got up from the table

and began to put on her cloak, which Nurse had had nicely dried for her downstairs,—‘dear me, this is *really* a rainy day! There’s no chance now of its clearing, I’m afraid. The good time of the day for that is past; isn’t it, Nurse?’

‘Well, yes, miss,’ said Nurse, glancing out of the window as she spoke; ‘they do say it seldom changes, not with steady rain like this, after twelve o’clock. It may brighten up a bit towards evening; I’ve noticed it often does that, but it would be too late then for the poor dears to get out.’

‘The poor dears don’t look very doleful about it, happily,’ said Miss Wren cheerfully, as she stooped to kiss This and That good-bye.

‘No, us doesn’t mind—not to-day,’ said Cecilia.

‘We’ve got lots to do,’ added Sandford importantly.

‘I am very glad to hear it,’ said their governess; ‘but you won’t forget your two verses and your spelling words?’

And nodding to them as she said this, Miss Wren closed the door behind her.

Nurse did not leave the room before dinner, so there was no chance of getting out Billy and the other toys. But nothing was said about looking

over the old things, which Thissie had been rather afraid of, for she had noticed before this that rainy days were often chosen by mamma and Nurse for 'rummaging,' as Thattie called it. 'Looking over things,' Nurse would have said, and deciding what new clothes would be wanted, and what should be given away—how many breakages had been, and needed making up for, and things of this kind. And both the children felt very glad indeed when they had got the rest of their treasures safely out of the corner cupboard and up into the attic while Nurse was downstairs for a few minutes after dinner.

Then they ran down again to have their hands washed and to explain that they wanted to stay a good long while upstairs in the attic. Nurse had no objection to this. I think she had been half expecting to be begged for another story, and I don't think she had one ready, particularly as it would most likely have had to be about a hill! And besides this, she had some cutting out of new pinafores to do, and cutting out is not a thing you can manage well if you are telling a story, as it needs your whole attention.

She reminded This and That all the same, however, of their promises.

‘You won’t pull about the old carpets and stuffs so as to make yourselves dirty,’ she said; ‘and above all, you’ll be *sure* not to try to open the window that leads on to the roof?’

‘Kite, kite sure,’ said This.

‘Certain sure,’ said That.

So Nurse saw them trot off, feeling quite happy, as she knew she could trust them. It is a *great* comfort when children can be trusted, and makes their lives and those of the people about them *so* much happier! I wish I could make all children understand this. Of course accidents may happen for which nobody is to be blamed, or things may go wrong in other ways. But a great deal of trouble can be saved by obeying exactly those whom it is our duty to obey, even though we do not always quite see the reasons for what we are told to do or not to do.

And when troubles do come, they are not so hard to bear, if we all, big people as well as little ones, can honestly feel we have done our best, even if we have failed or made mistakes.

It was quite easy in this case for This and That to understand that what Nurse asked them to promise was wise and right. Nobody but a very foolish child

would have thought of trying to get out on to the roof, where only a very narrow ledge would have kept you from falling over, and as there was another little window at the farther end of the long room which they could safely look out at, as for some reason it had bars across it, they had no wish to meddle with the one which Nurse called the 'high window.'

And when they drew Bluebell and Racer and the others out from the corner where they had lain safely hidden, just at the edge of the rolls of carpet, they took care not to pull the carpets and other things about.

'Oh, dear Billy,' said Cecilia, when she and Sandford were comfortably seated on the floor, which was quite clean, as the attic was never allowed to get messy or dirty, with all their friends about them, and the coal-box ready at hand, 'how glad I am to have you safe up here! You don't know how unhappy us was when we find you'd been left in the old cupboard. Thattie,' she went on, 'do you know I almost fink I love Billy as much as any of the oldies? His horn'—for the goat had only one of his pair left—'does stick up 'aside his ear in such a *sweet* way. Do look.'

Thattie was on his knees by this time in front of the old coal-box.

‘Yes,’ he said, glancing over his shoulder; ‘he’s not a bad old fellow. But Thissie, we’ve forgotten some things. The new house is awffly dusty—black-dusty from the coals. We must have a cloth to clean it with, and I don’t b’lieve it’d ever come quite well. The best thing would be to have some nice paper to stick all round it before we put the oldies in.’

‘But we hasn’t any,’ said Thissie. She looked round the attic as if she rather expected some nice paper to drop from the roof or creep up from the floor, but without moving, as her lap was entirely covered with the toys. ‘The on’y fmg to do,’ she said at last, ‘is for you to go down and ask Nurse to give us some. You can tell her we’re being *kite* good.’

Thattie considered.

‘Yes,’ he said; ‘I should think she’d give us some,’ and he jumped up. ‘You won’t mind staying here alone while I go?’ he added.

‘Alone,’ said Thissie. ‘I’m not a bit alone with the dear oldies.’

So That set off again downstairs.

CHAPTER VII

THE LIBRARY BOOKCASE

So neat, so neat,
You'd say the fairies kept it.
Miss Prim.

WHEN Sandford got to the nursery he found there another person besides Nurse. This was Mildred, his mamma's maid. She was standing by the table watching the cutting-out, and speaking of some alteration in the shape of the pinafores. Nurse herself looked very busy. She was frowning a little, and she had two or three pins in her mouth, which she at once took out, saying something about its being a bad habit she should break herself of.

Sandford was not alarmed by Nurse's frown at all. He knew that she was rather short-sighted, and she sometimes frowned when she was not the very least bit in the world vexed about anything. Still he saw she was rather extra busy, and he was a kind boy. So

he hesitated a little before asking what he had come down to beg for.

‘Nurse,’ he began, ‘are you very, extraly busy?’

‘Well, yes, dear, I am, rather,’ she answered. ‘What is it you want, Master That?’

‘Some nice, quite clean paper—to—to wrap up—no, not esactly that, but something like that—some things in,’ he replied, thinking it best to come to the point at once.

Nurse gave a tiny sigh. It *is* tiresome to be interrupted when you are really busy about anything.

‘Nice, quite clean paper,’ she repeated, ‘and large sheets, if it’s to wrap up things.’

‘Yes,’ said That. ‘Little sheets wouldn’t be much use. And we’d *rather* not have newspapers. We’s being *quite* good in the attic, Nurse,’ he added.

‘Well, I suppose I must go and look for some,’ she said, ‘though I don’t rightly know where to put my hand on any. All my stock for lining drawers is done, but I thought I wouldn’t ask for any more till after the spring cleaning, ’specially as——’

She stopped short. Mildred spoke at once, so quickly that it almost seemed as if she had interrupted Nurse, and Thattie did not notice the sudden stop.

‘Let me get some for Master Sandford,’ she said. ‘If you once get those patterns mixed you’ll find it a bother to straighten them again. And I know where I can get some lining paper. My lady always lets me take it out of the cupboard where she keeps it, down in the library. There’s beautiful tissue paper there too—blue as well as white—blue keeps laces so nice. I might give you a sheet or two of the tissue paper also, my dear?’ she went on to Thattie.

Thattie did not quite know what ‘tissue paper’ was, for he and Thissie called it ‘flutter paper.’ They had names of their own for many things. But he was wise enough not to refuse what might turn out a good offer till he knew more about it. So he just said—

‘Thank you, Milly. I’d like to go downstairs with you and for you to show me the papers, and then I could choose.’

And the two went down to the library together.

Mamma was out—she had told the children she had to go a long drive to have luncheon with a friend, in spite of its being such a very rainy day. And perhaps she might not be back even by her usual tea-time.

The cupboard in the library was locked, but the

key was in a little box on the writing-table. Mamma always kept it there, so that Mildred could get it easily if anything was wanted in the way of paper or envelopes or such things, as she often sent Mildred to fetch them for her.

Sandford had never seen the inside of the cupboard as well as to-day, and he stood looking at it admiringly. It looked so very neat, with the different piles and packages in nice order.

‘It’s like a shop,’ he said to the maid. ‘Don’t you think, Milly, it’d be lovely to have a shop for things like that—all so nice and clean and new? I shouldn’t like *some* kinds of shops—not a butcher’s, nor, I don’t *think*, a fisher’s—except that the big rocks of ice do look very pretty, with the fishes all done up with greeny. Thissie says *she’d* like a toy-shop, but I think toy-shops is rather messy.’

Mildred laughed. She was a very good-natured girl, but I don’t think she understood the children as well as Nurse did, though she was a good deal younger.

‘When I was as little as you, Master That,’ she said, ‘I used to think I’d like to have a confectioner’s shop—the kind where they sell lots of goodies.’

‘We don’t care for *lotses* of goodies,’ said That.

'We just like a few 'nockasionally. And people with shops have to sell their things, not to keep them for theirselves, or else they'd get no money. Mamma told me.'

Mildred laughed still more.

'Upon my word, Master That,' she said, 'you are an old-fashioned piece of goods. And I never said I'd eat *all* the goodies if I was a confectioner, just one now and again.'

Sandford did not answer. He was thinking over what Mildred said. She did use funny words sometimes. 'One now and again' seemed to him almost like 'always,' for 'now and again' might keep on without stopping. And 'old-fashioned piece of goods' was a very queer, and not very polite way to speak of him. But Mildred was one of the people he did not feel inclined to tell that he 'did not understand.' She was too ready to laugh at him. Yet he knew it was kind of her to have come downstairs to get him the paper, so he just said rather gravely—

'Please show me the paper, Milly.'

She held out a little roll of large whity-brown sheets, not very thick or very thin. Thattie felt it with his thumb and forefinger. He had seen Nurse do so when he was in a shop with her sometimes; for

there was a small town not very far from the children's home. It was there Thattie had seen butchers' and fishmongers' and other kinds of shops, and when he had noticed Nurse taking off her glove and rubbing the stuff between her fingers he thought it looked very clever. And though Mildred was more inclined to laugh than ever, she forced herself to look grave too.

'Yes,' said Sandford at last, 'it'll do very well for what we want. And now, please, show me the—the other kind—the blue and the white,' for he did not want to own that he could not remember the word "tissue."

'Some people call it "silver paper,"' said Mildred, as she brought it out.

'Oh,' exclaimed That, 'it's *flutter* paper! Yes, thank you, Milly, we'd like a little of that too—the white, please. I don't think the blue is a pretty colour. What a silly name "silver paper" is,' he went on. 'It isn't a bit like silver. What *we* call silver is what's wrapped round some of the choclits mamma gives us.'

'This kind is called "silver paper" because it is often used for wrapping up silver plate in,' said the maid,—'forks and spoons, and such like.'

‘Oh,’ said Sandford, seeing the name was not so silly after all. ‘Milly, just let me look a minute,’ and he peered into the cupboard. ‘What’s in those dear little neat boxes?’

‘Cards,’ said Mildred,—‘your mamma’s cards.’

‘Oh,’ said Thattie again, and he thought to himself that it was rather a good thing to know exactly where the cards were kept, as mamma had said he and Thissie might have as many of them as they liked; and he did not see far back on the other side of the lower shelf a pile of bigger and thicker cards, with coloured backs and pictures or spots of different shapes and kinds on the front. ‘Playing cards’ mamma had called them, though This and That had thought she said ‘plain cards.’

Thattie thanked Mildred again, and then she locked the cupboard and put the key carefully away where she had found it. And a minute or two afterwards That appeared in the attic with his rolls of paper.

‘You has been a long time, Thattie,’ said his sister. ‘I didnt mind, ’cos the oldies *has* been so sweet. Us has been talking lotses together, and Bluebell finks they’ll be kite comfable up here till it’s time to go to auntie’s hill. Oh, Thattie,’ as he

spread out his treasures, 'what lovely papers!' Flutter paper too! We'll put that inside the other, won't we, Thattie? It'll be *so* soft for them to go to sleep on, won't it?'

And the next hour and more passed most happily in arranging and rearranging the coal-box. I cannot tell you how many times it was filled and emptied again, nor how carefully, to begin with, the children cleaned out the queer hiding-place with the old duster Sandford had brought on purpose, and lined it with the nice sheets of the thicker paper first, and then the soft tissue inside.

In the end they settled that the most comfortable way was for Bluebell to lie down almost flat, with her tied-up head on a pillow of 'flutter,' and Racer reposing on her shoulder. Then a kind of railing round them was made with the spades, while the fat pig looked very cosy in the old bucket, and Billy and the blackey-boys still cosier, tucked into the handleless basket. Then with two sheets of paper, thick and thin, over all to keep the party warm and free from dust, the lid was softly shut down, after the oldies had been told to go to sleep.

'They are really very cosy now,' said This, with a little sigh. 'It seems almost a pity,

Thattie, that they'll have to be took out again, doesn't it?'

'Oh no,' That replied. 'They'd get very tired of being so squeezed up if it was for always. And then, think how they'll like the beeyoutiful fresh air on the 'nill, and seein' the dear little flowers. They can make theirselves noseays. And then they *couldn't* stay here always; they'd be sure to get frowed away some day. For there'll be more oldies, you see, Thissie; there'll always be more, and the house'd get too full of them.'

'I don't fink us'll ever love any as much as theses,' said Cecilia; 'us has had theses such an awffly long time. But I've been planning, Thattie, to be much more careful of our toys now, so that they'd never get kite so hurted and brokened as theses, and then they'd not be frowed away, but gaved to some nice poor children who'd love them and be kind to them.'

'Yes,' Thattie agreed; 'I think that'd be a very good thing. But, Thissie, we'd better go down now, or Nursie'll be coming to fetch us and wonderin' what we're doing. We mush push the oldies' house into a corner, I think.'

They looked about, and at last decided on a very good place, just behind a high wooden case which

they knew was never moved. It was far too big and heavy to take away as luggage, besides which, it was filled with curtains and blankets and such things, carefully laid away and covered up. And from where the coal-box now stood, the lower window could be seen, so that, as Thissie said, if Bluebell *liked*, she could open the door and peep out.

'They'd see the sky any way, and at night the stars do look so pretty and kind,' said she.

For it was always considered polite to talk of poor Bluebell as if she still had eyes to see with.

Nurse had not noticed how long the children had stayed up in the attic; she had been so busy about the new pinafores—white muslin with wonderful 'teeny-weeny' tucks and lace frills and I don't know all what for Cecilia, and brown Holland blouses, all 'smocked' or 'windowed,' as That called it, for the shape of the smocking reminded him of latticed panes, for both. Those for Sandford were to be trimmed with scarlet braid, and those for Cecilia with white; that was the only difference in the blouses.

The two children looked at them with interest, and Nurse was explaining about them, when she happened to catch sight of the cuckoo clock on the wall.

‘Oh dear,’ she said, ‘it’s a quarter to five. I should have had tea ready. And I did hope I should have got all this cutting-out done this afternoon. I promised not to keep the patterns long, as my cousin wants them back again.’ Her cousin was also a nurse, in a family in Scotland.

This and That looked sorry.

‘It wasn’t our fault, was it, Nursie?’ asked That.
‘We have been good, haven’t we?’

‘And not bozered you?’ added Thissie.

‘No, no, dears, to be sure not,’ said Nurse. ‘But as your mamma’s out and won’t be in, very likely, before your bedtime, I don’t think I should keep on at this work after tea. I would like to amuse you—you’ve amused yourselves all the afternoon and been no trouble.’

But when they were all seated comfortably round the tea-table, Sandford looked up seriously.

‘Nurse,’ he said, ‘I’ve been thinking you can finish your patterning, if you’ll let Thissie and me go down to the drawing-room the same as if mummy was there. We can build with our bricks, and mummy said we might have as many cards as we liked out of her cupboard—“plain cards,” she said. And I saw them when Milly got out the paper,

and the key's there. They'll make such spull-endid tops—I mean roofs—to our houses.'

'Oh yes,' added Cecilia; 'do let's, Nursie. Us'll be kite good, and if mummy does come in, her'll be pleased to see us playing so nicely.'

Nurse considered. She knew the children could be trusted not to do any mischief, such as touching the delicate china ornaments, or anything of that kind. What Thattie said about the cards scarcely caught her attention, as he had spoken of them being given or promised by his mamma.

'Well, yes,' she said; 'I don't see but what you may. It will be a little change from upstairs this rainy day, and you have your downstairs' toys all ready. And I won't say but that I'll be glad of the nursery to myself. I'm not one as can cut out without giving all my mind to it, though it sounds silly.'

'It must be somefin like sums,' said Cecilia, looking very sympathising. 'If Thattie makes the leastiest squeak I can't count the figures a bit.'

So when Nurse went downstairs with the tray, the children followed her, and she saw them safely into the drawing-room.

'We'll stay in our corner quite quiet,' said Sand-

ford, 'cept just fetching the cards from the libery. But that won't take a minute ; I know esactly where they are now.'

'And you said your mamma told you you might have them?' asked Nurse, noticing this time more particularly what he was talking about.

'Oh yes,' said Thattie, looking up brightly. 'She said we might have as many as we liked. I didn't know where the key of the cupboard was then, but I know now,' he added candidly, 'and I know esactly how to open it.'

So it was without any fears of mistakes or mischief that Nurse left her little pair in the drawing-room.

They got out their great box of bricks and set to work building very eagerly.

'Us'll have lotses of time to-night,' said Cecilia, 'with mamma not being in, there's nuffin to inter-rumt us. Us can build a whole street, neely a whole town, Thattie?'

He glanced at the bricks.

'It might be a village,' he said ; 'but it would take two or three boxes-full for a town. You see, Thissie, we must keep some bricks to cover the cards, else the houses would look very funny—all flat. We must





'AND WHERE'S THE CARDS?' ASKED THISSIE.—p. 119.

put the bricks to look lumpy-up in the middle, and for chimneys.'

'I fink we could make them the way you mean,' said Cecilia, 'wif *two* cards, put up like big A's.'

'No, they'd keep slippin' down,' That replied, 'and the rain would come in at the ends. I'll show you the best way—but we'd better get the cards out now.'

Thissie jumped up.

'Let me come too, to the libery, wif you,' she said, and Thattie made no objection.

The room was just as Sandford and Mildred had left it, and the key of the cupboard—or more exactly speaking the bookcase, for what the children called the cupboard was really the lower, closed-in part of a high bookcase with glass doors—was in the little match-box on their mamma's writing-table.

Sandford took it out and fitted it very carefully into the keyhole. It turned easily, and the lock did not suffer in any way as locks often do suffer when children meddle with them, for he was a neat-handed little boy.

'Look, Thissie,' he said admiringly, 'doesn't it look nice? All so tidy and clean. Mummy does keep her papers nice.'

'And where's the cards?' asked Thissie, peeping over his shoulder as he knelt on the floor.

‘Here,’ Sandford replied, drawing out one of the little boxes he had noticed before. It was a gray box, and when they opened it they saw that it was nearly full of cards with their mamma’s name printed on, but—to their surprise they were edged rather deeply with black.

‘Mummy didn’t say nothing about black on them. I wonder if these isn’t the right ones. She said *plain* cards,’ he said, looking rather puzzled.

‘And these isn’t plain,’ Thissie agreed. ‘Look again, Thattie. Yes, there behind, there’s another box, just the same bigness, only it’s pink.’

Sandford drew it out and opened it. Yes, there, to their joy, were other cards—not very many, about twenty or thirty, for they only came up half-way from the bottom of the box, and these had no black edge, just mamma’s name in the middle, and the name of the house down in the corner, like auntie’s, that she had given them.

‘These is them,’ exclaimed Thattie eagerly. ‘You see, Thissie, I *were* right.’

He had felt a little afraid of Cecilia’s saying he had made some mistake, and held up one of the cards in triumph.

‘Yes,’ she agreed, ‘*them’s* got no black edge. Them

must be the plain ones. There's on'y a few, Thattie. Can us have them all?'

'Oh yes; mummy said, "as many as you like," There's not many, but I daresay they'll do. Now I want to shut up the cubberd, This. Get out of the way, please.'

But Thissie was peeping from behind him into the farther back part of the shelves, just as Thattie had done from behind Mildred.

'Thattie,' she said, 'I see colours over in that corner—like as if they was picshur cards, tied round with string. Do let's look what them is.'

'No,' said Sandford decidedly; 'we's got what mummy said. She didn't say nothing about picshur cards, so it's best not to touch nuthin' more. Quick, Thissie, or you'll get catched;' and Thissie drew back while he closed the little door and carefully and slowly locked it again. Then he put the key back where he had found it, and the two trotted off to the drawing-room again.

There they played very happily for a good while—they made a splendid street of houses, with a church at one end and a 'hospillan' at the other—all roofed with the cards, on which they placed edgings of bricks and chimneys in the middle. They

even found that with management they could make a bigger roof with two or three cards, keeping them firm with bricks in the corners. So the time passed very quickly, till Mildred put her head in at the door with a message from Nurse. Would they begin tidying away their toys, as it was getting late, and she was coming to fetch them in a minute or two.

The 'minute or two spread to five or six. The bricks and the cards were all safely put to bed in the big box before Nurse appeared.

'You *have* been good children,' she said. 'I must tell your dear mamma. I hope you have not been dull without her? I feel as if I should have come down to play with you.'

'No, thank you, Nursie,' said That. 'We haven't been dull at all.'

'Us has had such a beautiful street of houses,' said This.

And as Nurse went upstairs with them, she reminded them that the day after to-morrow they were to go to have tea with Mrs. Lubin.

'That will be a treat,' she said; 'and you do deserve one.'

CHAPTER VIII

THE WISE PRINCESS

Wise as an owl, but a deal prettier !

Old Play.

THE rainy day had been a Saturday, and on Sunday This and That never built houses in the drawing-room when they came down there. They had toys on purpose for Sundays—some picture toys that matched their ‘Sunday stories,’ and lots of very pretty books. Mamma kept these in a corner of the big music box. By that, I do not mean a ‘musical box’ that plays tunes, but a box in which she kept the sheets of music which she played from.

This and That liked Sundays. They always went to church in the morning, except sometimes if it was very, *very* rainy or stormy, or very bitterly cold. But that did not often happen. And they liked going to church. It was never very long, and there was always *something* that they could understand, and

generally very pretty hymns. And even the having 'best' clothes on is pleasant, I think.

Then papa was at home all day, and they had dinner downstairs, and altogether Sunday was just very nice and happy.

The day after that particular Sunday was the Monday on which Mrs. Lubin had invited them to tea, and as they started for the old lady's house by three o'clock, and she always liked them to stay till there was only time to walk home and go straight up to bed, that made a second afternoon of not playing in the drawing-room with their bricks as usual.

They set off, all three of them, for there were few things Nurse enjoyed more than a cosy tea with Mrs. Lubin's housekeeper, and it was so long since their kind friend had been well enough to have them with her, that the pleasure, now it had come again, seemed doubled.

It was a lovely day—a real spring day—and so mild that, in spite of the care Mrs. Lubin had to take not to catch cold, she was walking up and down the drive between her house and the pretty little lodge at the gates, watching for her visitors. As soon as This and That caught sight of her they set off running to meet her.

‘Welcome, my dear little people,’ she said, as she bent down to kiss them; ‘it *is* nice to have you here again. And what a beautiful day you have brought with you.’

‘We didn’t bring it,’ said Sandford, with a twinkle of fun in his eyes, ‘it comed of itself.’

‘And it stayed at home wif mummy too,’ added Cecilia, who always took up a joke quickly.

Mrs. Lubin laughed heartily. She loved fun, as if she was still a child herself.

‘And is dear mamma well?’ she asked, ‘and enjoying the fine weather? Dear, dear,’ she went on, ‘*what* a wet day we had on Saturday! I was so glad it wasn’t to-day.’

‘Saturday couldn’t be Monday,’ said That gravely. ‘And mamma is quite well, thank you.’

Mrs. Lubin laughed again, but this time the children did not quite see why.

Then she took them through her pretty conservatory and fernery, pointing out some changes she had made in them since This and That’s last visit, and promising them each a tiny pot of some ‘*dear* little fernies,’ that they specially admired, ‘to keep for their very own.’

By this time it was a little past four o’clock; tea would not be till five.

‘What would you like to do now?’ asked Mrs. Lubin, seating herself in her own especial arm-chair, not far from the bright little fire. ‘Would you like to arrange the Indian cabinet, or what?’

‘I know,’ said Thissie, pulling forward a footstool close to Mrs. Lubin. ‘I’d like, *first*, you to tell us a story, and then to rarrange the cabinet. Wouldn’t you, Thattie?’

‘Yes,’ said That, ‘if it’s a ’nill—I mean a h-hill story.’

‘A what story, my dear?’ asked Mrs. Lubin.

And then they explained about the hill behind auntie’s house, and how they were going there one day, and how pretty it was, and that auntie wanted them to think of stories about hills, but that it was ‘razer difficul’ to make up stories ‘theirselves.’

‘So Nursie told us one, and if you’d tell us one, we’d have two ready for auntie, and p’raps her’ll have some ready for us when we go there,’ said That.

‘So *pull-ease* tell us one, dear Mrs. Lubin,’ said Thissie in her coaxingest voice.

Mrs. Lubin looked very ‘considering.’ She had often told them stories about when she ‘was a little girl,’ but none of these had anything to do with hills that she could remember, and she said so.



THIS AND THAT AT MRS. LUBIN'S.—p. 126.



‘Think again, please,’ said Thattie, ‘perhaps it’ll come.’ And suddenly Mrs. Lubin’s face lighted up.

‘I do remember a little story,’ she said,—‘a kind of fairy story that I read somewhere long, long ago. Not about *a* hill, but about *seven* hills. The name of it, if I recollect rightly, was “The Wise Princess.” Would you like to hear it?’

This and That thought for a moment, then they looked at each other and then at Mrs. Lubin.

‘Is it all about lessons, and her being so clever?’ asked Thattie gravely, and though Thissie did not speak, it was easy to see that the same thought was in her mind.

Their old friend smiled.

‘No,’ she said. ‘I don’t think you would find it too learned. We need not say much about all the princess knew; it will be enough to tell you that she was very wise. And being wise does not only mean learning lots of lessons.’

‘It means being sensibul too,’ said Thattie. ‘And I like sensibul people. Yes, please tell it us.’

‘Pull-ease tell it us,’ echoed Thissie.

So Mrs. Lubin began, and the two faces cleared as they heard her first words.

‘Once upon a time there lived a king and queen who had only one child—a daughter.’

‘Oh,’ exclaimed the children, ‘that *is* nice! Stories is always nice that begins “once upon a time.” Was she a princess?’ they added.

‘Yes, of course,’ said Mrs. Lubin smiling; ‘the daughter of a king and queen is always a princess.’

‘Oh,’ said the children again. And then they settled themselves on their footstools quite satisfied.

‘The princess was called “Sagessa,” because, besides being very pretty and very good, she was very wise, and that name means wise.’

‘But,’ began Sandford, and then he stopped. He was afraid it was rude to interrupt Mrs. Lubin so often.

‘But what, dear?’ she said kindly.

‘I was only thinking,’ he replied, ‘that she’d be named that when she was a little baby, and how did they know when she was quite a little baby that she’d grow up so very sensibul?’

‘I can’t say for certain,’ said Mrs. Lubin. ‘Perhaps I should not have said “because she was so wise.” Maybe they gave her the name *hoping* she would be. Or perhaps fairies came to her christening and promised her the gift of wisdom as well as of goodness and beauty.’

‘Yes,’ said Cecilia, ‘I think that must have been it. Now *pull-ease* don’t interrupt any more, Thattie.’

‘I cannot say if the fairies had promised that Sagessa should have all these good qualities,’ continued Mrs. Lubin, ‘for I do not think the story said so. But she *had* them, and that is enough for us to know. So when she grew up to be a young lady, she was both loved and admired by all who knew her. And, as always happens to charming princesses, the honour of marrying her was much desired by all the charming princes who knew or even heard of her. Strangely enough, this state of things brought our princess the first trouble of her life, and the first disagreement between her and her parents, for naturally the king and queen were very anxious to see her happily married, particularly as she had no brothers or sisters, and a good husband would be a great help to her when the time came for her to be queen in her father’s place.

‘But Sagessa had her own ideas on the matter.

“I will marry no one,” she said, “who is not as wise as, or wiser than I am myself;” and prince after prince was sent off, looking and feeling rather foolish after a visit to Sagessa.

‘And after a time the matter grew so serious and

seemed to be so hopeless that the king and queen made up their minds to have a long talk with their daughter about it, and get her to settle something.

'Now I must tell you that the country where these good people lived, and over which some day Sagessa would be queen, was called the Country of the Seven Hills. For the principal city, where the palace was, and all the great folk had their homes, stood, not on, but just beside a group of seven hills or mountains. They were of different heights, but there was one in the centre a good deal higher than any of the six others, which were round about it. This mountain in the middle was indeed so lofty that its top was seldom to be seen, as it was almost always enveloped in clouds.'

Here the children wriggled a little bit as if they wanted to speak but scarcely liked to do so. Mrs. Lubin stopped.

'What is it, dears?' she asked.

'We doesn't——' began That.

'Us don't——' followed This, 'understand,' went on both, 'what you said about clouds and en—en——'

'I should have said "covered with," or "wrapped up in" clouds,' replied Mrs. Lubin. "'Enveloped" means covered—just as when you put a letter in an

envelope it is covered by it. And there are very often clouds up in the sky, not very high up, so that the top of a tall hill gets in among them. Sometimes people call the clouds round a hill peak "its nightcap," for fun, you know. When you go to your auntie's, I daresay her hill will sometimes have its nightcap on.'

This and That smiled, and said they now understood. And Mrs. Lubin went on:—

'There were strange stories about this highest hill. It was said that at the very top there was a treasure of some kind, though nobody seemed to know exactly what it was, for it was many, many years since any one had climbed to this highest point. Only one person knew what the treasure was, and that was the Princess Sagessa. She herself had not known it for very long, and how she came to know it I cannot say. Perhaps the fairies told her; perhaps she found it in some of the old books she was so fond of studying in the palace library. However that may have been, she kept the secret to herself and told nobody.

'But when the king and queen had the serious talk with her which I told you they settled to have, an idea came into her head. She had listened quietly

and with great respect to what her kind parents said—for she was good as well as wise. I mean she was not only learned and well taught as regarded lessons and such things, but she had the sort of true wisdom which knows that goodness is the best thing any one can possess and should try for. And she was also quite free from self-conceit.

‘So she sat silent for a few minutes thinking deeply before she spoke. Then she replied in her usual gentle voice.

“My dear father and mother, I thank you for all your loving thought for me, and I will try to meet your wishes.” At this the king and queen nudged each other with satisfaction. They thought Sagessa did not see them do so, but she did. “It is true,” she went on, “that hitherto I have disliked the idea of marrying, because among all the fine young princes who have paid court to me, there has never been one whom I could really look up to, as a wife should look up to a husband. I know I have some gifts which every girl does not possess, but, believe me, I am not vain or proud on this account. They are *gifts*—I am grateful for them, but I should certainly be very foolish and not wise at all if they made me conceited. Still I feel that I am right in

being very cautious in the choice of a husband. Now, my dear parents, I have a proposal to make to you. I will promise to marry any prince you approve of who succeeds in climbing to the top of the centre hill—the hill which is called the Crown Peak——”’ But here a sudden exclamation from This and That caused Mrs. Lubin to stop for a moment, and as they both called out together, neither could be vexed with the other for ‘interruption.’

‘Why,’ they said, ‘that’s the same name as in Nurse’s story—she called the high hill “Peak” too,’ and Mrs. Lubin smiled again as she explained that ‘peak’ meant a point or a top.

“And,” the princess went on, “though my proposal may seem a very curious one, I think you will find in the end that it is wise.”

‘The king and queen were delighted to hear that the princess was really meaning to follow their wishes, so they promised to let her plan be known to all the princes who had tried to win her. But a sudden idea struck the king—

“My dear child,” he said, “how shall you know that the prince, whoever he is, really has succeeded in climbing to the top?”

‘The princess laughed.

“How silly of me,” she said; and it was quite charming to hear her calling herself silly. “I should have explained to you that I know the secret of the treasure on the Crown Peak. There can be no mistake or error about it. He who gains it will bring me the token of his success.”

‘So, far and wide, was spread the news of the Princess Sagessa’s promise to her suitors. And in a few days a great many princes came to the palace to hear more about it. But after it was explained to them, and they were told that to climb up to the top of the mountain would certainly not be easy and perhaps dangerous, and that no one in the country had ever yet done so, nearly all the princes gave up thoughts of it.

“It is all nonsense,” they said, “just a trick of the princess’s to get rid of us by making us break our necks.”

‘And in the end only three remained. Two of these three were very fine young princes indeed, very clever and very pleased with themselves, and each quite sure that he could do what nobody else could. The third was neither very fine-looking nor very clever, and not at all vain. The great difference between him and the other two was that he really

loved the princess for her own sake, though he did not think himself nearly good enough for her and had very little hope of winning her, while the two others thought far more of what a fine thing it would be to marry her and help to rule her rich and beautiful country.

‘The first to set out on the journey to the top was Prince Gallant. He was the eldest of the three, and was to have two days for his trial, as that was quite long enough. And the two others were to wait till he returned.

‘You can imagine that they both felt very anxious during those two days, though they did not say much to each other, as they were not special friends. Indeed, Prince Bravo, as the second was called, looked down upon quiet Prince Gentil, the third, and Prince Gentil was quite content to be left alone.

‘The evening of the second day came without any news of Prince Gallant. It was not till night had fallen that he made his way back, not sorry, I dare say, that it was too dark for him to be seen. For he was in a sad state, limping along with a sprained foot, his fine clothes soiled and torn, himself in a very bad temper. He had not got to the Crown Peak, or anywhere near it; he had had two or three

bad falls, and though he was obliged to stay a night at the palace to get his bruises attended to, and to have some rest and food he refused to see either the princess or her parents, and started off home again the next day as cross as a bear.

‘But when the princess heard it she only smiled.

“It will do him no harm,” she said, “and perhaps some good,” for she guessed what had happened to him. He had tried to make his own way to the top of the hill instead of carefully looking for the right path.

‘And the next day off set Prince Bravo, even more pleased with himself and more sure that he would get to the Crown Peak than Prince Gallant had been. But even worse troubles happened to him. Night came—the night of the second day—without his returning at all. The princess, who had a kind heart and did not wish any of her suitors to suffer badly on her account, even though it was their own fault, sent out messengers to look for him, but it was not till dawn had broken the next morning that they found him lying completely exhausted and not able to move.

‘By his own account he had got very near the top of the mountain where he found a sudden sort of wall

of rock impossible to climb. He had not strength to make his way back and begin again from the start as he would have had to do, and coming home he lost his way! He was not so cross about it as Prince Gallant had been, for he was better tempered, but he was very disappointed, and humbly asked leave to bid the princess farewell.

'She whispered a few words to him as she did so.

"Why, prince," she said, "did you not follow the directions plainly to be seen by any one who is anxious to follow the only safe and certain path?"

'Poor Bravo hung his head.

"Ah!" he said, "there was my mistake. I thought I knew better than those wiser than myself."

'So now there remained only the third prince—quiet Prince Gentil.

'He set off very early the next morning, earlier than the others had done, for he hoped to make good way before the heat of the day and while he himself was still fresh and untired.

'He soon reached the foot of the hills, where the first climbing began. At first it was scarcely to be called climbing at all, and he seemed to make little progress. Any one less patient and modest would have been vexed and turned off the gently sloping

path. This was what the others had done. But that was not Prince Gentil's way—on he went, the steepness increasing so slowly that it was not for some time he found out that he really had mounted a good way, and that he was beginning to get rather hot and out of breath. Then he made his first halt and looked about him, and to his pleasure he caught sight of a sign-post close at hand, on which he read these words—

“Well done, so far. Expect no royal road.”

‘They seemed just meant for him. For you see he *was* royal, but he had the good sense and modesty to know that princes must work their way to wisdom like other people. And after a while, feeling quite refreshed, off he started again.

‘I cannot say but that, even to him, it was pretty hard work. Every now and then, however, he was encouraged by meeting a sign-post with the same words, or words something like them—now and then, at some very difficult bit, still more encouraging, and when it grew towards evening and too dark to read the letters, they were all lighted up as if by fairy candles. And early on the morning of the second day brave Prince Gentil found himself really at the top, and there, safe in a little hollow among the heap

of stones which showed the highest point, he found the treasure.

‘What *do* you think it was?’

This and That shook their heads. They *couldn't* think.

‘It was a crystal glass filled with the purest water. And on it were engraved some words in a very, very old language, which the prince could not at first understand. But his good sense told him that, as he had climbed up all that way to gain wisdom, it was plainly to be seen what he was meant to do. So he raised the cup to his lips and drank the water—every drop. And then, as he glanced at it again, he saw what the words meant. It was something like this—

‘Wisely hast thou hither come,
Wiser still shalt thou go home.

I daresay the verse was prettier than that, but I cannot quite remember it, though that was the meaning. And now all seemed plain and easy. Feeling as fresh and strong as when he set out, the prince turned to make his way down, scarcely able to believe in his great happiness, and carrying with him the beautiful crystal cup to present to his dear

princess as a sign that he had really done what she had desired.

‘She was waiting for him, as happy as he was, for quiet and modest as he seemed, her own wisdom had told her that he was far the most likely to win, of all that had hoped to please her, for he had been ready and willing to follow good advice and not to set up his own ideas and self-will as the two other princes had done.

‘And the crystal cup was placed in a beautiful cabinet in the palace, where, if we could find our way there, I daresay it is still to be seen, though the story of Prince Gentil and Princess Sagessa is a very old one.’

Mrs. Lubin stopped.

This and That gave a deep sigh, which meant that they were very pleased, and thanked her very much.

‘Did you understand my old story, my dearies?’ asked Mrs. Lubin. ‘Perhaps it was a little difficult for you?’

‘It’s a *very* nice story,’ they answered. ‘P’raps Nursie’s was a tiny bit easier,’ added This; ‘but if you’ll tell me about the princess again, when I’m a little bigger, I fink I’d under’tand it kite well, and I did like it *very* much.’

‘Did you read it in a book?’ asked Thattie.

‘Yes,’ said Mrs. Lubin, ‘in a very old little book which I had when I was very young, and I found it again a few years ago at my sister’s. That is how I remember it so well. Some day, perhaps, I could borrow the book for you, and you might read it yourselves. These old fairy stories often have meanings to find out that one does not see all at once.’

‘Yes,’ said Thattie, ‘I was thinking that,’—for you see he was older than Thissie.

Then the footman came to say that tea was ready. When Mrs. Lubin was alone or had grown-up ladies with her, of course she had it in the drawing-room, but when This and That came she thought it was more comfortable in the dining-room, and I am quite sure they thought so too.

CHAPTER IX

A SAD TROUBLE

That time we were so very sad

Long, long ago, now.

Childish Memories.

TEA at Mrs. Lubin's was always a great treat, though I should not like you to think that Sandford and Cecilia were at all greedy children. But they liked nice things in a right way, as children should. And they liked to see the tea all put out prettily, with flowers and pretty cups and saucers and bright shining spoons.

And the cakes and buns were all home-made, and so, of course, was the strawberry jam, and—I was going to say—the honey. But I don't quite know if you can speak of honey as home-made, though the bees who made it did certainly live at Moorfield, which was the name of Mrs. Lubin's house. And even the bread and butter seemed to taste *ever* so

much nicer than at home, though I daresay there was a little fancy about this.

At home too This and That had only milk, or, in cold weather, *very* weak tea, but at Mrs. Lubin's they were allowed to have cocoa or chocolate made in some very delicious way, which they enjoyed almost the most of anything.

After tea they spent a good long while in arranging the Indian cabinet. Mrs. Lubin told them she had been waiting for them to come for it to have a really good dusting. She was not afraid of trusting it to them to do, as they were careful children. Besides this, most of the ornaments in it were either of very strong china or of wood or metal or something which would not break. I rather think Mrs. Lubin had chosen things of this kind to keep in it on purpose, for though This and That were her favourite little visitors, she sometimes had grand-nephews and nieces to stay with her who were not quite as careful or 'neat-handed' as the two children of this story.

And so the time passed only too quickly and happily till Nurse tapped at the door and came in to say that she was afraid it was 'just upon' six o'clock, and that Master Sandford and Miss Cecilia must be getting ready for their walk home.

When they had changed their shoes, and had got on their coats and hats—the evenings were still rather chilly, of course—Mrs. Lubin kissed them very lovingly, and they gave her such a great hug that I am afraid the lace round her neck and the pretty ribbons of her cap got rather crushed. But she was far too kind to mind, and she stood at the door watching them down the drive, one on each side of Nurse, hopping and skipping every now and then as they made their way along.

‘Dear children,’ thought the kind old lady to herself, ‘I am so glad they have been happy. And it is a lovely evening for their walk home.’

It was a very lovely evening: the sunset was going to be very beautiful, Nurse said, and it really seemed as if summer was close at hand. I scarcely think that This and That had ever felt happier in all their lives than as they trotted along.

And yet there was trouble before them. It sometimes does seem as if trouble came specially just when we are “extra” happy, even to children—or perhaps the being so happy makes one notice it more. And trouble *must* come. It would not be true to hide this from you, dear children, even while you are still young. For none of us could ever hope

for the best and most lasting happiness except for the teaching of trouble.

All the same, it makes me feel rather sad to have to tell you of our poor little This and That's trouble, though it was not a *very* big one after all.

Mamma was still out when they reached home. They felt rather sorry at this, but not very surprised. For their mother knew they would not be back till bedtime, and so she had not hurried, as she generally did, when she went out to pay calls, knowing that they would be expecting their 'children's hour' in the drawing-room.

Nurse saw a look of disappointment in their faces however. She was always quick to notice any such look, and quick to comfort, as all really loving nurses are.

'Never mind, my dears,' she said. 'Very likely your mamma will be in before you are asleep. And even if not, she is sure to come up and kiss you, and I will tell her how happy and good you have been.'

So it was only with a *very* tiny feeling of disappointment that This and That laid their heads on their pillows and fell asleep. They were really rather tired, you see, though they scarcely knew it.

It happened as Nurse had said. The children's

mother looked in at the nursery on her way downstairs to dinner. Nurse was a little surprised that she had not done so on the way up, for she had heard the carriage drive in some little time before.

‘I suppose it must have been so much later than usual that she was afraid of keeping their papa waiting,’ thought Nurse to herself.

She did not know that their mamma had kept away on purpose till she was dressed, not *wishing* to find This and That still awake.

How pretty she looked as she stood between their cots in her white evening dress! But as Nurse was gazing at her and almost wishing they would wake up, she noticed a look on mamma’s face which startled her a little. Was it only the distress of knowing that in a few days she would have to be parted from her little boy and girl for several weeks? *Nurse* knew this was going to be, though till now the children had not been told.

No, it was not that look. It was more like a vexed and worried expression than just a rather sad one, and as Nurse grew more sure of this, she too began to feel troubled.

‘They have been so good and happy, ma’am,’ she

began in rather a low voice, moving nearer the cots as she spoke.

But the children's mother made a little sign to her to return to the other side of the room, where she had been folding away the 'best' clothes the two had worn that afternoon.

'I want to speak to you a little, Nurse,' she said. 'I dressed first on purpose because I wanted to find them asleep. I have plenty of time, and I don't think they will hear. They seem so fast asleep.'

'Yes, ma'am—they are tired, I daresay, bless them, though the walk did not seem at all too much for them. And I was to be sure to tell you, from Mrs. Lubin, ma'am, that they'd been as good as gold. She *was* pleased—and she thinks them so grown too, and coming on nicely every way.'

Still these pleasant words did not bring a smile to poor mamma's face.

'Mrs. Lubin is very kind,' she said, 'most kind. But I must tell you, Nurse, that I am rather unhappy about—about the children, this evening.'

Nurse started and her face fell.

'About the children,' she repeated anxiously, 'Is there any illness about? I can get them ready to go to their auntie's to-morrow if you like, ma'am?'

But their mamma shook her head.

‘No, it is nothing of that kind, Nurse,’ she said. ‘It is that I am afraid they have been rather naughty about something, and even a little—deceitful.’

She stopped before saying the last word, as if it hurt her to use it. It hurt poor Nurse. Of that there was no doubt, for her face grew crimson and she clasped her hands.

‘Oh, ma’am,’ she said, almost as if she were going to cry, ‘don’t say that. Such open-hearted, trusting children. Oh no, ma’am—there must be some mistake.’

‘I will tell you all about it,’ said the children’s mother, sorry to see Nurse so distressed, and sitting down as she spoke. ‘You know I have a great many calls to pay just now before going away for so long. And on many of my friends I have only time to leave cards. Well, this afternoon, knowing This and That were at Moorfield, I settled to leave a good many, and not to hurry home as usual. Just when I was ready to start, I found that my card-case was almost empty. So I sent Mildred downstairs to the cupboard in the library bookcase where I keep such things, to bring me some. I had a good many still. To my surprise she came back to say she could find

none—only some with a black edge, which I used when we were in mourning. I could scarcely believe her, and I went to look myself. It was quite true. There was not one plain one left—only the black-edged ones. I could not make it out—nor could Mildred, and I had to go off with some sheets of note-paper, which I scribbled my name on, and at every house I was obliged to ask the servant to say to the lady I had used all my cards. It was *very* tiresome. When I got home, I was just running up to see if the children were still awake, when Mildred stopped me.

“I have found your calling cards, ma’am,” she said, and she took me into the drawing-room, and there, sure enough, was quite a number of them—thirty or more—just those I had known were in the cupboard. They were lying on the top of the children’s big box of bricks, which was open, with a good many of the bricks taken out.

“They were hidden away underneath the bricks,” Mildred went on to explain, and when I asked her what in the world had made her look for them in such an odd place, she told me about Thattie having come downstairs with her the other day when it was raining so and I was out, to get some sheets of wrapping-up paper that you had

said the children might have. *That* was all right of course.'

'Yes, ma'am,' said Nurse; 'it was on Saturday, and I knew they might have some paper. But I never would have taken upon me to say they might have your calling-cards. Dear, dear!'

'Of course not,' said her mistress. 'But Mildred said she remembered Sandford peeping into the cupboard and asking what was in the little boxes where the calling-cards were, and peering about a good deal—you know his way when he wants to notice anything specially. And somehow—she scarcely knows why—it came into her head to look among the toys in the drawing-room. And in the box of bricks she saw a bit of card sticking out at one corner, and this led to her examining more closely, and there, underneath the bricks, as I said, were all my cards! What I don't like in it, Nurse, is Thattie having said nothing about it to Mildred, and then going and getting them in that secret sort of way as he must have done.'

But at this Nurse's face brightened up a little.

'Oh, ma'am,' she said, 'I do remember something about it now. Master Sandford did say to me that there were some cards—I fancied he meant some old

plain cards you might have had for patchwork or something of that kind—you gave them leave to have. He was quite sure he had got leave for them.'

Mamma looked more and more puzzled. For the time she had quite forgotten what she had said several days before about the old *playing* cards.

'I am glad of what you say, Nurse,' she replied, as she rose slowly from her chair and turned to go downstairs. 'It does not look as if they—or That rather—had meant to hide anything. Still I rather wonder he did not ask Mildred about them when he was at the cupboard with her.'

'I daresay he did not think then that they might want the cards that very afternoon,' said Nurse. 'It was not till after tea that I gave them leave to go down to the drawing-room. I was so busy cutting out the pinafores. And then, you see, ma'am, they're not used to ask Mildred for anything. I don't blame her—she's quite a kind girl, would never want to make mischief, but she's not used to children, and doesn't understand them—bless their little hearts! Master Sandford *may* have said something about the calling cards to her that she didn't rightly take in.'

But mamma shook her head.

No; she had closely questioned Mildred, and was

quite sure he had said nothing about wanting or taking any. He had only asked to see inside the box where they were, but without a word more.

Still, the children's mother felt rather happier after her talk with Nurse. Nurse was so sure that no harm, no concealing had been *meant*, and as mamma crossed the room again and stood for a moment between the two cots, the kind woman was pleased to see that her mistress stooped and kissed very, very gently each little sweet, sleep-flushed face, instead of standing there, as she had done before, with the troubled, anxious look that went to Nurse's heart.

'I think they had better not come down to our breakfast to-morrow morning,' she said in a low voice. 'Say I will send for them when I am ready, and that I am tired. I know I shall be, for I have had a headache all the afternoon. I will explain to their papa.'

She was thinking to herself that if This and That—Thattie especially—*had* anything on their conscience, this leaving them to themselves in the morning more than usual would awaken it more clearly and give them time to see that they had done wrong.

But no—though Nurse watched both faces closely

when she gave their mamma's message, there was no sign of anything but disappointment and surprise on either of them.

'Poor mamma,' said the two together. 'Is her headick *very* bad, Nursie? She doesn't mind often if it does hurt her a little if we don't make a noise.'

And then they sat down rather sadly on their little chairs, not seeming inclined to do anything else.

'Us'll just wait here,' said Cecilia, 'till mummy sends for us,' and then she and Sandford went on talking to each other, though Nurse, coming and going about the room, only caught a word or two now and then of what they said.

'It seems so funny,' said This; 'like as if fings was getting all different, when us doesn't go down to the diney-room.'

'And we had such lots to tell mummy,' That was saying the next time Nurse passed near. 'All about Mrs. Lubin's and——'

'Shall we go up to the attic?' he asked Thissie a minute or two later, but Thissie shook her head and said something about not making the oldies unhappy, which Nurse certainly would not have understood even if she had heard it all! So half an hour, three-quarters, nearly an hour passed. It

was not till within twenty minutes or so of Miss Wren's usual time for coming that Mildred at last appeared at the door with a message that their mamma wanted Master Sandford and Miss Cecilia in her own room.

They jumped up and ran off at once, overjoyed and yet somehow a very little frightened. As Thissie had said, everything seemed 'different' this morning, and this is not always a comfortable feeling. And when they saw their mamma—though she kissed them kindly, her face was grave—they were not met by any little joke or loving words of caress as generally happened.

'Did you enjoy yourselves at Mrs. Lubin's, my dears?' their mamma asked.

'Yes, thank you, mummy, very much,' was the reply.

But it did not sound altogether as hearty as usual, and this their mamma at once noticed, and put it down to quite a mistaken reason, not knowing that the cause was her own very serious manner, which added to the children's feeling of something being wrong and strange.

'As much, *quite* as much as the last time you were there, before Mrs. Lubin was ill?' said mamma again.

‘Yes, quite as much—more, lots more than ever,’ said Thattie, with some surprise in his voice.

‘Kite as much, lotses more,’ echoed This.

‘Oh,’ said mamma, ‘I was not sure that you would. You know that if children have done anything not quite right or good, it takes the pleasure out of the very pleasantest things.’

She looked at Thattie as she said this, and his cheeks grew red, though he could not have explained why.

‘Yes, mummy,’ he said gently, feeling rather puzzled.

‘Well, my boy?’ she went on quite kindly, indeed very kindly, but still with something different from usual in her voice. But Thattie only looked at her, his cheeks still red and the puzzle growing greater in his blue eyes.

‘Yes——’ he began. ‘I—I mean, I don’t understand, please, mum—mamma.’

‘Think a little—don’t be in a hurry. Think, both of you, though I am talking most to you, Sandford. Have you done nothing—touched nothing—taken nothing, lately, that you should not have done without leave, and—and *hidden* what you had done, lest you should be scolded?’

‘Lately,’ repeated Thattie slowly; ‘does “lately” mean “late,” mamma? I’m trying to think. I am, truly, mamma. But does lately mean late?’

‘No, of course not,’ said his mother, and her voice sounded rather sharper. ‘It means not long ago—just a day or two ago. And what does it matter whether it was late or early, if it was a wrong thing you did?’

‘No,’ said Thattie; ‘it wouldn’t bettern it, I know. But I on’y wanted to understand, ’cos I’m tryin’ to think. I’m tryin’ very hard, mummy.’

‘And I’m tryin’ too, very hard,’ said This.

Both of them were trying very hard *not* to do something—not to cry, though they were too puzzled to know why they felt on the point of doing so.

‘It cannot be so very hard to remember—if you *want* to remember,’ said mamma slowly. ‘It was not anything you did in a great hurry, for you must have thought about where you would hide what you had taken.’

At her first words Thattie had shaken his head. It *was* very hard to remember, though with his whole heart he wanted to do so. And Thissie shook her head too, just because he did. But as mamma went on speaking, a sudden idea came into Thattie’s mind

—it was at the word ‘hide,’ and what she said about having thought about ‘where’ they should hide. They had thought a great deal about where to hide the oldies—could it be about the oldies, this strange thing that mamma seemed so sorry about, and that had been ‘naughty’? But then they had not ‘taken’ the oldies; they were their very own and nobody else’s; they were not counted good enough to send to the children’s ‘hospillan’! Still—it did seem to match a good deal, and Thattie’s face grew redder still, as he took into his mind the idea that they might have to tell all about their plan, for taking their dear aged friends to auntie’s hill, where they would run no risk of being ‘frown away,’ or burnt, or anything dreadful like that.

Just yet, however, he would not tell. He must first talk it over with Thissie. But he tried to think what he *could* tell—something to make mummy understand a little, to make her see they had not meant to do, had really not *done* anything naughty or disobedient.

‘Mamma,’ he said at last, ‘don’t you remember saying us might have a secret—quite a good secret? It has a little to do with hidin’, but——’

Something between a sob and a choke from Thissie

startled him. She caught his arm and he stopped suddenly.

'Oh, Thattie,' she exclaimed, 'don't, don't tell. It'll spoil it all.'

Their mother turned to her, and for the first time she seemed vexed with Thissie too.

'Cecilia,' she said, 'it is very wrong of you to try to stop your brother if he was going to tell me the truth. No secret can be a quite good secret if you are so afraid of my knowing it.'

Thissie burst out crying. But there was some firmness about her too.

'Mummy,' she said, 'you gived us leave. And it wouldn't be a secret if we told it you. And it was kite a good secret—it was, it was.'

'Do not cry like that,' said mamma. 'You know, Thissie, how difficult it is for you to stop if you let yourself go on. Try to leave off,' and the kinder tone made This do her best to swallow her sobs. Still more perhaps Thattie's next words.

'Thissie,' he said, 'you *know* I wouldn't tell without your leave. It's yourn too. You are silly. Mamma, it's true what she says. You did give us leave to have a little *quite* good, *pairfitly* good secret. And there's some hidin' in it, but there isn't no *takin'*

—truly there isn't. Mummy, mummy,' Thattie's talking grew very babyish when he was so upset; 'oh, mummy, us wouldn't take anything what wasn't ourn without leave.'

'No,' sobbed Thissie; 'ter-uly us wouldn't.'

Mamma looked very unhappy herself.

'Then why can't you tell me all about it?' she said. She was so very anxious not to force the owning it upon them by showing them the calling cards hidden beneath the bricks. It would be so much better, she thought, if she could get them to tell of themselves.

A ring at the front door made her cross the room to her own bell, and when Mildred appeared, she turned to her quickly.

'I think that must be Miss Wren,' she said; 'will you ask her to wait a minute or two in the library? I want to speak to her before she goes upstairs.'

'Yes, ma'am,' said Mildred. But though she went away again at once, an instant's glance had shown her that the children were in trouble, and it made her very sorry.

CHAPTER X

CLEARING UP

There's room to sit
All three . . .
This is what we call fun.

Rocking and Talking.

THIS and That looked at each other when their mother left the room. Thattie was trying *very* hard not to cry.

Thissie spoke to him through the tears which *would* still come, though she too was doing her best to choke them down.

'Thattie,' she said, 'does you understand even a tiny bit what mummy means?'

'No, Thissie,' he said, 'in course I don't, unless it's to do with the oldies—about the hidin'. But it wasn't naughty to take them—they was ourn, our very own.'

'And mummy *did* say us might have a kite good secret,' said This. 'Mummy is getting not fair.'

'Thissie,' said Sandford. 'That's not good of you.'
But This was growing excited.

'I don't care,' she said. 'It *isn't* fair, and I——'

She stopped suddenly, for just then their mamma came back. She caught sight of her little girl's angry face and heard the tone of her voice.

'I am afraid,' she thought to herself, 'that somehow or other Thissie is more to blame than That; it may be to save her being found fault with that he won't speak out. Well, I must be patient and just wait and see.'

So she took no notice of Cecilia's flushed cheeks and impatient words.

'Miss Wren has gone upstairs,' she said, 'so I will not keep you any longer just now. I shall see you again this afternoon, and by then I hope that you will have something more to tell me—that you will have remembered what you have done wrong, That—and Thissie, though you are still only a very little girl, I think you are old enough to understand that it would be very unkind—*very* unkind to stop your brother telling me anything he feels he should tell.'

To this Cecilia made no answer. She trotted out of the room in silence and stumped upstairs, making more noise than usual.

‘Thattie,’ she said when they stopped a moment on the landing, ‘Thissie doesn’t love mummy when her calls you “my bruvver.”’

Sandford turned to her a melancholy face. He was looking and feeling far more sad and puzzled than vexed or angry.

‘You mustn’t feel that way, Thissie,’ he replied. ‘It’s naughty. P’raps,’ he went on, ‘if we tell the oldies about it, they might think what it can be. Let’s go up to them after lessons. Try to be *very* good at lessons, Thissie, so that Miss Wren will be pleased, and then we won’t have any to learn over this afternoon.’

Thissie said nothing, but she did think that Sandford was a very good, patient, little boy,—‘Much gooderer than me,’ was the way she said it to herself.

And for his sake—partly perhaps out of some shame that she should seem a ‘baby’ to her governess, who had little sisters of her own at home and understood about children, as well as big people, trying to be ‘brave’ and unselfish—she left off crying, giving her eyes a good scrub outside the nursery door before going in.

Miss Wren bade them good morning as usual, without seeming to think there was anything the

matter, which both This and That were very glad of. Nor did they find out that she was rather less strict than she generally was, for she felt really sorry for the two troubled little faces, and turned away as if very busily looking at something else, when once a big tear fell on Cecilia's slate, nearly drowning a whole line of figures!

So lessons were got over smoothly, and when their governess left she kissed them both and said they might tell their mamma they had been good and attentive.

There was still an hour to dinner-time and it had begun to rain, so they could not go out into the garden, as they usually did at this time of day.

'May we go up to the attic, Nurse?' they asked very meekly.

Nurse hesitated. She would have said 'Yes' in a moment, but to-day, knowing their mamma was not pleased with them, and that she was unhappy about them, she scarcely knew if she should allow them to leave the nursery. But both This and That looked pale and tired, and on wet days it was a very good thing to air the room well by opening wide both windows and door, which she could not do while the children were there. So after an instant's thought,

she said 'Yes,' they might go upstairs for half an hour, and she would come to fetch them herself if she thought they were staying too long.

They were glad to be by themselves, and still more glad when they had opened the coal-box lid and taken a peep at their dear oldies, who looked very peaceful and comfortable, just as they had left them.

'We may cry a little now,' said Thissie, 'just a little. I would like to, Thattie, if you don't mind, and p'raps you'd like to. I don't mind.'

'Very well,' said That, 'if you won't get into a you-can't-stop-yourself way.'

'No,' said This. 'I p'omise you I'll cry very genkly. And I'll take out one of the oldies to comfort me—not Bluebell; she's too delikid, and she's packed in too tight I think'; and she peeped again at her treasures, 'I fink piggy will do, and he's at the front.'

Piggy was got out easily. Thissie wrapped him in her handkerchief and hugged him closely, with a sort of crooning murmur, while the scarcely dried tears showed themselves only too ready to collect again. And Thattie, sorrowfully admiring her, sat beside her on the floor, winking hard, for in spite of Thissie's invitation he did not want to break down.



A PEEP AT THE DEAR OLDIES.—p. 164.



'Oh, piggy, piggy,' moaned Thissie; 'oh, piggy, and all dear oldies, us are so very unhappy. Mummy's not pull-eased, and us don't know why. What shall us do, oldies? Us is a'fraid it's all along of you.' Here she stopped for a moment and turned to That: 'Shall Thissie tell them all about it?' she asked.

Thattie winked away a tear.

'I don't know what you mean by all about it,' he said rather gruffly. 'If we knowed all about it, we'd know what it are that mummy wants us to say we did that was naughty. I suppose,' he went on, after a moment's thinking—'I suppose, Thissie, it must be about hiding the oldies. Mummy did say hiding was the naughtiest part, and it must be naughty, though we didn't know it was?'

But Thissie wouldn't give in.

'No,' she said, 'it *weren't* naughty, and I shan't never say it were. It weren't naughty to do it, and it weren't naughty 'cos it was a secret, 'cos us had got leave for a secret.'

Then she cuddled piggy again and went on with her 'So unhappy, piggy, dear, so very unhappy.'

'Thissie,' said Sandford again, 'stop cry-singing, please, for a minute. I want to say something. I

think we must tell mummy about the oldies. It's comed into me that we must, and then p'raps we'll understand what we did that was naughty.'

Cecilia stopped crying and opened her eyes very wide.

'Oh, Thattie,' she said, 'tell our secret and spoil it all, and have the oldies frowed away or burnt! Oh, oh——'

'Hush, Thissie,' said Sandford. 'Mummy isn't a cruel uncle like the babies-in-the-wood's uncle, or—or—like a 'ogre. Her'll not burn the oldies if we ask her. I truly don't think she will. But we *can't* go on like this. Mummy knows we've hided something, and it's all that that's made the mistook. Yes, Thissie, we must tell mummy, and beg and *beg* her to let us take the oldies away to the 'nill.'

Thissie did not speak. She was beginning to think it would have to be, but she did not like it at all.

At last—'Her gaved us leave to have a secret—a kite good secret,' she said, as she had already said so often.

'I know,' said Sandford, 'but p'raps, Thissie, it's more comforbler for children not to have secrets, even if they do get leave—'cept p'raps about birthday

presents. And'—he stopped a little—'I've been thinking that it might have been very difficult to take the oldies without anybody knowing. They're rather big, you know. We'd have had to push them into corners—we couldn't have took them all together. And Nursie would have been certain sure to find some of them when we got to auntie's, and p'raps she'd have said she *must* frow them away, for fear auntie's servints thought we had such 'nugly toys.'

'They're *not* 'nugly,' exclaimed Thissie angrily. She was in the sort of half-tired, half-cross humour that all children are in sometimes, when they feel as if they must speak sharply to somebody.

Thattie was so much in earnest that it made him wonderfully patient.

'They don't seem 'nugly to *us*,' he said; 'but they'd seem dreffly old and poor to anybody that didn't understand. P'raps mummy'll promise to be kind to them before we tell her all the secret. And then, Thissie, they'll be far comfobler than if we had to push them into corners of the travelling rugs or anything like that, for they *might* even tumble out in the railway and get runned over by the train.'

These last words had more effect on Thissie than

all that he had said before, though she would not give him the satisfaction of actually saying so. But she left off her sad song to piggy, and only hugged him tight and whispered that if he was a good piggy he and all the others should go in a nice soft, warm corner of a trunk to auntie's, and not tumble out in the railway or have any more 'ter-roubles.' Then she put him carefully back in the coal-box, telling him he might talk to Bluebell and Racer and the blackey-boys about going in the railway, and just as she had drawn the 'flutter paper' curtain over them again and shut down the lid, the door of the attic opened and Nurse looked in to say that their dinner was ready, and the two little people stumped downstairs after her.

They were very quiet all dinner-time, but Nurse was pleased to see a rather less troubled look on the two faces she knew so well. Thattie especially seemed quiet and composed, as if he had made up his mind to something. And Thissie had left off crying and was quiet too, though her eyes were still swollen and her face rather flushed, and her voice not so sweet and gentle as usual.

For, as we know, she was still feeling sore and almost angry.

After dinner they got ready for a walk. If they had not still been feeling so troubled, they would have enjoyed it very much; Nurse was so kind, helping them to hunt in the hedges for the first early flowers and buds coming out, so that, with the addition of some of the still remaining prettily shaded leaves which were to be found in sheltered corners, they made up a pretty little bouquet for their mother.

It still wanted some time till tea would be ready. But Mildred came up to the nursery as soon as she heard them returning, to say that their mamma wished them to go down to her in the library for a little. This was not their usual time for being with her downstairs, not 'the children's hour,' and it made them feel strange and more unhappy again, though Nurse kissed them and told them to speak out and not be afraid—that was the way to make things come right if they had gone wrong. Still they made their way only slowly downstairs, without any of their usual springs and jumps of joy.

As Thissie said to That in a low voice—

'Everything seems differund to-day, Thattie, and it makes me ter-rembly,' but That was pleased to see that the angry look had gone out of her eyes, and that she spoke quite gently.

Mamma was waiting for them in the library, and though she was grave her eyes looked very kind.

‘Come here, dears,’ she said, and she held out a hand to each. ‘We are going to have a quiet little talk together, to try if we can’t get everything straight and happy again.’

This was comforting, and still more so was the tone in which it was said. Mamma was not a very ‘old’ person herself, though she was quite ‘grown-up,’ and she sometimes took things too seriously to heart, just as many children do. And she had begun to think that perhaps she had been rather too severe and anxious about what the children had done and concealed. *Somehow*, perhaps they had not meant to do wrong. Only why then hide it?

Thattie looked up at her words. Then, though his lips were quivering, he drew his hand gently from his mother’s and stood straight in front of her, speaking out like a little man.

‘Mummy,’ he said, ‘I’se goin’ to tell you *all*—about our secret, and if it was naughty we didn’t mean it.’

‘‘Cos,’ Thissie *couldn’t* help repeating, ‘you did say, mummy, that us might have a kite good secret.’

Thattie turned round impatiently, but mamma

just gave the little girl's hand a squeeze, as much as to say, 'Let That speak first.'

And then he told the simple, funny, and yet rather touching story of the dear oldies, and his and Thissie's fears for them, and how they had packed them away 'comfably' in the old coal-box, meaning somehow or other to get them out again and pack them in some corner of the luggage to go to auntie's, where the oldies had been promised they should have a peaceful nest of their own in the sweet soft grass of the famous hill, which, I am sorry to say, became a 'nill' again in poor Thattie's flurry and excitement.

'But, p'raps,' he ended up, 'p'raps it's better for you to know, mummy. For Thissie and me's been thinking we don't know where we'd have packed them 'cept in the railway rugs, and they might have tumbled out.'

'And been runned over by the railway train,' added This solemnly.

Mamma did not speak for a minute. She just looked at them both, and her eyes were quite kind, only there was still a good deal of puzzle in her face.

'And this is your secret, then?' she said at last. 'Have you nothing more to tell me?'

'No,' said Thattie, shaking his curly head, 'nothing

more that you don't know, mamma. The secret was only about the oldies.'

'And if,' This put in again, 'if it was naughty, mummy, us didn't mean it, for you know you did say us might have——'

'Oh, Thissie,' said Thattie, 'do be quiet about what mummy said. You've told it such hundred lots of times.'

'Never mind,' said mamma, 'it's all right. I have not forgotten about it. And I promise you now that the oldies, as you call them'—and here her voice grew rather 'funny,' as if she were going either to laugh or cry, the children were not sure which—'shall have a peaceful home *somewhere*—at auntie's, if you like it best.'

'On the 'nill—h-ill, I mean?' said That eagerly.

'We shall see—wherever you like best. I myself think the hill would be rather cold—in winter,' at least. But you and Thissie shall choose. You may make your minds quite easy about the poor dears. But now, listen to me, my darlings. It is not the secret you have told me that has been making me unhappy about you. As Thissie says, it is quite a good little secret. What I want to know is this. You have taken something of mine to use among your games

that you should not have taken. You must know you have done so, and I should not have been vexed or troubled, at least not *so* vexed or troubled, if you had owned to having done it. I wish you would tell me now that you are sorry you took anything without leave.'

Both children's eyes were opened very wide; they stared at their mother as if they could *not* understand. 'Tookened something of yours without leave?' said That.

'Somefin of mummy's wifout leave?' echoed This. 'Yes; dears, something—or some things—that you have hidden—I am afraid—hidden on purpose.'

The puzzle on both faces increased. 'Hided on purpose?' said the two voices together. 'Yes, dears, so that mummy and Nurse would not see, as you did not want them to be angry with you,' answered mamma.

She spoke very gently, but still the moment she had said it, she wished she had not. For a pink flush spread all over little Sandford's face and his hands clasped each other tightly.

'Oh, mamma,' he exclaimed, 'we wouldn't ever——' and then his voice choked.

'Oh, mummy,' said Cecilia, though she did not so

clearly understand, 'us wouldn't never——' and then she flung her arms round her brother, whispering, 'Don't k'y, Thattie.'

Thattie had no intention of crying. He just said very quietly—

'Please, mamma, what was it you thoughtened us had hidid ?'

It was best now to speak out plainly.

'My calling cards, my boy—the cards that are in your big box of bricks—down underneath them, at the bottom of the box.'

'*Callin'* cards,' repeated That. Then his face cleared. 'Oh, *ladies'* cards,' he said, 'like auntie's. Yes, mamma, you said we might take the *plain* ones, as many as we wanted. And these *is* plain ones, without no black edge, like you used to have. We wouldn't have took any with a black edge, though there wasn't any. We saw in the box when we took out the plain ones.'

Now it was *mamma's* face that cleared.

'*Plain* ones,' she repeated. 'Oh, my poor Thattie. Yes, I remember. I did give you leave to take the old *playing* cards—I remember. As many as you liked. And you thought I meant calling cards. I see it all now. Look here'—and mamma seized the

little key, lying in its usual place on her writing-table, and went down on her knees before the low cupboard of the bookcase where she kept her stores of paper and such things—the neat cupboard I have told you of. And from the far back corner she drew out a packet of *playing* cards—cards with coloured pictures of kings and queens and knaves; and hearts and diamonds and spades and clubs, in black and red. ‘Look here,’ she said, ‘*these* are the cards I meant. Old or at least *used* playing cards that papa thinks too old for whist, but too good to throw away. I kept them on purpose for you.’

That and This stared at the cards as if they had never seen such a thing before, though they had once or twice seen their papa and uncles playing whist in the evening, and even remembered one of their big cousins trying to teach them themselves some simple game.

‘Oh!’ said Thattie, ‘I never thought you meant those, mummy. I thought they were not at all *plain*.’

‘No,’ said his mother; ‘and I did not mean *plain*, but *playing*—you hear the difference, Thattie?’

‘Yes,’ he replied slowly, ‘I understand it now. But I *didn’t* understand it, mummy. You does

know, now, doesn't you? I—I am very sorry for having took the wrong ones, but I didn't *hide* them, mummy?’

‘No, dear, I am sure you did not,’ said mamma. ‘And I,’—she went on very gently—‘*I* am sorry for having thought so. We are both sorry, but I am the most, because you have not been to blame at all—except that—perhaps it would have been better if you had asked me to give you the cards, instead of taking them yourself.’

‘You were out that day, and I thought you meant we might take them any time,’ said Thattie.

‘Yes,’ said This, ‘and Thattie turned the key *very* carefly, mummy.’

‘Well, it's all right now,’ said mamma. ‘Let us go into the drawing-room and get out the big brick box, and perhaps my cards will still be fit to use, for my new ones have not come yet. And you may take these other cards and put them with your toys, for building houses with.’

‘Not houses,’ said That, ‘just roofses, mummy. We don't want a great lot for that.’

‘You may as well take them all,’ said mamma; ‘and there are other things you may like them for—making pancakes is very amusing.’

This and That had never made pancakes, and they felt sure it would be very nice, so they took the coloured cards and followed mamma into the drawing-room.

The other ones were just where they had left them, in the big box below the bricks. A few were rather soiled, but some others were quite clean and smooth, and mamma said they would last till her new ones came. Then Nurse, looking rather anxious, put her head in at the door, to say that tea was ready if Master Sandford and Miss Cecilia could come now.

“It’s all right, Nurse,” said mamma, looking as glad as the children themselves that it *was* all right. ‘It has all been a mistake, as Thattie will tell you, and if you can’t quite understand, I will explain afterwards.’

What happy little hearts This and That carried upstairs as they trotted beside Nurse! How extra good, tea tasted that afternoon, especially the strawberry jam which Mildred came running up with as a little treat from mamma, who had sent her to get it out of the store-closet. And what a *very* happy ‘children’s hour,’ they had in the drawing-room again, when mamma taught them how to make card

pancakes, and when they were tired of that, took them both at once on her knee and had a good talk about what it would be best to do with the poor dear 'oldies.'

'You must show them all to me to-morrow, darlings,' she said. 'I have forgotten about them, I am afraid.'

'Isn't mummy sweet?' said Thattie with a sigh of happiness, as he was falling asleep. 'I don't think I ever loved her *kite* as much before, did you, Thissie?'

'No,' said Thissie; 'I didn't never love her better than when she kissed us good-night just now. But I *fink* her should have remembered better about giving us leave to have a kite——'

'Oh, stop,' said Thattie. 'If she didn't remember, it wasn't for you not remindin' and remindin' till——' he had begun rather grumpily, but all of a sudden his speaking turned into a little soft snore, for he was fast asleep! And Thissie thought the best thing she could do was to follow his example.

CHAPTER XI

SAD AND GLAD

For glad is never all glad, my dears,
And sad should not be all sad.

Old Song.

AND the next morning mamma was introduced to the oldies, or the oldies to mamma. I am not sure which I should say? And after all, it was not quite an introducing, for mamma had known them all 'in their youth,' as she said—Thissie would call it 'newth,' as she thought it had to do with being new. Indeed, several of them had been presents from herself and papa—birthday or Christmas presents to That and This.

She looked very grave when Thissie explained to her that Bluebell's head *had* to be always tied up in a handkerchief for fear of her catching cold, and said 'Yes,' it was much better to be careful. And Thissie was very glad that mamma was too polite to ask to

see her face, or to have the handkerchief unfastened, as it would have hurt Miss Bluebell's feelings—and Thissie's feelings too—to have to say that she had no face at all to show!

Racer and the others were not quite in so bad a way; still mamma agreed with This and That that they were all too aged and 'delikid' to be sent to a children's hospital or anything of that kind, and she promised to think well over in her mind what *would* be the best and most comfortable plan for them. Then she went downstairs, This and That with her, for they heard Miss Wren coming upstairs to the nursery, and they had not yet got their lesson-books out. As they were doing so, That gave a peaceful little sigh.

'After 'nall, Thissie, he said, 'it's nicer not to have no secrets—not from mummy, any way.'

'P'raps,' said Thissie, though she did not seem quite so sure about it as her brother. 'It's nice to be kite certing that the dear oldies are safe, and that nobody can't frow them away. I wonder what mummy will settle about them.'

There was not a very long time to wonder about this. I think it could not have been more than three or four days after the day that had begun so

unhappily and ended 'all right again,' that one morning, when the children went downstairs as usual to the dining-room, 'to help papa and mamma to finish their breakfast,' they noticed something unusual about their mother. Her eyes were a little red as if she had been crying, and she kissed them in a very hugging sort of way.

'What is it, mummy dear?' said Thissie, while Thattie glanced at papa, wondering if *possibly* papa had been vexed with poor little mummy, though he had never known him be so. Only he had never seen mummy's eyes red before, and he couldn't think of anything else that could have made her cry!

'Has you been ky'ing, mummy darling?' Thissie went on, for her mother did not answer at once.

'There's nothing really the matter, sweet,' said she at last.

'Only that mummy is *rather* a silly girl,' said papa. But his voice was so kind and his smile so nice that Sandford was quite satisfied that he was not the least vexed. 'It is only that your long-talked-of visit to auntie is coming off at last.'

'But why should that make mummy sorry?' said both children, very surprised. 'That's all a nice thing. You're coming too, aren't you, mummy?' said That.

‘*And* papa?’ added This.

‘Thank you, Thissie,’ said papa.

But ‘No, darlings,’ said mamma, ‘that’s just it. Papa and I have to go abroad—a good long way—to Italy, to see an uncle you don’t know, who is old and rather ill. He has wanted us for a good while, and we knew we would have to go before long, though we put it off in the winter. I did not want you two to leave home in the cold weather and perhaps get coughs or sore throats, without mummy to take care of you. But now the spring is coming on, and I think you will be very happy at auntie’s. And oh, by the bye, I am forgetting—there is a letter for you, or at least a letter for you to read, inside mine. One came for me this morning from auntie, fixing all about your going.’

And out of an envelope lying beside her mamma drew a tiny little letter written on the sweetest pink paper with rosebuds in the corner. It was addressed to—whom *do* you think? To

‘THE DEAR OLDIES,
‘COALBOX HOUSE.’

How This and That smiled when mamma read this out to them, for they could not yet make out

writing very well, and how they smiled still more when she read the little letter inside. This was it.

‘MY DEAR OLDIES—I have heard all about you from Thissie and Thattie, and I write to say that when they come to stay with me, I hope you will all come too. I will do my best to make you comfortable, and I hope you will stay as long as ever you like ; indeed, for always, if we can find a cosy corner to suit you.—Your affectionate friend,

‘THISSIE’S AND THATTIE’S AUNTIE.’

‘Oh, mummy, how kind of auntie ! Did you write to tell her about them ?’ exclaimed the children, and in their pleasure they forgot the sad part of it all—that their mamma was not going with them on their visit, the thought of which had made her poor eyes red.

But she was too glad to see her little boy and girl so happy, to say anything more about the sad part, and she talked brightly to them of all they would do when they were at the pretty house on the side of the hill, where auntie lived—the nice walks they would go, and the flowers—of new kinds, some of them, that only grow on hills—they would gather.

‘And,’ said Thissie, ‘we must think over our hill stories, the ones that Mrs. Lubin and Nursie told us. Auntie said we must be sure to have some ready to tell her, and then p’raps *she’ll* tell us some.’

After that morning it seemed all bustle for several days—the trunks were brought down from the attic; the nursery tables were covered with piles of the children’s clothes, for mamma and Nurse to look over; even Miss Wren, though she was not going to auntie’s with This and That, was busy choosing their books and toys, which were to be packed in a small box by themselves. All this was very interesting, but the most interesting of all, now that there was no longer any secret about it, was the packing the dear oldies, and more than once This said to That, or That said to This, ‘*What* a good thing it was that mummy and Nursie and “everybody” knew about them.’

‘We never could have got them put in nowhere, wifout you seeing, could we, Nursie?’ said Thattie one day with a smile, for Nursie of course knew the whole story and was as kind as possible about it.

‘No, deary, I don’t think you could,’ Nurse replied.

‘And then, p’raps you’d have thought us silly, and you’d have said us couldn’t take them, and

mummy mightened have been in, and the poor oldies would have been frowed away, and all would have been miderable,' said This, half ready to cry at the sad picture her own words were drawing.

'I'd never have wanted to see the 'nill or to climb up it, or—or—nothin',' agreed Thattie.

'Well, well, my dears, don't make yourselves sad about it now that it *is* all right,' said Nurse, as she gently poked 'piggy' into a soft place among That's knickerbockers. "All's well that ends well," you know.'

'If only mummy and papa was coming too,' said Thattie, 'it would be *quite* nice.'

In her heart Nurse felt the same, for though she was sure the children's uncle and aunt would be most kind and good, she did not like the thought of their mamma going so far away. But she did not let the little people know this; she spoke brightly and cheerfully to them about how happy they would be at their auntie's, and the nice letters they would write to their mamma, and the beautiful long ones she would write back again, and how delightful it would be when she and their papa came to fetch them home again when the long bright summer days had come.

And Miss Wren showed them on the map of Europe the country, shaped like a boot, where their papa and mamma were going; and all the big people hoped that little This and That would never think there was anything to be unhappy about in the parting before them.

Perhaps they scarcely did till the very last. But that day the big people's hopes turned out rather mistaken. For when it came to the last breakfast party in the dining-room, the last buttering of a piece of toast for mummy by her little boy, the last eating the top of papa's egg by his little girl, and mamma's eyes looked again not quite like themselves, and the children knew that in one short hour the carriage would be at the door to drive them to the railway station, then—ah! then—it got too much, and the tears *would* come, and mamma and This and That were all in each others' arms crying together, till papa said it really would not do; they must try to be brave.

But papa himself did not look so very brave after all when he stood on the railway station platform, watching the train as it whizzed away, the children waving to him till he was quite out of sight, Nurse anxiously holding them back by their clothes. Then

they both burst out sobbing, and she had to take them into her arms and comfort them as best she could, though the tears were running down her own face. It did them all good in the end however to have had 'their cry out,' as Nurse said, and after a while they were able to sit up and look about them, and count how long it would be till they got to auntie's, and to wonder if she would be at the station herself to meet them, and even, after another half-hour or so, to eat one of the nice buns—home-made buns—which Nurse had got in her bag.

After this everything seemed to brighten up again. It was a lovely sunny spring day fortunately—and there were lots of pretty things to look at as they whirled past them. Primroses on the railway banks, dear little lambkins in the fields, sweet little cottages with blossoming fruit trees in their tiny orchards—altogether it was very nice and cheerful. And the best of all was when at last, after about three hours' travelling, the train slackened for the third time since the journey began, and Nurse told them that they were now close to their auntie's station and might begin looking out to see if she or their uncle was waiting.

'We don't know 'nuncle,' said Sandford; 'we've never seen him.'

He spoke rather gruffly, as he always did when he felt at all shy. Cecilia looked at him rather anxiously, not sure if he felt that he was not going to like their uncle. If so, she was quite sure that *she* would not do so either.

‘No,’ she said, echoing her brother, ‘us hasn’t ever seen him.’

‘Well, never mind that,’ Nurse was beginning in an encouraging tone; ‘you will soon’—when a joyful shout from both children interrupted her.

‘It’s auntie—auntie her own self!’ they cried.

And so it was—as far along the platform as she could get, to catch the first sight of the coming train, and to be caught sight of by those in it, stood kind, pretty auntie. And when the children had waved and shouted to her, so that she was quite sure they *had* seen her, she set off running back again to the part of the station under cover, where she knew they would get out. And oh, joy! who, or what, do you think, was running beside her? Not ‘uncle,’ poor man, though the children were not at all sorry for that, which was rather silly of them, as how can you know if you will like or not like any one before you have even seen them?—but a beautiful big black poodle, ‘all shaven and shorn,’ like the priest in the nursery

rhyme, except for lovely furry ridges here and there, and beautiful black fur 'buttons,' as Thissie called them, and of course nice ringlety-looking ears.

'Oh,' said both with a sigh of satisfaction, 'her's got a lovely big dog,' and they were so delighted that almost before they had given themselves time to kiss auntie, and to answer her questions as to whether they had had a pleasant journey and so on, they were patting and stroking the poodle and asking his name and calling him 'You dear, you sweet doggie,' till he nearly wagged his tail off.

'You never told us you had such a spull-endid poodle-dog,' said Thattie, very proud of himself for knowing the right description of the black beauty.

'No, I didn't,' said auntie laughing; 'because when I was with you I *hadn't* got him. He was a present from your uncle on my last birthday, a few weeks ago, and his name is 'Monsieur,' but as that is a French word——'

'I know,' said Sandford, 'it means "Sir."'

'Or "Mister,"' said Thissie, very proud indeed of *her* knowledge; 'don't you 'amember, Thattie, Miss Wren toldened us that French people say it for bof "Sir" and "Mister"?''

'Yes,' said auntie, 'you are quite right. Well—'

as it is rather a difficult word for people who haven't learnt French to say, we call him "Moss." It doesn't suit him badly, for his stripes and tufts *are* rather like black moss, if there were such a thing,' and auntie stooped down as she spoke and gave an affectionate tug to one of the furry 'buttons.' 'He is an old darling,' she said; 'as soon as we get home, I'll make him show off his tricks to you.'

Then came the little bustle of collecting the luggage, big and small, and settling which things should go in the waggonette and which in the cart that had come for it from auntie's. And at last the travellers were seated in the waggonette, Moss jumping in first of all, which was not very polite of him, but then he *was* only a doggie!

'It was not a very long drive—about three or four miles, through very pretty country, and the last part of it, though they went slowly, was very interesting, as they were going uphill, and very soon auntie told them to begin to look out to see her own particular hill, about which they had thought and heard so much, and which gave its name of 'Hill-side' to her pretty home.

'It is not a very uncommon name,' she said; 'but really one scarcely *could* call it anything else.'

And then she made This and That stand up to have the first sight of it.

‘Oh!’ exclaimed That.

And ‘Oh,’ exclaimed This.

And these ‘Oh’s’ meant a great deal. Of course ‘Oh’ *may* mean almost anything, but these meant ‘What a dear, delightful-looking house, and what a nice garden, and what beautiful trees, and’—best of all—‘what a *lovely* big hill behind, stretching up, up, up, almost into the sky!’

‘Oh, auntie, dear,’ said Thissie, feeling too pleased to be the least little bit shy now, ‘I’m certing sure Thattie and I’ll be *very* happy here. If only mummy was here too,’ and then came the little sigh, which might have been followed by a tear, or several tears, if Thattie hadn’t very sensibly spoken in time to prevent it.

‘Auntie,’ he said, ‘may we climb up the hill to-day?—just a tiny bit,’ he added quickly, seeing that auntie looked doubtful, and glanced at Nurse to see what *she* thought about it.

‘Well,’ she replied, ‘we must see. You have not had any proper dinner to-day, you know, and it is past three o’clock. If you have tea very early, with a nice fresh egg each, to make up for dinner, and if

you don't feel too tired after all your travelling, Moss and I might take you a little way up the hill, just far enough to see the view. Eh, Moss—you lazy old fellow—what do you say to that?' for Moss had pricked up his ears at the sound of his own name.

'He says he would like it,' said Thissie gravely. 'I can feel his tail wagging against my boots,' for Moss was comfortably settled on the floor of the carriage.

'He isn't *really* lazy, is he, auntie?' asked Thattie. Auntie shook her head.

'I'm afraid he really *is*, rather so,' she replied. 'He is very funny in one way—he cannot bear climbing uphill. He stops short and looks at me piteously every few steps, as much as to say, "I'm really not used to this sort of thing. How silly human beings are! Why can't you be content to walk along a nice flat road?"'

'How funny!' said the children, and the wish to see Moss's odd way of conducting himself uphill made them still more anxious to begin their own mountain climbing.

The house and garden and trees and everything were even nicer when they got close to them than as seen from a little way off. And *inside* was really

most interesting. For, as is often the case with a house built on the side of a hill, what seemed upstairs when you first went in at the front, turned into not upstairs at all when you got to the back, but on a level with the garden behind, part of which was, as it were, scooped out of the hill itself. The children's rooms, of which there were three—a nice nursery for the daytime, with a good-sized bedroom at one side, and a tiny one at the other, looked out upon this, and to their great delight, on to the hill beyond—so close indeed to the steeply rising ground that Thattie felt sure he could get right on to it at once if he stood on the window-sill outside, and gave a good jump. But Nurse put a stop to talk of 'any such tricks' pretty sharply, by saying she would have to tell their uncle, and as Thattie had not yet seen their uncle, he felt even more in awe of him than if it had been papa.

They did full justice to the nice tea prepared for them, which pleased auntie when she came up, followed of course by 'Monsieur Moss,' as Thissie called him, to see how they were getting on. And Nurse was, I think, not at all sorry to see them set off for a little stroll with auntie and the poodle, as it would give her a nice quiet time for unpacking the

trunks which had just been carried upstairs, and getting all the children's belongings into order.

Faithful little Thissie ran back just as they were starting to whisper a reminder to Nursie to take great care of the oldies, and put them somewhere 'all together,' as she was afraid they would be feeling very strange.

'I will see to them, my dear,' said Nurse. 'I think it will be best to leave them in one of the empty boxes till you settle about them.'

Then Thissie ran after the others, who were waiting for her at the front door.

CHAPTER XII

THE GOLDEN STEPS

Humble and teachable and mild
May I, as a little child,
My Master's steps pursue.

CHARLES WESLEY.

AUNTIE took them out by the front this first time, because, as she said laughing, she wanted them to learn a little of the 'geography' of Hillside. She led them through the pretty sloping garden, past the neat coach-houses and stables at the back, till they came to a kind of terrace walk, behind that part of the house where their own rooms were. This walk had a wall on one side, and in this wall was a door, which she unlocked with a key that hung on a chain which she wore hanging from her belt. And as soon as they passed through this door they were really on the hill itself!

They scarcely spoke for a minute or two; they

rushed up the short thymy grass till they were out of breath, and then they stood still and looked about them in delight. It was *such* a nice hill—not stony or rough, or uneven, but a real grassy hill, with tiny little sheep paths here and here, but no cart-tracks or ruts to spoil it. And when auntie and Monsieur got up to them—Moss coming *very* slowly and looking exceedingly sorry for himself—by which time This and That had got back their breath again, they both burst out joyfully—

‘Oh, auntie, dear, it is such a lovely hill! We really didn’t know what a lovely hill it was.’

‘Go on a little farther, dears. Don’t hurry quite so fast, or you will get too tired and hot. We will all keep together, and then you can give poor Mossie a pat now and then to cheer him,’ for just as she had told them, the poodle was standing in front of his mistress, wagging his tail in a pitifully beseeching way and looking up with his mournful eyes, as if to say, ‘Oh, *why* do you bring me up this horrid old hill, when you know I dislike climbing so?’

The children could not help laughing at him, though they felt sorry for him too; it was plain that he did dislike it extremely, though not as much as he would have disliked being left alone at home!

And when they had got up a little higher, to a spot that auntie knew well, she made them stop again and turn round, and then the 'view' she had spoken of was all before them. I don't think children care very much for 'views'; at least, I know I did not when I was little, but this view, besides being really beautiful, was very interesting. There were so many things to notice in it. The river, far off, like a silver thread; the railway line by which they had come, shown by a puff of white steam creeping along, though in reality it was a fast train they were watching; the dear little nestling cottages, with their blue smoke curling up among the trees, and the old village church whose clock began to strike at that moment.

'How nice and funny it is!' said Thissie, speaking for once before That.

'Yes, I'd like to live on a 'n-he-ill, always,' said That. 'Up at the very top. May we go up to the very top to-night, auntie, please?'

'No, darlings, not to-night. It's much more of a climb than you think. But some day soon, I hope you will manage it. We must get uncle to help us.'

The idea of uncle 'helping' did not quite please Sandford. He felt himself too much of a man for

that sort of thing; besides—he was not feeling very sure about this stranger uncle. He got rather red, but I don't think auntie noticed it, for just at that moment she jumped up—they had all been sitting down, much to Mossie's satisfaction—with a cry of pleasure.

'There he is,' she exclaimed, as she caught sight of a figure coming out at the door in the garden wall. 'Oh, Hubert,' as 'uncle,' for of course it was uncle, came nearer, 'I am so glad you have come. We were just talking of you. Here they are—your unknown nephew and niece; and this is Uncle Hubert, darlings.'

And the moment This and That looked up into his face and saw his kind, merry, blue eyes, their hearts were gained. There was no more wondering if they would like him or if he would be good to them, or any feeling at all, except that he seemed a younger, merrier, kind of second papa. And his voice and words were just as nice as his eyes.

'I can't call you exactly my "unknown nephew and niece,"' he said, as he kissed them, and threw himself down on the grass beside the little group, 'considering that auntie here has done nothing but talk of Thattie and Thissie for the last few days? And now, I hope, Lily,'—'Lily' was auntie's name—



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'that you will be content, as they are really here. What does Moss say to you both?' and he gave a kind little pinch to the poodle's ear.

'He hasn't *said* nothin',' Thattie answered.

'No, nuffin',' Thissie echoed.

'But I think,' her brother went on,—'I think he means to like us, for he waggles his tail a good deal.'

'Yes,' said Thissie, 'him does.'

The smile on uncle's face broadened ; he loved to hear the children's funny way of talking.

'And you like him, I hope?' he said.

'Oh yes,' they answered eagerly. 'We think he's a *darling*.' 'We like everybody and everything here,' Sandford went on in a sort of burst ; 'specially the 'n—the *hill*. We do so want to climb to the very top. Will you take us some day very soon up to the very, *very* top?'

'Certainly I will, my boy. We shall all go together, Monsieur here too ; do you hear, Sir? We must choose a fine clear day, so that you can write to your mother and tell her what a long, long way you could see from the top.'

'As far as—the country like a boot?' asked Thissie, her voice trembling a very little.

Auntie explained what she meant.

‘No, I’m afraid not quite as far as that,’ said her uncle. But he had heard the little shake in her voice, and he put his arm very kindly round her, and she nestled in to him just as she did to her father, and felt that she loved uncle already very much.

And then they all strolled down the hill again, and in by the door in the wall, and auntie showed them a nice little side way into the house which brought them on to the landing where their rooms were. There were only two or three steps to go up, as I explained to you, as their rooms were at the back.

The next morning the great question of the oldies’ new home had to be settled. Auntie had been thinking a great deal about it before This and That came, and now that they had seen the hill, though they thought it a beautiful hill, they agreed with auntie that in winter it would be very cold, and on rainy days even worse, for their aged friends. So they were very pleased when auntie showed them a funny little cupboard up in the wall in her linen room—perhaps I should have explained before that auntie’s house was a very old-fashioned one, with rambling passages and queer-shaped ceilings, and

odd cupboards and closets where you would never expect to find them—high up, so that you had to stand on a chair to reach it. And this cupboard auntie thought would be the very place for the oldies, as she kept nothing in it, and no one would ever disturb them there. The children thought quite the same, so there their old friends were comfortably settled, and there they still are, for all I know to the contrary.

Some days passed very happily, though their uncle had not been able to take them to the top of the hill. He was very busy just then, and the weather rather unsettled, so he said it was better to wait a little.

There were plenty of nice things to do however. There were letters to write to papa and mamma, and letters to read which came from them on their way to Italy. And every day auntie gave the children a *little* 'lessons,' not as much as Miss Wren did, but just enough to prevent their forgetting what they had learnt, and to teach them *something* more; best of all, to keep them from feeling idle and losing the good habit of giving their attention. Nearly every day, too, auntie herself took them a short climb up the hill, unwillingly accompanied by Moss! And when they were all settled comfortably for a rest—if the

afternoon was fine and dry enough for sitting on the grass, that is to say—they had such nice talks; and auntie made them tell her the ‘hill stories’ they had heard from kind Mrs. Lubin and Nurse, both of which she thought very nice.

But when these stories were told, This and That turned upon auntie, and I think it was quite fair, with a request for a story—a ‘hill story’—from her.

She tried to get out of it—which was rather too bad, wasn’t it?—by saying she wasn’t good at telling stories.

‘Would you rather wait till the day uncle is with us?’ said Thattie. ‘You might tell it us when we are resting at the very top.’

Auntie’s face got a little rosy.

‘No,’ she said; ‘I should feel very shy if uncle was there too. I’ll think about it and try to have a story ready for you for to-morrow, if it is fine enough for us to come out and sit here.’

The children thanked her, and went to bed hoping very much that to-morrow would be fine and dry.

And it was. The next afternoon found them all cosily settled—Moss looking *so* pleased when he found they did not mean to go any higher. He stood up to let them see how fast he could wag his

tail, and then he gave a great yawn, showing his beautiful white teeth and red tongue, as much as to say, 'I really *am* tired and sleepy,' and lastly, snuggled himself down by auntie's soft skirts to take a nap, with no wish to disturb or be disturbed for some time to come.

'Now then, auntie, please,' said Thattie.

'Auntie, pull-ease,' said Thissie.

'I don't know that you will care for my story,' said auntie; 'it is very short and not amusing, I fear; but some other day I may remember a more interesting one perhaps. Well—once——'

'Upon a time?' asked Thattie.

'If you like,' said auntie. 'Once upon a time, then, there was a little boy. He had rather a strange name. It was "Faithful." As soon as Faithful grew old enough to understand what was said to him, he was told that he had a long journey before him, and that a great part of this journey would be upwards, to the top of a high hill, at the foot of which he had been born. This part of the journey would be bright and pleasant in most ways, he was told, for he would be steadily growing stronger and bigger and more active. And if he had to go over rough bits sometimes, or sometimes stumbled and hurt himself,

he would not mind very much, for he would soon forget it again, and his hopefulness and cheerfulness would recover themselves. "But"—and here the friend whose part it was to explain things to him began to speak very gravely indeed—"but," he said, "one most earnest counsel I must give you. All the way up to the top of the hill, though hidden among the grass and flowers, are golden steps, like the 'rungs,' as they are called, or bars of a ladder. These steps never go wrong; if you keep to them you cannot get astray. Yet it is not always easy to see them; sometimes you may search for them and not succeed in catching sight of their gleam at all. Then you must be patient and not lose courage, for if you always *wish* to follow them, there is no fear but that you will soon find them again. Sometimes they will seem clearest and brightest in the full sunshine; sometimes they will seem to sparkle out even more plainly in the darkness of night. But of one thing you may be sure—they will always be there."

'Faithful listened very attentively, for he was a thoughtful little boy.

"I will try to remember," he said. "But tell me, when I get to the top, what shall I do then? What will happen?"

‘His friend looked at him with kind, grave eyes.

“‘I cannot tell you exactly,” he said. “It may be that for some distance you will walk straight on, neither upwards nor downwards. Yet the steps—the golden steps—though neither ascending nor descending, will be there, and you must never leave off looking to see their gleam.”

“‘And then?” asked Faithful.

“‘Then,” his guide answered, “then, after a time, this will certainly happen. Your pathway will begin to slope downwards. At first perhaps so gently and slowly that you will scarcely notice that you are no longer treading on level ground. But after a time, looking backwards, you will see that it has been descending steadily. And even it *might* be that it would go down very suddenly and sharply,” and here the gentle guide’s voice grew lower and he stopped a moment. “But even if so,” he went on, “you need have no fear, if you keep looking for the golden steps.”

‘Faithful listened and thought over the words of his friend.

“‘I will not forget,” he said, “I *will* keep looking. Only tell me—I should like to know—where will the steps lead me to at last? Down at the foot of the

hill again, what shall I find? Will it grow dark and gloomy?"

"It may seem so as you draw near the end of your journey," said the guide; "but it will only be in seeming. The steps will grow brighter and clearer. This is all I can tell you," he went on. "It is not for me to say more, except this"—and his face shone as if the sun were lighting it up—"that better things than I could make you understand if I tried will meet you at your journey's end, if you keep looking for the golden steps, even though they may seem to lead down into gloom."

'And those were his last words to the boy he had been sent to teach.

'So little Faithful set out on his long journey.

'All happened very much as his friend had said. The journey up the hill was mostly easy and pleasant. Faithful felt so young and happy that even the little bits of rough walking he sometimes had did not discourage him, and with every day he seemed to grow stronger and bigger, as indeed he did. He had some troubles, but these were generally caused by his own fault in forgetting to keep looking for the gleam of the golden steps. Whenever he did so, or whenever he was tempted away from the direction where

he knew pretty well they were sure to be, he was certain to stumble and bruise himself, or even to fall and get more seriously hurt. And then he would make up his mind not to forget again, and not to be tempted away from what he knew was the right path, even though he had to search closely for it sometimes, by any of the pretty flowers or mountain berries which he often saw growing just a little way off. For somehow that little way generally turned out farther than he had fancied, and it was always much more difficult to catch sight of the gleam of the steps once he had strayed to any distance from them. On the whole, however, he obeyed his teacher's advice, for, as I told you, he was a thoughtful and good boy.

'So at last came the end of the first part of the long journey, and Faithful found himself at the top of the hill. And by this time he had grown to be a man. For a good distance he walked along flat ground, and he found it very interesting. There was such a wide view on every side, and many things to tempt him away from the straight road, along which still, whenever he looked for them, he could clearly see the shine of the steps, for even though they were neither going up nor down, they were there to mark his path.

‘And he found it all just as when he was still coming upwards. If ever he wandered away it was always more difficult to find the little golden bars again; the farther he strayed the more difficult it was. And he had some great frights that he had lost them altogether. But things did not get so bad as that; on the whole he was true to his name.

‘So on he walked, sometimes stumbling, sometimes peacefully and happily, till the level ground came to an end. At first he scarcely noticed it; the slope downwards began so gradually, but before long he felt it. His steps were less sure; his limbs after a while began to ache, and his sight was less clear.

“I am growing old,” thought Faithful.

‘And the down hill grew steeper, and he grew less strong, till at last came the day when looking well before him, he saw the foot of the hill straight below and knew that he must soon reach it, for the steps gleamed brightly, more brightly than before, in the growing darkness beneath him. There was no mistaking where they led to. And sometimes Faithful’s brave heart grew afraid; it all looked so strange and misty—not like the cheerful top of the hill. But he always took courage when he looked at the steps.

‘Then came the moment at which he reached the very foot, and the steps stopped, and he stood there wondering what was to come to him now. And a strange, beautiful thing it was that did happen. He felt a sort of lifting up—it made him giddy at first and he closed his eyes for a moment. But when he opened them again, there before him was the sky, more lovely than he had ever seen it. He was higher up now, far higher than he had ever been, for the long, long ladder of gold had risen with him without his knowing it, and he stood——’

Auntie stopped.

‘Where?’ asked Thattie breathlessly.

‘At the gate of the skies,’ said auntie softly. ‘He saw the gate before him, white with a whiteness he had never dreamed of; and though he could not see clearly what was on its other side, he did not feel as if he was in any hurry to know. For there, just outside it, stood his dear guide, his face lighted up with happy smiles, his kind hands stretched out in welcome.’

‘He was a ‘angel,’ interrupted the children.

Auntie smiled.

‘Yes,’ she said; ‘I think so. And Faithful knew that there, beyond the gate, were the beautiful

happy things his friend had told him of—more beautiful and happier than he could fancy, however he tried. And as he glanced back, he saw that the golden steps had faded from sight—he needed them no longer.’

‘It is a lovely story,’ said Thissie. But her little face looked rather puzzled. ‘Is it a fairy story?’ she asked.

‘No,’ answered Thattie, before auntie had time to speak; ‘it’s not ’xactly a fairy story. It’s——’ and then he too looked a little puzzled.

‘Do you understand at all what is meant by the long journey?’ asked auntie. ‘Perhaps it was foolish of me to tell you that kind of story.’

‘No, no, it wasn’t,’ said Thattie eagerly. ‘I do understand a good deal, ’cos of somethin’ Mrs. Lubin said one day—that she was going downhill, and mummy explained that she meant getting old. And the end part, auntie—was that,—and here his voice grew lower—‘was that about going to heaven? And the gold steps mean being good, don’t they?’

‘Yes,’ said his aunt, looking pleased. ‘I think you have understood very well indeed, dear.’

‘Shall we see the gold steps, p’raps, when we

go up to the top of the hill wif uncle?' asked Thissie.

'No, darling. I can't promise you that. I am afraid my story was a little too difficult for *you*,' and she put her arm round Thissie and kissed her. 'But some day we will talk about it again, and then I daresay you will understand it better.'

And Thissie did not mind waiting till she was older to understand it better, for auntie was so kind.

And though there were no shining golden steps to be seen, half hidden among the grass, on *their* hill, they spent a very happy day indeed, when uncle took them up to the very top, where they had a beautiful view and quite a little picnic feast of buns and milk and other nice things.

They wrote to tell their father and mother all about it, you may be sure.

But a still happier day was one some months later, when papa and mamma came to fetch them to take them to their own dear home again, even though they were very sorry to leave their uncle and aunt and the beautiful hill.

I am not at all sure that Thissie felt *quite* certain that the golden steps were not somewhere on the

hill, if she and Thattie could have searched well. But now that she is some years older, she does understand auntie's story, and I think it sometimes helps her and Thattie to 'keep on always trying to be good.'

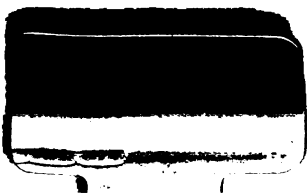
THE END



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