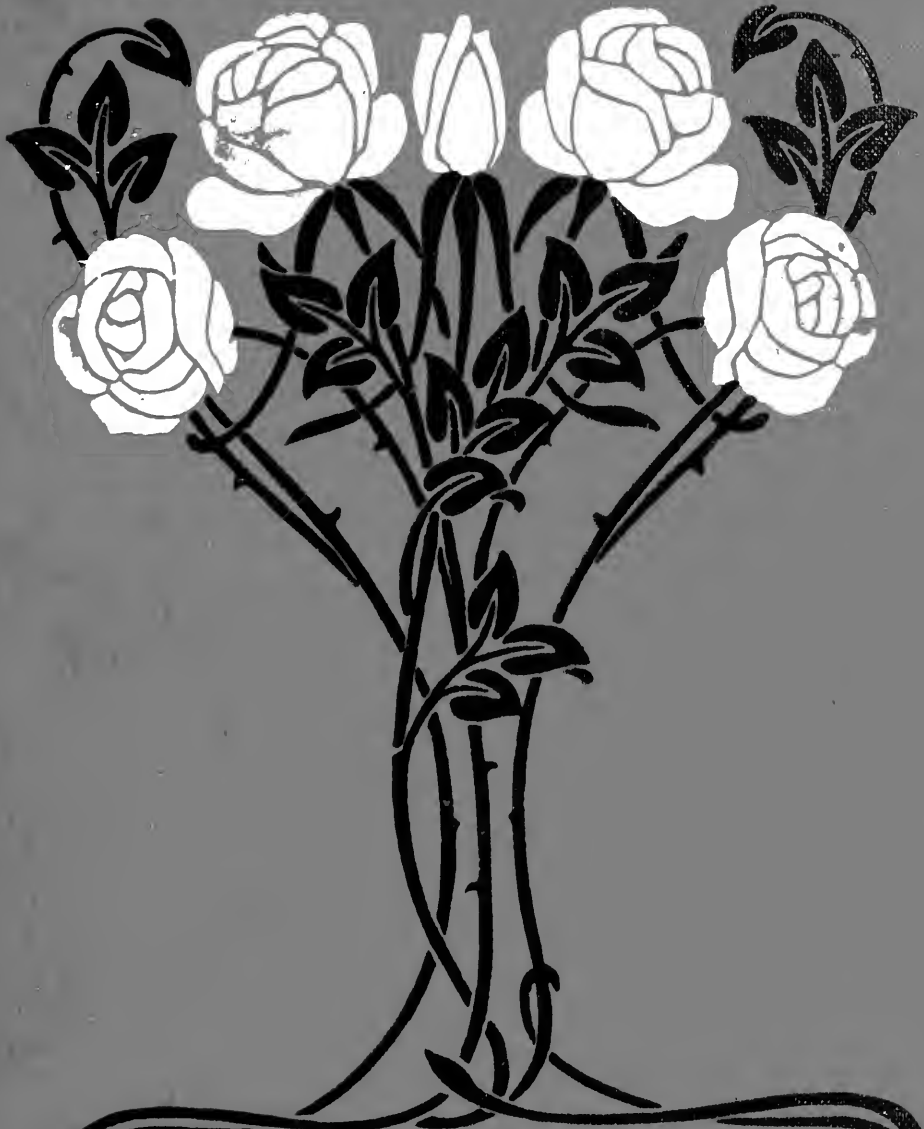


UNFASHIONED FABLES
AND
BROTHERS OF FITY



JULIANA HORATIA FWINN

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JULIANA HORATIA EWING'S WORKS
VOLUME THREE

OLD-FASHIONED FAIRY TALES

BROTHERS OF PITY

AND OTHER TALES OF
BEASTS AND MEN

JULIANA HORATIA EWING'S WORKS

Library Edition

OLD-FASHIONED
FAIRY TALES
BROTHERS OF PITY
AND OTHER TALES OF
BEASTS AND MEN

BY

JULIANA HORATIA EWING

Author of "Jackanapes," "Daddy Darwin's Dovecot"
etc.

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“Know'st thou not the little path
That winds about the Ferny brae?
That is the road to bonnie Elfland,
Where thou and I this night maun gae.”

THOS. THE RHYMER.

PREFACE

As the title of this story-book may possibly suggest that the tales are old fairy tales told afresh, it seems well to explain that this is not so.

Except for the use of common “properties” of Fairy Drama, and a scrupulous endeavour to conform to tradition in local colour and detail, the stories are all new.

They have appeared at intervals during some years past in "AUNT JUDY'S MAGAZINE FOR YOUNG PEOPLE," and were written in conformity to certain theories respecting stories of this kind, with only two of which shall the kindly reader of prefaces be troubled.

First, that there are ideas and types, occurring in the myths of all countries, which are common properties, to use which does not lay the teller of fairy tales open to the charge of plagiarism. Such as the idea of the weak outwitting the strong; the failure of man to choose wisely when he may have his wish; or the desire of sprites to exchange their careless and unfettered existence for the pains and penalties of humanity, if they may thereby share in the hopes of the human soul.

Secondly, that in these household stories (the models for which were originally oral tradition), the thing most to be avoided is a discursive or descriptive style of writing. Brevity and epigram must ever be soul of their wit, and they should be written as tales that are told.

The degree in which, if at all, the following tales fulfil these conditions, nursery critics must decide.

There are older critics before whom fairy tales, as such, need excuse, even if they do not meet with positive disapprobation.

On this score I can only say that, for myself, I believe them to be — beyond all need of defence —

most valuable literature for the young. I do not believe that wonder-tales confuse children's ideas of truth. If there are young intellects so imperfect as to be incapable of distinguishing between fancy and falsehood, it is surely most desirable to develop in them the power to do so; but, as a rule, in childhood we appreciate the distinction with a vivacity which, as elders, our care-clogged memories fail to recall.

Moreover fairy tales have positive uses in education, which no cramming of facts, and no merely domestic fiction can serve.

Like Proverbs and Parables, they deal with first principles under the simplest forms. They convey knowledge of the world, shrewd lessons of virtue and vice, of common sense and sense of humour, of the seemly and the absurd, of pleasure and pain, success and failure, in narratives where the plot moves briskly and dramatically from a beginning to an end. They treat, not of the corner of a nursery or a playground, but of the world at large, and life in perspective; of forces visible and invisible; of Life, Death, and Immortality.

For causes obvious to the student of early myths, they foster sympathy with nature, and no class of child-literature has done so much to inculcate the love of animals.

They cultivate the Imagination, that great gift which time and experience lead one more and more

to value — handmaid of Faith, of Hope, and, perhaps most of all, of Charity!

It is true that some of the old fairy tales do not teach the high and useful lessons that most of them do; and that they unquestionably deal now and again with phases of grown-up life, and with crimes and catastrophes, that seem unsuitable for nursery entertainment.

As to the latter question, it must be remembered that the brevity of the narrative — whether it be a love story or a robber story — deprives it of all harm; a point which writers of modern fairy tales do not always realize for their guidance.

The writer of the following tales has endeavoured to bear this principle in mind, and it is hoped that the morals — and it is of the essence of fairy tales to have a moral — of all of them are beyond reproach.

For the rest they are committed to the indulgence of the gentle reader.

Hans Andersen, perhaps the greatest writer of modern fairy tales, was content to say:

“FAIRY TALE NEVER DIES.”

J. H. E.

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OLD - FASHIONED FAIRY TALES

GOOD LUCK IS BETTER THAN GOLD



HERE was once upon a time a child who had Good Luck for his godfather.

“I am not Fortune,” said

Good Luck to the parents; “I have no gifts to bestow, but whenever he needs help I will be at hand.”

“Nothing could be better,” said the old couple. They were delighted. But what pleases the father often fails to satisfy the son :

moreover, every man thinks that he deserves just a little more than he has got, and does not reckon it to the purpose if his father had less.

Many a one would be thankful to have as good

reasons for contentment as he had who had Good Luck for his godfather.

If he fell, Good Luck popped something soft in the way to break his fall; if he fought, Good Luck directed his blows, or tripped up his adversary; if he got into a scrape, Good Luck helped him out of it; and if ever Misfortune met him, Good Luck contrived to hustle her on the pathway till his godson got safely by.

In games of hazard the godfather played over his shoulder. In matters of choice he chose for him. And when the lad began to work on his father's farm the farmer began to get rich. For no bird or field-mouse touched a seed that his son had sown, and every plant he planted thrived when Good Luck smiled on it.

The boy was not fond of work, but when he did go into the fields, Good Luck followed him.

"Your christening-day was a blessed day for us all," said the old farmer.

"He has never given me so much as a lucky sixpence," muttered Good Luck's godson.

"I am not Fortune — I make no presents," said the godfather.

When we are discontented it is oftener to please our neighbours than ourselves. It was because the other boys had said — "Simon, the shoemaker's son, has an alderman for his godfather. He gave him a silver spoon with the Apostle Peter for the handle;

but thy godfather is more powerful than any alderman" — that Good Luck's godson complained, "He has never given me so much as a bent sixpence."

By and by the old farmer died, and his son grew up, and had the largest farm in the country. The other boys grew up also, and as they looked over the farmer's boundary-wall, they would say,

"Good morning, Neighbour. That is certainly a fine farm of yours. Your cattle thrive without loss. Your crops grow in the rain and are reaped with the sunshine. Mischance never comes your road. What you have worked for you enjoy. Such success would turn the heads of poor folk like us. At the same time one would think a man need hardly work for his living at all who has Good Luck for his godfather."

"That is very true," thought the farmer. "Many a man is prosperous, and reaps what he sows, who had no more than the clerk and the sexton for gossips at his christening."

"What is the matter, Godson?" asked Good Luck, who was with him in the field.

"I want to be rich," said the farmer.

"You will not have to wait long," replied the godfather. "In every field you sow, in every flock you rear there is increase without abatement. Your wealth is already tenfold greater than your father's."

"Aye, aye," replied the farmer. "Good wages for good work. But many a young man has gold at

his command who need never turn a sod, and none of the Good People came to *his* christening. Fortunatus's Purse now, or even a sack or two of gold — ”

“Peace!” cried the godfather; “I have said that I give no gifts.”

Though he had not Fortunatus's Purse, the farmer had now money and to spare, and when the harvest was gathered in, he bought a fine suit of clothes, and took his best horse and went to the royal city to see the sights.

The pomp and splendour, the festivities and fine clothes dazzled him.

“This is a gay life which these young courtiers lead,” said he. “A man has nothing to do but to enjoy himself.”

“If he has plenty of gold in his pocket,” said a bystander.

By and by the Princess passed in her carriage. She was the King's only daughter. She had hair made of sunshine, and her eyes were stars.

“What an exquisite creature!” cried the farmer. “What would not one give to possess her?”

“She has as many suitors as hairs on her head,” replied the bystander. “She wants to marry the Prince of Moonshine, but he only dresses in silver, and the King thinks he might find a richer son-in-law. The Princess will go to the highest bidder.”

“And I have Good Luck for my godfather, and

am not even at court!" cried the farmer; and he put spurs to his horse, and rode home.

Good Luck was taking care of the farm.

"Listen, Godfather!" cried the young man. "I am in love with the King's daughter, and want her to wife."

"It is not an easy matter," replied Good Luck, "but I will do what I can for you. Say that by good luck you saved the Princess's life, or perhaps better the King's — for they say he is selfish —"

"Tush!" cried the farmer. "The King is covetous, and wants a rich son-in-law."

"A wise man may bring wealth to a kingdom with his head, if not with his hands," said Good Luck, "and I can show you a district where the earth only wants mining to be flooded with wealth, besides there are a thousand opportunities that can be turned to account and influence. By wits and work, and with Good Luck to help him, many a poorer man than you has risen to greatness."

"Wits and work!" cried the indignant godson. "You speak well — truly! A hillman would have made a better godfather. Give me as much gold as will fill the three meal-bins, and you may keep the rest of your help for those who want it."

Now at this moment by Good Luck stood Dame Fortune. She likes handsome young men, and there was some little jealousy between her and the godfather; so she smiled at the quarrel.

“ You would rather have had me for your gossip ? ” said she.

“ If you would give me three wishes, I would,” replied the farmer boldly, “ and I would trouble you no more.”

“ Will you make him over to me ? ” said Dame Fortune to the godfather.

“ If he wishes it,” replied Good Luck. “ But if he accepts your gifts he has no further claim on me.”

“ Nor on me either,” said the Dame. “ Hark ye, young man, you mortals are apt to make a hobble of your three wishes, and you may end with a sausage at your nose, like your betters.”

“ I have thought of it too often,” replied the farmer, “ and I know what I want. For my first wish I desire imperishable beauty.”

“ It is yours,” said Dame Fortune, smiling as she looked at him.

“ The face of a prince and the manners of a clown are poor partners,” said the farmer. “ My second wish is for suitable learning and courtly manners, which cannot be gained at the plough-tail.”

“ You have them in perfection,” said the Dame, as the young man thanked her by a graceful bow.

“ Thirdly,” said he, “ I demand a store of gold that I can never exhaust.”

“ I will lead you to it,” said Dame Fortune ; and the young man was so eager to follow her that he did not even look back to bid farewell to his godfather.

He was soon at court. He lived in the utmost pomp. He had a suit of armour made for himself out of beaten gold. No metal less precious might come near his person, except for the blade of his sword. This was obliged to be made of steel, for gold is not always strong enough to defend one's life or his honour. But the Princess still loved the Prince of Moonshine.

"Stuff and nonsense!" said the King. "I shall give you to the Prince of Gold."

"I wish I had the good luck to please her," muttered the young Prince. But he had not, for all his beauty and his wealth. However, she was to marry him, and that was something.

The preparations for the wedding were magnificent.

"It is a great expense," sighed the King, "but then I get the Prince of Gold for a son-in-law."

The Prince and his bride drove round the city in a triumphal procession. Her hair fell over her like sunshine, but the starlight of her eyes was cold.

In the train rode the Prince of Moonshine, dressed in silver, and with no colour in his face.

As the bridal chariot approached one of the city gates, two black ravens hovered over it, and then flew away, and settled on a tree.

Good Luck was sitting under the tree to see his godson's triumph, and he heard the birds talking above him.

"Has the Prince of Gold no friend who can tell

him that there is a loose stone above the archway that is to'teering to fall?" said they. And Good Luck covered his face with his mantle as the Prince drove through.

Just as they were passing out of the gateway the stone fell on to the Prince's head. He wore a casque of pure gold, but his neck was broken.

"We can't have all this expense for nothing," said the King: so he married his daughter to the Prince of Moonshine. If one can't get gold one must be content with silver.

"Will you come to the funeral?" asked Dame Fortune of the godfather.

"Not I," replied Good Luck. "I had no hand in *this* matter."

The rain came down in torrents. The black feathers on the ravens' backs looked as if they had been oiled.

"Caw! caw!" said they. "It was an unlucky end."

However, the funeral was a very magnificent one, for there was no stint of gold.

THE HILLMAN AND THE HOUSEWIFE



It is well known that the Good People cannot abide meanness. They like to be liberally dealt with when they beg or borrow of the human race; and, on the other hand, to those who come to them in need, they are invariably generous.

Now there once lived a certain Housewife who had a sharp eye to her own interests in temporal matters, and gave alms of what she had no use for, for the good of her soul. One day a Hillman knocked at her door.

“Can you lend us a saucepan, good Mother?” said he. “There’s a wedding in the hill, and all the pots are in use.”

“Is he to have one?” asked the servant lass who had opened the door.

“Aye, to be sure,” answered the Housewife. “One must be neighbourly.”

But when the maid was taking a saucepan from the shelf, she pinched her arm, and whispered sharply — “Not that, you slut! Get the old one out of the

cupboard. It leaks, and the Hillmen are so neat, and such nimble workers, that they are sure to mend it before they send it home. So one obliges the Good People, and saves sixpence in tinkering. But you'll never learn to be notable whilst your head is on your shoulders."

Thus reproached, the maid fetched the saucepan, which had been laid by till the tinker's next visit, and gave it to the dwarf, who thanked her, and went away.

In due time the saucepan was returned, and, as the Housewife had foreseen, it was neatly mended and ready for use.

At supper-time the maid filled the pan with milk, and set it on the fire for the children's supper. But in a few minutes the milk was so burnt and smoked that no one could touch it, and even the pigs refused the wash into which it was thrown.

"Ah, good-for-nothing hussy!" cried the Housewife, as she refilled the pan herself, "you would ruin the richest with your carelessness. There's a whole quart of good milk wasted at once!"

"*And that's twopence,*" cried a voice which seemed to come from the chimney, in a whining tone, like some nattering, discontented old body going over her grievances.

The Housewife had not left the saucepan for two minutes, when the milk boiled over, and it was all burnt and smoked as before.

"The pan must be dirty," muttered the good

woman, in great vexation; "and there are two full quarts of milk as good as thrown to the dogs."

"*And that's fourpence,*" added the voice in the chimney.

After a thorough cleaning, the saucepan was once more filled and set on the fire, but with no better success. The milk was hopelessly spoilt, and the housewife shed tears of vexation at the waste, crying, "Never before did such a thing befall me since I kept house! Three quarts of new milk burnt for one meal!"

"*And that's sixpence,*" cried the voice from the chimney. "*You didn't save the tinkering after all, Mother!*"

With which the Hillman himself came tumbling down the chimney, and went off laughing through the door.

But thenceforward the saucepan was as good as any other.

THE NECK

A LEGEND OF A LAKE



IN a certain lake there once lived a Neck, or Water Sprite, who desired above all things, to obtain a human soul. Now when the sun shone this Neck rose up and sat upon the waves and played upon his harp. And he played so sweetly

that the winds stayed to listen to him, and the sun lingered in his setting, and the moon rose before her time. And the strain was in praise of immortality.

Furthermore, out of the lake there rose a great rock, whereon dwelt an aged hermit, who by reason of his loneliness was afflicted with a spirit of melan-

choly; so that when the fit was on him, he was constantly tempted to throw himself into the water, for his life was burdensome to him. But one day, when this gloomy madness had driven him to the edge of the rock to cast himself down, the Neck rose at the same moment, and sitting upon a wave, began to play. And the strain was in praise of immortality. And the melody went straight to the heart of the hermit as a sunbeam goes into a dark cave, and it dispelled his gloom, and he thought all to be as well with him as before it had seemed ill. And he called to the Neck and said, "What is that which thou dost play, my son?"

And the Neck answered, "It is in praise of immortality."

Then said the hermit, "I beg that thou wilt play frequently beneath this rock; for I am an aged and solitary man, and by reason of my loneliness, life becomes a burden to me, and I am tempted to throw it away. But by this gracious strain the evil has been dispelled. Wherefore I beg thee to come often and to play as long as is convenient. And yet I cannot offer thee any reward, for I am poor and without possessions."

Then the Neck replied, "There are treasures below the water as above, and I desire no earthly riches. But if thou canst tell me how I may gain a human soul, I will play on till thou shalt bid me cease."

And the hermit said, "I must consider the matter. But I will return to-morrow at this time and answer thee."

Then the next day he returned as he had said, and the Neck was waiting impatiently on the lake, and he cried, "What news, my father?"

And the hermit said, "If that at any time some human being will freely give his life for thee, thou wilt gain a human soul. But thou also must die the selfsame day."

"The short life for the long one!" cried the Neck; and he played a melody so full of happiness that the blood danced through the hermit's veins as if he were a boy again. But the next day when he came as usual the Neck called to him and said, "My father, I have been thinking. Thou art aged and feeble, and at the most there are but few days of life remaining to thee. Moreover, by reason of thy loneliness even these are a burden. Surely there is none more fit than thou to be the means of procuring me a human soul. Wherefore I beg of thee, let us die to-day."

But the hermit cried out angrily, "Wretch! Is this thy gratitude? Wouldst thou murder me?"

"Nay, old man," replied the Neck, "thou shalt part easily with thy little fag-end of life. I can play upon my harp a strain of such surpassing sadness that no human heart that hears it but must break. And yet the pain of that heartbreak shall be such

that thou wilt not know it from rapture. Moreover, when the sun sets below the water, my spirit also will depart without suffering. Wherefore I beg of thee, let us die to-day."

"Truly," said the hermit, "it is because thou art only a Neck, and nothing better, that thou dost not know the value of human life."

"And art thou a man, possessed already of a soul, and destined for immortality," cried the Neck, "and dost haggle and grudge to benefit me by the sacrifice of a few uncertain days, when it is but to exchange them for the life that knows no end?"

"Our days are always uncertain," replied the hermit; "but existence is very sweet, even to the most wretched. Moreover, I see not that thou hast any claim upon mine." Saying which he returned to his cell, but the Neck, flinging aside his harp, sat upon the water, and wept bitterly.

Days passed, and the hermit did not show himself, and at last the Neck resolved to go and visit him. So he took his harp, and taking also the form of a boy with long fair hair and a crimson cap, he appeared in the hermit's cell. There he found the old man stretched upon his pallet, for he was dying. When he saw the Neck he was glad, and said, "I have desired to see thee, for I repent myself that I did not according to thy wishes. Yet is the desire of life stronger in the human breast than thou canst understand. Nevertheless I am sorry, and I am

sorry also that, as I am sick unto death, my life will no longer avail thee. But when I am dead, do thou take all that belongs to me, and dress thyself in my robe, and go out into the world, and do works of mercy, and perchance some one whom thou hast benefited will be found willing to die with thee, that thou mayst obtain a soul."

"Now indeed I thank thee!" cried the Neck. "But yet one word more — what are these works of which thou speakest?"

"The corporal works of mercy are seven," gasped the hermit, raising himself on his arm. "To feed the hungry and give the thirsty drink, to visit the sick, to redeem captives, to clothe the naked, to shelter the stranger and the houseless, to visit the widow and fatherless, and to bury the dead." Then even as he spoke the last words the hermit died. And the Neck clothed himself in his robe, and, not to delay in following the directions given to him, he buried the hermit with pious care, and planted flowers upon his grave. After which he went forth into the world.

Now for three hundred years did the Neck go about doing acts of mercy and charity towards men. And amongst the hungry, and the naked, and the sick, and the poor, and the captives, there were not a few who seemed to be weary of this life of many sorrows. But when he had fed the hungry, and clothed the naked, and relieved the sick, and made the poor rich, and set the captive free, life was too

dear to all of them to be given up. Therefore he betook himself to the most miserable amongst men, and offering nothing but an easy death in a good cause, he hoped to find some aged and want-worn creature who would do him the kindness he desired. But of those who must look forward to the fewest days and to the most misery there was not one but, like the fabled woodcutter, chose to trudge out to the end his miserable span.

So when three hundred years were past, the Neck's heart failed him, and he said, "All this avails nothing. Wherefore I will return to the lake, and there abide what shall befall." And this he accordingly did.

Now one evening there came a tempest down from the hills, and there was a sudden squall on the lake. And a certain young man in a boat upon the lake was overtaken by the storm. And as he struggled hard, and it seemed as if every moment must be his last, a young maid who was his sweetheart came down to the shore, and cried aloud in her agony, "Alas, that his young life should be cut short thus!"

"Trouble not thyself," said the Neck; "this life is so short and so uncertain, that if he were rescued to-day he might be taken from thee to-morrow. Only in eternity is love secure. Wherefore be patient, and thou shalt soon follow him."

"And who art thou that mockest my sorrow?" cried the maiden.

“ One who has watched the passing misfortunes of many generations before thine,” replied the Neck.

And when the maiden looked, and saw one like a little old man wringing out his beard into the lake, she knew it was a Neck, and cried, “ Now surely thou art a Neck, and they say, ‘ When Necks play, the winds wisht; ’ wherefore I beg of thee to play upon thy harp, and it may be that the storm will lull, and my beloved will be saved.”

But the Neck answered, “ It is not worth while.”

And when the maiden could not persuade him, she fell upon her face in bitter grief, and cried, “ Oh, my Beloved! Would GOD I could die for thee!”

“ And yet thou wouldst not if thou couldst,” said the Neck.

“ If it be in thy power to prove me — prove me!” cried the maiden; “ for indeed he is the only stay of aged parents, and he is young and unprepared for death. Moreover his life is dearer to me than my own.”

Then the Neck related his own story, and said, “ If thou wilt do this for me, which none yet has done whom I have benefited, I will play upon my harp, and if the winds wisht, thou must die this easy death; but if I fail in my part, I shall not expect thine to be fulfilled. And we must both abide what shall befall, even as others.” And to this the maiden consented most willingly. Only she said, “ Do this

for me, I beg of thee. Let him come so near that I may just see his face before I die." And it was so agreed.

Then the aged Neck drew forth his harp and began to play. And as he played the wind stayed, as one who pauses to hearken with cleft lips, and the lake rose and fell gently, like the bosom of a girl moved by some plaintive song, and the sun burst forth as if to see who made such sweet music. And so through this happy change the young man got safe to land. Then the Neck turned to the maiden and said, "Dost thou hold to thy promise?" And she bowed her head.

"In the long life be thy recompense!" cried the Neck fervently, and taking his harp again, he poured his whole spirit into the strain. And as he played, it seemed as if the night wind moaned among pine-trees, but it was more mournful. And it was as the wail of a mother for her only son, and yet fuller of grief. Or like a Dead March wrung from the heart of a great musician — loading the air with sorrow — and yet all these were as nothing to it for sadness. And when the maiden heard it, it was more than she could bear, and her heart broke, as the Neck had said. Then the young man sprang to shore, and when she could see his face clearly, her soul passed, and her body fell like a snapped flower to the earth.

Now when the young man knew what was befallen, he fell upon the Neck to kill him, who said,

“Thou mayest spare thyself this trouble, for in a few moments I shall be dead. But do thou take my robe and my harp, and thou shalt be a famous musician.”

Now even as the Neck spoke the sun sank, and he fell upon his face. And when the young man lifted the robe, behold there was nothing under it but the harp, across which there swept such a wild and piteous chord that all the strings burst as if with unutterable grief.

Then the young man lifed the body of his sweetheart in his arms, and carried her home, and she was buried with many tears.

And in due time he put fresh strings to the harp, which, though it was not as when it was in the hands of the Neck, yet it made most exquisite music. And the young man became a famous musician. For out of suffering comes song.

Furthermore, he occupied himself in good works until that his time also came.

* * * * *

And in Eternity Love was made secure.

THE NIX IN MISCHIEF



A CERTAIN lake in Germany was once the home of a Nix, who became tired of the monotony of life under water, and wished to go into the upper world and amuse himself.

His friends and relations all tried to dissuade him. "Be wise," said they, "and remain where you are safe, seeing that no business summons you from the lake. Few of our kindred have had dealings with the human race without suffering from their curiosity or clumsiness; and,

do them what good you may, in the long run you will reap nothing but ingratitude. From how many waters have they not already banished us? Wherefore let well alone, and stay where you are."

But this counsel did not please the Nix — (as, indeed, there is no reason to suppose that advice is more palatable under water than on dry land) — and he only said, "I shall not expect gratitude, for I have no intention of conferring benefits; but I wish

to amuse myself. The Dwarfs and Kobolds play what pranks they please on men and women, and they do not always have the worst of it. When I hear of their adventures, the soles of my feet tingle. This is a sign of travelling, and am I to be debarred from fun because I live in a lake instead of a hill?"

His friends repeated their warnings, but to no purpose. The Nix remained unconvinced, and spent his time in dreaming of the clever tricks by which he should outwit the human race, and the fame he would thereby acquire on his return to the lake.

Mischief seldom lacks opportunity, and shortly after this it happened that a young girl came down to the lake for water to wash with; and dipping her pail just above the Nix's head, in a moment he jumped in, and was brought safe to land. The maid was Bess, the washerwoman's daughter; and as she had had one good scolding that morning for oversleeping herself, and another about noon for dawdling with her work, she took up the pail and set off home without delay.

But though she held it steadily enough, the bucket shook, and the water spilled hither and thither. Thinking that her right arm might be tired, she moved the weight to her left, but with no better success, for the water still spilled at every step. "One would think there were fishes in the pail," said Bess, as she set it down. But there was nothing to be seen but a thin red water-worm wriggling at the

bottom, such as you may see any day in a soft-water tub. It was in this shape, however, that the Nix had disguised himself, and he almost writhed out of his skin with delight at the success of his first essay in mischief.

When they once more set forward the Nix leaped and jumped harder than ever, so that not only was the water spilled, but the maiden's dress was soaked, and her tears dropped almost as fast as the wet dripped from her clothes.

"The pail is bewitched!" cried the poor girl. "How my mother will beat me for this! And my back aches as if I were carrying lead, and yet the water is nearly half gone."

"This is something like fun!" laughed the Nix. "When I go home and relate *my* adventures, no dwarf's pranks will be named again!" But when Bess looked into the pail, he was the same slimy, stupid-looking worm as before. She dared not return to the lake for more water — "for," said she, "I should be as much beaten for being late as for bringing short measure, and have the labour to boot." So she took up her burden again, and the Nix began his dance afresh, and by the time they came to their journey's end, there was not a quart of water in the pail.

"Was ever a poor woman plagued with such a careless hussy?" cried the mother when she saw the dripping dress; and, as Bess had expected, she

seasoned her complaints with a hearty slap. "And look what she calls a pailful of water!" added the mother, with a second blow.

"Late in the morning's unlucky all day," thought poor Bess, and, as her mother cuffed her, she screamed till the house rang with the noise; for she had good lungs, and knew that it is well to cry out before one gets too much hurt.

Meanwhile the Nix thought she was enduring agonies, and could hardly contain his mischievous glee; and when the woman bade her "warm some water quickly for the wash," he was in no way disturbed, for he had never seen boiling water, and only anticipated fresh sport as he slipped from the pail into the kettle.

"Now," cried the mother sharply, "see if you can lift *that* without slopping your clothes."

"Aye, aye," laughed the Nix, "see if you can, my dear!" and as poor Bess seized it in her sturdy red hands he began to dance as before. But the kettle had a lid, which the pail had not. Moreover Bess was a strong, strapping lass, and, stimulated by the remembrance of her mother's slaps, with a vigorous effort she set the kettle on the fire. "I shall be glad when I'm safely in bed," she muttered. "Everything goes wrong to-day."

"It is warm in here," said the Nix to himself, after a while; "in fact — stuffy. But one must pay something for a frolic, and it tickles my ears to

hear that old woman rating her daughter for my pranks. Give me time and opportunity, and I'll set the whole stupid race by the ears. There she goes again! It is worth enduring a little discomfort, though it certainly is warm, and I fancy it grows warmer."

By degrees the bottom of the kettle grew quite hot, and burnt the Nix, so that he had to jump up and down in the water to keep himself cool. The noise of this made the woman think that the kettle was boiling, and she began to scold her daughter as before, shouting, "Are you coming with that tub to-night or not? The water is hot already."

This time the Nix laughed (as they say) on the other side of his mouth; for the water had now become as hot as the bottom of the kettle, and he screamed at the top of his shrill tiny voice with pain.

"How the kettle sings to-night!" said Bess, "and how it rains!" she added. For at that moment a tremendous storm burst around the house, and the rain poured down in sheets of water, as if it meant to wash everything into the lake. The kettle now really boiled, and the lid danced up and down with the frantic leaping and jumping of the agonized Nix, who puffed and blew till his breath came out of the spout in clouds of steam.

"If your eyes were as sharp as your ears you'd see that the water is boiling over," snapped the woman; and giving her daughter a passing push,

she hurried to the fireplace, and lifted the kettle on to the ground.

But no sooner had she set it down, than the lid flew off, and out jumped a little man with green teeth and a tall green hat, who ran out of the door wringing his hands and crying —

“ Three hundred and three years have I lived in the water of this lake, and I never knew it boil before ! ”

As he crossed the threshold a clap of thunder broke with what sounded like a peal of laughter from many voices, and then the storm ceased as suddenly as it had begun.

The woman now saw how matters stood, and did not fail next morning to fasten an old horseshoe to the door of her house. And seeing that she had behaved unjustly to her daughter, she bought her the gayest set of pink ribbons that were to be found at the next fair.

It is on record that Bess (who cared little for slaps and sharp speeches) thought this the best bargain she had ever made. But whether the Nix was equally well satisfied is not known.

THE COBBLER AND THE GHOSTS



LONG ago there lived a cobbler who had very poor wits, but by strict industry he could earn enough to keep himself and his widowed mother in comfort.

In this manner he had lived for many years in peace and prosperity, when a distant relative died who left him a certain sum of money. This so elated the cobbler that he could think of nothing else, and his only talk was of the best way of spending the legacy.

His mother advised him to lay it by against a rainy day.

“For,” said she, “we have lived long in much comfort as we are, and have need of nothing; but when you grow old, or if it should please Heaven that you become disabled, you will then be glad of your savings.”

But to this the cobbler would not listen. “No,”

said he, "if we save the money it may be stolen, but if we spend it well, we shall have the use of what we buy, and may sell it again if we are so minded."

He then proposed one purchase after another, and each was more foolish than the rest. When this had gone on for some time, one morning he exclaimed: "I have it at last! We will buy the house. It cannot be stolen or lost, and when it is ours we shall have no rent to pay, and I shall not have to work so hard."

"He will never hit on a wiser plan than that," thought the widow; "it is not to be expected." So she fully consented to this arrangement, which was duly carried out; and the bargain left the cobbler with a few shillings, which he tied up in a bag and put in his pocket, having first changed them into pence, that they might make more noise when he jingled the bag as he walked down the street.

Presently he said: "It is not fit that a man who lives in his own house, and has ready money in his pocket too, should spend the whole day in labouring with his hands. Since by good luck I can read, it would be well that I should borrow a book from the professor, for study is an occupation suitable to my present position."

Accordingly, he went to the professor, whom he found seated in his library, and preferred his request.

"What book do you want?" asked the professor.

The cobbler stood and scratched his head thoughtfully. The professor thought that he was trying to

recall the name of the work; but in reality he was saying to himself: "How much additional knowledge one requires if he has risen ever so little in life! Now, if I did but know where it is proper to begin in a case full of books like this! Should one take the first on the top shelf, or the bottom shelf, to the left, or to the right?"

At last he resolved to choose the book nearest to him; so drawing it out from the rest, he answered:

"This one, if it please you, learned sir." The professor lent it to him, and he took it home and began to read.

It was, as it happened, a book about ghosts and apparitions; and the cobbler's mind was soon so full of these marvels that he could talk of nothing else, and hardly did a stroke of work for reading and pondering over what he read. He could find none of his neighbours who had seen a ghost, though most had heard of such things, and many believed in them.

"Live and learn," thought the cobbler; "here is fame as well as wealth. If I could but see a ghost there would be no more to desire." And with this intent he sallied forth late one night to the churchyard.

Meanwhile a thief (who had heard the jingle of his money-bag) resolved to profit by the cobbler's whim; so wrapping himself in a sheet, he laid wait for him in a field that he must cross to reach the church.

When the cobbler saw the white figure, he made

sure that he had now seen a ghost, and already felt proud of his own acquaintance, as a remarkable character. Meanwhile, the thief stood quite still, and the cobbler walked boldly up to him, expecting that the phantom would either vanish or prove so impalpable that he could pass through it as through a mist, of which he had read many notable instances in the professor's book. He soon found out his mistake, however, for the supposed ghost grappled him, and without loss of time relieved him of his money-bag. The cobbler (who was not wanting in courage), fastened as tightly on to the sheet, which he still held with desperate firmness when the thief had slipped through his fingers; and after waiting in vain for further marvels, he carried the sheet home to his mother, and narrated his encounter with the ghost.

"Alack-a-day! that I should have a son with so little wit!" cried the old woman; "it was no ghost, but a thief, who is now making merry with all the money we possessed."

"We have his sheet," replied her son; "and that is due solely to my determination. How could I have acted better?"

"You should have grasped the man, not the sheet," said the widow, "and pummelled him till he cried out and dropped the money-bag."

"Live and learn," said the cobbler. The next night he went out as before, and this time reached the

churchyard unmolested. He was just climbing the stile, when he again saw what seemed to be a white figure standing near the church. As before, it proved solid, and this time he pummelled it till his fingers bled, and for very weariness he was obliged to go home and relate his exploits. The ghost had not cried out, however, nor even so much as moved, for it was neither more nor less than a tall tombstone shining white in the moonlight.

“Alack-a-day!” cried the old woman, “that I should have a son with so little wit as to beat a gravestone till his knuckles are sore! Now if he had covered it with something black that it might not alarm timid women or children, that would at least have been an act of charity.”

“Live and learn,” said the cobbler. The following night he again set forth, but this time in another direction. As he was crossing a field behind his house he saw some long pieces of linen which his mother had put out to bleach in the dew.

“More ghosts!” cried the shoemaker, “and they know who is behind them. They have fallen flat at the sound of my footsteps. But one must think of others as well as oneself, and it is not every heart that is as stout as mine.” Saying which he returned to the house for something black to throw over the prostrate ghosts. Now the kitchen chimney had been swept that morning, and by the back door stood a sack of soot.

“What is blacker than soot?” said the cobbler; and taking the sack, he shook it out over the pieces of linen till not a thread of white was to be seen. After which he went home, and boasted of his good deeds.

The widow now saw that she must be more careful as to what she said; so, after weighing the matter for some time, she suggested to the cobbler that the next night he should watch for ghosts at home; “for they are to be seen,” said she, “as well when one is in bed as in the fields.”

“There you are right,” said the cobbler, “for I have this day read of a ghost that appeared to a man in his own house. The candles burnt blue, and when he had called thrice upon the apparition he became senseless.”

“That was his mistake,” said the old woman. “He should have turned a deaf ear, and even pretended to slumber; but it is not every one who has courage for this. If one could really fall asleep in the face of the apparition, there would be true bravery.”

“Leave that to me,” said the cobbler. And the widow went off chuckling to herself, “If he comes to any mischance by holding his tongue and going to sleep, ill-luck has got him by the leg, and counsel wasted on him.”

As soon as his mother was in bed, the cobbler prepared for his watch. First he got together all the candles in the house, and stuck them here and

there about the kitchen, and sat down to watch till they should burn blue. After waiting some time, during which the candles only guttered with the draughts, the cobbler decided to go to rest for a while. "It is too early yet," he thought; "I shall see nothing till midnight."

Very soon, however, he fell asleep; but towards morning he awoke, and in the dim light perceived a figure in white at his bedside. It was a blacksmith who lived near, and he had run in in his night-shirt without so much as slippers on his feet.

"The ghost at last!" thought the cobbler, and, remembering his mother's advice, he turned over and shut his eyes.

"Neighbour! neighbour!" cried the blacksmith, "your house is on fire!"

"An old bird is not to be caught with chaff," chuckled the cobbler to himself; and he pulled the bed-clothes over his head.

"Neighbour!" roared the blacksmith, snatching at the quilt to drag it off, "are you mad? The house is burning over your head. Get up for your life!"

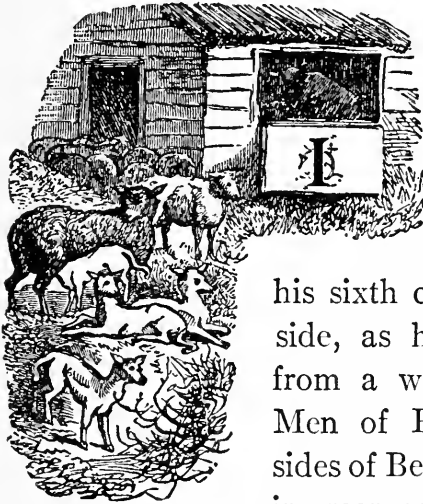
"I have the courage of a general, and more," thought the cobbler; and holding tightly on to the clothes he pretended to snore.

"If you will burn, burn!" cried the blacksmith angrily, "but I mean to save my bones" — with which he ran off.

And burnt the cobbler undoubtedly would have been, had not his mother's cries at last convinced him that the candles had set fire to his house, which was wrapped in flames. With some difficulty he escaped with his life, but of all he possessed nothing remained to him but his tools and a few articles of furniture that the widow had saved.

As he was now again reduced to poverty, he was obliged to work as diligently as in former years, and passed the rest of his days in the same peace and prosperity which he had before enjoyed.

THE LAIRD AND THE MAN OF PEACE



IN the Highlands of Scotland there once lived a Laird of Brockburn, who would not believe in fairies. Although

his sixth cousin on the mother's side, as he returned one night from a wedding, had seen the Men of Peace hunting on the sides of Ben Muich Dhui, dressed in green, and with silver-mounted

bridles to their horses which jingled as they rode; and though Rory the fiddler having gone to play at a christening did never come home, but crossing a hill near Brockburn in a mist was seduced into a *Shian*,¹ or fairy turret, where, as all decent bodies well believe, he is playing still — in spite, I say, of the wise saws and experience of all his neighbours, Brockburn remained obstinately incredulous.

Not that he bore any ill-will to the Good People, or spoke uncivilly of them; indeed he always dis-

¹ *Shian*, a Gaelic name for fairy towers, which by day, are not to be told from mountain crags.

avowed any feeling of disrespect towards them if they existed, saying that he was a man of peace himself, and anxious to live peaceably with whatever neighbours he had, but that till he had seen one of the *Daoiné Shi*¹ he could not believe in them.

Now one afternoon, between Hallowmas and Yule, it chanced that the Laird, being out on the hills looking for some cattle, got parted from his men and dogs and was overtaken by a mist, in which, familiar as the country was to him, he lost his way.

In vain he raised his voice high, and listened low, no sound of man or beast came back to him through the thickening vapour.

Then night fell, and darkness was added to the fog, so that Brockburn needed to sound every step with his *rung*² before he took it.

Suddenly light footsteps pattered beside him, then Something rubbed against him, then It ran between his legs. The delighted Laird made sure that his favourite collie had found him once more.

“Wow, Jock, man!” he cried; “but ye needna throw me on my face. What’s got ye the night, that *you* should lose your way in a bit mist?”

To this a voice from the level of his elbow replied, in piping but patronizing tones:

“Never did I lose my way in a mist since the night that Finn crossed over to Ireland in the Dawn of

¹ *Daoiné Shi* (pronounced *Dheener Shee*) = Men of Peace.

² *Rung* = a thick stick.

History. Eh, Laird! I'm weel acquaint with every bit path on the hill-side these hundreds of years, and I'll guide ye safe hame, never fear!"

The hairs on Brockburn's head stood on end till they lifted his broad bonnet, and a damp chill broke out over him that was not the fog. But, for all that, he stoutly resisted the evidence of his senses, and only felt about him for the collie's head to pat, crying:

"Bark! Jock, my mannie, bark! Then I'll recognize your voice, ye ken. It's no canny to hear ye speak like a Christian, my wee doggie."

"I'm nae your doggie, I'm a Man of Peace," was the reply. "Dinna miscall your betters, Brockburn: why will ye not credit our existence, man?"

"Seein's believin'," said the Laird, stubbornly; "but the mist's ower thick for seein' the night, ye ken."

"Turn roun' to your left, man, and ye'll see," said the Dwarf, and catching Brockburn by the arm, he twisted him swiftly round three times, when a sudden blaze of light poured through the mist, and revealed a crag of the mountain well known to the Laird, and which he now saw to be a kind of turret, or tower.

Lights shone gaily through the crevices or windows of the *Shian*, and sounds of revelry came forth, among which fiddling was conspicuous. The tune played at that moment was "Delvyn-side."

Blinded by the light, and amazed at what he saw, the Laird staggered, and was silent.

“Keep to your feet, man — keep to your feet!” said the Dwarf, laughing. “I doubt ye’re fou, Brockburn!”

“I’m nae fou,” said the Laird, slowly, his rung grasped firmly in his hand, and his bonnet set back from his face, which was deadly pale. “But — man — *is yon Rory?* I’d know his fiddle in a thousand.”

“Ask no questions, and ye’ll be tellt no lees,” said the Dwarf. Then stepping up to the door of the *Shian*, he stood so that the light from within fell full upon him, and the astonished Laird saw a tiny but well-proportioned man, with delicate features, and golden hair flowing over his shoulders. He wore a cloak of green cloth, lined with daisies, and had silver shoes. His beautiful face quivered with amusement, and he cried triumphantly, “D’ye see me? — d’ye see me noo, Brockburn?”

“Aye, aye,” said the Laird; “and seein’s believin’.”

“Then roun’ wi’ ye!” shouted the Man of Peace; and once more seizing the Laird by the arm, he turned him swiftly round — this time, to the right — and at the third turn the light vanished, and Brockburn and the Man of Peace were once more alone together in the mist.

“Aweel, Brockburn,” said the Man of Peace, “I’ll alloo ye’re candid, and have a convincible mind. I’m

no ill disposit to ye, and yese get safe hame, man."

As he spoke he stooped down, and picking up half-a-dozen big stones from the mountain-side, he gave them to the Laird, saying, "If the gudewife asks ye about the bit stanes, say ye got them in a compliment."¹

Brockburn put them into his pocket, briefly saying, "I'm obleeged to ye;" but as he followed the Man of Peace down the hill-side, he found the obligation so heavy, that from time to time he threw a stone away, unobserved, as he hoped, by his companion. When the first stone fell, the Man of Peace looked sharply round, saying:

"What's yon?"

"It'll be me striking my rung upon the ground," said the Laird.

"You're mad," said the Man of Peace, and Brockburn felt sure that he knew the truth, and was displeased. But as they went on, the stones were so heavy, and bumped the Laird's side so hard, that he threw away a second, dropping it as gently as he could. But the sound of its fall did not escape the ears of the Man of Peace, who cried as before:

"What's yon?"

"It's jest a nasty host² that I have," said the Laird.

¹ "In a compliment" = "as a present."

² "Host" = cough.

“Man, you’re daft,” said the Dwarf, contemptuously; “that’s what ails ye.”

The Laird now resolved to be prudent, but the inconvenience of his burden was so great that after a while he resolved to risk the displeasure of the Man of Peace once more, and gently slipped a third stone to the ground.

“Third time’s lucky,” he thought. But the proverb failed him, for the Dwarf turned as before, shouting: “What’s yon?”

“It’ll be my new brogues¹ that ye hear bumpin’ upon the muckle stanes,” said the Laird.

“Ye’re fou, Brockburn, I tellt ye so. Ye’re fou!” growled the Man of Peace, angrily, and the Laird dared not drop any more of the Dwarf’s gifts. After a while his companion’s good humour seemed to return, and he became talkative and generous.

“I mind your great-grandfather weel, Brockburn. He was a hamely man. I found his sheep for him one night on this verra hill-side. Mair by token, ye’ll find your beasties at hame, and the men and the dogs forebye.”

The Laird thanked him heartily, and after a while the Dwarf became more liberal-spirited still.

“Yese no have to say that ye’ve been with the *Daoiné Shi* and are no the better for it,” he said. “I’m thinking I’ll grant ye three wushes. But choose wisely, man, and dinna throw *them* away. I

¹ “Brogues” = shoes.

hae my fears that ye're no without a bee in your bonnet, Brockburn."

Incensed by this insinuation, the Laird defended his own sagacity at some length, and retorted on his companion with doubts of the power of the *Daoiné Shi* to grant wishes.

"The proof of the pudding's in the eating o't," said the Man of Peace. "Wush away, Brockburn, and mak the nut as hard to crack as ye will."

The Laird at once began to cast about in his mind for three wishes sufficiently comprehensive to secure his lifelong prosperity; but the more he beat his brains the less could he satisfy himself.

How many miles he wandered thus, the Dwarf keeping silently beside him, he never knew, before he sank exhausted on the ground, saying:

"I'm thinking, man, that if ye could bring hame to me, in place of bringing me hame, I'd misdoubt your powers nae mair. It's a far cry to Loch Aue,¹ ye ken, and it's a weary long road to Brockburn."

"Is this your wush?" asked the Man of Peace.

"This is my wush," said the Laird, striking his rung upon the ground.

The words had scarcely passed his lips when the whole homestead of Brockburn, house and farm buildings, was planted upon the bleak hill-side.

The astonished Laird now began to bewail the rash wish which had removed his home from the

¹ "It's a far cry to Loch Aue." — *Scotch Proverb*.

sheltered and fertile valley where it originally stood to the barren side of a bleak mountain.

The Man of Peace, however, would not take any hints as to undoing his work of his own accord. All he said was,

“If ye wush it away, so it’ll be. But then ye’ll only have one wush left. Ye’ve small discretion the nicht, Brockburn, I’m feared.”

“To leave the steading in sic a spot is no to be thought on,” sighed the Laird, as he spent his second wish in undoing his first. But he cannily added the provision,

“And ye may tak me wi’ it.”

The words were no sooner spoken than the homestead was back in its place, and Brockburn himself was lying in his own bed, Jock, his favourite collie, barking and licking his face by turns for joy.

“Whisht, whisht, Jock!” said the Laird. “Ye wouldna bark when I begged of ye, so ye may haud your peace noo.”

And pushing the collie from him, he sat up in bed and looked anxiously but vainly round the chamber for the Man of Peace.

“Lie down, lie down,” cried the gudewife from beside him. “Ye’re surely out o’ your wuts, Brockburn. Would ye gang stravaging about the country again the nicht?”

“Where is he?” cried the Laird.

“There’s not a soul here but your lawful wife

and your ain dear doggie. Was there ae body that ye expected?" asked his wife.

"The Man o' Peace, woman!" cried Brockburn. "I've ane o' my wushes to get, and I maun hae't."

"The man's mad!" was the gudewife's comment. "Ye've surely forgotten yoursel, Brockburn. Ye never believed in the *Daoiné Shi* before."

"Secin's believin'," said the Laird. "I for-gathered with a Man o' Peace the nicht on the hill, and I wush I just saw him again."

As the Laird spoke the window of the chamber was lit up from without, and the Man of Peace appeared sitting on the window-ledge in his daisy-lined cloak, his feet hanging down into the room, the silver shoes glittering as they dangled.

"I'm here, Brockburn!" he cried. "But eh, man! Ye've had your last wush."

And even as the stupefied Laird gazed, the light slowly died away, and the Man of Peace vanished also.

On the following morning the Laird was roused from sleep, by loud cries of surprise and admiration.

The good wife had been stirring for some hours, and in emptying the pockets of her good man's coat she had found three huge cairngorms of exquisite tint and lustre. Brockburn thus discovered the value of the gifts, half of which he had thrown away.

But no subsequent visits to the hill-side led to their recovery. Many a time did the Laird bring home a heavy pocketful of stones, at the thrifty

gudewife's bidding, but they only proved to be the common stones of the mountain-side. The *Shian* could never be distinguished from any other crag, and the *Daoinë Shi* were visible no more.

Yet it is said that the Laird of Brockburn prospered and throve thereafter, in acre, stall, and stead-ing, as those seldom prosper who have not the good word of the People of Peace.

THE OGRE COURTING



IN days when ogres were still the terror of certain districts, there was one who had long kept a whole neighbourhood in fear without any one daring to dispute his tyranny.

By thefts and exactions, by heavy ransoms from merchants too old and tough to be eaten, in one way and another, the Ogre had become very rich; and although those who knew could tell of huge cellars full of gold and jewels, and yards and barns groaning with the weight of stolen goods, the richer he grew the more anxious and covetous he became. Moreover, day by day, he added to his stores; for though (like most ogres) he was as stupid as he was strong, no one had ever been found, by force or fraud, to get the better of him.

What he took from the people was not their heaviest grievance. Even to be killed and eaten by him was not the chance they thought of most.

A man can die but once; and if he is a sailor, a shark may eat him, which is not so much better than being devoured by an ogre. No, that was not the worst. The worst was this — he would keep getting married. And as he liked little wives, all the short women lived in fear and dread. And as his wives always died very soon, he was constantly courting fresh ones.

Some said he ate his wives; some said he tormented, and others, that he only worked them to death. Everybody knew it was not a desirable match, and yet there was not a father who dare refuse his daughter if she were asked for. The Ogre only cared for two things in a woman — he liked her to be little, and a good housewife.

Now it was when the Ogre had just lost his twenty-fourth wife (within the memory of men) that these two qualities were eminently united in the person of the smallest and most notable woman of the district, the daughter of a certain poor farmer. He was so poor that he could not afford properly to dower his daughter, who had in consequence remained single beyond her first youth. Everybody felt sure that Managing Molly must now be married to the Ogre. The tall girls stretched themselves till they looked like maypoles, and said, “Poor thing!” The slatterns gossiped from house to house, the heels of their shoes clacking as they went, and cried that this was what came of being too thrifty.

And sure enough, in due time, the giant widower

came to the farmer as he was in the field looking over his crops, and proposed for Molly there and then. The farmer was so much put out that he did not know what he said in reply, either when he was saying it, or afterwards, when his friends asked about it. But he remembered that the Ogre had invited himself to sup at the farm that day week.

Managing Molly did not distress herself at the news.

“Do what I bid you, and say as I say,” said she to her father; “and if the Ogre does not change his mind, at any rate you shall not come empty-handed out of the business.”

By his daughter's desire the farmer now procured a large number of hares, and a barrel of white wine, which expenses completely emptied his slender stocking, and on the day of the Ogre's visit, she made a delicious and savoury stew with the hares in the biggest pickling tub, and the wine-barrel was set on a bench near the table.

When the Ogre came, Molly served up the stew, and the Ogre sat down to sup, his head just touching the kitchen rafters. The stew was perfect, and there was plenty of it. For what Molly and her father ate was hardly to be counted in the tubful. The Ogre was very much pleased, and said politely:

“I'm afraid my dear, that you have been put to great trouble and expense on my account. I have a large appetite, and like to sup well.”

“Don’t mention it, sir,” said Molly. “The fewer rats the more corn. How do *you* cook them?”

“Not one of all the extravagant hussies I have had as wives ever cooked them at all,” said the Ogre; and he thought to himself, “Such a stew out of rats! What frugality! What a housewife!”

When he broached the wine, he was no less pleased, for it was of the best.

“This, at any rate, must have cost you a great deal, neighbour,” said he, drinking the farmer’s health as Molly left the room.

“I don’t know that rotten apples could be better used,” said the farmer; “but I leave all that to Molly. Do you brew at home?”

“We give *our* rotten apples to the pigs,” growled the Ogre. “But things will be better ordered when she is my wife.”

The Ogre was now in great haste to conclude the match, and asked what dowry the farmer would give his daughter.

“I should never dream of giving a dowry with Molly,” said the farmer, boldly. “Whoever gets her, gets dowry enough. On the contrary, I shall expect a good round sum from the man who deprives me of her. Our wealthiest farmer is just widowed, and therefore sure to be in a hurry for marriage. He has an eye to the main chance, and would not grudge to pay well for such a wife, I’ll warrant.”

“I am no churl myself,” said the Ogre, who was

anxious to secure his thrifty bride at any price; and he named a large sum of money, thinking, "We shall live on rats henceforward, and the beef and mutton will soon cover the dowry."

"Double that, and we'll see," said the farmer, stoutly.

But the Ogre became angry, and cried: "What are you thinking of, man? Who is to hinder my carrying your lass off, without 'with your leave' or 'by your leave,' dowry or none?"

"How little you know her!" said the farmer. "She is so firm that she would be cut to pieces sooner than give you any benefit of her thrift, unless you dealt fairly in the matter."

"Well, well," said the Ogre, "let us meet each other." And he named a sum larger than he at first proposed, and less than the farmer had asked. This the farmer agreed to, as it was enough to make him prosperous for life.

"Bring it in a sack to-morrow morning," said he to the Ogre, "and then you can speak to Molly; she's gone to bed now."

The next morning, accordingly, the Ogre appeared, carrying the dowry in a sack, and Molly came to meet him.

"There are two things," said she, "I would ask of any lover of mine: a new farmhouse, built as I should direct, with a view to economy; and a feather-bed of fresh goose feathers, filled when the

old woman plucks her geese. If I don't sleep well, I cannot work well."

"That is better than asking for finery," thought the Ogre; "and after all the house will be my own." So, to save the expense of labour, he built it himself, and worked hard, day after day, under Molly's orders, till winter came. Then it was finished.

"Now for the feather-bed," said Molly. "I'll sew up the ticking, and when the old woman plucks her geese, I'll let you know."

When it snows, they say the old woman up yonder is plucking her geese, and so at the first snowstorm Molly sent for the Ogre.

"Now you see the feathers falling," said she, "so fill the bed."

"How am I to catch them?" cried the Ogre.

"Stupid! don't you see them lying there in a heap?" cried Molly; "get a shovel, and set to work."

The Ogre accordingly carried in shovelfuls of snow to the bed, but as it melted as fast as he put it in, his labour never seemed done. Towards night the room got so cold that the snow would not melt, and now the bed was soon filled.

Molly hastily covered it with sheets and blankets, and said: "Pray rest here to-night, and tell me if the bed is not comfort itself. To-morrow we will be married."

So the tired Ogre lay down on the bed he had

filled, but, do what he would, he could not get warm.

“The sheets must be damp,” said he, and in the morning he woke with such horrible pains in his bones that he could hardly move, and half the bed had melted away. “It’s no use,” he groaned, “she’s a very managing woman, but to sleep on such a bed would be the death of me.” And he went off home as quickly as he could, before Managing Molly could call upon him to be married; for she was so managing that he was more than half afraid of her already.

When Molly found that he had gone, she sent the farmer after him.

“What does he want?” cried the Ogre, when they told him the farmer was at the door.

“He says the bride is waiting for you,” was the reply.

“Tell him I’m too ill to be married,” said the Ogre.

But the messenger soon returned:

“He says she wants to know what you will give her to make up for the disappointment.”

“She’s got the dowry, and the farm, and the feather-bed,” groaned the Ogre; “what more does she want?”

But again the messenger returned:

“She says you’ve pressed the feather-bed flat, and she wants some more goose feathers.”

“There are geese enough in the yard,” yelled

the Ogre. "Let him drive them home; and if he has another word to say, put him down to roast."

The farmer, who overheard this order, lost no time in taking his leave, and as he passed through the yard he drove home as fine a flock of geese as you will see on a common.

It is said that the Ogre never recovered from the effects of sleeping on the old woman's goose feathers, and was less powerful than before.

As for Managing Molly, being now well dowered, she had no lack of offers of marriage, and was soon mated to her mind.

THE MAGICIANS' GIFTS



THERE was once a king in whose dominions lived no less than three magicians.

When the king's eldest son was christened, the king invited the three magicians to the christening feast,

and to make the compliment the greater, he asked one of them to stand godfather. But the other two, who were not asked to be godfathers, were so angry at what they held to be a slight, that they only waited to see how they might best revenge themselves upon the infant prince.

When the moment came for presenting the christening gifts, the godfather magician advanced to the cradle and said, "My gift is this: Whatever he wishes for he shall have. And only I who give

shall be able to recall this gift." For he perceived the jealousy of the other magicians, and knew that, if possible, they would undo what he did. But the second magician muttered in his beard, "And yet I will change it to a curse." And coming up to the cradle, he said, "The wishes that he has thus obtained he shall not be able to revoke or change."

Then the third magician grumbled beneath his black robe, "If he were very wise and prudent he might yet be happy. But I will secure his punishment." So he also drew near to the cradle, and said, "For my part, I give him a hasty temper."

After which, the two dissatisfied magicians withdrew together, saying, "Should we permit ourselves to be slighted for nothing?"

But the king and his courtiers were not at all disturbed.

"My son has only to be sure of what he wants," said the king, "and then, I suppose, he will not desire to recall his wishes."

And the courtiers added, "If a prince may not have a hasty temper, who may, we should like to know?"

And everybody laughed, except the godfather magician, who went out sighing and shaking his head, and was seen no more.

Whilst the king's son was yet a child, the gift of the godfather magician began to take effect. There was nothing so rare and precious that he could

not obtain it, or so difficult that it could not be accomplished by his mere wish. But, on the other hand, no matter how inconsiderately he spoke, or how often he changed his mind, what he had once wished must remain as he had wished it, in spite of himself; and as he often wished for things that were bad for him, and oftener still wished for a thing one day, and regretted it the next, his power was the source of quite as much pain as pleasure to him. Then his temper was so hot, that he was apt hastily to wish ill to those who offended him, and afterwards bitterly to regret the mischief that he could not undo. Thus, one after another, the king appointed his trustiest counsellors to the charge of his son, who, sooner or later, in the discharge of their duty, were sure to be obliged to thwart him; on which the impatient prince would cry, "I wish you were at the bottom of the sea with your rules and regulations;" and the counsellors disappeared accordingly, and returned no more.

When there was not a wise man left at court, and the king himself lived in daily dread of being the next victim, he said, "Only one thing remains to be done: to find the godfather magician, and persuade him to withdraw his gift."

So the king offered rewards, and sent out messengers in every direction, but the magician was not to be found. At last, one day he met a blind beggar, who said to him, "Three nights ago I

dreamed that I went by the narrowest of seven roads to seek what you are looking for, and was successful."

When the king returned home, he asked his courtiers, "Where are there seven roads lying near to each other, some broad, and some narrow?" And one of them replied, "Twenty-one miles to the west of the palace is a four-cross road, where three field-paths also diverge."

To this place the king made his way, and taking the narrowest of the field-paths, went on and on till it led him straight into a cave, where an old woman sat over a fire.

"Does a magician live here?" asked the king.

"No one lives here but myself," said the old woman. "But as I am a wise woman I may be able to help you if you need it."

The king then told her of his perplexities, and how he was desirous of finding the magician, to persuade him to recall his gift.

"He could not recall the other gifts," said the wise woman. "Therefore it is better that the prince should be taught to use his power prudently and to control his temper. And since all the persons capable of guiding him have disappeared, I will return with you and take charge of him myself. Over me he will have no power."

To this the king consented, and they returned together to the palace, where the wise woman be-

came guardian to the prince, and she fulfilled her duties so well that he became much more discreet and self-controlled. Only at times his violent temper got the better of him, and led him to wish what he afterwards vainly regretted.

Thus all went well till the prince became a man, when, though he had great affection for her, he felt ashamed of having an old woman for his counsellor, and he said, "I certainly wish that I had a faithful and discreet adviser of my own age and sex."

On that very day a young nobleman offered himself as companion to the prince, and as he was a young man of great ability, he was accepted: whereupon the old woman took her departure, and was never seen again.

The young nobleman performed his part so well that the prince became deeply attached to him, and submitted in every way to his counsels. But at last a day came when, being in a rage, the advice of his friend irritated him, and he cried hastily, "Will you drive me mad with your long sermons? I wish you would hold your tongue for ever." On which the young nobleman became dumb, and so remained. For he was not, as the wise woman had been, independent of the prince's power.

The prince's grief and remorse knew no bounds. "Am I not under a curse?" said he. "Truly I ought to be cast out from human society, and sent to live with wild beasts in a wilderness. I only bring

evil upon those I love best — indeed, there is no hope for me unless I can find my godfather, and make him recall this fatal gift.”

So the prince mounted his horse, and, accompanied by his dumb friend, who still remained faithful to him, he set forth to find the magician. They took no followers, except the prince's dog, a noble hound, who was so quick of hearing that he understood all that was said to him, and was, next to the young nobleman, the wisest person at court.

“Mark well, my dog,” said the prince to him, “we stay nowhere till we find my godfather, and when we find him we go no further. I rely on your sagacity to help us.”

The dog licked the prince's hand, and then trotted so resolutely down a certain road that the two friends allowed him to lead them and followed close behind.

They travelled in this way to the edge of the king's dominions, only halting for needful rest and refreshment. At last the dog led them through a wood, and towards evening they found themselves in the depths of the forest, with no sign of any shelter for the night. Presently they heard a little bell, such as is rung for prayer, and the dog ran down a side path and led them straight to a kind of grotto, at the door of which stood an aged hermit.

“Does a magician live here?” asked the prince.

“No one lives here but myself,” said the hermit,

“but I am old, and have meditated much. My advice is at your service if you need it.”

The prince then related his history, and how he was now seeking the magician godfather, to rid himself of his gift.

“And yet that will not cure your temper,” said the hermit. “It were better that you employed yourself in learning to control that, and to use your power prudently.”

“No, no,” replied the prince; “I must find the magician.”

And when the hermit pressed his advice, he cried, “Provoke me not, good father, or I may be base enough to wish you ill; and the evil I do I cannot undo.”

And he departed, followed by his friend, and calling his dog. But the dog seated himself at the hermit's feet, and would not move. Again and again the prince called him, but he only whined and wagged his tail, and refused to move. Coaxing and scolding were both in vain, and when at last the prince tried to drag him off by force, the dog growled.

“Base brute!” cried the prince, flinging him from him in a transport of rage. “How have I been so deceived in you? I wish you were hanged!” And even as he spoke the dog vanished, and as the prince turned his head he saw the poor beast's body dangling from a tree above him. The sight overwhelmed him, and he began bitterly to lament his cruelty.

“Will no one hang me also,” he cried, “and rid the world of such a monster?”

“It is easier to die repenting than to live amending,” said the hermit; “yet is the latter course the better one. Wherefore abide with me, my son, and learn in solitude those lessons of self-government without which no man is fit to rule others.”

“It is impossible,” said the prince. “These fits of passion are as a madness that comes upon me, and they are beyond cure. It only remains to find my godfather, that he may make me less baneful to others by taking away the power I abuse.” And raising the body of the dog tenderly in his arms, he laid it before him on his horse, and rode away, the dumb nobleman following him.

They now entered the dominions of another king, and in due time arrived at the capital. The prince presented himself to the king, and asked if he had a magician in his kingdom.

“Not to my knowledge,” replied the king. “But I have a remarkably wise daughter, and if you want counsel she may be able to help you.”

The princess accordingly was sent for, and she was so beautiful, as well as witty, that the prince fell in love with her, and begged the king to give her to him to wife. The king, of course, was unable to refuse what the prince wished, and the wedding was celebrated without delay; and by the advice of his wife the prince placed the body of his faithful

dog in a glass coffin, and kept it near him, that he might constantly be reminded of the evil results of giving way to his anger.

For a time all went well. At first the prince never said a harsh word to his wife; but by and by familiarity made him less careful, and one day she said something that offended him, and he fell into a violent rage. As he went storming up and down, the princess wrung her hands, and cried, "Ah, my dear husband, I beg of you to be careful what you say to me. You say you loved your dog, and yet you know where he lies."

"I know that I wish you were with him, with your prating!" cried the prince, in a fury; and the words were scarcely out of his mouth when the princess vanished from his side, and when he ran to the glass coffin, there she lay, pale and lifeless, with her head upon the body of the hound.

The prince was now beside himself with remorse and misery, and when the dumb nobleman made signs that they should pursue their search for the magician, he only cried, "Too late! too late!"

But after a while he said, "I will return to the hermit, and pass the rest of my miserable life in solitude and penance. And you, dear friend, go back to my father."

But the dumb nobleman shook his head, and could not be persuaded to leave the prince. Then they took the glass coffin on their shoulders, and on foot,

and weeping as they went, they retraced their steps to the forest.

For some time the prince remained with the hermit, and submitted himself to his direction. Then the hermit bade him return to his father, and he obeyed.

Every day the prince stood by the glass coffin, and beat his breast and cried, "Behold, murderer, the fruits of anger!" And he tried hard to overcome the violence of his temper. When he lost heart he remembered a saying of the hermit: "Patience had far to go, but she was crowned at last." And after a while the prince became as gentle as he had before been violent. And the king and all the court rejoiced at the change; but the prince remained sad at heart, thinking of the princess.

One day he was sitting alone, when a man approached him, dressed in a long black robe.

"Good-day, godson," said he.

"Who calls me godson?" said the prince.

"The magician you have so long sought," said the godfather. "I have come to reclaim my gift."

"What cruelty led you to bestow it upon me?" asked the prince.

"The king, your father, would have been dissatisfied with any ordinary present from me," said the magician, "forgetting that the responsibilities of common gifts, and very limited power, are more than enough for most men to deal with. But I have not neglected you. I was the wise woman who

brought you up. Again, I was the hermit, as your dog was sage enough to discover. I am come now to reclaim what has caused you such suffering."

"Alas!" cried the prince, "why is your kindness so tardy? If you have not forgotten me, why have you withheld this benefit till it is too late for my happiness? My friend is dumb, my wife is dead, my dog is hanged. When wishes cannot reach these, do you think it matters to me what I may command?"

"Softly, prince," said the magician; "I had a reason for the delay. But for these bitter lessons you would still be the slave of the violent temper which you have conquered, and which, as it was no gift of mine, I could not remove. Moreover, when the spell which made all things bend to your wish is taken away, its effects are also undone. Godson! I recall my gift."

As the magician spoke the glass sides of the coffin melted into the air, and the princess sprang up, and threw herself into her husband's arms. The dog also rose, stretched himself, and wagged his tail. The dumb nobleman ran to tell the good news to the king, and all the counsellors came back in a long train from the bottom of the sea, and set about the affairs of state as if nothing had happened.

The old king welcomed his children with open arms, and they all lived happily to the end of their days.

THE WIDOWS AND THE STRANGERS



IN days of yore, there were once two poor old widows who lived in the same hamlet and under the same roof. But though the cottages joined and one roof covered them, they had each a separate dwelling; and although they were alike in age and circumstances, yet in other respects they were very different. For

one dame was covetous, though she had little to save, and the other was liberal, though she had little to give.

Now, on the rising ground opposite to the widows' cottages, stood a monastery where a few pious and charitable brethren spent their time in prayer, labour, and good works. And with the alms of these monks, and the kindness of neighbours, and because their wants were few, the old women dwelt in comfort, and had daily bread, and lay warm at night.

One evening, when the covetous old widow was

having supper, there came a knock at her door. Before she opened it she hastily put away the remains of her meal.

“For,” said she, “it is a stormy night, and ten to one some belated vagabond wants shelter; and when there are victuals on the table every fool must be asked to sup.”

But when she opened the door, a monk came in who had his cowl pulled over his head to shelter him from the storm. The widow was much disconcerted at having kept one of the brotherhood waiting, and loudly apologized, but the monk stopped her, saying, “I fear I cut short your evening meal, my daughter.”

“Now in the name of ill-luck, how came he to guess that?” thought the widow, as with anxious civility she pressed the monk to take some supper after his walk; for the good woman always felt hospitably inclined towards any one who was likely to return her kindness sevenfold.

The brother, however, refused to sup; and as he seated himself the widow looked sharply through her spectacles to see if she could gather from any distention of the folds of his frock whether a loaf, a bottle of cordial, or a new winter’s cloak were most likely to crown the visit. No undue protuberance being visible about the monk’s person, she turned her eyes to his face, and found that her visitor was one of the brotherhood whom she had not seen before.

And not only was his face unfamiliar, it was utterly unlike the kindly but rough countenances of her charitable patrons. None that she had ever seen boasted the noble beauty, the chiselled and refined features of the monk before her. And she could not but notice that, although only one rushlight illumined her room, and though the monk's cowl went far to shade him even from that, yet his face was lit up as if by light from within, so that his clear skin seemed almost transparent. In short, her curiosity must have been greatly stirred, had not greed made her more anxious to learn what he had brought than who he was.

"It's a terrible night," quoth the monk, at length. "Such tempest without only gives point to the indoor comforts of the wealthy; but it chills the very marrow of the poor and destitute."

"Aye, indeed," sniffed the widow with a shiver. "If it were not for the charity of good Christians, what would poor folk do for comfort on such an evening as this?"

"It was that very thought, my daughter," said the monk, with a sudden earnestness on his shining face, "that brought me forth even now through the storm to your cottage."

"Heaven reward you!" cried the widow, fervently.

"Heaven does reward the charitable!" replied the monk. "To no truth do the Scriptures bear such constant and unbroken witness; even as it is written:

‘He that hath pity upon the poor lendeth unto the Lord; and look, what he layeth out it shall be paid him again.’ ”

“What a blessed thing it must be to be able to do good!” sighed the widow, piously wishing in her heart that the holy man would not delay to earn his recompense.

“My daughter,” said the monk, “that blessing is not withheld from you. It is to ask your help for those in greater need than yourself that I am come to-night.” And forthwith the good brother began to tell how two strangers had sought shelter at the monastery. Their house had been struck by lightning, and burnt with all it contained; and they themselves, aged, poor, and friendless, were exposed to the fury of the storm. “Our house is a poor one,” continued the monk. “The strangers’ lodging-room was already full, and we are quite without the means of making these poor souls comfortable. You at least have a sound roof over your head, and if you can spare one or two things for the night, they shall be restored to you to-morrow, when some of our guests depart.”

The widow could hardly conceal her vexation and disappointment. “Now, dear heart, holy father!” cried she, “is there not a rich body in the place, that you come for charity to a poor o’ld widow like me, that am in a case rather to borrow myself than to lend to others?”

“Can you spare us a blanket?” said the monk. “These poor strangers have been out in the storm, remember.”

The widow started. “What meddling busybody told him that the Baroness gave me a new blanket at Michaelmas?” thought she; but at last, very unwillingly, she went to an inner room to fetch a blanket from her bed.

“They shan’t have the new one, that’s flat,” muttered the widow; and she drew out the old one and began to fold it up. But though she had made much of its thinness and insufficiency to the Baroness, she was so powerfully affected at parting with it, that all its good qualities came strongly to her mind.

“It’s a very suitable size,” said she to herself, “and easy for my poor old arms to shake or fold. With careful usage, it would last for years yet; but who knows how two wandering bodies that have been tramping miles through the storm may kick about in their sleep? And who knows if they’re decent folk at all; likely enough they’re two hedge birds, who have imposed a pitiful tale on the good fathers, and never slept under anything finer than a shock of straw in their lives.”

The more the good woman thought of this, the more sure she felt that such was the case, and the less willing she became to lend her blanket to “a couple of good-for-nothing tramps.” A sudden idea decided her. “Ten to one they bring fever with

them!" she cried; "and dear knows I saw enough good bedding burnt after the black fever, three years ago! It would be a sin and a shame to burn a good blanket like this." And repeating "a sin and a shame" with great force, the widow restored the blanket to its place.

"The coverlet's not worth much," she thought; "but my goodman bought it the year after we were married, and if anything happened to it I should never forgive myself. The old shawl is good enough for tramps." Saying which she took a ragged old shawl from a peg, and began to fold it up. But even as she brushed and folded, she begrudged the faded rag.

"It saves my better one on a bad day," she sighed; "but I suppose the father must have something."

And accordingly she took it to the monk, saying, "It's not so good as it has been, but there's warmth in it yet, and it cost a pretty penny when new."

"And is this all that you can spare to the poor houseless strangers?" asked the monk.

"Aye, indeed, good father," said she, "and that will cost me many a twinge of rheumatics. Folk at my age can't lie cold at night for nothing."

"These poor strangers," said the monk, "are as aged as yourself, and have lost everything."

But as all he said had no effect in moving the widow's compassion, he departed, and knocked at

the door of her neighbour. Here he told the same tale, which met with a very different hearing. This widow was one of those liberal souls whose possessions always make them feel uneasy unless they are being accepted, or used, or borrowed by some one else. She blessed herself that, thanks to the Baroness, she had a new blanket fit to lend to the king himself, and only desired to know with what else she could serve the poor strangers and requite the charities of the brotherhood.

The monk confessed that all the slender stock of household goods in the monastery was in use, and one after another he accepted the loan of almost everything the widow had. As she gave the things he put them out through the door, saying that he had a messenger outside; and having promised that all should be duly restored on the morrow, he departed, leaving the widow with little else than an old chair in which she was to pass the night.

When the monk had gone, the storm raged with greater fury than before, and at last one terrible flash of lightning struck the widows' house, and though it did not hurt the old women, it set fire to the roof, and both cottages were soon ablaze. Now as the terrified old creatures hobbled out into the storm, they met the monk, who, crying, 'Come to the monastery!' seized an arm of each, and hurried them up the hill. To such good purpose did he help them, that they seemed to fly, and

arrived at the convent gate they hardly knew how.

Under a shed by the wall were the goods and chattels of the liberal widow.

“Take back thine own, daughter,” said the monk; “thy charity hath brought its own reward.”

“But the strangers, good father?” said the perplexed widow.

“Ye are the strangers,” answered the monk; “and what thy pity thought meet to be spared for the unfortunate, Heaven in thy misfortune hath spared to thee.”

Then turning to the other widow, he drew the old shawl from beneath his frock, and gave it to her, saying, “I give you joy, dame, that this hath escaped the flames. It is not so good as it has been; but there is warmth in it yet, and it cost a pretty penny when new.”

Full of confusion, the illiberal widow took back her shawl, murmuring, “Lack-a-day! If I had but known it was ourselves the good father meant!”

The monk gave a shrewd smile.

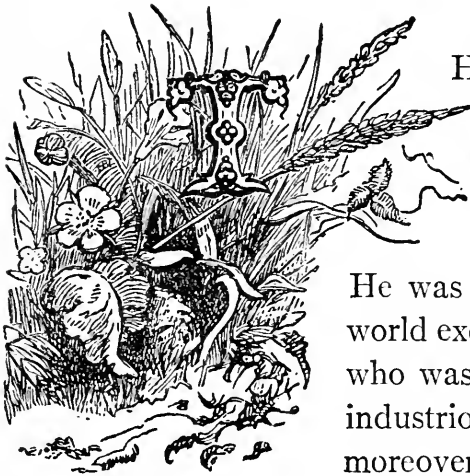
“Aye, aye, it would have been different, I doubt not,” said he; “but accept the lesson, my daughter, and when next thou art called upon to help the unfortunate, think that it is thine own needs that would be served; and it may be thou shalt judge better as to what thou canst spare.”

As he spoke, a flash of lightning lit up the ground

where the monk stood, making a vast aureole about him in the darkness of the night. In the bright light, his countenance appeared stern and awful in its beauty, and when the flash was past, the monk had vanished also.

Furthermore when the widows sought shelter in the monastery, they found that the brotherhood knew nothing of their strange visitor.

KIND WILLIAM AND THE WATER SPRITE



HERE once lived
a poor weaver
whose wife died
a few years after
their marriage.

He was now alone in the
world except for their child,
who was a very quick and
industrious little lad, and,
moreover, of such an oblig-

ing disposition that he gained the nickname of
Kind William.

On his seventh birthday his father gave him a
little net with a long handle, and with this Kind
William betook himself to a shallow part of the
river to fish. After wandering on for some time,
he found a quiet pool dammed in by stones, and
here he dipped for the minnows that darted about
in the clear brown water. At the first and second
casts he caught nothing, but with the third he

landed no less than twenty-one little fishes, and such minnows he had never seen, for as they leaped and struggled in the net they shone with alternate tints of green and gold.

He was gazing at them with wonder and delight, when a voice behind him cried, in piteous tones —

“ Oh, my little sisters! Oh, my little sisters!”

Kind William turned round, and saw, sitting on a rock that stood out of the stream, a young girl weeping bitterly. She had a very pretty face, and abundant yellow hair of marvellous length, and of such uncommon brightness that even in the shade it shone like gold. She was dressed in grass green, and from her knees downwards she was hidden by the clumps of fern and rushes that grew by the stream.

“ What ails you, my little lass?” said Kind William.

But the maid only wept more bitterly, and wringing her hands, repeated, “ Oh, my little sisters! Oh, my little sisters!” presently adding in the same tone, “ The little fishes! Oh, the little fishes!”

“ Dry your eyes, and I will give you half of them,” said the good-natured child; “ and if you have no net you shall fish with me this afternoon.”

But at this proposal the maid’s sobs redoubled, and she prayed and begged with frantic eagerness that he would throw the fish back into the river. For some time Kind William would not consent to

throw away his prize, but at last he yielded to her excessive grief, and emptied the net into the pool, where the glittering fishes were soon lost to sight under the sand and pebbles.

The girl now laughed and clapped her hands.

“This good deed you shall never rue, Kind William,” said she, “and even now it shall repay you threefold. How many fish did you catch?”

“Twenty-one,” said Kind William, not without regret in his tone.

The maid at once began to pull hairs out of her head, and did not stop till she had counted sixty-three, and laid them together in her fingers. She then began to wind the lock up into a curl, and it took far longer to wind than the sixty-three hairs had taken to pull. How long her hair really was Kind William never could tell, for after it reached her knees he lost sight of it among the fern; but he began to suspect that she was no true village maid, but a water sprite, and he heartily wished himself safe at home.

“Now,” said she, when the lock was wound, “will you promise me three things?”

“If I can do so without sin,” said Kind William.

“First,” she continued, holding out the lock of hair, “will you keep this carefully, and never give it away? It will be for your own good.”

“One never gives away gifts,” said Kind William. “I promise that.”

“The second thing is to spare what you have spared. Fish up the river and down the river at your will, but swear never to cast net in this pool again.”

“One should not do kindness by halves,” said Kind William. “I promise that also.”

“Thirdly, you must never tell what you have now seen and heard till thrice seven years have passed. And now come hither, my child, and give me your little finger, that I may see if you can keep a secret.”

But by this time Kind William’s hairs were standing on end, and he gave the last promise more from fear than from any other motive, and seized his net to go.

“No hurry, no hurry,” said the maiden (and the words sounded like the rippling of a brook over pebbles). Then bending towards him, with a strange smile, she added, “You are afraid that I shall pinch too hard, my pretty boy. Well, give me a farewell kiss before you go.”

“I kiss none but the miller’s lass,” said Kind William, sturdily; for she was his little sweetheart. Besides, he was afraid that the water witch would enchant him and draw him down. At his answer she laughed till the echoes rang, but Kind William shuddered to hear that the echoes seemed to come from the river instead of from the hills; and they rang in his ears like a distant torrent leaping over rocks.

“Then listen to my song,” said the water sprite. With which she drew some of her golden hairs over her arm, and tuning them as if they had been the strings of a harp, she began to sing :

“Warp of woollen and woof of gold :
When seven and seven and seven are told.”

But when Kind William heard that the river was running with the cadence of the tune, he could bear it no longer, and took to his heels. When he had run a few yards he heard a splash, as if a salmon had jumped, and on looking back he found that the yellow-haired maiden was gone.

Kind William was trustworthy as well as obliging, and he kept his word. He said nothing of his adventure. He put the yellow lock into an old china teapot that had stood untouched on the mantelpiece for years. And fishing up the river and down the river he never again cast net into the haunted pool. And in course of time the whole affair passed from his mind.

Fourteen years went by, and Kind William was Kind William still. He was as obliging as ever, and still loved the miller's daughter, who, for her part, had not forgotten her old playmate. But the miller's memory was not so good, for the fourteen years had been prosperous ones with him, and he was rich, whereas they had only brought bad trade and

poverty to the weaver and his son. So the lovers were not allowed even to speak to each other.

One evening Kind William wandered by the river side lamenting his hard fate. It was his twenty-first birthday, and he might not even receive the good wishes of the day from his old playmate. It was just growing dusk, a time when prudent bodies hurry home from the neighbourhood of fairy rings, sprite-haunted streams, and the like, and Kind William was beginning to quicken his pace, when a voice from behind him sang —

“Warp of woollen and woof of gold;
When seven and seven and seven are told.”

Kind William felt sure that he had heard this before, though he could not recall when or where; but suspecting that it was no mortal voice that sang, he hurried home without looking behind him. Before he reached the house he remembered all, and also that on this very day his promise of secrecy expired.

Meanwhile the old weaver had been sadly preparing the loom to weave a small stock of yarn, which he had received in payment for some work. He had set up the warp, and was about to fill the shuttle, when his son came in and told the story, and repeated the water sprite's song.

“Where is the lock of hair, my son?” asked the old man.

“In the teapot still, if you have not touched it,” said Kind William; “but the dust of fourteen years must have destroyed all gloss and colour.”

On searching the teapot, however, the lock of hair was found to be as bright as ever, and it lay in the weaver’s hand like a coil of gold.

“It is the song that puzzles me,” said Kind William. “Seven, and seven, and seven, make twenty-one. Now that is just my age.”

“There is your warp of woollen, if that is anything,” added the weaver, gazing at the loom with a melancholy air.

“And this is golden enough,” laughed Kind William, pointing to the curl. “Come, father, let us see how far one hair will go on the shuttle.” And suiting the action to the word, he began to wind. He wound the shuttle full, and then sat down to the loom and began to throw.

The result was a fabric of such beauty that the weavers shouted with amazement, and one single hair served for the woof of the whole piece.

Before long there was not a town dame or a fine country lady but must needs have a dress of the new stuff, and before the sixty-three hairs were used up, the fortunes of the weaver and his son were made.

About this time the miller’s memory became clearer, and he was often heard to speak of an old boy-and-girl love between his dear daughter and the wealthy manufacturer of the golden cloth. Within

a year and a day Kind William married his sweetheart, and as money sticks to money, in the end he added the old miller's riches to his own.

Moreover there is every reason to believe that he and his wife lived happily to the end of their days.

And what became of the water sprite?

That you must ask somebody else, for I do not know.

MURDOCH'S RATH¹



HERE was not a nicer boy in all Ireland than Pat, and clever at his trade too, if only he'd had one.

But from his cradle he learned nothing (small blame to him with no one to teach him!), so when he came to years of discretion, he earned his living by running messages for his neighbours; and Pat could always be trusted to make the best of a bad bargain, and bring back all the change, for he was the soul of honesty and good nature.

It's no wonder then that he was beloved by every one, and got as much work as he could do, and if the pay had but fitted the work, he'd have been mighty comfortable; but as it was, what he got wouldn't have kept him in shoe-leather, but for making both ends meet by wearing his shoes in his pocket, except when he was in the town, and obliged

¹ *Rath* = a kind of moat-surrounded spot much favoured by Irish fairies. The ditch is generally overgrown with furze bushes.

to look genteel for the credit of the place he came from.

Well, all was going on as peaceable as could be, till one market-day, when business (or it may have been pleasure) detained him till the heel of the evening, and by night fall, when he began to make the road short in good earnest, he was so flustered, rehearsing his messages to make sure he'd forgotten nothing, that he never bethought him to leave off his brogues, but tramped on just as if shoe-leather were made to be knocked to bits on the king's highway.

And this was what he was after saying —

“A dozen hanks of grey yarn for Mistress Murphy.”

“Three gross of bright buttons for the tailor.”

“Half an ounce of throat drops for Father Andrew, and an ounce of snuff for his housekeeper,” and so on.

For these were what he went to the town to fetch, and he was afraid lest one of the lot might have slipped his memory.

Now everybody knows there are two ways home from the town; and that's not meaning the right way and the wrong way, which my grandmother (rest her soul!) said there was to every place but one that it's not genteel to name. (There could only be a wrong way *there*, she said.) The two ways home from the town were the highway, and the way by Murdoch's Rath.

Murdoch's Rath was a pleasant enough spot in the daytime, but not many persons cared to go by it when the sun was down. And in all the years Pat was going backwards and forwards, he never once came home except by the high road till this unlucky evening, when, just at the place where the two roads part, he got, as one may say, into a sort of confusion.

"Halt!" says he to himself (for his own uncle had been a soldier, and Pat knew the word of command). "The left hand turn is the right one," says he, and he was going down the high road as straight as he could go, when suddenly he bethought himself. "And what am I doing?" he says. "This was my left hand going to town, and how in the name of fortune could it be my left going back, considering that I've turned round? It's well that I looked into it in time." And with that he went off as fast down the other road as he started down this.

But how far he walked he never could tell, before all of a sudden the moon shone out as bright as day, and Pat found himself in Murdoch's Rath.

And this was the smallest part of the wonder; for the Rath was full of fairies.

When Pat got in they were dancing round and round till his feet tingled to look at them, being a good dancer himself. And as he sat on the side of the Rath, and snapped his fingers to mark the time, the dancing stopped, and a little man comes

up, in a black hat and a green coat, with white stockings, and red shoes on his feet.

“Won’t you take a turn with us, Pat?” says he, bowing till he nearly touched the ground. And, indeed, he had not far to go, for he was barely two feet high.

“Don’t say it twice, sir,” says Pat. “It’s myself will be proud to foot the floor wid ye;” and before you could look round, there was Pat in the circle dancing away for bare life.

At first his feet felt like feathers for lightness, and it seemed as if he could have gone on for ever. But at last he grew tired, and would have liked to stop, but the fairies would not, and so they danced on and on. Pat tried to think of something *good* to say, that he might free himself from the spell, but all he could think of was:

“A dozen hanks of grey yarn for Missis Murphy.”

“Three gross of bright buttons for the tailor.”

“Half an ounce of throat drops for Father Andrew, and an ounce of snuff for his housekeeper,” and so on.

And it seemed to Pat that the moon was on the one side of the Rath when they began to dance, and on the other side when they left off; but he could not be sure after all that going round. One thing was plain enough. He danced every bit of leather off the soles of his feet, and they were blistered so that he could hardly stand; but all the little folk

did was to stand and hold their sides with laughing at him.

At last the one who spoke before stepped up to him, and — “Don’t break your heart about it, Pat,” says he; “I’ll lend you my own shoes till the morning, for you seem to be a good-natured sort of a boy.”

Well, Pat looked at the fairy man’s shoes, that were the size of a baby’s, and he looked at his own feet; but not wishing to be uncivil, “Thank ye kindly, sir,” says he. “And if your honour ’ll be good enough to put them on for me, maybe you won’t spoil the shape.” For he thought to himself, “Small blame to me if the little gentleman can’t get them to fit.”

With that he sat down on the side of the Rath, and the fairy man put on the shoes for him, and no sooner did they touch Pat’s feet, than they became altogether a convenient size, and fitted him like wax. And, more than that, when he stood up, he didn’t feel his blisters at all.

“Bring ’em back to the Rath at sunrise, Pat, my boy,” says the little man.

And as Pat was climbing over the ditch, “Look round, Pat,” says he. And when Pat looked round, there were jewels and pearls lying at the roots of the furze-bushes on the ditch, as thick as peas.

“Will you help yourself, or take what’s given ye, Pat?” says the fairy man.

“ Did I ever learn manners? ” says Pat. “ Would you have me help myself before company? I’ll take what your honour pleases to give me, and be thankful.”

The fairy man picked a lot of yellow furze-blossoms from the bushes, and filled Pat’s pockets.

“ Keep ’em for love, Pat, me darlin’,” says he.

Pat would have liked some of the jewels, but he put the furze-blossoms by for love.

“ Good evening to your honour,” says he.

“ And where are you going, Pat, dear? ” says the fairy man.

“ I’m going home,” says Pat. And if the fairy man didn’t know where that was, small blame to him.

“ Just let me dust them shoes for ye, Pat,” says the fairy man. And as Pat lifted up each foot he breathed on it, and dusted it with the tail of his green coat.

“ Home! ” says he, and when he let go, Pat was at his own doorstep before he could look round, and his parcels safe and sound with him.

Next morning he was up with the sun, and carried the fairy man’s shoes back to the Rath. As he came up, the little man looked over the ditch.

“ The top of the morning to your honour,” says Pat; “ here’s your shoes.”

“ You’re an honest boy, Pat,” says the little gentleman. “ It’s inconvenienced I am without them,

for I have but the one pair. Have you looked at the yellow flowers this morning?" he says.

"I have not, sir," says Pat; "I'd be loth to deceive you. I came off as soon as I was up."

"Be sure to look when you get back, Pat," says the fairy man, "and good luck to ye."

With which he disappeared, and Pat went home. He looked for the furze-blossoms, as the fairy man told him, and there's not a word of truth in this tale if they weren't all pure gold pieces.

Well, now Pat was so rich, he went to the shoemaker to order another pair of brogues, and being a kindly, gossiping boy, the shoemaker soon learned the whole story of the fairy man and the Rath. And this so stirred up the shoemaker's greed that he resolved to go the next night himself, to see if he could not dance with the fairies, and have like luck.

He found his way to the Rath all correct, and sure enough the fairies were dancing, and they asked him to join. He danced the soles off his brogues, as Pat did, and the fairy man lent him his shoes, and sent him home in a twinkling.

As he was going over the ditch, he looked round, and saw the roots of the furze-bushes glowing with precious stones as if they had been glow-worms.

"Will you help yourself, or take what's given ye?" said the fairy man.

"I'll help myself, if you please," said the cobbler, for he thought — "If I can't get more than Pat

brought home, my fingers must all be thumbs."

So he drove his hand into the bushes, and if he didn't get plenty, it wasn't for want of grasping.

When he got up in the morning, he went straight to the jewels. But not a stone of the lot was more precious than roadside pebbles. "I ought not to look till I come from the Rath," said he. "It's best to do like Pat all through."

But he made up his mind not to return the fairy man's shoes.

"Who knows the virtue that's in them?" he said. So he made a small pair of red leather shoes, as like them as could be, and he blacked the others upon his feet, that the fairies might not know them, and at sunrise he went to the Rath.

The fairy man was looking over the ditch, as before.

"Good morning to you," said he.

"The top of the morning to you, sir," said the cobbler; "here's your shoes." And he handed him the pair that he had made, with a face as grave as a judge.

The fairy man looked at them, but he said nothing, though he did not put them on.

"Have you looked at the things you got last night?" says he.

"I'll not deceive you, sir," says the cobbler. "I came off as soon as I was up. Sorra peep I took at them."

“Be sure to look when you get back,” says the fairy man. And just as the cobbler was getting over the ditch to go home, he says,

“If my eyes don’t deceive me,” says he, “there’s the least taste in life of dirt on your left shoe. Let me dust it with the tail of my coat.”

“That means home in a twinkling,” thought the cobbler, and he held up his foot.

The fairy man dusted it, and muttered something the cobbler did not hear. Then, “Sure,” says he, “it’s the dirty pastures that you’ve come through, for the other shoe’s as bad.”

So the cobbler held up his right foot, and the fairy man rubbed that with the tail of his green coat.

When all was done the cobbler’s feet seemed to tingle, and then to itch, and then to smart, and then to burn. And at last he began to dance, and he danced all round the Rath (the fairy man laughing and holding his sides), and then round and round again. And he danced till he cried out with weariness and tried to shake the shoes off. But they stuck fast, and the fairies drove him over the ditch, and through the prickly furze-bushes, and he danced away. Where he danced to, I cannot tell you. Whether he ever got rid of the fairy shoes, I do not know. The jewels never were more than wayside pebbles, and they were swept out when his cabin was cleaned which was not too soon, you may be sure.

All this happened long ago; but there are those who say that the covetous cobbler dances still, between sunset and sunrise, round Murdoch's Rath.

THE LITTLE DARNER



IN days gone by there lived a poor widow who had brought up her only child so well that the little lass was more helpful and handy than many a grown-up person.

When other women's children were tearing and dirtying their clothes, clamouring at their mothers' skirts for this and that, losing and breaking and spoiling things, and getting into mischief of all kinds, the widow's little girl, with her tiny thimble on her finger, could patch quite neatly. She was to be trusted to put anything in its proper place, and when meals were over she would stand on a little stool at the table washing up the dishes. Moreover, she could darn stockings so well that the darn looked like a part of the stocking. The slatternly mothers who spoiled and scolded their children by turns, and had never taught them to be tidy and

obedient, used often to quote the widow's little girl to their troublesome brats, and say, "Why don't you help your mother as the widow's daughter helps her?"

Thus it came about that the helpless, useless, untidy little girls hated the very name of the widow's daughter, because they were always being told of her usefulness and neatness.

Now the widow's child often earned a few pence by herding sheep or pigs for the farmers, or by darning stockings for their wives, and as she could be trusted, people were very glad to employ her. One day she was keeping watch over five little pigs in a field, and, not to waste time, was darning a pair of stockings as well, when some of the little girls who had a spite against her resolved to play her a trick.

Near the field where the little maid and the pigs were there was a wood, into which all children were strictly forbidden to go. For in the depths of the wood there lived a terrible Ogre and Ogress, who kidnapped all children who strayed near their dwelling. Every morning the Ogre threw a big black bag over his shoulder, and stalked through the forest, making the ground shake as he walked. If he found any truant children he popped them into his bag, and when he got home his wife cooked them for supper.

The trick played upon the widow's daughter was this. Five little girls came up to the field where

she was herding the five little pigs, and each chasing a pig, they drove them into the Ogre's wood. In vain the little maid called to her flock; the pigs ran in a frightened troop into the wood, and she ran after them. When the five little girls saw that she had got them together again, they ran in to chase them away once more, and so they were all in the wood together, when the ground shook under them, upsetting the six little girls and the five little pigs; as they rolled over the Ogre picked them up, and put them one after another into his bag.

When they were jolting about with the pigs in the poke as the Ogre strode homewards, the five spiteful children were as sorry as you please; and as the pigs were always fighting and struggling to get to the top, they did not escape without some scratches. And their screams, and the squealing of the little pigs made such a noise that the Ogre's wife heard it a mile and a half away in the depths of the wood; and she lighted a fire under the copper, and filled it with water, ready to cook whatever her husband brought home.

As for the widow's little daughter she pulled her needle-book from her pocket, and every now and then she pushed a needle through the sack, that it might fall on the ground, and serve as a guide if she should ever have the chance of finding her way home again.

When the Ogre arrived, he emptied the sack, and

sent the six little girls and the five little pigs all sprawling on to the floor, saying,

“These will last us some time. Cook the fattest, and put the rest into the cellar. And whilst you get dinner ready, I will take another stroll with the bag. Luck seldom comes singly.”

When he had gone, the Ogress looked over the children, and picked out the widow's daughter, saying,

“You look the most good-humoured. And the best-tempered always make the best eating.”

So she set her down on a stool by the fire till the water should boil, and locked the others up in the cellar.

“Tears won't put the fire out,” thought the little maid. So instead of crying she pulled out the old stocking, and went on with her darning. When the Ogress came back from the cellar she went up to her and looked at her work.

“How you darn!” she cried. “Now that's a sort of thing I hate. And the Ogre does wear such big holes in his stockings, and his feet are so large, that, though my hand is not a small one, I cannot fill out the heel with my fist, and then who's to darn it neatly I should like to know?”

“If I had a basin big enough to fill out the heel, I think I could do it,” said the little maid.

The Ogress scratched her big ear thoughtfully for a minute, and then she said,

“To lose a chance is to cheat oneself. Why shouldn't this one darn while the others boil? Yes, I think you shall try. Six days ought to serve for mending all the stockings, though the Ogre hasn't a whole pair left, and angry enough he'll be. And when household matters are not to his mind he puts that big sack over my head, and ties it round my neck. And if you had ever done housework with your head in a poke, you'd know what it is! So you shall darn the stockings, and if you do them well, I'll cook one of the others first instead of you.”

Saying which, the Ogress fetched one of the Ogre's stockings, and the widow's child put a big basin into the heel to stretch it, and began to darn. The Ogress watched her till she had put all the threads one way, and when she began to run the cross threads, interlacing them with the utmost exactness, the old creature was delighted, and went to fetch another child to be cooked instead of the widow's.

When the other little girl came up, she cried and screamed so that the room rang with her lamentations, and the widow's child laid down her needle and ceased working.

“Why don't you go on darning?” asked the Ogress.

“Alas! dear mother,” said she, “the little sister's cries make my heart beat so that I cannot darn evenly.”

“Then she must go back to the cellar for a bit,”

said the Ogress. "And meanwhile I'll sharpen the knife."

So after she had taken back the crying child, and had watched the little girl, who now darned away as skilfully as ever, the Ogress took down a huge knife from the wall, and began to sharpen it on a grindstone in a corner of the kitchen. As she sharpened the knife, she glanced from time to time at the little maid, and soon perceived that she had once more ceased working.

"Why don't you go on darning?" asked the Ogress.

"Alas! dear mother," said the child, "when I hear you sharpening that terrible knife my hands tremble so that I cannot thread my needle."

"Well, it will do now," growled the Ogress, feeling the edge of the blade with her horny finger; and, having seen the darning-needle once more at work, she went to fetch up one of the children. As she went, she hummed what cookmaids sing —

"Dilly, dilly duckling, come and be killed!"

But it sounded like the wheezing and groaning of a heavy old door upon its rusty hinges.

When she came in, with the child in one hand, and the huge knife in the other, she went up to the little darning to look at her work. The heel of the Ogre's stocking was exquisitely mended, all but

seven threads; but the little maid sat idle with her hands before her.

“Why don’t you go on darning?” asked the Ogress.

“Alas! dear mother,” was the reply, “when I think of my little playmate about to die, the tears blind my eyes, so that I cannot see what stitches I take. Wherefore I beg of you, dear mother, to cook one of the little pigs instead, that I may be able to go on with my work, and that a pair of stockings may be ready to-morrow morning when the Ogre will ask for them; so my playmate’s life will be spared, and your head will not be put into a poke.”

At first the Ogress would not hear of such a thing, but at last she consented, and made a stew of one of the little pigs instead of cooking the little girl.

“But supposing the Ogre goes to count the children,” said she; “he will find one too many.”

“Then let her go, dear mother,” said the widow’s daughter; “she will find her way home, and you will never be blamed.”

“But she must stir the stew with her forefinger first,” said the Ogress, “that it may have a human flavour.”

So the little girl had to stir the hot stew with her finger, which scalded it badly; and then she was set at liberty, and ran home as hard as she could; and as the little maid’s needles sparkled here and there

on the path, she had no difficulty in finding her way.

The Ogre was quite contented with his dinner, and the Ogress got great praise for the way in which she had darned his stockings. Thus it went on for four days more. As the widow's little girl wouldn't work if her companions were killed, the Ogress cooked the pigs one after another, and the children were all sent away with burnt forefingers.

When the fifth had been dismissed, and all the pigs were eaten, the Ogress said —

“To-morrow you will have to be stewed, and now I wish I had kept one of the others that I might have saved you altogether to work for me. However, there is one comfort, the stockings are finished.”

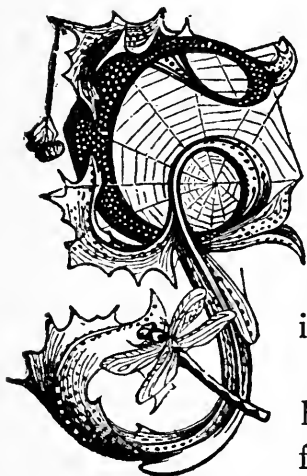
But meanwhile the other children had got safely home, and had told their tale. And all the men of the place set off at once to attack the Ogre, and release the widow's child. Guided by the needles, they arrived just as the Ogress was sharpening the big knife for the last time.

So they killed the Ogre and his wife, and took the industrious little maid back to her mother.

The other little girls were now very repentant; and when their fingers were well, they all learned to darn stockings at once.

And as there was now no danger about going into the wood, it was no longer forbidden. And this being the case, the children were much less anxious to play there than formerly.

THE FIDDLER IN THE FAIRY RING



GENERATIONS ago, there once lived a farmer's son, who had no great harm in him, and no great good either. He always meant well, but he had a poor spirit, and was too fond of idle company.

One day his father sent him to market with some sheep for sale, and when business was over for the day, the rest of the country folk made ready to go home, and more than one of them offered the lad a lift in his cart.

"Thank you kindly, all the same," said he, "but I am going back across the downs with Limping Tim."

Then out spoke a steady old farmer and bade the lad go home with the rest, and by the main road. For Limping Tim was an idle, graceless kind of fellow, who fiddled for his livelihood, but what else

he did to earn the money he squandered, no one knew. And as to the sheep path over the downs, it stands to reason that the highway is better travelling after sunset, for the other is no such very short cut; and has a big fairy ring so near it, that a butter woman might brush it with the edge of her market cloak, as she turned the brow of the hill.

But the farmer's son would go his own way, and that was with Limping Tim, and across the downs.

So they started, and the fiddler had his fiddle in his hand, and a bundle of marketings under his arm, and he sang snatches of strange songs, the like of which the lad had never heard before. And the moon drew out their shadows over the short grass till they were as long as the great stones of Stonehenge.

At last they turned the hill, and the fairy ring looked dark under the moon, and the farmer's son blessed himself that they were passing it quietly, when Limping Tim suddenly pulled his cloak from his back, and handing it to his companion, cried, "Hold this for a moment, will you? I'm wanted. They're calling for me."

"I hear nothing," said the farmer's son. But before he had got the words out of his mouth, the fiddler had completely disappeared. He shouted aloud, but in vain, and had begun to think of proceeding on his way, when the fiddler's voice cried, "Catch!" and there came flying at him from the

direction of the fairy ring, the bundle of marketings which the fiddler had been carrying.

“It’s in my way,” he then heard the fiddler cry. “Ah, this is dancing! Come in, my lad, come in!”

But the farmer’s son was not totally without prudence, and he took good care to keep at a safe distance from the fairy ring.

“Come back, Tim! Come back!” he shouted, and, receiving no answer, he adjured his friend to break the bonds that withheld him, and return to the right way, as wisely as one man can counsel another.

After talking for some time to no purpose, he again heard his friend’s voice, crying, “Take care of it for me! The money dances out of my pocket.” And therewith the fiddler’s purse was hurled to his feet, where it fell with a heavy chinking of gold within.

He picked it up, and renewed his warnings and entreaties, but in vain; and, after waiting for a long time, he made the best of his way home alone, hoping that the fiddler would follow, and come to reclaim his property.

The fiddler never came. And when at last there was a fuss about his disappearance, the farmer’s son, who had but a poor spirit, began to be afraid to tell the truth of the matter. “Who knows but they may accuse me of theft?” said he. So he hid the cloak, and the bundle, and the money-bag in the garden.

But when three months passed, and still the fiddler did not return, it was whispered that the farmer's son had been his last companion; and the place was searched, and they found the cloak, and the bundle, and the money-bag, and the lad was taken to prison.

Now, when it was too late, he plucked up a spirit, and told the truth; but no one believed him, and it was said that he had murdered the fiddler for the sake of his money and goods. And he was taken before the judge, found guilty, and sentenced to death.

Fortunately, his old mother was a Wise Woman. And when she heard that he was condemned, she said, "Only follow my directions, and we may save you yet; for I guess how it is."

So she went to the judge, and begged for her son three favours before his death.

"I will grant them," said the judge, "if you do not ask for his life."

"The first," said the old woman, "is, that he may choose the place where the gallows shall be erected; the second, that he may fix the hour of his execution; and the third favour is, that you will not fail to be present."

"I grant all three," said the judge. But when he learned that the criminal had chosen a certain hill on the downs for the place of execution, and an hour before midnight for the time, he sent to beg

the sheriff to bear him company on this important occasion.

The sheriff placed himself at the judge's disposal, but he commanded the attendance of the gaoler as some sort of protection; and the gaoler, for his part, implored his reverence the chaplain to be of the party, as the hill was not in good spiritual repute. So, when the time came, the four started together, and the hangman and the farmer's son went before them to the foot of the gallows.

Just as the rope was being prepared, the farmer's son called to the judge, and said, "If your Honour will walk twenty paces down the hill, to where you will see a bit of paper, you will learn the fate of the fiddler."

"That is, no doubt, a copy of the poor man's last confession," thought the judge.

"Murder will out, Mr. Sheriff," said he; and in the interests of truth and justice he hastened to pick up the paper.

But the farmer's son had dropped it as he came along, by his mother's direction, in such a place that the judge could not pick it up without putting his foot on the edge of the fairy ring. No sooner had he done so than he perceived an innumerable company of little people dressed in green cloaks and hoods, who were dancing round in a circle as wide as the ring itself.

They were all about two feet high, and had aged

faces, brown and withered, like the knots on gnarled trees in hedge bottoms, and they squinted horribly; but, in spite of their seeming age, they flew round and round like children.

“Mr. Sheriff! Mr. Sheriff!” cried the judge, “come and see the dancing. And hear the music, too, which is so lively that it makes the soles of my feet tickle.”

“There is no music, my Lord Judge,” said the sheriff, running down the hill. “It is the wind whistling over the grass that your lordship hears.”

But when the sheriff had put his foot by the judge’s foot, he saw and heard the same, and he cried out, “Quick, Gaoler, and come down! I should like you to be witness to this matter. And you may take my arm, Gaoler, for the music makes me feel unsteady.”

“There is no music, sir,” said the gaoler; “but your worship doubtless hears the creaking of the gallows.”

But no sooner had the gaoler’s feet touched the fairy ring, than he saw and heard like the rest, and he called lustily to the chaplain to come and stop the unhallowed measure.

“It is a delusion of the Evil One,” said the parson; “there is not a sound in the air but the distant croaking of some frogs.” But when he too touched the ring, he perceived his mistake.

At this moment the moon shone out, and in the

middle of the ring they saw Limping Tim the fiddler, playing till great drops stood out on his forehead, and dancing as madly as he played.

“Ah, you rascal!” cried the judge. “Is this where you’ve been all the time, and a better man than you as good as hanged for you? But you shall come home now.”

Saying which, he ran in, and seized the fiddler by the arm, but Limping Tim resisted so stoutly that the sheriff had to go to the judge’s assistance, and even then the fairies so pinched and hindered them that the sheriff was obliged to call upon the gaoler to put his arms about his waist, who persuaded the chaplain to add his strength to the string. But as ill luck would have it, just as they were getting off, one of the fairies picked up Limping Tim’s fiddle, which had fallen in the scuffle, and began to play. And as he began to play, every one began to dance — the fiddler, and the judge, and the sheriff, and the gaoler, and even the chaplain.

“Hangman! hangman!” screamed the judge, as he lifted first one leg and then the other to the tune, “come down, and catch hold of his reverence the chaplain. The prisoner is pardoned, and he can lay hold too.”

The hangman knew the judge’s voice, and ran towards it; but as they were now quite within the ring he could see nothing, either of him or his companions.

The farmer's son followed, and warning the hangman not to touch the ring, he directed him to stretch his hands forwards in hopes of catching hold of some one. In a few minutes the wind blew the chaplain's cassock against the hangman's fingers, and he caught the parson round the waist. The farmer's son then seized him in like fashion, and each holding firmly by the other, the fiddler, the judge, the sheriff, the gaoler, the parson, the hangman, and the farmer's son all got safely out of the charmed circle.

"Oh, you scoundrel!" cried the judge to the fiddler; "I have a very good mind to hang you up on the gallows without further ado."

But the fiddler only looked like one possessed, and upbraided the farmer's son for not having the patience to wait three minutes for him.

"Three minutes!" cried he; "why, you've been here three months and a day."

This the fiddler would not believe, and as he seemed in every way beside himself, they led him home, still upbraiding his companion, and crying continually for his fiddle.

His neighbours watched him closely, but one day he escaped from their care and wandered away over the hills to seek his fiddle, and came back no more.

His dead body was found upon the downs, face downwards, with the fiddle in his arms. Some said he had really found the fiddle where he had left it,

and had been lost in a mist, and died of exposure. But others held that he had perished differently, and laid his death at the door of the fairy dancers.

As to the farmer's son, it is said that thenceforward he went home from market by the highroad, and spoke the truth straight out, and was more careful of his company.

“ I WON’T ”



“ I WON’T CARE ” — so they say — fell into a goose-pond; and “ I won’t ” is apt to come to no better an end. At least, my grandmother tells me that was how the Miller had to quit his native town, and leave the tip of his nose behind him.

It all came of his being allowed to say “ I won’t ” when he was quite a little boy. His mother thought he looked pretty when he was pouting, and that wilfulness gave him an air which distinguished him from other people’s children. And when she found out that his lower lip was becoming so big that it spoilt his beauty, and that his wilfulness gained his way twice and stood in his way eight times out of ten, it was too late to alter him.

Then she said, “ Dearest Abinadab, do be more obliging ! ”

And he replied (as she had taught him), "I won't."

He always took what he could get, and would neither give nor give up to other people. This, he thought was the way to get more out of life than one's neighbours.

Amongst other things, he made a point of taking the middle of the footpath.

"Will you allow me to pass you, sir? — I am in a hurry," said a voice behind him one day.

"I won't," said Abinadab; on which a poor washer-woman, with her basket, scrambled down into the road, and Abinadab chuckled.

Next day he was walking as before.

"Will you allow me to pass you, sir? — I am in a hurry," said a voice behind him.

"I won't," said Abinadab. On which he was knocked into the ditch; and the Baron walked on, and left him to get out of the mud on which ever side he liked.

He quarrelled with his friends till he had none left, and he quarrelled with the tradesmen of the town till there was only one who would serve him, and this man offended him at last.

"I'll show you who's master!" said the Miller.

"I won't pay a penny of your bill — not a penny."

"Sir," said the tradesman, "my giving you offence now is no just reason why you should refuse to pay for what you have had and been satisfied with. I must beg you to pay me at once."

"I won't," said the Miller, "and what I say I mean. I won't; I tell you, I won't."

So the tradesman summoned him before the Justice, and the Justice condemned him to pay the bill and the costs of the suit.

"I won't," said the Miller.

So they put him in prison, and in prison he would have remained if his mother had not paid the money to obtain his release. By and by she died, and left him her blessing and some very good advice, which (as is sometimes the case with bequests) would have been more useful if it had come earlier.

The Miller's mother had taken a great deal of trouble off his hands which now fell into them. She took in all the small bags of grist which the country-folk brought to be ground, and kept account of them, and spoke civilly to the customers, big and little. But these small matters irritated the Miller.

"I may be the slave of all the old women in the country side;" said he, "but I won't — they shall see that I won't."

So he put up a notice to say that he would only receive grist at a certain hour on certain days. Now, but a third of the old women could read the notice, and they did not attend to it. People came as before; but the Miller locked the door of the mill and sat in the counting-house and chuckled.

"My good friend," said his neighbours, "you can't do business in this way. If a man lives by trade,

he must serve his customers. And a Miller must take in grist when it comes to the mill."

"Others may if they please," said the Miller; "but I won't. When I make a rule, I stick to it."

"Take advice, man, or you'll be ruined," said his friends.

"I won't," said the Miller.

In a few weeks all the country-folk turned their donkeys' heads towards the windmill on the heath. It was a little farther to go, but the Windmiller took custom when it came to him, gave honest measure, and added civil words gratis.

The other Miller was ruined.

"All you can do now is to leave the mill while you can pay the rent, and try another trade," said his friends.

"I won't," said the Miller. "Shall I be turned out of the house where I was born, because the country-folk are fools?"

However, he could not pay the rent, and the landlord found another tenant.

"You must quit," said he to the Miller.

"That I won't," said the Miller, "not for fifty new tenants."

So the landlord sent for the constables, and he was carried out, which is not a dignified way of changing one's residence. But then it is not easy to be obstinate and dignified at the same time.

His wrath against the landlord knew no bounds.

"Was there ever such a brute?" he cried. "Would any man of spirit hold his home at the whim of a landlord? I'll never rent another house as long as I live."

"But you must live somewhere," said his friends.

"I won't," said the Miller.

He was no longer a young man, and the new tenant pitied him.

"The poor old fellow is out of his senses," he said. And he let him sleep in one of his barns. One of the mill cats found out that there was a new warm bed in this barn, and she came and lived there too, and kept away the mice.

One night, however, Mrs. Pussy disturbed the Miller's rest. She was in and out of the window constantly, and meowed horribly into the bargain.

"It seems a man can't even sleep in peace," said the Miller. "If this happens again, you'll go into the mill-race to sing to the fishes."

The next night the cat was still on the alert, and the following morning the Miller tied a stone round her neck, and threw her into the water.

"Oh, spare the poor thing, there's a good soul," said a bystander.

"I won't," said the Miller. "I told her what would happen."

When his back was turned, however, the bystander got Pussy out, and took her home with him.

Now the cat was away, the mice could play; and

they played hide-and-peek over the Miller's nightcap.

It came to such a pass that there was no rest to be had.

"I won't go to bed, I declare I won't," said the Miller. So he sat up all night in an armchair, and threw everything he could lay his hands on at the corners where he heard the mice scuffling, till the place was topsy-turvy.

Towards morning he lit a candle and dressed himself. He was in a terrible humour; and when he began to shave, his hand shook and he cut himself. The draughts made the flame of the candle unsteady too, and the shadow of the miller's nose (which was a large one) fell in uncertain shapes upon his cheeks, and interfered with the progress of the razor. At first he thought he would wait till daylight. Then his temper got the better of him.

"I won't," he said, "I won't; why should I?"

So he began again. He held on by his nose to steady his cheeks, and he gave it such a spiteful pinch that the tears came into his eyes.

"Matters have come to a pretty pass, when a man's own nose is to stand in his light," said he.

By and by a gust of wind came through the window. Up flared the candle, and the shadow of the miller's nose danced half over his face, and the razor gashed his chin.

Transported with fury, he struck at it before he

could think what he was doing. The razor was very sharp, and the tip of the Miller's nose came off as clean as his whiskers.

When daylight came, and he saw himself in the glass, he resolved to leave the place.

"I won't stay here to be a laughing-stock," said he.

As he trudged out on to the highway, with his bundle on his back, the Baron met him and pitied him. He dismounted from his horse, and leading it up to the Miller, he said, --

"Friend, you are elderly to be going far afoot. I will lend you my mare to take you to your destination. When you are there, knot the reins and throw them on her shoulder, saying, 'Home!' She will then return to me. But mark one thing, — she is not used to whip or spur. Humour her, and she will carry you well and safely."

The Miller mounted willingly enough, and set forward. At first the mare was a little restive. The Miller had no spurs on, but, in spite of the Baron's warning, he kicked her with his heels. On this, she danced till the Miller's hat and bundle flew right and left, and he was very near to following them.

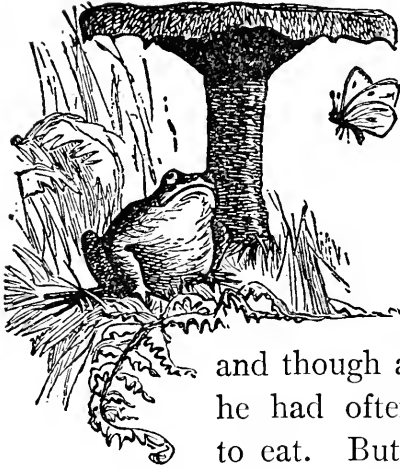
"Ah, you vixen!" he cried. "You think I'll humour you as the Baron does. But I won't — no, you shall see that I won't!" And gripping his walking-stick firmly in his hand, he belaboured the Baron's mare as if it had been a donkey.

On which she sent the Miller clean over her head, and cantered back to the castle; and wherever it was that he went to, he had to walk.

He never returned to his native village, and everybody was glad to be rid of him. One must bear and forbear with his neighbours, if he hopes to be regretted when he departs.

But my grandmother says that long after the mill had fallen into ruin, the story was told as a warning to wilful children of the Miller who cut off his nose to spite his own face.

THE MAGIC JAR



HERE was once a young fellow whom fortune had blessed with a good mother, a clever head, and a strong body. But beyond this she had not much favoured him; and though able and willing to work, he had often little to do, and less to eat. But his mother had taught him to be contented with his own lot, and to feed for others. Moreover, from her he inherited a great love for flowers.

One day, when his pockets were emptiest, a fair was held in the neighbouring town, and he must needs go as well as the rest, though he had no money to spend. But he stuck a buttercup in his cap, for which he had nothing to pay, and strode along as merrily as the most.

Towards evening some of the merry-makers became riotous; and a party of them fell upon an old Jew who was keeping a stall of glass and china, and would

smash his stock. Now as the Jew stood before his booth beseeching them to spare his property, up came the strong young man, with the flower still unwithered in his cap, and he took the old Jew's part and defended him. For from childhood his mother had taught him to feel for others.

So those who would have ill-treated the old Jew now moved off, and the young man stayed with him till he had packed up his wares.

Then the Jew turned towards him and said, "My son, he who delivers the oppressed, and has respect unto the aged, has need of no reward, for the blessing of Him that blesseth is about him. Nevertheless, that I may not seem ungrateful, choose, I pray thee, one of these china jars; and take it to thee for thine own. If thou shalt choose well, it may be of more use to thee than presently appears."

Thereupon the young man examined the jars, which were highly ornamented with many figures and devices; but he chose one that was comparatively plain; only it had a bunch of flowers painted on the front, round which was a pretty device in spots or circles of gold.

Then said the Jew, "My son, why have you chosen this jar, when there are others so much finer?"

The young man said, "Because the flowers please me, and I have a love for flowers."

Then said the Jew, "Happy is he whose tastes

are simple ! Moreover, herein is a rare wisdom, and thou hast gained that which is the most valuable of my possessions. This jar has properties which I will further explain to thee. It was given to me by a wise woman, subject to this condition, that I must expose it for sale from sunrise to sunset at the yearly fair. When I understood this I took counsel with myself how I should preserve it ; and I bought other china jars of more apparent value, and I marked them all with the same price. For I said within myself, ‘ There is no man who does not desire to get as much as he can for his money, therefore from its contrast with these others, my jar is safe.’ And it was even so ; for truly, many have desired to buy the jar because of the delicate beauty of the flowers, if I would have sold it for less than others which seemed more valuable.”

“ Many times it has been almost gone, but when I have shown the others at the same price, my customers have reviled me, saying, ‘ Dog of a Jew, dost thou ask as much for this as for these others which are manifestly worth double ? ’ and they have either departed, cursing me, and taking nothing ; or they have bought one of the more richly decorated jars at the same price. For verily in most men the spirit of covetousness is stronger than the love of beauty, and they rather desire to get much for their money, than to obtain that which is suitable and convenient.”

“ But in thee, oh, young man ! I have beheld a rare wisdom. To choose that which is good in thine eyes, and suitable to thy needs, rather than that which satisfieth the lust of over-reaching ; and lo ! what I have so long kept from thousands, has become thine ! ”

Then the young man wished to restore to the Jew the jar he valued so highly, and to choose another.

But the Jew refused, saying, “ A gift cannot be recalled. Moreover I will now explain to thee its uses. Within the jar lies a toad, whose spit is poison. But it will never spit at its master. Every evening thou must feed it with bread and milk, when it will fall asleep ; and at sunrise in the morning it will awake and breathe heavily against the side of the jar, which will thus become warm. As it warms the flowers will blossom out, and become real, and full of perfume, and thou wilt be able to pluck them without diminishing their number. Moreover, these twelve round spots of gold will drop off, and become twelve gold pieces, which will be thine. And thus it will be every day. Only thou must thyself rise with the sun, and gather the flowers and the gold with thine own hands. Furthermore, when the jar cools, the flowers and gilding will be as before. Fare thee well.”

And even as he spoke the Jew lifted the huge crate of china on to his back, and disappeared among the crowd.

All came about as the Jew had promised. As he had twelve gold pieces a day, the young man now wanted for nothing, besides which he had fresh flowers on his table all the year round.

Now it is well said, "Thy business is my business, and the business of all beside;" for every man's affairs are his neighbours' property. Thus it came about that all those who lived near the young man were perplexed that he had such beautiful flowers in all seasons; and esteemed it as an injury to themselves that he should have them and give no explanation as to whence they came.

At last it came to the ears of the king, and he also was disturbed. For he was curious, and fond of prying into small matters; a taste which ill becomes those of high position. But the king had no child to succeed him; and he was always suspecting those about him of plotting to obtain the crown, and thus he came to be for ever prying into the affairs of his subjects.

Now when he heard of the young man who had flowers on his table all the year round, he desired one of his officers to go and question him as to how he obtained them. But the young man contrived to evade his questions, and the matter rested for a while.

Then the king sent another messenger, with orders to press the young man more closely; and because the young man disdained to tell a lie, he said, "I get the flowers from yon china jar."

Then the messenger returned, and said to the king, "The young man says that he gets the flowers from a certain china jar which stands in his room."

Then said the king, "Bring the contents of the jar hither to me." And the messenger returned and brought the toad.

But when the king laid hold upon the toad, it spat in his face; and he was poisoned and died.

Then the toad sat upon the king's mouth, and would not be enticed away. And every one feared to touch it because it spat poison. And they called the wise men of the council; and they performed certain rites to charm away the toad, and yet it would not go.

But after three days, the master of the toad came to the palace, and without saying who he was, he desired to be permitted to try and get the toad from the corpse of the king.

And when he was taken into the king's chamber, he stood and beckoned to the toad, saying, "The person of the king, and the bodies of the dead are sacred, wherefore come away."

And the toad crawled from the king's face and came to him, and did not spit at him; and he put it back into the jar.

Then said the wise men, "There is no one so fit to succeed to the kingdom as this man is; both for wisdom of speech and for the power of command."

And what they said pleased the people; and the

young man was made king. And in due time he married an amiable and talented princess, and had children. And he ruled the kingdom well and wisely, and was beloved till his death.

Now when, after the lapse of many years, he died, there was great grief among the people, and his body was laid out in his own room, and the people were permitted to come and look upon his face for the last time.

And among the crowd there appeared an aged Jew. And he did not weep as did the others; but he came and stood by the bier, and gazed upon the face of the dead king in silence. And after a while he exclaimed, and said —

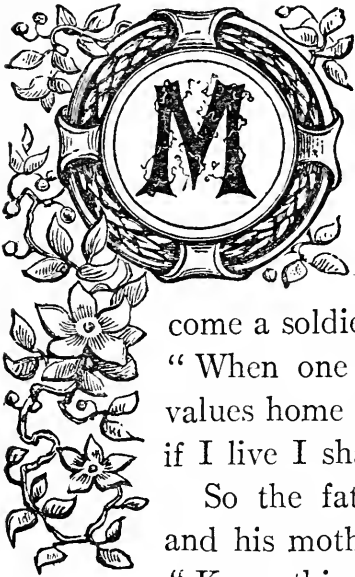
“ Oh, wonderful spectacle! A man, and not covetous. A ruler, and not oppressive. Contented in poverty, and moderate in wealth. Elect of the people, and beloved to the end!”

And when he had said this, he again became silent and stood as one astonished.

And no one knew when he came in, nor perceived when he departed.

But when they came to search for the china jar, it was gone, and could never afterwards be found.

THE FIRST WIFE'S WEDDING - RING



ANY years ago, there lived a certain worthy man who was twice married. By his first wife he had a son, who soon after his mother's death resolved to become a soldier, and go to foreign lands.

"When one has seen the world, one values home the more," said he; "and if I live I shall return."

So the father gave him a blessing, and his mother's wedding-ring, saying, "Keep this ring, and then, however

long you stay away, and however changed you may become, by this token I shall know you to be my true son and heir."

In a short time the father married again, and by this marriage also he had one son.

Years passed by, and the elder brother did not return, and at last every one believed him to be dead. But in reality he was alive, and after a long

time he turned his steps homewards. He was so much changed by age and travelling that only his mother would have known him again, but he had the ring tied safe and fast round his neck. One night, however, he was too far from shelter to get a bed, so he slept under a hedge, and when he woke in the morning the string was untied and the ring was gone. He spent a whole day in searching for it, but in vain; and at last he resolved to proceed and explain the matter to his father.

The old man was overjoyed to see him, and fully believed his tale, but with the second wife it was otherwise. She was greatly displeased to think that her child was not now to be the sole heir of his father's goods; and she so pestered and worked upon the old man by artful and malicious speeches, that he consented to send away the new comer till he should have found the first wife's wedding-ring.

"Is the homestead I have taken such care of," she cried, "to go to the first vagrant who comes in with a brown face and a ragged coat, pretending that he is your son?"

So the soldier was sent about his business; but his father followed him to the gate, and slipped some money into his hand, saying, "GOD speed you back again with the ring!"

It was Sunday morning, and the bells were ringing for service as he turned sadly away.

"Ding, dong!" rang the bells, "ding, dong!"

Why do you not come to church like others? Why are you not dressed in your Sunday clothes, and wherefore do you heave such doleful sighs, whilst we ring merrily? Ding, dong! ding, dong!"

"Is there not a cause?" replied the soldier. "This day I am turned out of home and heritage, though indeed I am the true heir."

"Nevertheless we shall ring for your return," said the bells.

As he went, the sun shone on the green fields, and in the soldier's eyes, and said, "See how brightly I shine! But you, comrade, why is your face so cloudy?"

"Is there not good reason?" replied he. "This day I am turned out of home and heritage, and yet I am the true heir."

"Nevertheless I shall shine on your return," said the sun.

Along the road the hawthorn hedges were white with blossom. "Heyday!" they cried, "who is this that comes trimp tramp, with a face as long as a poplar-tree? Cheer up, friend! It is spring! sweet spring! All is now full of hope and joy, and why should you look so sour?"

"May I not be excused?" said the soldier. "This day I am turned out of home and heritage, and yet I am the true heir."

"Nevertheless, we shall blossom when you return," said the hedges.

When he had wandered for three days and three nights, all he had was spent, and there was no shelter to be seen but a dark gloomy forest, which stretched before him. Just then he saw a small, weazened old woman, who was trying to lift a bundle of sticks on to her back.

“That is too heavy for you, good mother,” said the soldier; and he raised and adjusted it for her.

“Have you just come here?” muttered the old crone; “then the best thanks I can give you is to bid you get away as fast as you can.”

“I never retreated yet, dame,” said the soldier, and on he went.

Presently he met with a giant, who was strolling along by the edge of the wood, knocking the cones off the tops of the fir-trees with his finger-nails. He was an ill-favoured looking monster, but he said, civilly enough, “You look in want of employment, comrade. Will you take service with me?”

“I must first know two things,” answered the soldier; “my work and my wages.”

“Your work,” said the giant, “is to cut a path through this wood to the other side. But then you shall have a year and a day to do it in. If you do it within the time, you will find at the other end a magpie’s nest, in which is the ring of which you are in search. The nest also contains the crown jewels which have been stolen, and if you take these to the king, you will need no further reward. But, on the

other hand, if the work is not done within the time, you will thenceforth be my servant without wages."

"It is a hard bargain," said the soldier, "but need knows no law, and I agree to the conditions."

When he came into the giant's abode, he was greatly astonished to see the little weazened old woman. She showed no sign of recognizing him, however, and the soldier observed a like discretion. He soon discovered that she was the giant's wife, and much in dread of her husband, who treated her with great cruelty.

"To-morrow you shall begin to work," said the giant.

"If you please," said the soldier, and before he went to bed he carried in water and wood for the old woman.

"There's a kinship in trouble," said he.

Next morning the giant led him to a certain place on the outskirts of the forest, and giving him an axe, said, "The sooner you begin, the better, and you may see that it is not difficult." Saying which, he took hold of one of the trees by the middle, and snapped it off as one might pluck a flower.

"Thus to thee, but how to me?" said the soldier; and when the giant departed he set to work. But although he was so strong, and worked willingly, the trees seemed almost as hard as stone, and he made little progress. When he returned at night the giant asked him how he got on.

“The trees are very hard,” said he.

“So they always say,” replied the giant; “I have always had idle servants.”

“I will not be called idle a second time,” thought the soldier, and next day he went early and worked his utmost. But the result was very small. And when he came home, looking weary and disappointed, he could not fail to perceive that this gave great satisfaction to the giant.

Matters had gone on thus for some time, when one morning, as he went to work, he found the little old woman gathering sticks as before.

“Listen,” said she. “He shall not treat you as he has treated others. Count seventy to the left from where you are working, and begin again. But do not let him know that you have made a fresh start. And do a little at the old place from time to time, as a blind.”

And before he could thank her, the old woman was gone. Without more ado, however, he counted seventy from the old place, and hit the seventieth tree such a blow with his axe, that it came crashing down then and there. And he found that, one after another, the trees yielded to his blows, as if they were touchwood. He did a good day's work, gave a few strokes in the old spot, and came home, taking care to look as gloomy as before.

Day by day he got deeper and deeper into the wood, the trees falling before him like dry elder twigs;

and now the hardest part of his work was walking backwards and forwards to the giant's home, for the forest seemed almost interminable. But on the three hundred and sixty-sixth day from his first meeting with the giant, the soldier cut fairly through on to an open plain, and as the light streamed in, a magpie flew away, and on searching her nest, the soldier found his mother's wedding-ring. He also found many precious stones of priceless value, which were evidently the lost crown jewels. And as his term of service with the giant was now ended, he did not trouble himself to return, but with the ring and the jewels in his pocket set off to find his way to the capital.

He soon fell in with a good-humoured fellow who showed him the way and pointed out everything of interest on the road. As they drew near, one of the royal carriages was driving out of the city gates, in which sat three beautiful ladies who were the king's daughters.

"The two eldest are engaged to marry two neighbouring princes," said the companion.

"And whom is the youngest to marry?" asked the soldier, "for she is by far the most beautiful."

"She will never marry," answered his companion, "for she is pledged to the man who shall find the crown jewels, and cut a path through the stone-wood forest that borders the king's domains. And that is much as if she were promised to the man who

should fetch down the moon for her to play with. For the jewels are lost beyond recall, and the wood is an enchanted forest."

"Nevertheless she shall be wed with my mother's ring," thought the soldier. But he kept his own counsel, and only waited till he had smartened himself up, before he sought an audience of the king.

His claim to the princess was fully proved; the king heaped honours and riches upon him; and he made himself so acceptable to his bride elect, that the wedding was fixed for an early day.

"May I bring my old father, madam?" he asked of the princess.

"That you certainly may," said she. "A good son makes a good husband."

As he entered his native village the hedges were in blossom, the sun shone, and the bells rang for his return.

His stepmother now welcomed him, and was very anxious to go to court also. But her husband said, "No. You took such good care of the homestead, it is but fit you should look to it whilst I am away."

As to the giant, when he found that he had been outwitted, he went off, and was never more heard of in those parts. But the soldier took his wife into the city, and cared for her to the day of her death.

THE MAGICIAN TURNED MISCHIEF- MAKER



HERE was once a wicked magician who prospered, and did much evil for many years.

But there came a day when Vengeance, disguised as a blind beggar, overtook him, and outwitted him, and stole his magic wand. With this he had been accustomed to turn those who offended him

into any shape he pleased; and now that he had lost it he could only transform himself.

As Vengeance was returning to his place, he passed through a village, the inhabitants of which had formerly lived in great terror of the magician, and told them of the downfall of his power. But they only said, "Blind beggars have long tongues. One must not believe all one hears," and shrugged their shoulders, and left him.

Then Vengeance waved the wand and said, "As you have doubted me, distress each other;" and so departed.

By and by he came to another village, and told the news. But here the villagers were full of delight, and made a feast, and put the blind beggar in the place of honour; who, when he departed, said, "As you have done by me, deal with each other always!" and went on to the next village.

In this place he was received with even warmer welcome; and when the feast was over, the people brought him to the bridge which led out of the village; and gave him a guide-dog to help him on his way.

Then the blind beggar waved the wand once more and said, —

"Those who are so good to strangers must needs be good to each other. But that nothing may be wanting to the peace of this place, I grant to the beasts and birds in it that they may understand the language of men."

Then he broke the wand in pieces, and threw it into the stream. And when the people turned their heads back again from watching the bits as they floated away, the blind beggar was gone.

Meanwhile the magician was wild with rage at the loss of his wand, for all his pleasure was to do harm and hurt. But when he came to himself he said: "One can do a good deal of harm with his

tongue. I will turn mischief-maker; and when the place is too hot to hold me, I can escape in what form I please."

Then he came to the first village, where Vengeance had gone before, and here he lived for a year and a day in various disguises; and he made more misery with his tongue than he had ever accomplished in any other year with his magic wand. For every one distrusted his neighbour, and was ready to believe ill of him. So parents disowned their children, and husbands and wives parted, and lovers broke faith; and servants and masters disagreed; and old friends became bitter enemies, till at last the place was intolerable even to the magician, and he changed himself into a cockchafer, and flew to the next village, where Vengeance had gone before.

Here also he dwelt for a year and a day, and then he left it because he could do no harm. For those who loved each other trusted each other, and the magician made mischief in vain. In one of his disguises he was detected, and only escaped with his life from the enraged villagers by changing himself into a cockchafer and flying on to the next place, where Vengeance had gone before.

In this village he made less mischief than in the first, and more than in the second. And he exercised all his art, and changed his disguises constantly; but the dogs knew him under all.

One dog — the oldest dog in the place — was keep-

ing watch over the miller's house, when he saw the magician approaching, in the disguise of an old woman.

“Do you see that old witch?” said he to the sparrows, who were picking up stray bits of grain in the yard. “With her evil tongue she is parting my master's daughter and the finest young fellow in the country-side. She puts lies and truth together, with more skill than you patch moss and feathers to build nests. And when she is asked where she heard this or that, she says, ‘A little bird told me so.’”

“We never told her,” said the sparrows indignantly, “and if we had your strength, Master Keeper, she should not malign us long!”

“I believe you are right!” said Master Keeper. “Of what avail is it that we have learned the language of men, if we do not help them to the utmost of our powers. She shall torment my young mistress no more.”

Saying which he flew upon the disguised magician as he entered the gate, and would have torn him limb from limb, but that the mischief-maker changed himself as before into a cockchafer, and flew hastily from the village.

And thus he might doubtless have escaped to do yet further harm, had not three cock-sparrows overtaken him just before he crossed the bridge.

From three sides they hemmed him in, crying, “Which of us told you?” “Which of us told you?”

“ Which of us told you? ” — and pecked him to pieces before he could transform himself again.

After which peace and prosperity befell all the neighbourhood.

KNAVE AND FOOL



FOOL and a Knave once set up house together: which shows what a fool the Fool was.

The Knave was delighted with the agreement; and the Fool thought himself most fortunate to have met with a companion who would supply his lack of mother-wit.

As neither of them liked work, the Knave proposed that they should live upon their joint savings as long as these should last; and, to avoid disputes, that they should use the Fool's share till it came to an end, and then begin upon the Knave's stocking.

So, for a short time, they lived in great comfort at the Fool's expense, and were very good company; for easy times make easy tempers.

Just when the store was exhausted, the Knave came running to the Fool with an empty bag and

a wry face, crying, "Dear friend, what shall we do? This bag, which I had safely buried under a gooseberry-bush, has been taken up by some thief, and all my money stolen. My savings were twice as large as yours; but now that they are gone, and I can no longer perform my share of the bargain, I fear our partnership must be dissolved."

"Not so, dear friend," said the Fool, who was very good-natured; "we have shared good luck together, and now we will share poverty. But as nothing is left, I fear we must seek work."

"You speak very wisely," said the Knave. "And what, for instance, can you do?"

"Very little," said the Fool; "but that little I do well."

"So do I," said the Knave. "Now can you plough, or sow, or feed cattle, or plant crops?"

"Farming is not my business," said the Fool.

"Nor mine," said the Knave; "but no doubt you are a handicraftsman. Are you clever at carpentry, mason's work, tailoring, or shoemaking?"

"I do not doubt that I should have been had I learned the trades," said the Fool, "but I never was bound apprentice."

"It is the same with myself," said the Knave; "but you may have finer talents. Can you paint, or play the fiddle?"

"I never tried," said the Fool; "so I don't know."

"Just my case," said the Knave. "And now,

since we can't find work, I propose that we travel till work finds us."

The two comrades accordingly set forth, and they went on and on, till they came to the foot of a hill, where a merchantman was standing by his wagon, which had broken down.

"You seem two strong men," said he, as they advanced; "if you will carry this chest of valuables up to the top of the hill, and down to the bottom on the other side, where there is an inn, I will give you two gold pieces for your trouble."

The Knave and the Fool consented to this, saying, "Work has found us at last;" and they lifted the box on to their shoulders.

"Turn, and turn about," said the Knave; "but the best turn between friends is a good turn; so I will lead the way up-hill, which is the hardest kind of travelling, and you shall go first down-hill, the easy half of our journey."

The Fool thought this proposal a very generous one, and, not knowing that the lower end of their burden was the heavy one, he carried it all the way. When they got to the inn, the merchant gave each of them a gold piece, and, as the accommodation was good, they remained where they were till their money was spent. After this, they lived there awhile on credit; and when that was exhausted, they rose one morning whilst the landlord was still in bed, and pursued their journey, leaving old scores behind them.

They had been a long time without work or food, when they came upon a man who sat by the roadside breaking stones, with a quart of porridge and a spoon in a tin pot beside him.

“You look hungry, friends,” said he, “and I, for my part, want to get away. If you will break up this heap, you shall have the porridge for supper. But when you have eaten it, put the pot and spoon under the hedge, that I may find them when I return.”

“If we eat first, we shall have strength for our work,” said the Knave; “and as there is only one spoon, we must eat by turns. But fairly divide, friendly abide. As you went first the latter part of our journey, I will begin on this occasion. When I stop, you fall to, and eat as many spoonfuls as I ate. Then I will follow you in like fashion, and so on till the pot is empty.”

“Nothing could be fairer,” said the Fool; and the Knave began to eat, and went on till he had eaten a third of the porridge. The Fool, who had counted every spoonful, now took his turn, and ate precisely as much as his comrade. The Knave then began again, and was exact to a mouthful; but it emptied the pot. Thus the Knave had twice as much as the Fool, who could not see where he had been cheated.

They then set to work.

“As there is only one hammer,” said the Knave,

“we must work, as we supped, by turns; and as I began last time, you shall begin this. After you have worked awhile, I will take the hammer from you, and do as much myself whilst you rest. Then you shall take it up again, and so on till the heap is finished.”

“It is not every one who is as just as you,” said the Fool; and taking up the hammer, he set to work with a will.

The Knave took care to let him go on till he had broken a third of the stones, and then he did as good a share himself; after which the Fool began again, and finished the heap.

By this means the Fool did twice as much work as the Knave, and yet he could not complain.

As they moved on again, the Fool perceived that the Knave was taking the can and the spoon with him.

“I am sorry to see you do that, friend,” said he.

“It’s a very small theft,” said the Knave. “The can cannot have cost more than sixpence, when new.”

“That was not what I meant,” said the Fool, “so much as that I fear the owner will find it out.”

“He will only think the things have been stolen by some vagrant,” said the Knave — “which, indeed, they would be if we left them. But as you seem to have a tender conscience, I will keep them myself.”

After a while they met with a farmer, who offered

to give them supper and a night's lodging, if they would scare the birds from a field of corn for him till sunset.

"I will go into the outlying fields," said the Knave, "and as I see the birds coming, I will turn them back. You, dear friend, remain in the corn, and scare away the few that may escape me."

But whilst the Fool clapped and shouted till he was tired, the Knave went to the other side of the hedge, and lay down for a nap.

As they sat together at supper, the Fool said, "Dear friend, this is laborious work. I propose that we ask the farmer to let us tend sheep, instead. That is a very different affair. One lies on the hill-side all day. The birds do not steal sheep; and all this shouting and clapping is saved."

The Knave very willingly agreed, and next morning the two friends drove a flock of sheep on to the downs. The sheep at once began to nibble, the dog sat with his tongue out, panting, and the Knave and Fool lay down on their backs, and covered their faces with their hats to shield them from the sun.

Thus they lay till evening, when, the sun being down, they uncovered their faces, and found that the sheep had all strayed away, and the dog after them.

"The only plan for us is to go separate ways in search of the flock," said the Knave; "only let us agree to meet here again." They accordingly started in opposite directions; but when the Fool was fairly

off, the Knave returned to his place, and lay down as before.

By and by the dog brought the sheep back; so that, when the Fool returned, the Knave got the credit of having found them; for the dog scorned to explain his part in the matter.

As they sat together at supper, the Fool said, "The work is not so easy as I thought. Could we not find a better trade yet?"

"Can you beg?" said the Knave. "A beggar's trade is both easy and profitable. Nothing is required but walking and talking. Then one walks at his own pace, for there is no hurry, and no master, and the same tale does for every door. And, that all may be fair and equal, you shall beg at the front door, whilst I ask in alms at the back."

To this the Fool gladly agreed; and as he was as lean as a hunted cat, charitable people gave him a penny or two from time to time. Meanwhile, the Knave went round to the back yard, where he picked up a fowl, or turkey, or anything that he could lay his hands upon.

When he returned to the Fool, he would say, "See what has been given to me, whilst you have only got a few pence."

At last this made the Fool discontented, and he said, "I should like now to exchange with you. I will go to the back doors, and you to the front."

The Knave consented, and at the next house the

Fool went to the back door; but the mistress of the farm only rated him, and sent him away. Meanwhile the Knave, from the front, had watched her leave the parlour, and slipping in through the window, he took a ham and a couple of new loaves from the table, and so made off.

When the friends met, the Fool was crestfallen at his ill luck, and the Knave complained that all the burden of their support fell upon him. "See," said he, "what they give me, where you get only a mouthful of abuse!" And he dined heartily on what he had stolen; but the Fool only had bits of the bread-crust, and the parings of the ham.

At the next place the Fool went to the front door as before, and the Knave secured a fat goose and some plums in the back yard, which he popped under his cloak. The Fool came away with empty hands, and the Knave scolded him, saying, "Do you suppose that I mean to share this fat goose with a lazy beggar like you? Go on, and find for yourself." With which he sat down and began to eat the plums, whilst the Fool walked on alone.

After a while, however, the Knave saw a stir in the direction of the farm they had left, and he quickly perceived that the loss of the goose was known, and that the farmer and his men were in pursuit of the thief. So, hastily picking up the goose, he overtook the Fool, and pressed it into his arms, saying, "Dear friend, pardon a passing ill humour, of which

I sincerely repent. Are we not partners in good luck and ill? I was wrong, dear friend; and, in token of my penitence, the goose shall be yours alone. And here are a few plums with which you may refresh yourself by the wayside. As for me, I will hasten on to the next farm, and see if I can beg a bottle of wine to wash down the dinner, and drink to our good-fellowship." And before the Fool could thank him, the Knave was off like the wind.

By and by the farmer and his men came up, and found the Fool eating the plums, with the goose on the grass beside him.

They hurried him off to the justice, where his own story met with no credit. The woman of the next farm came up also, and recognized him for the man who had begged at her door the day she lost a ham and two new loaves. In vain he said that these things also had been given to his friend. The friend never appeared; and the poor Fool was whipped and put in the stocks.

Towards evening the Knave hurried up to the village green, where his friend sat doing penance for the theft.

"My dear friend," said he, "what do I see? Is such cruelty possible? But I hear that the justice is not above a bribe, and we must at any cost obtain your release. I am going at once to pawn my own boots and cloak, and everything about me that I can spare, and if you have anything to add, this is no time to hesitate."

The poor Fool begged his friend to draw off his boots, and to take his hat and coat as well, and to make all speed on his charitable errand.

The Knave took all that he could get, and, leaving his friend sitting in the stocks in his shirt-sleeves, he disappeared as swiftly as one could wish a man to carry a reprieve.

For those good folks to whom everything must be explained in full, it may be added that the Knave did not come back, and that he kept the clothes.

It was very hard on the Fool; but what can one expect if he keeps company with a Knave?

THE END.

BROTHERS OF PITY,

AND OTHER TALES OF

BEASTS AND MEN.

P R E F A C E .

“Father Hedgehog and his Neighbors,” and “Toots and Boots,” were both suggested by Fedor Flinzer’s clever pictures; but “Toots” was also “a real person.” In his latter days he was an honorary member of the Royal Engineers’ Mess at Aldershot, and, on occasion, dined at table.

“The Hens of Hencastle” is not mine. It is a free translation from the German of Victor Blüthgen, by Major Yeatman-Biggs, R. A., to whom I am indebted for permission to include it in my volume, as a necessary prelude to “Flaps.” The story took my fancy greatly, but the ending seemed to me imperfect and unsatisfactory, especially in reference to so charming a character as the old watch-dog, and I wrote “Flaps” as a sequel.

J H. E.

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BROTHERS OF PITY

“ Who dug his grave? ”

* * *

“ Who made his shroud? ”

“ I,” said the Beetle,

“ With my thread and needle,

I made his shroud.”—*Death of Cock Robin.*

IT must be much easier to play at things when there are more of you than when there is only one.

There is only one of me, and Nurse does not care about playing at things. Sometimes I try to persuade her ; but if she is in a good temper she says she has got a bone in her leg, and if she isn't she says that when little boys can't amuse themselves it's a sure and certain sign they've got the “ worrits,” and the sooner they are put to bed with a Gregory's powder “ the better for themselves and every one else.”

Godfather Gilpin can play delightfully when he has time, and he believes in fancy things, only he is so very busy with his books. But even when he is reading he will let you put him in the game. He doesn't mind pretending to be a fancy person if he hasn't to do anything, and if I do speak to him he always remembers who he is. That is why I like

playing in his study better than in the nursery. And Nurse always says, "He's safe enough with the old gentleman," so I'm allowed to go there as much as I like.

Godfather Gilpin lets me play with the books, because I always take care of them. Besides, there is nothing else to play with, except the window-curtains, for the chairs are always full. So I sit on the floor, and sometimes I build with the books (particularly Stonehenge), and sometimes I make people of them, and call them by the names on their backs, and the ones in other languages we call foreigners, and Godfather Gilpin tells me what countries they belong to. And sometimes I lie on my face and read (for I could read when I was four years old), and Godfather Gilpin tells me the hard words. The only rule he makes is, that I must get all the books out of one shelf, so that they are easily put away again. I may have any shelf I like, but I must not mix the shelves up.

I always took care of the books, and never had any accident with any of them till the day I dropped Jeremy Taylor's "Sermons." It made me very miserable, because I knew that Godfather Gilpin could never trust me so much again.

However, if it had not happened, I should not have known anything about the Brothers of Pity; so, perhaps (as Mrs. James, Godfather Gilpin's housekeeper, says), "All's for the best," and "It's an ill wind that blows nobody good."

It happened on a Sunday, I remember, and it was the day after the day on which I had had the shelf

in which all the books were alike. They were all foreigners—Italians—and all their names were *Goldoni*, and there were forty-seven of them, and they were all in white and gold. I could not read any of them, but there were lots of pictures, only I did not know what the stories were about. So next day, when Godfather Gilpin gave me leave to play a Sunday game with the books, I thought I would have English ones, and big ones, for a change, for the *Goldonis* were rather small.

We played at church, and I was the parson, and Godfather Gilpin was the old gentleman who sits in the big pew with the knocker, and goes to sleep (because he wanted to go to sleep), and the books were the congregation. They were all big, but some of them were fat, and some of them were thin, like real people—not like the *Goldonis*, which were all alike.

I was arranging them in their places and looking at their names, when I saw that one of them was called Taylor's "Sermons," and I thought I would keep that one out and preach a real sermon out of it when I had read prayers. Of course I had to do the responses as well as "Dearly beloved brethren" and those things, and I had to sing the hymns too, for the books could not do anything, and Godfather Gilpin was asleep.

When I had finished the service I stood behind a chair that was full of newspapers, for a pulpit, and I lifted up Taylor's "Sermons," and rested it against the chair, and began to look to see what I would preach. It was an old book, bound in brown leather,

and ornamented with gold, with a picture of a man in a black gown and a round black cap and a white collar in the beginning; and there was a list of all the sermons with their names and the texts. I read it through, to see which sounded the most interesting, and I didn't care much for any of them. However, the last but one was called "A Funeral Sermon, preached at the Obsequies of the Right Honorable the Countess of Carbery;" and I wondered what obsequies were, and who the Countess of Carbery was, and I thought I would preach that sermon and try to find out.

There was a very long text, and it was not a very easy one. It was: "For we must needs die, and are as water spilt on the ground, which cannot be gathered up again: neither doth God respect any person: yet doth He devise means that His banished be not expelled from him."

The sermon wasn't any easier than the text, and half the *s*'s were like *f*'s which made it rather hard to preach, and there was Latin mixed up with it, which I had to skip. I had preached two pages when I got into the middle of a long sentence, of which part was this: "Every trifling accident decomposes us; and as the face of waters wafting in a storm so wrinkles itself, that it makes upon its forehead furrows deep and hollow like a grave: so do our great and little cares and trifles first make the wrinkles of old age, and then they dig a grave for us."

I knew the meaning of the words "wrinkles" and "old age." Godfather Gilpin's forehead had unusually deep furrows and, almost against my will I

turned so quickly to look if his wrinkles were at all like the graves in the churchyard, that Taylor's "Sermons," in its heavy binding, slipped from the pulpit and fell to the ground.

And Godfather Gilpin woke up, and (quite forgetting that he was really the old gentleman in the pew with the knocker) said, "Dear me, dear me! is that Jeremy Taylor that you are knocking about like a football? My dear child, I can't lend you my books to play with if you drop them on to the floor."

I took it up in my arms and carried it sorrowfully to Godfather Gilpin. He was very kind, and said it was not hurt, and I might go on playing with the others; but I could see him stroking its brown leather and gold back, as if it had been bruised and wanted comforting, and I was far too sorry about it to go on preaching, even if I had had anything to preach.

I picked up the smallest book I could see in the congregation, and sat down and pretended to read. There were pictures in it, but I turned over a great many, one after the other, before I could see any of them, my eyes were so full of tears of mortification and regret. The first picture I saw when my tears had dried up enough to let me see was a very curious one indeed. It was a picture of two men carrying what looked like another man covered with a blue quilt, on a sort of a bier. But the funny part about it was the dress of the men. They were wrapped up in black cloaks, and had masks over their faces, and underneath the picture was written, "*Fratelli della Misericordia*"—"Brothers of Pity."

I do not know whether the accident to Jeremy Taylor had made Godfather Gilpin too anxious about his books to sleep, but I found that he was keeping awake, and after a bit he said to me, "What are you staring so hard and so quietly at, little Mouse?"

I looked at the back of the book, and it was called "Religious Orders;" so I said, "It's called 'Religious Orders,' but the picture I'm looking at has got two men dressed in black, with their faces covered all but their eyes, and they are carrying another man with something blue over him."

"*Fratelli della Misericordia*," said Godfather Gilpin.

"Who are they, and what are they doing?" I asked. "And why are their faces covered?"

"They belong to a body of men," was Godfather Gilpin's reply, "who bind themselves to be ready in their turn to do certain offices of mercy, pity, and compassion to the sick, the dying, and the dead. The brotherhood is six hundred years old, and still exists. The men who belong to it receive no pay, and they equally reject the reward of public praise, for they work with covered faces, and are not known even to each other. Rich men and poor men, noble men and working men, men of letters and the ignorant, all belong to it, and each takes his turn when it comes round to nurse the sick, carry the dying to hospital, and bury the dead.

"Is that a dead man under the blue coverlet?" I asked with awe.

"I suppose so," said Godfather Gilpin.

“But why don't his friends go to the funeral?” I inquired.

“He has no friends to follow him,” said my godfather. “That is why he is being buried by the Brothers of Pity.”

Long after Godfather Gilpin had told me all that he could tell me of the *Fratelli della Misericordia*—long after I had put the congregation (including the “Religious Orders” and Taylor’s “Sermons”) back into the shelf to which they belonged—the masked faces and solemn garb of the men in the picture haunted me.

I have changed my mind a great many times, since I can remember, about what I will be when I am grown up. Sometimes I have thought I should like to be an officer and die in battle; sometimes I settled to be a clergyman and preach splendid sermons to enormous congregations; once I quite decided to be a head fireman and wear a brass helmet, and be whirled down lighted streets at night, every one making way for me, on errands of life and death.

But the history of the Brothers of Pity put me out of conceit with all other heroes. It seemed better than anything I had ever thought of—to do good works unseen of men, without hope of reward, and to those who could make no return. For it rang in my ears that Godfather Gilpin had said, “He has no friends—that is why he is being buried by the Brothers of Pity.”

I quite understood what I thought they must feel, because I had once buried a cat who had no

friends. It was a poor half-starved old thing, for the people it belonged to had left it, and I used to see it slinking up to the back door and looking at 'Tabby, who was very fat and sleek, and at the scraps on the unwashed dishes after dinner. Mrs. Jones kicked it out every time, and what happened to it before I found it lying draggled and dead at the bottom of the Ha-ha, with the top of a kettle still fastened to its scraggy tail, I never knew, and it cost me bitter tears to guess. It cost me some hard work, too, to dig the grave, for my spade was so very small.

I don't think Mrs. Jones would have cared to be a Brother of Pity, for she was very angry with me for burying that cat, because it was such a wretched one, and so thin and dirty, and looked so ugly and smelt so nasty. But that was just why I wanted to give it a good funeral, and why I picked my crimson lily and put it in the grave, because it seemed so sad the poor thing should be like that when it might have been clean and fluffy, and fat and comfortable, like Tabby, if it had had a home and people to look after it.

It was remembering about the cat that made me think that there were no Brothers of Pity (not even in Tuscany, for I asked Godfather Gilpin) to bury beasts and birds and fishes when they have no friends to go to their funerals. And that was how it was that I settled to be a Brother of Pity without waiting till I grew up and could carry men.

I had a shilling of my own, and with sixpence of it I bought a yard and a half of black calico at the

post-office shop, and Mrs. Jones made me a cloak out of it; and with the other sixpence I bought a mask—for they sell toys there too. It was not a right sort of mask, but I could not make Mrs. Jones understand about a hood with two eye-holes in it, and I did not like to show her the picture, for if she had seen that I wanted to play at burying people, perhaps she would not have made me the cloak. She made it very well, and it came down to my ankles, and I could hide my spade under it. The worst of the mask was that it was a funny one, with a big nose; but it hid my face all the same, and when you get inside a mask you can feel quite grave whatever it's painted like.

I had never had so happy a summer before as the one when I was a Brother of Pity. I heard Nurse saying to Mrs. Jones that "there was no telling what would keep children out of mischief," for that I "never seemed to be tired of that old black rag and that ridiculous face."

But it was not the dressing-up that pleased me day after day, it was the chance of finding dead bodies with no friends to bury them. Going out is quite a new thing when you have something to look for; and Godfather Gilpin says he felt just the same in the days when he used to collect insects.

I found a good many corpses of one sort and another: birds and mice and frogs and beetles, and sometimes bigger bodies—such as kittens and dogs. The stand of my o'ld wooden horse made a capital thing to drag them on, for all the wheels were there, and I had a piece of blue cotton-velvet to put on the

top, but the day I found a dead mole I did not cover him. I put him outside, and he looked like black velvet lying on blue velvet. It seemed quite a pity to put him into the dirty ground, with such a lovely coat.

One day I was coming back from burying a mouse, and I saw a "flying watchman" beetle lying quite stiff and dead, as I thought, with his legs stretched out, and no friends; so I put him on the bier at once, and put the blue velvet over him, and drew him to the place where the mouse's grave was. When I took the pall off and felt him, and turned him over and over, he was still quite rigid, so I felt sure he was dead, and began to dig his grave; but when I had finished and went back to the bier, the flying watchman was just creeping over the wheel. He had only pretended to be dead, and had given me all that trouble for nothing.

When first I became a Brother of Pity, I thought I would have a graveyard to bury all the creatures in, but afterwards I changed my mind and settled to bury them all near wherever I found them. But I got some bits of white wood, and fastened them across each other with bits of wire, and so marked every grave.

At last there were lots of them dotted about the fields and woods I knew. I remembered to whom most of them belonged, and even if I had forgotten, it made a very good game, to pretend to be a stranger in the neighborhood, and then to pretend to be somebody else, talking to myself, and saying, "Wherever you see those little graves some poor creature has **been buried by the Brothers of Pity.**"

I did not like to read the burial service, for fear it should not be quite right (especially for frogs; there were so many of them in summer, and they were so horrid-looking, I used to bury several together, and pretend it was the time of the plague); but I did not like not having any service at all. So when I put on my cloak and mask, and took my spade and the bier, I said, "Brothers, let us prepare to perform this work of mercy," which is the first thing the real *Fratelli della Misericordia* say when they are going out. And when I buried the body I said, "Go in peace," which is the last thing that they say. Godfather Gilpin told me, and I learnt it by heart.

I enjoyed it very much. There were graves of beasts and birds who had died without friends in the hedges and the soft parts of the fields in almost all our walks. I never showed them to Nurse, but I often wondered that she did not notice them. I always touched my hat when I passed them, and sometimes it was very difficult to do so without her seeing me, but it made me quite uncomfortable if I passed a grave without. When I could not find any bodies I amused myself with making wreaths to hang over particularly nice poor beasts, such as a bullfinch or a kitten.

I had been a Brother of Pity for several months, when a very curious thing happened.

One summer evening I went by myself after tea into a steep little field at the back of our house, with an old stone-quarry at the top, on the ledges of which, where the earth had settled, I used to play at making gardens. And there, lying on a bit of very

stony ground, half on the stones and half on the grass, was a dead robin-redbreast. I love robins very much, and it was not because I wanted one to die, but because I thought that if one did die, I should so like to bury him, that I had wished to find a dead robin ever since I became a Brother of Pity. It was rather late, but it wanted nearly an hour to my usual bedtime, so I thought I would go home at once for my dress and spade and bier, and for some roses. For I had resolved to bury this (my first robin-redbreast) in a grave lined with rose-leaves, and to give him a wreath of forget-me-nots.

Just as I was going I heard a loud buzz above my head, and something hit me in the face. It was a beetle, whirring about in the air, and as I turned to leave poor Robin the beetle sat down on him, on the middle of his red breast, and by still hearing the buzzing, I found that another beetle was whirling and whirring just above my head in the air. I like beetles (especially the flying watchmen), and these ones were black, too; so I said, for fun, "You've got on your black things and if you'll take care of the body till I get my spade you shall be Brothers of Pity."

I ran home, and I need not have gone indoors at all, for I keep my cloak and my spade and the bier in the summerhouse, but the bits of wood were in the nursery cupboard, so, after I had got some good roses, and was quite ready, I ran up stairs, and there, to my great vexation, Nurse met me, and said I was to go to bed.

I thought it was very hard, because it had been a

very hot day, and I had had to go a walk in the heat of the sun along the old coaching-road with Nurse, and it seemed so provoking, now it was cool and the moon was rising, that I should have to go to bed, especially as Nurse was sending me there earlier than usual, because she wanted to go out herself, and I knew it.

I tried to go to sleep, but I couldn't. Every time I opened my eyes the moonlight was more and more like daylight through the white blind. At last I almost thought I must have really been to sleep without knowing it, and that it must be morning. So I got out of bed, and went to the window and peeped ; but it was still moonlight—only moonlight as bright as day—and I saw Nurse and two of the maids just going through the upper gate into the park.

In one moment I made up my mind. Nurse had only put me to bed to get me out of the way. I did not mean to trouble her, but I was determined not to lose the chance of being Brother of Pity to a robin-redbreast.

I dressed myself as well as I could, got out unobserved, and made my way to the summer-house. Things look a little paler by moonlight, otherwise I could see quite well. I put on my cloak, took my spade and the handle of the bier in my right hand, and holding the mask over my face with my left, I made my way to the quarry field.

It was a lovely night, and as I strolled along I thought with myself that the ground where Robin lay was too stony for my spade, and that I **must move**

him a little lower, where some soft earth bordered one side of the quarry.

I was as certain as I had ever been of anything that I did not think about this till then, but when I got to the quarry the body was gone from the place where I had found it ; and when I looked lower, on the bit of soft earth there lay Robin, just in the place where I was settling in my mind that I would bury him.

I could not believe my eyes through the holes in my mask, so I pulled it off, but there was no doubt about the fact. There he lay ; and round him, when I looked closer, I saw a ridge like a rampart of earth, which framed him neatly and evenly, as if he were already halfway into his grave.

The moonlight was as clear as day, there was no mistake as to what I saw, and whilst I was looking the body of the bird began to sink by little jerks, as if some one were pulling it from below. When first it moved I thought that poor Robin could not be dead after all, and that he was coming to life again like the flying watchman, but I soon saw that he was not, and that some one was pulling him down into a grave.

When I felt quite sure of this, when I had rubbed my eyes to clear them, and pulled up the lashes to see if I was awake, I was so horribly frightened that, with my mask in one hand and the spade and the handle of my bier in the other, I ran home as fast as my legs would carry me, leaving the roses and the cross and the blue-velvet pall behind me in the quarry.

Nurse was still out ; and I crept back to bed without detection, where I dreamed disturbedly of invisible gravediggers all through the night.

I did not feel quite so much afraid by daylight, but I was not a bit less puzzled as to how Cock Robin had been moved from the stony place to the soft earth, and who dug his grave. I could not ask Nurse about it, for I should have had to tell her I had been out, and I could not have trusted Mrs. Jones either ; but Godfather Gilpin never tells tales of me, and he knows everything, so I went to him.

The more I thought of it the more I saw that the only way was to tell him everything ; for if you only tell parts of things you sometimes find yourself telling lies before you know where you are. So I put on my cloak and my mask, and took the shovel and bier into the study, and sat down on the little footstool I always wait on when Godfather Gilpin is in the middle of reading, and keeps his head down to show that he does not want to be disturbed.

When he shut up his book and looked at me he burst out laughing. I meant to have asked him why, but I was so busy afterwards I forgot. I suppose it was the nose, for it had got rather broken when I fell down as I was burying the old drake that Neptune killed.

But he was very kind to me, and I told him all about my being a Brother of Pity, and how I had wanted to bury a robin, and how I had found one, and how he had frightened me by burying himself.

“Some other Brother of Pity must have found him,” said my godfather, still laughing. “And he

must have got Jack the Giant-killer's cloak of darkness for *his* dress, so that you did not see him."

"There was nobody there," I earnestly answered, shaking my mask as I thought of the still, lonely moonlight. "Nothing but two beetles, and I said if they would take care of him they might be Brothers of Pity."

"They took you at your word, *mio fratello*. Take off your mask, which a little distracts me, and I will tell you who buried Cock Robin."

I knew when Godfather Gilpin was really telling me things—without thinking of something else, I mean—and I listened with all my ears.

"The beetles whom you very properly admitted into your brotherhood," said my godfather, "were burying beetles, or sexton beetles,* as they are sometimes called. They bury animals of all sizes in a surprisingly short space of time. If two of them cannot conduct the funeral, they summon others. They carry the bodies, if necessary, to suitable ground. With their flat heads (for the sexton beetle does not carry a shovel as you do) they dig trench below trench all round the body they are committing to the earth, after which they creep under it and pull it down, and then shovel away once more, and so on till it is deep enough in, and then they push the earth over it and tread it and pat it neatly down."

"Then was it the beetles who were burying the robin-redbreast?" I gasped.

"I suspect so," said Godfather Gilpin. "But we will go and see."

**Necrophorus humator*, &c.

He actually knocked a book down in his hurry to get his hat, and when I helped him to pick it up, and said, "Why, godfather, you're as bad as I was about Taylor's 'Sermons,'" he said, "I am an old fool, my dear. I used to be very fond of insects before I settled down to the work I'm at now, and it quite excites me to go out into the fields again."

I never had a nicer walk, for he showed me lots of things I had never noticed, before we got to the quarry field; and then I took him straight to the place where the bit of soft earth was, and there was nothing to be seen, and the earth was quite smooth and tidy. But when he poked with his stick the ground was very soft, and after he had poked a little we saw some nut-brown feathers, and we knew it was Robin's grave.

And I said, "Don't poke any more, please. I wanted to bury him with rose-leaves, but the beetles were dressed in black, and I gave them leave, and I think I'll put a cross over him, because I don't think it's untrue to show that he was buried by the Brothers of Pity."

Godfather Gilpin quite agreed with me, and we made a nice mound (for I had brought my spade), and put the best kind of cross, and afterwards I made a wreath of forget-me-nots to hang on it.

He was the only robin-redbreast I have found since I became a Brother of Pity, and that was how it was that it was not I who buried him after all.

Many of the walks that Nurse likes to take I do not care about, but one place she likes to go to, especially on Sunday, I like too, that is the churchyard.

I was always fond of it. It is so very nice to read the tombstones, and fancy what the people were like, particularly the ones who lived long ago, in 1600 and something, with beautifully-shaped sixes and capital letters on their graves. For they must have dressed quite differently from us, and perhaps they knew Charles the first and Oliver Cromwell.

Diggory the gravedigger never talks much, but I like to watch him. I think he is rather deaf, for when I asked him if he thought, if he went on long enough, he could dig himself through to the other side of the world, he only said "Hey?" and chucked up a great shovelful of earth. But perhaps it was because he was so deep down that he could not hear.

Now, when he is quite out of sight, and chucks the earth up like that, it makes me think of the sexton beetles; for Godfather Gilpin says they drive their flat heads straight down, and then lift them with a sharp jerk, and throw the earth up so.

I said to Diggory one day, "Don't you wish your head was flat, instead of being as it is, so that you could shovel with it instead of having to have a spade?"

He wasn't so deep down that time, and he heard me, and put his head up out of the grave and rested on his spade. But he only scratched his head and stared, and said, "You be an uncommon queer young gentleman, to be sure," and then went on digging again. And I was afraid he was angry, so I daren't ask him any more.

I daren't of course ask him if he is a Brother of Pity, but I think he deserves to be, for workhouse



BROTHERS OF PITY.

"I have taken the beetles for my brothers, of course. . . . I wonder if either they or Diggory know that they belong to the Order of *Fratelli della Misericordia*, and that I belong to it too." — PAGE 23.

burials at any rate ; for if you have only the Porter and Silly Billy at your funeral, I don't think you can call that having friends.

I have taken the beetles for my brothers, of course. Godfather Gilpin says I should find far more bodies than I do if they were not burying all along. I often wish I could understand them when they hum, and that they knew me.

I wonder if either they or Diggory know that they belong to the order of *Fratelli della Misericordia*, and that I belong to it too ?

But of course it would not be right to ask them, even if either of them would answer me, for if we were "known, even to each other," we should not really and truly be Brothers of Pity.

NOTE.—Burying beetles are to the full as skillful as they are described in this tale. With a due respect for the graces of art, I have not embodied the fact that they feed on the carcasses which they bury. The last thing that the burying beetle does, after tidying the grave, is to make a small hole and go down himself, having previously buried his partner with their prey. Here the eggs are laid and the larvæ hatched and fed.

FATHER HEDGEHOG AND HIS NEIGHBORS.

CHAPTER I.

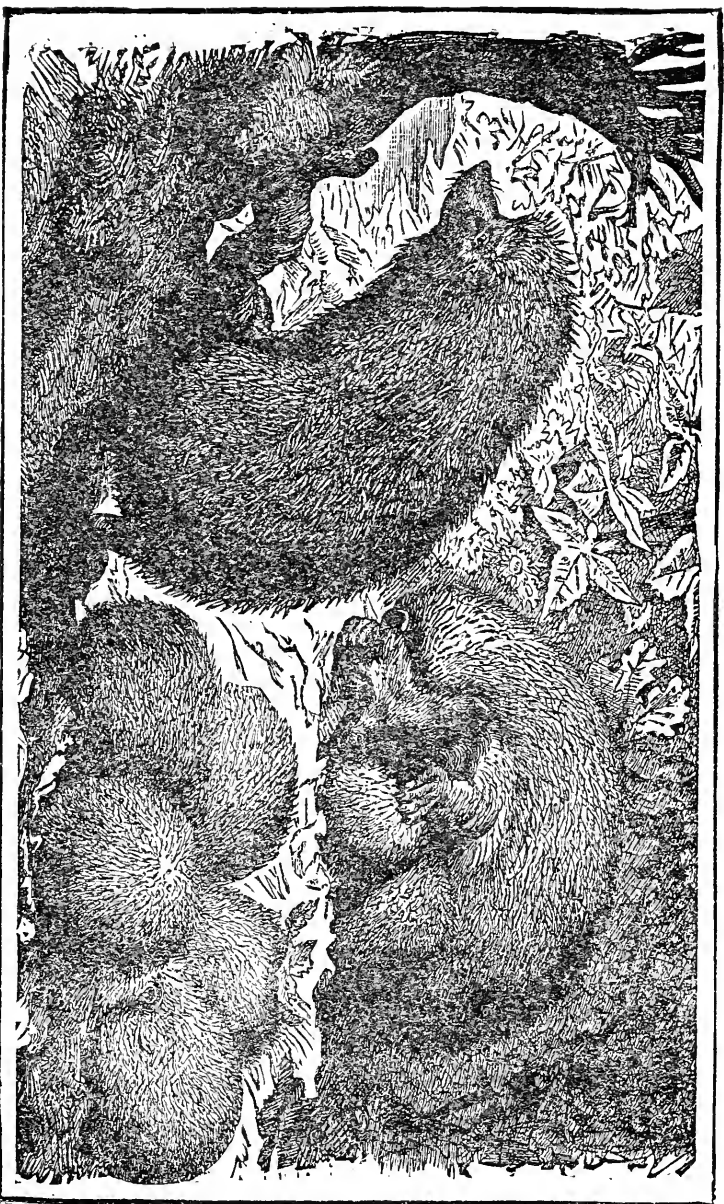
THE care of a large family is no light matter, as everybody knows. And that year I had an unusually large family. No less than seven young urchins for Mrs Hedgehog and myself to take care of and start in life ; and there was not a prickly parent on this side of the brook, or within three fields beyond, who had more than four.

My father's brother had six one year, I know. It was the summer that I myself was born. I can remember hearing my father and mother talk about it before I could see. As these six cousins were discussed in a tone of interest and respect which seemed to bear somewhat disparagingly on me and my brother and sisters (there were only four of *us*), I was rather glad to learn that they also had been born blind. My father used to go and see them, and report their progress to my mother on his return.

"They can see to-day."

"They have curled themselves up. Every one of them. Six beautiful little balls ; as round as crab-apples and as safe as burrs !"

I tried to curl myself up, but I could only get my coat a little way over my nose. I cried with vexation. But one should not lose heart too easily. With patience and perseverance most things can be



FATHER HEDGEHOG.

"No less than seven young urchins for Mrs. Hedgehog and myself to take care of; and there was not a prickly parent on this side of the brook who had more than four." — PAGE 24.

brought about, and I could soon both see and curl myself into a ball. It was about this time that my father hurried home one day, tossing the leaves at least three inches over his head as he bustled along.

“What in the hedge do you think has happened to the six?” said he.

“Oh, don’t tell me!” cried my mother; “I am so nervous.” (Which she was, and rather foolish as well, which used to irritate my father, who was hasty tempered, as I am myself.)

“They’ve been taken by gipsies and flitted,” said he.

“What do you mean by *flitted*?” inquired my mother.

“A string is tied round a hind-leg of each, and they are tethered in the grass behind the tent, just as the donkey is tethered. So they will remain till they grow fat, and then they will be cooked.”

“Will the donkey be cooked when he is fat?” asked my mother.

“I smell valerian,” said my father; on which she put out her nose, and he ran at it with his prickles. He always did this when he was annoyed with any member of his family; and though we knew what was coming, we are all so fond of valerian, we could never resist the temptation to sniff, just on the chance of there being some about.

I had long wanted to see my cousins, and I now begged my father to let me go with him the next time he went to visit them. But he was rather cross that morning, and he ran at me his back up.

“So you want to gad about and be kidnapped and flitted too, do you? Just let me——”

But when I saw him coming, I rolled myself up as tight as a wood-louse, and as my ears were inside I really did not hear what else he said. But I was not a whit less resolved to see my cousins.

One day my father bustled home.

“Upon my whine,” said he, “they live on the fat of the land. Scraps of all kinds, apples, and a dish of bread and milk under their very noses. I sat inside a gorse bush on the bank, and watched them till my mouth watered.”

The next day he reported—

“They’ve cooked one—in clay. There are only five now.”

And the next day—

“They’ve cooked another. Now there are only four.”

“There won’t be a cousin left if I wait much longer,” thought I.

On the morrow there were only three.

My mother began to cry. “My poor dear nieces and nephews!” said she (though she had never seen them). “What a world this is!”

“We must take it as we eat eggs,” said my father, with that air of wisdom which naturally belongs to the sayings of the head of the family, “the shell with the yolk. And they have certainly had excellent victuals.’

Next morning he went off as usual, and I crept stealthily after him. With his spines laid flat to his sides, and his legs well under him, he ran at a good

round pace, and as he did not look back I followed him with impunity. By-and-by he climbed a bank and then crept into a furze bush, whose prickles were no match for his own. I dared not go right into the bush for fear he should see me, but I settled myself as well as I could under shelter of a furze branch, and looked down on to the other side of the bank, where my father's nose was also directed. And there I saw my three cousins, tethered as he had said, and apparently very busy over-eating themselves on food which they had not had the trouble of procuring.

If I had heard less about the cooking, I might have envied them ; as it was, that somewhat voracious appetite characteristic of my family disturbed my judgment sufficiently to make me almost long to be flitted myself. I fancy it must have been when I pushed out my nose and sniffed involuntarily towards the victuals, that the gipsy man heard me.

He had been lying on the grass, looking much lazier than my cousins—which is saying a good deal—and only turning his swarthy face when the gipsy girl, as she moved about and tended the fire, got out of the sight of his eyes. Then he moved so that he could see her again ; not, as it seemed, to see what she was doing or to help her to do it, but as leaves move with the wind, or as we unpacked our noses against our wills when my father said he smelt valerian.

She was very beautiful. Her skin was like a trout pool—clear and yet brown. I never saw any eyes like her eyes, though our neighbor's—the

Water Rat—at times recalls them. Her hair was the color of ripe blackberries in a hot hedge—very ripe ones, with the bloom on. She moved like a snake. I have seen my father chase a snake more than once, and I have seen a good many men and women in my time. Some of them walk like my father, they bustle along and kick up the leaves as he does; and some of them move quickly and yet softly, as snakes go. The gipsy girl moved so, and wherever she went the gipsy man's eyes went after her.

Suddenly he turned them on me. For an instant I was paralysed and stood still. I could hear my father bustling down the bank; in a few minutes he would be at home, where my brother and sisters were safe and sound, whilst I was alone and about to reap the reward of my disobedience, in the fate of which he had warned me—to be taken by gipsies and flitted.

Nothing, my dear children—my seven dear children—is more fatal in an emergency than indecision. I was half disposed to hurry after my father, and half resolved to curl myself into a ball. I had one foot out and half my back rounded, when the gipsy man pinned me to the ground with a stick, and the gipsy girl strode up. I could not writhe myself away from the stick, but I gazed beseechingly at the gipsy girl and squealed for my life.

“Let the poor little brute go, Basil,” she said, laughing. “We’ve three flitted still.”

“Let it go?” cried the young man scornfully, and with another poke, which I thought had crushed me to bits, though I was still able to cry aloud.

The gipsy girl turned her back and went away with one movement and without speaking.

“Sybil!” cried the man; but she did not look round.

“Sybil, I say!”

She was breaking sticks for the fire slowly across her knee, but she made no answer. He took his stick out of my back, and went after her.

“I’ve let it go,” he said, throwing himself down again, “and a good dinner has gone with it. But you can do what you like with me—and small thanks I get for it.”

“I can do anything with you but keep you out of mischief,” she answered, fixing her eyes steadily on him. He sat up and began to throw stones, aiming them at my three cousins.

“Take me for good and all, instead of tormenting me, and you will,” he said.

“Will you give up Jemmy and his gang?” she asked; but as he hesitated for an instant she tossed the curls back from her face and moved away, saying, “Not you; for all your talk! And yet for your sake, I would give up——”

He bounded to his feet, but she had put the bonfire between them, and before he could get round it, she was on the other side of a tilted cart, where another woman, in a crimson cloak, sat doing something to a dirty pack of cards.

I did not like to see the gipsy man on his feet again, and having somewhat recovered breath, I scrambled down the bank and got home as quickly as the stiffness and soreness of my skin would allow.

I never saw my cousins again, and it was long before I saw any more gipsies ; for that day's adventure gave me a shock to which my children owe the exceeding care and prudence that I display in the choice of our summer homes and winter retreats, and in repressing every tendency to a wandering disposition among the members of my family.

CHAPTER II.

THAT summer—I mean the summer when I had seven—we had the most charming home imaginable. It was in a wood, and on that side of the wood which is farthest from houses and high roads. Here it was bounded by a brook, and beyond this lay a fine pasture field.

There are fields and fields. I never wish to know a better field than this one. I seldom go out much till the evening, but if business should take one along the hedge in the heat of the sun, there are as juicy and refreshing crabs to be picked up under a tree about half-way down the south side, as the thirstiest creature could desire.

And when the glare and drought of midday have given place to the mild twilight of evening, and the grass is refreshingly damped with dew, and scents are strong, and the earth yields kindly to the nose, what beetles and lob-worms reward one's routing !

I am convinced that the fattest and stupidest slugs that live, live near the brook. I never knew one

who found out I was eating him, till he was half-way down my throat. And just opposite to the place where I furnished your dear mother's nest, is a small plantation of burdocks, on the underside of which stick the best flavored snails I am acquainted with, in such inexhaustible quantities, that a hedgehog might have fourteen children in a season, and not fear their coming short of provisions.

And in the early summer, in the long grass on the edge of the wood—but no! I will not speak of it.

My dear children, my seven dear children, may you never know what it is to taste a pheasant's egg—to taste several pheasant's eggs, and to eat them, shells and all.

There are certain pleasures of which a parent may himself have partaken, but which, if he cannot reconcile them with his ideas of safety and propriety, he will do well not to allow his children even to hear of. I do not say that I wish I had never tasted a pheasant's egg myself, but, when I think of traps baited with valerian, of my great-uncle's greatcoat nailed to the keeper's door, of the keeper's heavy-heeled boots, and of the impropriety of poaching, I feel, as a father, that it is desirable that you should never know that there are such things as eggs, and then you will be quite happy without them.

But it was not the abundant and varied supply of food which had determined my choice of our home: it was not even because no woodland bower could be more beautiful,—because the coppice foliage was fresh and tender overhead, and the old leaves soft and elastic to the prickles below —because the young

oaks sheltered us behind, and we had a charming outlook over the brook in front, between a gnarled alder and a young sycamore, whose embracing branches were the lintel of our doorway.

No. I chose this particular spot in this particular wood, because I had reason to believe it to be a somewhat neglected bit of what men call "property,"—because the bramble bushes were unbroken, the fallen leaves untrodden, the hyacinths and ragged-robins ungathered by human feet and hands,—because the old fern-fronds faded below the fresh green plumes,—because the violets ripened seed,—because the trees were unmarked by woodmen and overpopulated with birds, and the water-rat sat up in the sun with crossed paws and without a thought of danger,—because, in short, no birds'-nesting, fern-digging, flower-picking, leafmould-wanting, vermin-hunting creatures ever came hither to replenish their ferneries, gardens, cages, markets, and museums.

My feelings may therefore be imagined when I was roused from an afternoon nap one warm summer's day by the voices of men and women. Several possibilities came into my mind, and I imparted them to my wife.

"They may be keepers."

"They may be poachers."

"They may be boys birds'-nesting."

"They may be street-sellers of ferns, moss, and so forth."

"They may be collectors of specimens."

"They may be pic-nic-ers—people who bring salt twisted up in a bit of paper with them, and leave it

behind when they go away. Don't let the children touch it!"

"They may be—and this is the worst that could happen—men collecting frogs, toads, newts, snails, *and hedgehogs* for the London markets. We must keep very quiet. They will go away at sunset."

I was quite wrong, and when I heard the slow wheels of a cart I knew it. They were none of these things, and they did not go away. They were travelling tinkers, and they settled down and made themselves at home within fifty yards of mine.

My nerves have never been strong since that day under the furze bush. My first impulse was to roll myself up so tightly that I got the cramp, whilst every spine on my back stood stiff with fright. But after a time I recovered myself, and took counsel with Mrs. Hedgehog.

"Two things," said she, "are most important. We must keep the children from gadding, and we must make them hold their tongues."

"They never can be so foolish as to wish to quit your side, my dear, in the circumstances," said I. But I was mistaken.

I know nothing more annoying to a father who has learned the danger of indiscreet curiosity in his youth, than to find his sons apparently quite uninfluenced by his valuable experience.

"What are tinkers like?" was the first thing said by each one of the seven on the subject.

"They are a set of people," I replied, in a voice as sour as a green crab, "who if they hear us talking, or catch us walking abroad, will kill your mother and

me, and temper up two bits of clay and roll us up in them. Then they will put us into a fire to bake, and when the clay turns red they will take us out. The clay will fall off and our coats with it. What remains they will eat—as we eat snails. You seven will be flitted. That is, you will be pegged to the ground till you grow big.” (I thought it well not to mention the bread and milk.) “Then they will kill and bake and eat you in the same fashion.”

I think this frightened the children; but they would talk about the tinkers, though they dared not go near them.

“The best thing you can do,” said Mrs. Hedgehog, “is to tell them a story to keep them quiet. You can modulate your own voice, and stop if you hear the tinkers.”

Hereupon I told them the story (a very old one) of the hedgehog who ran a race with a hare, on opposite sides of a hedge, for the wager of a louis d’or and a bottle of brandy. It was a great favorite with them.

“The moral of the tale, my dear children,” I was wont to say, “is, that our respected ancestor’s head saved his heels, which is never the case with giddy-pated creatures like the hare.”

“Perhaps it was a very young hare,” said Mrs. Hedgehog, who is amiable, and does not like to blame any one if it can be avoided.

“I don’t think it can have been a *very* young hare,” said I, “or the hedgehog would have eaten him instead of outwitting him. As it was, he placed himself and Mrs. Hedgehog at opposite ends of the

course. The hare started on one side of the hedge and the hedgehog on the other. Away went the hare like the wind, but Mr. Hedgehog took three steps and went back to his place. When the hare reached his end of the hedge, Mrs. Hedgehog, from the other side, called out, "I'm here already." Her voice and her coat were very like her husband's, and the hare was not observant enough to remark a slight difference of size and color. The moral of which is, my dear children, that one must use his eyes as well as his legs in this world. The hare tried several runs, but there was always a hedgehog at the goal when he got there. So he gave in at last, and our ancestors walked comfortably home, taking the louis d'or and the bottle of brandy with them."

"What is a louis d'or?" cried three of my children; and "What is brandy?" asked the other four.

"I smell valerian," said I; on which they poked out their seven noses, and I ran at them with my spines, for a father who is not an Encyclopædia on all fours must adopt *some* method of checking the inquisitiveness of the young.

When grown-up people desire information or take an interest in their neighbors, this, of course, is another matter. Mrs. Hedgehog and I had never seen tinkers, and we resolved to take an early opportunity some evening of sending the seven urchins down to the burdock plantations to pick snails, whilst we made a cautious visit to the tinker camp.

But mothers are sad fidgets, and anxious as Mrs. Hedgehog was to gratify her curiosity, she kept putting off our expedition till the children's spines

should be harder ; so I made one or two careful ones by myself, and told her all the news on my return.

CHAPTER III.

“THE animal Man,” so I have heard my uncle who was a learned hedgehog, say,—“The animal man is a diurnal animal ; he comes out and feeds in the day-time.” But a second cousin, who had travelled as far as Covent Garden, and who lived for many years in a London kitchen, told me that he thought my uncle was wrong, and that man comes out and feeds at night. He said he knew of at least one house in which the crickets and black beetles never got a quiet kitchen to themselves till it was nearly morning.

. But I think my uncle was right about men in the country. I am sure the tinker and his family slept at night. He and his wife were out a great deal during the day. They went away from the wood and left the children with an old woman, who was the tinker’s mother. At one time they were away for several days, and about my usual time for going out the children were asleep, and the old woman used to sit over the camp fire with her head on her hands.

“The language of men, my dear,” I observed to Mrs. Hedgehog, “is quite different to ours, even in general tone ; but I assure you that when I first heard the tinker’s mother, I could have wagered a louis d’or and a bottle of brandy that I heard hedge-

hogs whining to each other. In fact, I was about to remonstrate with them for their imprudence, when I found out that it was the old woman who was moaning and muttering to herself."

"What is the matter with her?" asked Mrs. Hedgehog.

"I was curious to know myself," said I, "and from what I have overheard, I think I can inform you. She is the tinker's mother, and judging from what he said the other night, was not by any means indulgent to him when he was a child. She is harsh enough to his young brats now; but it appears that she was devoted to an older son, one of the children of his first wife; and that it is for the loss of this grandchild that she vexes herself."

"Is he dead?"

"No, my dear, but——"

"Has he been flitted?"

"Something of the kind, I fear. He has been taken to prison."

"Dear, dear!" said Mrs. Hedgehog; "what a trial to a mother's feelings! Will they bake him?"

"I think not," said I. "I fancy that he is tethered up as a punishment for taking what did not belong to him; and the grandmother's grievance seems to be that she believes he was unjustly convicted. She thinks the real robber was a gipsy. Just as if I were taken, and my skin nailed to the keeper's door for pheasant's eggs which I had never had the pleasure of eating."

Mrs. Hedgehog was now dying of curiosity. She said she thought the children's spines were strong

enough for anything that was likely to happen to them ; and so the next fresh damp evening we sent the seven urchins down to the burdocks to pick snails, and crept cautiously toward the tinker's encampment to see what we could see. And there, by the smouldering embers of a bonfire, sat the old woman moaning, as I had described her, with her elbows on her knees, rocking and nursing her head, from which her long hair was looped and fell, like gray rags, about her withered fingers.

"I don't like her looks," snorted Mrs. Hedgehog. "And how disgustingly they have trampled the grass."

"It is quite true," said I ; "it will not recover itself this summer. I wish they had left us our wood to ourselves."

At this moment Mrs. Hedgehog laid her five toes on mine, to attract my attention, and whispered,—"Is it a gipsy?" and lifting my nose in the direction of the rustling brushwood, I saw Sybil. There was no mistaking her, though her cheeks looked hollower and her eyes larger than when I saw her last.

"Good evening, mother," she said.

The old woman raised her gaunt face with a start, and cried fiercely, "Begone with you! Begone!" and then bent it again upon her hands, muttering, "There are plenty of hedges and ditches too good for your lot, without their coming to worrit us in our wood."

The gipsy girl knelt quietly by the fire, and stirred up the embers.

“What is the matter, mother?” she said. “We’ve only just come, and when I heard that Tinker George and his mother were in the wood, I started to find you. ‘You makes too free with the tinkers,’ says my brother’s wife. ‘I goes to see my mother,’ says I, ‘who nursed me through a sickness, my real mother being dead, and my own people wanting to bury me through my not being able to speak or move, and their wanting to get to the Bartelmy Fair.’ I never forget, mother; have you forgotten me, that you drives me away for bidding you good-day?’”

“Good days are over for me,” moaned the old woman. “Begone, I say! Don’t let me see or hear any that belongs to Black Basil, or it may be the worse for them.”

(“The tinker-mother whines very nastily,” said Mrs. Hedgehog. “If I were the young woman, I should bite her.”)

“Hush!” I answered, “she is speaking.”

“Basil is in prison,” said the gipsy girl hoarsely.

The old woman’s eyes shone in their sockets, as she looked up at Sybil for a minute, as if to read the gipsy’s sentence on her face; and then she chuckled,—

“So they’ve taken the Terror of the Roads?”

Sybil’s eyes had not moved from the fire, before which she was now standing with clasped hands.

“The Terror of the Roads?” she said. “Yes, they call him that,—but I could turn him round my finger, mother.” Her voice had dropped, and she smoothed one of her black curls absently round her finger as she spoke.

“You couldn’t keep him out of prison,” taunted the old woman.

“I couldn’t keep him out of mischief,” said the girl, sadly ; and then, with a sudden flash of anger, she clasped her hands above her head and cried, “A black curse on Jemmy and his gang !”

“A black curse on them as lets the innocent go to prison in their stead. They comes there themselves in the end, and long may it hold them !” was the reply.

Sybil moved swiftly to the old woman’s side.

“I heard you was in trouble, mother, about Christian ; but you don’t think——”

“*Think !*” screamed the old woman, shaking her fists, whilst the girl interrupted her—

“Hush, mother, hush ! tell me now, tell me all, but not so loud,” and kneeling with her back to us, she said something more in a low voice, to which the old woman replied in a whine so much moderated, that though Mrs. Hedgehog and I strained our ears, and crept as near the group as we dared, we could not catch a word.

Only, after a while Sybil rose up and walked back slowly to the fire, twisting the long lock of her hair as before, and saying,—“I turns him round my finger, mother, as far as *that* goes——”

“So you thinks,” said the old crone. “But he never will—even if you would, Sybil Stanley ! Oh Christian, my child, my child !”

The gipsy girl stood still, like a young poplar-tree in the dead calm before thunder ; and there fell a silence, in which I dared not have moved myself, or

allowed Mrs. Hedgehog to move, three steps through the softest grass, for fear of being heard.

Then Sybil said abruptly, "I've never rightly heard about Christian, mother. What was it made you think so much more of him than you thinks about the others?"

CHAPTER IV.

"My son's first wife died after Christian was born," said the old woman. "I've a sharp tongue, as you know, Sybil Stanley, and I'm doubtful if she was too happy while she lived ; but when she was gone I knew she'd been a good 'un, and I've always spoken of her accordingly.

"You're too young to remember that year ; it was a year of slack trade and hard times all over. Farmer-folk grudged you fourpence to mend the kettle, and as to broken victuals, there wasn't as much went in at the front door to feed the family, as the servants would have thrown out at the back door another year to feed the pigs.

"When one gets old, my daughter, and sits over the fire at night and thinks, instead of tramping all day and sleeping heavy after it, as one does when one is young—things comes back ; things comes back, I say, as they says ghosts does.

"And when we camps near trees with long branches, like them over there, that waves in the wind and confuses your eyes among the smoke, I sometimes think I sees her face, as it was before she died, with

a pinched look across the nose. That is Christian's mother, my son's first wife ; and it comes back to me that I believe she starved herself to let him have more; for he's a man with a surly temper, like my own, is my son George. He grumbled worse than the children when he was hungry, and because she was so slow in getting strong enough to stand on her legs and carry the basket. You see he didn't hold his tongue when things were bad to bear, as she could. Men doesn't, my daughter."

"I know, I know," said the girl.

"I think I was jealous of her," muttered the old woman ; "it comes back to me that I begrudged her making so much of my son, but I know now that she was a good 'un, and I speak of her accordingly. She fretted herself about getting strong enough to carry the child to be christened, while we had the convenience of a parson near at hand, and I wasn't going to oblige her ; but the day after she died, the child was ailing, and thinking it might require the benefit of a burial-service as well as herself, I wrapped it up, and made myself decent, and took my way to the village. I was half-way up the street, when I met a young gentlewoman in a gray dress coming out of a cottage.

"'Good-day, my pretty lady,' says I. 'Could you show an old woman the residence of the clergyman that would do the poor tinkers the kindness of christening a sick child whose mother lies dead in a tilted cart at the meeting of the four roads ?'

"'I'm the clergyman's wife,' says she, with the color in her face, 'and I'm sure my husband will christen the poor baby. Do let me see it.'

“ ‘It’s only a tinker’s child,’ says I, ‘a poor brown-faced morsel for a pretty lady’s blue eyes to rest upon, that’s accustomed to the delicate sight of her own golden-haired children ; long may they live, and many may you and the gentle clergyman have of them !’ ”

“ ‘I have no children,’ says she, shortly, with the color in her face breaking up into red and white patches over her cheeks. ‘Let me carry the baby for you,’ says she, a taking it from me. ‘You must be tired.’ ”

“All the way she kept looking at it, and saying how pretty it was, and what beautiful long eyelashes it had, which went against me at the time, my daughter, for I knowed it was like its mother.

“The clergyman was a pleasing young gentleman of a genteel appearance, with a great deal to say for himself in the way of religion, as was right, it being his business. ‘Name this child,’ says he, and she gives a start that nobody sees but myself. So, thinking that the child being likely to die, there was no loss in obliging the gentlefolk, says I, looking down into the book as if I could read, ‘Any name the lady thinks suitable for the poor tinker’s child ;’ and says she, the color coming up into her face, ‘Call him Christian, for he shall be one.’ So he was named Christian, a name to give no manner of displeasure to myself or to my family ; it having been that of my husband’s father, who was unfortunate in a matter of horse-stealing, and died across the water.”

“What did *she* want with naming the baby, mother?” asked Sybil.

“I comes to that, my daughter, I comes to that, though it’s hard to speak of. I hate myself worse than I hates the police when I thinks of it. But ten pounds—pieces of gold, my daughter, when half-pence were hard to come by—and small expectation that he would outlive his mother by many days—and a feeling against him then, for her sake, though I thinks differently now——”

“You sold him to the clergy-folks?” said Sybil.

“Ten pieces of gold! You never felt the pains of starvation, my daughter—nor perhaps those of jealousy, which are worse. The young clergywoman had no children, on which score she fretted herself; and must have fretted hard, before she begged the poor tinker’s child out of the woods.”

“What did Tinker George say?” asked the girl.

“He used a good deal of bad language, and said I might as easily have got twenty pounds as ten, if I had not been as big a fool as the child’s mother herself. Men are strange creatures, my daughter.”

“So you left Christian with them?”

“I did, my daughter. I left him in the arms of the young clergywoman with the politest of words on both sides, and a good deal of religious conversation from the parson, which I does not doubt was well meant, if it was somewhat tedious.”

“And then—mother?”

“And then we moved to Banbury, where my son took his second wife, having made her acquaintance in an alehouse; and then, my daughter, I begins to know that Christian’s mother had been a good ’un.”

“George isn’t as happy with this one, then?”

“Men are curious creatures, my daughter, as you will discover for your own part without any instructions from me. He treats her far better than the other, because she treats him so much worse. But between them they soon put me a-one-side, and when I sat long evenings alone, sometimes in a wood, as it might be this, where the branches waves and makes a confusion of the shadows—and sometimes on the edge of a Hampshire heath where we camps a good deal, and the light is as slow in dying out of the bottom of the sky as he and she are in coming home, and the bits of water looks as if people had drowned themselves in them—when I sat alone, I say, minding the fire and the children—I wondered if Christian had lived, till I was all but mad with wondering and coming no nearer to knowing.

“‘His mother was a good daughter to you,’ I thinks; ‘and if you hadn’t sold him—sold your own flesh and blood—for ten golden sovereigns to the clergywoman, he might have been a good son to your old age.’

“At last I could bear idleness and the lone company of my own thoughts no longer, my daughter, and I sets off to travel on my own account, taking money at back doors, and living on broken meats I begged into the bargain, and working at nights instead of thinking. I knows a few arts, my daughter, of one sort and another, and I puts away most of what I takes, and changes it when the copper comes to silver, and *the silver comes to gold.*”

“I wonder you never went to see if he was alive,” said Sybil.

“I did, my daughter. I went several times under various disguisements, which are no difficulty to those who know how to adopt them, and with servant’s jewelry and children’s toys, I had sight of him more than once, and each time made me wilder to get him back.”

“And you never tried?”

“The money was not ready. One must act honorably, my daughter. I couldn’t pick up my own grandson as if he’d been a stray hen, or a few clothes off the line. It took me five years to save those ten pounds. Five long miserable years.”

“Miserable!” cried the gipsy girl, flinging her hair back from her eyes. “Miserable! Happy, you mean; too happy! It is when one can do nothing——”

She stopped, as if talking choked her, and the old woman, who seemed to pay little attention to any one but herself, went on:—

“It was when it was all but saved, and I hangs about that country, making up my plans, that he comes to me himself, as I sits on the outskirts of a wood beyond the village, in no manner of disguise, but just as I sits here.”

“He came to you?” said Sybil.

“He comes to me, my daughter; dressed like any young nobleman of eight years old, but bareheaded and barefooted, having his cap in one hand, and his boots and stockings in the other.

“‘Good morning, old gipsy woman,’ says he. ‘I heard there was an old gipsy woman in the wood; so I came to see. Nurse said if I went about in the

fields by myself, the gipsies would steal me ; but I told her I didn't care if they did, because it must be so nice to live in a wood, and sleep out of doors all night. When I grow up, I mean to be a wild man on a desert island, and dress in goats' skins. I sha'n't wear hats—I hate them ; and I don't like shoes and stockings either. When I can get away from Nurse, I always take them off. I like to feel what I'm walking on, and in the woods I like to scuffle with my toes in the dead leaves. There's a quarry at the top of this wood, and I should so have liked to have thrown my shoes and stockings and my cap into it ; but it vexes mother when I destroy my clothes, so I didn't, and I am carrying them.'

“Those were the very words he said, my daughter. He had a swiftness of tongue, for which I am myself famous, especially in fortune-telling ; but he used the language of gentility, and a shortness of speech which you will observe among those who are accustomed to order what they want instead of asking for it. I had hard work to summon voice to reply to him, my daughter, and I cannot tell you, nor would you understand it if I could find the words, what were my feelings to hear him speak with that confidence of the young clergywoman as his mother.

“‘A green welcome to the woods and the fields, my noble little gentleman,’ says I. ‘Be pleased to honor the poor tinker-woman by accepting the refreshment of a seat and a cup of tea.’

“‘I mayn't eat or drink anything when I an visiting the poor people,’ says he, ‘Mother doesn't allow me. But thank you all the same, and please don't

give me your stool, for I'd much rather sit on the grass; and, if you please, I should like you to tell me all about living in woods, and making fires, and hanging kettles on sticks, and going about the country and sleeping out of doors.' ”

“Did you tell him the truth, or make up a tale for him?” asked Sybil.

“Partly one and partly the other, my daughter. But when persons sets their minds on anything, they sees the truth in a manner according to their own thoughts, which is of itself as good as a made-up tale.

“He asks numberless questions, to which I makes suitable replies. Them that lives out of doors—can they get up as early as they likes, without being called? he asks.

“Does gipsies go to bed in their clothes?”

“Does they sometimes forget their prayers, with not regularly dressing and undressing?”

“Did I ever sleep on heather?”

“Does we ever travel by moonlight?”

“Do I see the sun rise every morning?”

“Did I ever meet a highwayman?”

“Does I believe in ghosts?”

“Can I really tell fortunes?”

“I takes his shapely little hand—as brown as your own, my daughter, for his mother, like myself, was a pure Roman, and looked down upon by her people in consequence for marrying my son, who is of mixed blood (my husband being in family, as in every other respect, undeserving of the slightest mention).

“‘Let me tell you your fortune, my noble little gentlemen,’ I says. ‘The lines of life are crossed

early with those of travelling. Far will you wander, and many things will you see. Stone houses and houses of brick will not detain you. In the big house with the blue roof, and the green carpet were you born, and in the big house with the blue roof and the green carpet will you die. The big house is delicately perfumed, my noble little gentleman, especially in the month of May; at which time there is also an abundance of music, and the singers sits overhead. Give the old gipsy woman a sight of your comely feet, my little gentleman, by the soles of which it is not difficult to see that you were born to wander.'

"With this and similar jaw I entertained him, my daughter, and his eyes looks up at me out of his face till I feels as if the dead had come back; but he had a way with him besides which frightened me, for I knew that it came from living with gentlefolk.

"'Are you mighty learned, my dear?' says I. 'Are you well instructed in books and schooling?'"

"'I can say the English History in verse,' he says, 'and I do compound addition; and I know my Catechism, and lots of hymns. Would you like to hear me?'"

"'If you please, my little gentleman,' I says.

"'What shall I say?' he asks. 'I know all the English History, only I am not always quite sure how the kings come; but if you know the kings and can just give me the name, I know the verses quite well. And I know the Catechism perfectly, but perhaps you don't know the questions without the book. The hymns, of course you don't want a book for, and I know them best of all.'

“‘I am not learned, myself,’ says I, ‘and I only know of two kings—the king of England—who, for that matter, is a queen, and a very good woman, they say, if one could come at her—and the king of the gipsies, who is as big a blackguard as you could desire to know, and by no means entitled to call himself king, though he gets a lot of money by it, which he spends in the public-house. As regards the other thing, my dear, I certainly does not know the questions without the book, nor, indeed, should I know them with the book, which is neither here nor there; so if the hymns require no learning on my part I gives the preference to them.’

“‘I like *them* best myself,’ he says; and he puts his hat and his shoes and stockings on the ground, and stands up and folds his hands behind his back, and repeats a large number of religious verses, with the same readiness with which the young clergyman speaks out of a book.

“It partly went against me, my daughter, for I am not religious myself, and he was always too fond of holy words, which I thinks brings ill-luck. But his voice was as sweet as a thrush that sits singing in a thorn-bush, and between that and a something in the verses which had a tendency to make you feel uncomfortable, I feels more disturbed than I cares to show. But oh, my daughter, how I loves him!

“‘The blessing of an old gipsy woman on your young head,’ I says. ‘Fair be the skies under which you wanders and shady the spots in which you rests!

“‘May the water be clear and the wood dry where you camps.



FATHER HEDGEHOG.

“What is the patteran?” he asks. “It’s a secret,” I says; “the roads keeps it, and the hedges keeps it.” “I can keep it,” he says boldly, “Pinch my finger and try me.”—PAGE 51.

“‘May every road you treads have turf by the wayside and the patteran* of a friend on the left.’

“‘What is the patteran?’ he asks.

“‘It is a secret,’ I says, looking somewhat sternly at him. ‘The roads keeps it, and the hedges keeps it——’

“‘I can keep it,’ he says boldly, ‘Pinch my finger, and try me!’

“As he speaks he holds out his little finger, and I pinches it, my daughter, till the color dies out of his lips, though he keeps them set, for I delights to see the nobleness and the endurance of him. So I explains the patteran to him, and shows him ours with two bits of hawthorn laid crosswise, for I does not regard him as a stranger, and I sees that he can keep his lips shut when it is required.

“He was practising the patteran at my feet, when I hears the cry of ‘Christian!’ and I cannot explain to you the chill that came over my heart at the sound.

“Trouble and age and the lone company of your own thoughts, my daughter, has a tendency to confuse you; and I am not by any means rightly certain at times about things I sees and hears. I sees Christian’s mother when I knows she can’t be there, and though I believes now that only one person was calling the child, yet, with the echo that comes from the quarry, and with worse than twenty echoes in my own mind, it seems to me that the wood is full of voices calling him.

“In my foolishness, my daughter, I sits like a stone,

* *Patteran* = the gipsy “trail.”

and he springs to his feet, and snatches up his things and says, 'Good-by, old gipsy woman, and thank you very much. I should like to stay with you,' he says, 'but nurse is calling me, and mother does get so frightened if I am long away and she doesn't know where. But I shall come back.'

"I never quite knows, my daughter, whether it was the echo that repeated his words, or whether it was my own voice I hears, as I stretches my old arms after him, crying, 'Come back!'

"But he runs off shouting, 'Coming, coming!'

"And the wood deafens me, it is so full of voices.

"*Christian! Christian!—Coming! Coming!*

'And I thinks I has some kind of a fit, my daughter, for when I wakes, the wood is as still as death, and he is gone, as dreams goes.'

CHAPTER V.

"I REALLY feel for the tinker-mother," whispered Mrs. Hedgehog.

"I feel for her myself," was my reply. "The cares of a family are heavy enough when they only last for the season, and one sleeps them off in a winter's nap. When—as in the case of men—they last for a lifetime, and you never get more than one night's rest at a time, they must be almost unendurable. As to prolonging one's anxieties from one's own families to the families of each of one's children—no parent in his senses——"

“What is the gipsy girl saying now?” asked Mrs. Hedgehog, who had been paying more attention to the women than to my observations—an annoyance to which, as head of the family, I have been subjected oftener than is becoming.

Sybil had been kneeling at the old woman’s feet, soothing her and chafing her hands. At last she said :

“But you did get him, mother. How was it?”

“Not for five more years, my daughter. And never in all that time could I get a sight of his face. The very first house I calls at next morning, I sees a chalk mark on the gate-post, placed there by some travelling tinker or peddler or what not, by which I knows that the neighborhood is being made too hot for tramps and vagrants, as they call us. And go back in what disguisement I might, there was no selling a bootlace, nor begging a crust of bread there—*there*, where *he* lived.

“I makes up the ten pounds, and ties it in a bag ; but I gets worse and worse in health and spirits and in confusion of mind, my daughter ; and when I comes accidentally across my son in a Bedfordshire lane, and his wife is drinking, and he is in much bewilderment with the children, I takes up again with them, and I was with them when Christian comes to me the second time.”

“He came back to you?”

“Learning and the confinement of stone walls, my daughter, than which no two things could be more contrary to the nature of those who dwells in the woods and lanes. I will not deny that the clergyman

—and especially the young clergywoman—had been very good to him; but for which he would probably have run away long before. But what is bred in the bone comes out in the flesh. He does pretty well with the learning, and he bears with the confinement of school, though it is worse than that of the clergy-house. But when a rumor has crept out that he is not the son of the clergyman nor of the clergywoman, and he is taunted with being a gipsy and a vagrant, he lays his bare hands on those nearest to him, my daughter, and comes away on his bare feet.”

“How did he find you, mother?”

“He has no fixed intentions beyond running away, my daughter; but as he is sitting in a hedge to bandage one of his feet with his handkerchief, he sees our patteran, and he goes on, keeping it by the left, and sees it again, and so follows it, and comes home.”

“You mean that he came to you?”

“I do, my dear. For home is not a house that never moves from one place, built of stone or brick, and with a front door for the genteel and a back door for the common people. If it was, prisons would be homes. But home, my daughter, is where persons is whom you belongs to, and it may be under a hedge to-day and in a fair to-morrow.”

“Mother,” said Sybil, “what did you do about the ten pounds?”

“I will tell you, my daughter. I was obliged to wait longer than was agreeable to me before proceeding to that neighborhood, for the police was searching everywhere, and it would be wearisome to relate

to you with what difficulty Christian was concealed. My plans had been long made, as you know.

“Clergyfolk, my daughter, with a tediousness of jaw which makes them as oppressive to listen long to as houses is to rest long in, has their good points like other persons ; they shows kindness to those who are in trouble, and they spends their money very freely on the poor. This is well-known, even by those who has no liking for parsons, and I have more than once observed that persons who goes straight to the public-house when they has money in their pockets, goes straight to the parson when their pockets is empty.

“It is also well known, my daughter, that when the clergyman collects money after speaking in his church, he doesn't take it for his own use, as is the custom with other people, such as Punch and Judy men, or singers, or fortune tellers ; at the same time he is as pleased with a good collection as if it were for his own use ; and if some rich person contributes a sovereign for the sick and poor, it is to him as it would be to you, my daughter, if your hand was crossed with gold by some noble gentleman who had been crossed in love.

“I explain this, my dear, that you may understand how it was that I had planned to pay back the clergy people's ten pounds in church, which would be as good as paying it into their hands, with the advantage of secrecy for myself. On the Saturday I drives into the little market in a donkey-cart with greens, and on Sunday morning I goes to church in a very respectable disguisement, and the sexton puts me in

a pew with some women of infirm mind in workhouse dresses, for which, my daughter, I had much to do to restrain myself from knocking him down. But I does ; and I behaves myself through the service with the utmost care, following the movements of the genteeler portion of the company, those in the pew with me having no manners at all ; one of them standing most of the time and giggling over the pew-back, and another sitting in the corner and weeping into her lap.

“But with the exception of getting up and sitting down, and holding a book open as near to the middle as I could guess, I pays little attention, my daughter, for all my thoughts is taken up with waiting for the collection to begin, and with trying to keep my eyes from the clergywoman’s face, which I can see quite clearly, though she is at some distance from me.”

“Did she look very wild, mother, as if she felt beside herself ? ”

“She looked very bad, my daughter, and gray, which was not with age. I tells you that I tried not to look at her ; and by-and-by the collection begins.

“It seems hours to me, my daughter, whilst the money is chinking and the clergyman is speaking, and the ten pieces of gold is getting so hot in my hands, I fancies they burns me, and still not one of the collecting men comes near our pew.

“At last, one by one, they begins to go past me and go up to the clergyman who is waiting for them at the upper end, and then I perceives that they regards us as too poor to pay our way like the rest, and that the plates will never be put into our pew at

all. So when the last but one is going past me I puts out my hand to beckon him, and the woman that is standing by me bursts out laughing, and the other cries worse than ever, and the collecting-man says, 'Hush! hush!' and goes past and takes the plate with him.

" 'A black curse on your insolence!' says I; and then I grips the laughing woman by the arm and whispers, 'If you make that noise again, I'll break your head,' and she sits down and begins to cry like the other.

"There is one more collecting-man, who comes last, and he is the Duke, who lives at the big house.

"The nobility and gentry, my daughter, when they are the real thing, has, like the real Romans, a quickness to catch your meaning, and a politeness of manner which you doesn't meet with among such people as the keeper of a small shop or the master of a workhouse. The Duke was a very old man with bent shoulders and the slow step of age, and I thinks he did not see or hear very quickly; and when I beckons to him he goes past. But when he is some way past he looks back. And when he see my hand out, he turns and comes slowly down again, and hands me the plate with as much politeness as if I had been in his own pew, and he says in a low voice, 'I beg your pardon.'

"But when I sees him stumbling back, and knows that in his politeness he will bring me the plate, there comes a fear on me, my daughter, that he may see the ten pieces of gold and think I has stolen them. And then I knows not what I shall do, for

the nobility and gentry, though quick and polite in a matter of obliging the poor, such as this one,—when they sits as poknees* to administer justice, loses both their good sense and their good manners as completely as any of the police.

“But it comes to me also that being such a real one—such an out-and-outer—his politeness may be so great that he may look another way, rather than peep and pry to see what the poor workhouse-company woman puts into the plate. And I am right, my daughter, for he looks away, and I lays the ten golden sovereigns in the plate, and he gives a little smile and a little bow, and goes slowly and stumblingly to the upper end, where the clergyman is still speaking verses.

“And then, my daughter, my hands, which made the gold sovereigns so hot, turns very cold, and I gets up and goes out of the church with as much respectfulness and quiet as I am able.

“And I tries not to look at her face as I turns to shut the door, but I was unable to keep myself from doing so, and as it looked then I can see it now, my dear, and I know I shall remember it till I die. I thinks somehow that she was praying, though it was not a praying part of the service, and when I looks to the upper end I sees that the eyes of the young clergyman her husband is fixed on her, as mine is.

“And of all the words which he preached that day and the verses he spoke with so much readiness, I could not repeat one to you, my daughter, to save my life, except the words he was saying just then,

* “Poknees,” gipsy word for magistrate.

and they remains in my ears as her face remains before my eyes :—

“ ‘ God is not unrighteous, that He will forget your work, and labor which proceedeth of love.’ ”

CHAPTER VI.

“ WE are all creatures of habit.” So my learned uncle, Draen y Coed, who was a Welsh hedgehog, used to say. “ Which was why an ancestor of my own, who acted as turnspit in the kitchen of a farmhouse in Yorkshire, quite abandoned the family custom of walking out in the cool of the evening, and declared that he couldn’t take two steps in comfort except in a circle, and in front of a kitchen fire at roasting heat.”

Uncle Draen y Coed was right, and I must add that I doubt if, in all his experience, or among the strange traditions of his most eccentric ancestors, he could find an instance of change of habits so unexpected, so complete, I may say so headlong, as when very quiet people, with an almost surly attachment to home, break the bounds of the domestic circle, and take to gadding, gossiping, and excitement.

Perhaps it is because they find that their fellow-creatures are nicer than they have been wont to allow them to be, and that other people’s affairs are quite as interesting as their own.

Perhaps—but what is the good of trying to explain infatuations ?

Why do we all love valerian? I can only record that, having set up every prickle on our backs against intruders into our wood, we now dreaded nothing more than that our neighbors should forsake us, and wished for nothing better than for fresh arrivals.

In old days, when my excellent partner and I used to take our evening stroll up the field, we were wont to regard it quite as a grievance if a cousin, who lived at the far end of the hedge, came out and caught us and detained us for a gossip. But now I could hardly settle to my midday nap for thinking of the tinker-mother; and as to Mrs. Hedgehog, she almost annoyed me by her anxiety to see Christian. However, curiosity is the foible of her sex, and I accompanied her daily to the encampment without a murmur.

The seven urchins we sent down to the burdocks to pick snails.

It was not many days after that on which we heard the old tinker-mother relate Christian's history, that we were stopped on our way to the corner where we usually concealed ourselves, by hearing strange voices from the winding pathway above us.

"It's a young man," said I.

"It's Christian!" cried Mrs. Hedgehog.

"I feel sure it is not," said I; "but if you will keep quiet, I will creep a little forward and see."

I am always in the right, as I make a point of reminding Mrs. Hedgehog whenever we dispute; and I was right on this occasion.

The lad who spoke was a young gentlemen of

about seventeen, and no more like a gipsy than I am. His fair hair was closely cropped, his eyes were quick and bright, his manner was alert and almost anxious, and though he was very slight as well as very young; he carried himself with dignity and some little importance. A lady, much older than himself, was with him, whom he was helping down the path.

“Take care, Gertrude, take care. There is no hurry, and I believe there’s no one in the wood but ourselves.”

“The people at the inn told us that there were gipsies in the neighborhood,” said the lady; “and oh, Ted! this is exactly the wood I dreamt of, except the purple and white——”

“Gertrude! What on earth are you after?”

“The flowers, Ted, the flowers in my dream! There they are, a perfect carpet of them. White—oh, how lovely!—and there, on the other side, are the purple ones. What are they, dear? I know you are a good botanist. He always raved about your collection.”

“Nonsense, I’m not a botanist. Several other fellows went in for it when the prize was offered, and all that my collection was good for was his doing. I never did see any one arrange flowers as he did, I must say. Every specimen was pressed so as somehow to keep its own way of growing. And when I did them, a columbine looked as stiff as a dog-daisy. I never could keep any character in them. Watson—the fellow who drew so well—made vignettes on the blank pages to lots of the specimens—‘Likely Habi-

tats' we call them. He used to sit with his paint-box in my window, and Christian used to sit outside the window, on the edge, dangling his legs, and describing scenes out of his head for Watson to draw. Watson used to say, 'I wish I could paint with my brush as that fellow paints with his tongue'—and when the vignettes were admired, I've heard him say, in his dry way, 'I copied them from Christian's paintings;' and the fellows used to stare, for you know he couldn't draw a line. And when——But I say, Gertrude, for Heaven's sake, don't devour everything I say with those great pitiful eyes of yours. I am a regular brute to talk about him."

"No, Ted, no. It makes me so happy to hear you, and to know that you know how good he really was, and how much he must have been aggravated before——"

"For goodness' sake, don't cry. Christian was a very good fellow, a capital fellow. I never thought I could have got on so well with any one who was—I mean who wasn't—well, of course I mean who was really a gipsy. I don't blame him a bit for resenting being bullied about his parents. I only blame myself for not looking better after him. But you know that well enough—you know it's because I never can forgive myself for having managed so badly when you put him in my care, that I am backing you through this mad expedition, though I don't approve of it one bit, and though I know John will blame me awfully."

("It's the clergywoman," whispered Mrs. Hedgehog excitedly, "and I must and will see her.")

When it comes to this with Mrs. Hedgehog's sex, there is nothing for it but to let the dear creatures have their own way, and take the consequences. She pushed her nose straight through the lower branches of an arbutus in which we were concealed, and I myself managed to get a nearer sight of our new neighbors.

As we crept forward, the clergywoman got up from where she was kneeling amongst the flowers, and laid her hand on the young gentleman's arm. I noticed it because I had never seen such a white hand before ; Sybil's paws were nearly as dark as my own.)

"John will blame no one if we find Christian," she said. "You are very, very good, Cousin Ted, to come with me and help me when you do not believe in my dream. But you must say it is odd about the flowers. And you haven't told me yet what they are."

"It is the bulbous-rooted fumitory," said the young man, pulling a piece at random in the reckless way in which men do disfigure forest flower-beds. "It isn't strictly indigenous, but it is naturalized in many places, and you must have seen it before, though you fancy you haven't."

"I have seen it once before," she said earnestly—"all in delicate glaucous-green masses, studded with purple and white, like these ; but it was in my dream. I never saw it otherwise, though I know you don't believe me."

"Dear Gertrude, I'll believe anything you like to tell me, if you'll come home. I'm sure I have done

very wrong. You know I'm always hard up, but I declare I'd give a hundred pounds if you'd come home with me at once. I don't believe there's a gipsy within——”

“Good-day, my pretty young gentleman. Let the poor gipsy-girl tell you your fortune.”

He turned round and saw Sybil standing at his elbow, her eyes flashing and her white teeth gleaming in a broad smile. He stood speechless in sudden surprise ; but the clergywoman, who was not surprised, came forward with her white hands stretched so expressively towards Sybil's brown ones, that the gipsy-girl all but took them in her own.

“Please kindly tell me—do you know anything of a young gipsy, named Christian ?”

The clergywoman spoke with such vehemence that Sybil answered directly, “I know his grandmother” —and then suddenly stopped herself.

But as she spoke, she had turned her head with an expressive gesture in the direction of the encampment, and without waiting for more, the clergywoman ran down the path, calling on her cousin to follow her.

CHAPTER VII.

My ancestor's artifice was very successful when the race was run on two sides of a hedge, backwards and forwards ; but if a louis d'or and a bottle of brandy had depended on my reaching the tinker-mother before the clergywoman, I should have lost

the wager. We hurried after her, however, as fast as we were able, keeping well under the brushwood.

When we could see our neighbors again, the tinker-mother was standing up, and speaking hurriedly, with a wild look in her eyes.

“Let me be, Sybil Stanley, and let me speak. I says again, what has fine folk to do with coming and worritting us in our wood? If I did sell him, I sold him fair—and if I got him back, I bought him back fair. Aye my delicate gentlewoman, you may look at me, but I did!

“Five years, five years of wind and weather, and hard days and lonely nights:—

“Five years of food your men would chuck to the pigs, and of clothes your maids would think scorn to scour in:—

“Five years—but I scraped it together, and *then* they baulked me. You shuts the door in the poor tinker-woman’s face; you gives the words of warning to the police.

Five more years—it was five more, wasn’t it, my daughter?—Sometimes I fancies I makes a mistake and overcounts. But *he’ll* know. Christian, my dear! Christian, I say!”

“Sit down, mother, sit down,” said the gipsy girl; and the old woman sat down, but she went on muttering:

“I will speak! what has they to do, I say, to ask me where he has gone to? A fine place for the fine gentleman they made of him. What has such as them to say to it, if I couldn’t keep him when I got

him—that they comes to taunt me and my gray hairs?”

She wrung her gray locks with a passionate gesture as she spoke, and then dropped her elbows on her knees and her head upon her hands.

The clergywoman had been standing very still, with her two white hands folded before her, and her eyes, that had dark circles round them which made them look large, fixed upon the tinker-mother as she muttered ; but when she ceased muttering the clergywoman unlocked her hands, and with one movement took off her hat. Her hair was smoothly drawn over the roundness of her head, and gathered in a knot at the back of her neck, and the brown of it was all streaked with gray. She threw her hat on to the grass, and moving swiftly to the old woman's side, she knelt by her, as we had seen Sybil kneel, speaking very clearly and touching the tinker-mother's hand.

“Christian's grandmother—you are his grandmother, are you not?—you must be much, much older than me, but look at *my* hair. Am *I* likely to taunt any one with having grown gray or with being miserable? It takes a good deal of pain, good mother, to make young hair as white as mine.”

“So it should,” muttered the old woman, “so it should. It is a plaguy world, I say, as it is; but it would be plaguy past any bearing for the poor, if them that has everything could do just as they likes and never feel no aches nor pains afterwards. And there's a many fine gentlefolk thinks they can, till they feels the difference.

“‘What’s ten pound to me?’ says you. ‘I wants the pretty baby with the dark eyes and the long lashes,’ says you.

“‘Them it belongs to is poor, they’d sell anything,’ says you.

“‘I wants a son,’ you says; ‘and having the advantages of gold and silver, I can buy one.’

“You calls him by a name of your own choosing, and puts your own name at the end of that. His hands are something dark for the son of such a delicate white lady-mother, but they can be covered with the kid gloves of gentility.

“You buys fine clothes for him, and nurses and tutors and schools for him.

“You teaches him the speech of gentlefolk, and the airs of gentlefolk, and the learning of gentlefolk.

“You crams his head with religion, which is a thing I doesn’t hold with, and with holy words, which I thinks brings ill-luck.

“You has the advantages of silver and gold, to make a fine gentleman of him, but the blood that flies to his face when he hears the words of insult is gipsy blood, and he comes back to the woods where he was born.

“Let me be, my daughter, I say I will speak—(Heaven keep my head cool!)—its good for such as them to hear the truth once in a way. She’s a dainty fine lady, and she taught him many fine things, besides religion, which I sets my face against. Tell her she took mighty good care of him—Ha! ha! the old tinker-woman had only one chance of teaching him anything—but she taught him the *patteran!*”

The clergywoman had never moved, except that when the tinker-mother shook off her hand she locked her white fingers in front of her as before, and her eyes wandered from the old woman's face, and looked beyond it, as if she were doing what I have often done, and counting the bits of blue sky which show through the oak-leaves before they grow thick. But she must have been paying attention all the same, for she spoke very earnestly.

“Good mother, listen to me. If I bought him, you sold him. Perhaps I did wrong to tempt you—perhaps I did wrong to hope to buy for myself what God was not pleased to give me. I was very young, and one makes many mistakes when one is young. I thought I was childless and unhappy, but I know now that only those are childless who have had children and lost them.

“Do you know that in all the years my son was with me, I do not think there was a day when I did not think of you? I used to wonder if you regretted him, and I lived in dread of your getting him back; and when he ran away, I knew you had. I never agreed with the lawyer's plans—my husband will tell you so—I always wanted to find you to speak to you myself. I knew what you must feel, and I thought I should like you to know that I knew it.

“Night after night I lay awake and thought what I would say to you when we met. I thought I would tell you that I could quite understand that our ways might become irksome to Christian, if he inherited a love for outdoor life, and for moving from place to place. I thought I would say that perhaps I was wrong

ever to have taken him away from his own people ; but as it was done and could not be undone, we might perhaps make the best of it together. I hope you understand me, though you say nothing? You see, if he is a gipsy at heart, he has also been brought up to many comforts you can not give him, and with the habits and ideas of a gentleman. You are too clever, and too fond of him, to mind my speaking plainly. Now there are things which a gentleman might do if he had the money, which would satisfy his love of roving as well. Many rich gentlemen dislike the confinement of houses and domestic ways as much as Christian, and they leave their fine homes to travel among dangers and discomforts. I could find the money for Christian to do this by-and-by. If he likes a wandering life, he can live it easily so—only he would be able to wander hundreds of miles where you wander one, and to sleep under other skies and among new flowers, and in forests to which such woods as these are shrubberies. He need not fall into any of the bad ways to which you know people are tempted by being poor. I have thought of it all, night after night, and longed to be able to tell you about it. He might become a famous traveller, you know ; he is very clever and very fond of books of adventure. This young gentleman will tell you so. How proud we should both be of him ! That is what I have thought might be if you did not hide him from me, and I did not keep him from you.

“ And as to religion—dear good mother, listen to me. Look at me—see if religion has been a fashion or a plaything to *me*. If it had not stood by me when

my heart was as heavy as yours, what profit should I have in it?

“Christian’s grandmother—you are his grandmother, I know, and have the better right to him—if you cannot agree to my plans—if you won’t let me help you about him—if you hide him from me, and I must live out my life and never see his dear face again—spare me the hope of seeing it when this life is over.

“If I did my best for your grandson—and you know I did—oh! for the love of Christ, our only Refuge, do not stand between him and the Father of us all!

“If you have felt what he must suffer if he is poor, and if you know so well how little it makes sure of happiness to be rich—if in a long life you have found out how hard it is to be good, and how rare it is to be happy—if you know what it is to love and lose, to hope and to be disappointed in one’s hoping—let him be religious, good mother!

“If you care for Christian, leave him the only strength that is strong enough to hold us back from sin, and to do instead of joy.”

The tinker-mother lifted her head; but before she could say a word, the young gentleman burst into indignant speech.

“Gertrude, I can bear it no longer. Not even for you, not even for the chance of getting Christian back. It’s empty swagger to say that I wish to God I’d the chance of giving my life to get him back for you. But you must come home now. I’ve bitten **my lip** through in holding my tongue, but I won’t see

you kneel another minute at the feet of that sulky old gipsy hag."

Whilst he was speaking the tinker-mother had risen to her feet, and when she stood quite upright she was much taller than I had thought. The young gentleman had moved to take his cousin by the hand, but the old woman waved him back.

"Stay where you are, young gentleman," she said. "This is no matter for boys to mix and meddle in. Sybil, my daughter—Sybil, I say! Come and stand near me, for I gets confused at times, and I fears I may not explain myself to the noble gentlewoman with all the respect that I could wish. She says a great deal that is very true, my daughter, and she has no vulgar insolence in her manners of speaking. I thinks I shall let her do as he says, if we can get Christian out, which perhaps, if she is cousin to any of the Justiciary, she may be able to do.

"The poor tinker-folk returns you the deepest of obligations, my gentle lady. If she'll let me see him when I wants to, it will be best, my daughter; for I thinks I am failing, and I shouldn't like to leave him with George and that drunken slut.

"I thinks I am failing, I say. Trouble and age and the lone company of your own thoughts, my noble gentlewoman, has a tendency to confuse you, though I was always highly esteemed for the facility of my speech, especially in the telling of fortunes.

"Let the poor gipsy look into your white hand, my pretty lady. The lines of life are somewhat broken with trouble, but they joins in peace. There's a dark young gentleman with a great influence on your

happiness, and I sees grandchildren gathered at your knees.

“What did the lady snatch away her hand for, my daughter? I means no offence. She shall have Christian. I have told her so. Tell him to get ready and go before his father gets back. He’s a bad ’un is my son George, and I knows now that she was far too good for him.

“Come a little nearer, my dear, that I may touch you. I sees your face so often, when I knows you can’t be there, that it pleases me to be able to feel you. I was afraid you bore me ill-will for selling Christian; but I bought him back, my dear, I bought him back. Take him away with you, my dear, for I am failing, and I shouldn’t like to leave him with George. Your eyes looks very hollow and your hair is gray. Not that I begrudges your making so much of my son, but he treats you ill, he treats you very ill. Don’t cry, my dear, it comes to an end at last, though I thinks sometimes that all the men in the world put together is not worth the love we wastes upon one. You hear what I say, Sybil? And that rascal, Black Basil, is the worst of a bad lot.”

“Hold your jaw, mother,” said Sybil sharply; and she added, “Be pleased to excuse her, my lady: she is old and gets confused at times, and she thinks you are Christian’s mother, who is dead.”

The old woman was bursting out again, when Sybil raised her hand, and we all pricked our ears at a sound of noisy quarrelling that came nearer.

“It’s George and his wife,” said Sybil. “Mother, the gentlefolks had better go. I’ll go to the inn

afterwards, and tell them about Christian. Take the lady away, sir. Come, mother, come!"

I've a horror of gipsy men, and even before our neighbors had dispersed I hustled away with Mrs. Hedgehog into the bushes.

CHAPTER VIII.

GOOD Mrs. Hedgehog hurt one of her feet slightly in our hurried retreat, and next day was obliged to rest it; but as our curiosity was more on the alert than ever, I went down in the afternoon to the tinker camp.

The old woman was sitting in her usual position, and she seemed to have recovered herself. Sybil was leaning back against a tree opposite; she wore a hat and shawl and looked almost as wild as the tinker-mother had looked the day before. She seemed to have been at the inn with the clergywoman, and was telling the tinker-mother the result.

"You told her he had got two years, my daughter! Does she say she will get him out?"

"She says she has no more power to do it than yourself, mother, and the young gentleman says the same—unless—unless it was made known that Christian was innocent."

"Two years," moaned the old woman. "Is she sure we couldn't buy him out, my dear? Two years—oh! Christian, my child, I shall never live to see you again!"

She sobbed for a minute, and then raising her hand suddenly above her head, she cried, "A curse on Black—" but Sybil seized her by the wrist so suddenly, that it checked her words.

"Don't curse him, mother," said the gipsy girl, "and I'll—I'll see what I can do. I meant to, and I've come to say good-by. I've brought a packet of tea for you; see that you keep it to yourself. Good-by, mother."

"Good evening, my daughter."

"I said good-by. You don't hold with religion, do you?"

"I does not, so far, my daughter; though I think the young clergywoman speaks very convincingly about it."

"Don't you think that there may be a better world, mother, for them that tries to do right, though things goes against them here?"

"I think there might very easily be a better world, my dear, but I never was instructed about it."

"You don't believe in prayers, do you, mother!"

"That I does not, my daughter. Christian said lots of 'em, and you sees what it comes to."

"It's not unlucky to say 'God bless you,' is it, I wanted you to say it before I go."

"No, my daughter, I doesn't object to that, for I regards it as an old-fashioned compliment, more in the nature of good manners than of holy words."

"God bless you, mother."

"God bless you, my daughter."

Sybil turned round and walked steadily away. The last glimpse I had of her was when she turned

once more, and put the hair from her face to look at the old woman ; but the tinker-mother did not see her, for she was muttering with her head upon her hands.

It was a remarkable summer—that summer when I had seven, and when we took so much interest in our neighbors.

I make a point of never disturbing myself about the events of bygone seasons. At the same time, to rear a family of seven urchins is not a thing done by hedgehog-parents every year, and the careers of that family are very clearly impressed upon my memory.

Number one came to a sad end.

What on the face of the wood made him think of pheasant's eggs I cannot conceive. I'm sure I never said anything about them ! It was whilst he was scrambling along the edge of the covert, that he met the Fox, and very properly rolled himself into a ball. The Fox's nose was as long as his own, and he rolled my poor son over and over with it, till he rolled him into the stream. The young urchins swim like fishes, but just as he was scrambling to shore, the Fox caught him by the waistcoat and killed him. I do hate slyness !

Numbers two and three were flitted. I told them so but young people will go their own way. They had excellent victuals.

Number four (my eldest daughter) settled very comfortably in life and had a family of three. She might have sent them down to the burdocks to pick snails quite well, but she would take them out walking with her instead. They were picked up (all four

of them) by two long-legged Irish boys, who put them into a basket and took them home. I do not think the young gentlemen meant any harm, for they provided plenty of food, and took them to bed with them. They set my daughter at liberty next day, and she spoke very handsomely of the young gentlemen, and said they had cured the skins with salt-petre, and were stuffing them when she left. But the subject was always an awkward one.

Number five is still living. He is the best hand at a fight with a snake that I know.

Numbers six and seven went to Covent Garden in a hamper. They say black-beetles are excellent eating.

The whole seven had a narrow escape with their lives just after Sybil left us. They over-ate themselves on snails, and Mrs. Hedgehog had to stay at home and nurse them. I kept my eye on our neighbors and brought her the news.

“Christian has come home,” I said, one day. “The Queen has given him a pardon.”

“Then he *did* take the pheasants’ eggs?” said Mrs. Hedgehog.

“Certainly not,” said I. “In the first place it wasn’t eggs, and in the second place it was Black Basil who took whatever it was, and he has confessed to it.”

“Then if Christian didn’t do it, how is it that he has been forgiven?” said Mrs. Hedgehog.

“I can’t tell you,” said I; “but so it is. And he is at this moment with the clergywoman and the tinker-mother.”

“Where is Sybil?” asked Mrs. Hedgehog.

I did not know then, and I am not very clear about her now. I never saw her again, but either I heard that she had married Black Basil, and that they had gone across the water to some country where the woods are bigger than they are here, or I have dreamt it in one of my winter naps.

I am inclined to think it must be true, because I always regarded Sybil as somewhat proud and unsociable, and I think she would like a big wood and very few neighbors.

But really when one sleeps for several months at a stretch it is not very easy to be accurate about one's dreams.

TOOTS AND BOOTS.

AN UNFINISHED TALE.

CHAPTER I.

MY name is Toots. Why, I have not the slightest idea. But I suppose very few people—cats or otherwise—are consulted about their own names. If they were, these would perhaps be, as a rule, more appropriate.

What qualities of mind or body my name was supposed to illustrate, I have not to this hour a notion. I distinctly remember the stage of my kittenhood, when I thought that Toots was the English for cream.

“Toots! Toots!” my young mistress used to say, in the most suggestive tones, creeping after me as I would creep after a mouse, with a saucerful of that delicious liquid in her hand.

“Toots is first-rate stuff,” I used to think, and I purred accordingly, for I never was an ungrateful cat.

This was in the dining-room, and in the morning. Later in the day, “Toots” was served in the drawing-room. It was between these two periods, I remember, that one day I found myself in the larder. Why I went there, puzzled me at the time; for if there is anything I hate it is a chill, and there was a horrid draught through a window pierced with tiny

holes, which seemed to let in a separate blast for every hair of one's fur. I followed the cook, it is true; but I did not follow the cook as a rule—nct, for instance, when she went out to the coal-hole in the yard. I had slipped in under her dress. I was behind the potato-tub when she went out, shutting the door after her. For some mysterious reason I felt on the tip-claw of expectation. My nose twitched with agreeable sensations. An inward voice seemed to murmur, *Toots!* Regardless of the draughts, I sprang on to the shelf close under the window. And there was such a dish of cream! The saucers in which one got it at breakfast did not hold a twentieth part of what this brimming pan contained. As to the five o'clock china, in which visitors give you a tepid teaspoonful with bits of old tea-leaves in it—I grinned at the thought as I drew in tongue-full after tongue-full of the thick yellow cream.

At this moment I heard my young mistress's voice in the distant passages.

"Toots, Toots!" said she.

"I've got plenty," purred I, lifting my head to speak, by a great effort.

"Toots, Toots!" she miowed on, for she wasn't much quicker-witted than the rest of her race.

"No, thank you," thought I; "and if you want five o'clock toots for yourself, I advise you to come here for it." I thought this, but speak I really could not—I was too busy lapping.

It was delicious stuff! But when the dish was about three-parts empty, I began to feel as if I had had a good deal, and to wish I had more appetite for

the rest. "It's a shame to leave it, though," I thought, "when a few more laps will empty the dish." For I come of an ancient and rough-tongued cat family who always lick their platters clean. So I set to work again, though the draught was most annoying, and froze the cream to butter on my whiskers.

I was polishing the glazed earthenware with the family skill, when I became conscious that the house was resounding to the cry of "Toots!"

"Toots, Toots!" squeaked the housemaid, in the servants' hall.

"Toots, Toots!" growled the elderly butler, in the pantry.

"Toots, Toots, cock-a-Toots!" yelled that intolerable creature, the Macaw.

"Toots, Toots!" snapped the cook.

"Miow," said I; for I had finished the cream, and could speak now, though I confess I did not feel equal to any great exertion.

The cook opened the door. She found me—she did not find the cream, which she had left in the dish ready for whipping.

Perhaps it was because she had no cream to whip, that she tried to whip me. Certainly, during the next half hour, I had reason to be much confused as to the meaning of the word "Toots." In the soft voice of my mistress it had always seemed to me to mean cream; now it seemed to mean kicks, blows, flapping dish-cloths, wash-leathers and dusters, pokers, carpet brooms, and every instrument of torture with which a poor cat could be chased from garret to cellar. I am pretty nimble, and though I never felt

less disposed for violent exercise, I flatter myself I led them a good dance before, by a sudden impulse of affectionate trustfulness, I sprang straight into my mistress's arms for shelter.

"You must beat him, miss," gasped the cook, "or there'll never be no bearing him in the house. Every drop of that lovely cream gone, and half the sweets for the ball supper throwed completely out of calculation!"

"Naughty Toots, naughty Toots, naughty Toots!" cried the young lady, and with every "Toots" she gave me a slap; but as her paws had no claws in them, I was more offended than hurt.

This was my first lesson in honesty, and it was also the beginning of that train of reasoning in my own mind, by which I came to understand that when people called "Toots" they meant me. And as—to do them justice—they generally called me with some kind intention, I made it a point of responding to my name.

Indeed, they were so kind to me, and my position was such a very comfortable one, that when a lean tabby called one day for a charitable subscription, and begged me to contribute a few spare partridge bones to a fund for the support of starving cats in the neighborhood, who had been deserted by families leaving town, I said that really such cases were not much in my line. There is a great deal of imposition about—perhaps the cats had stolen the cream, and hadn't left off stealing it when they were chased by the family. I doubted if families where the cats deserved respect and consideration ever did leave

town. One has so many calls, if one once begins to subscribe to things ; and I am particularly fond of partridge.

But when, a few months later, the very words which the lean tabby had spoken passed between the butler and the cook in reference to our own household, and I learned that "the family" were going "to leave town," I felt a pang of conscience, and wished I had subscribed the merry-thought, or even the breast-bone—there was very little on it—to the Deserted Cats' Fund.

But it was my young mistress who told me (with regrets and caresses, which in the circumstances were mere mockery) that I was to be left behind.

I have a particularly placid temper, and can adapt myself pretty comfortably to the ups and downs of life ; but this news made my tail stand on end.

"Poor dear Toots !" said my mistress, kissing my nose, and tickling me gently under the ear, as if she were saying the prettiest things possible. "I am *so* sorry ! I don't know *what* we are to do with you ! But we are going abroad, and we *can't* take you, you dear old thing ! We've such heaps of luggage, and such lots of servants, and no end of things that *must* go ! But I *can't bear to think* of you left behind !"

"No," said I indignantly ; "that's just it, and the people at number ten, and number fourteen, and number twenty-five, couldn't bear to think what would become of their cats, so they went away and didn't think about it. They couldn't bear to see them die, so they didn't give them a dose of quick poison, but left them to die of starvation, when they weren't

there to see. You're a heartless, selfish race, you human beings, and I suspect that Mrs. Tabby is not the only shabby-looking, true-hearted soul, who has to pester people for subscriptions to patch up the dreary end of existence for deserted pets, when caressing days are over. Fuff!"

And I jumped straight out of her arms, and whisked through the dining-room window. For some time I strolled thoughtfully along the top of the area railings. I rather hoped I might see Mrs. Tabby. I wondered how her subscription list was getting on. I felt all the difference between a lady's interest in a Reduced Gentlewomen's Benevolent Institution or a Poor Annuitants' Home, when she is well and wealthy, and the same lady's interest when some turn of Misfortune's wheel has left her "dependent on her own exertions." It seemed that I was to be left dependent on my own exertions—and my thoughts turned naturally to Mrs. Tabby and the Deserted Cats' Fund.

But not a sign of the good creature! At this moment a hansom cab rattled up, and a gentleman got out and rang our front door-bell. As he got out of the cab, I jumped down from the railings, and rubbed against his legs—he had very long legs.

"Halloa, Toots! is that you?" said he in a kindly voice, which had always had attractions for me, and which in my present mood was particularly grateful. His hat was set well on the back of his head, and I could clearly see the friendly expression of his countenance. Suddenly he tilted it over his nose, which I have observed that he is apt to do when

struck by a new idea. "Toots!" said he abruptly, "what are they going to do with you?"

Blessings on this kind of friend! say I; the friend who will encumber himself with the responsibility of thinking what's to become of you, when you are down in the world. Those tender-hearted souls who can't bear to think of your misfortunes are a much more numerous part of one's acquaintance.

A ray of hope began to dawn upon me. Perhaps a new and even more luxurious home was to be offered for my acceptance. In what foolish panic had I begun to identify myself with the needy classes of society? A cat of my stripes and style! Once more I thought of benevolent institutions from a patronizing point of view. But I would be a patron, and a generous one. The shock *had* done so much! And the next time Mrs. Tabby called I would *pick out a lot of my best bones for the Fund*.

Meanwhile, I went back to the railings, and from these took a flying leap, and perched myself on the gentleman's shoulder. I could hardly have managed it from the ground, he had such very long legs.

I think, by-the-by, that I have mentioned this before. I do not wish to repeat myself, or to dwell on my grievance, though, if his legs had been shorter, his riding-boots would not have been so long, and I might at this moment know what became of—but I must not forestall my story.

I jumped on to the gentleman's shoulder. In doing so, I knocked his hat over one eye. But I have seen it so since then, and he made no complaint. The man-servant opened the door, and we went into the house together.

CHAPTER II.

I FLATTER myself that my head is not remarkable for size and beauty alone. I am a cat of mind, and I made it up at once as to the course of conduct to pursue.

I am also a cat with some powers of observation, and I have observed that two things go a long way with men—flattery and persistence. Also that the difficulty of coaxing them is not in direct proportion to their size—rather the reverse. Another thing that I have observed is, that if you want to be well-treated, or have a favor to ask, it is a great thing to have a good coat on your back in good order.

How many a human being has sleeked the rich softness of my magnificent tiger skin, and then said, in perfect good faith, “How Toots enjoys being stroked!”

“How you enjoy the feel of my fur, you mean,” I am tempted to say. But I do not say it. It doesn’t do to disturb the self-complacency of people who have the control of the milk-jug.

Having made up my mind to coax the gentleman into adopting me, I devoted myself entirely to him for the evening, and ignored the rest of the party, as serenely as a cat knows how. Again and again did he put me down with firm, but not ungentle hands, saying—“Go down, Toots,” and pick stray hairs in a fidgety manner off his dress-trousers; and again and again did I return to his shoulder (where he

couldn't see the hairs) and purr in his ear, and rub my long whiskers against his short ones.

But it was not till he was comfortably established in an arm-chair by the drawing-room fire, round which the rest of the family were also seated, that the charm began to work.

"How devoted Toots is to you!" purred the ladies, after an ineffectual effort on my part to share the arm-chair.

"You're a very foolish Toots," said the gentleman. (I was back on his shoulder by this time.)

"Toots you've deserted me," said my young mistress. "I'm quite jealous," she added.

"Toots, you brute!" cried the gentleman, seizing me in both hands. "Where's your good taste, and your gratitude? Go to your mistress, sir," and he threw me into her lap. But I sprang back to his shoulder with one leap.

"It's really most extraordinary," said one lady.

"And Toots never goes to strangers as a rule," added my mistress.

Everybody is proud of being *exceptionally* favored. It was this last stroke, I am convinced, that rubbed him the right way. A gratified blandness pervaded his countenance. He made no further attempts to dislodge me, and I settled myself into the angles of his shoulder and affected to go to sleep.

"What are you going to do with him?" he asked, crossing one long leg over the other with a convulsive abruptness very trying to my balance, and to the strength of the arm-chair.

Both the ladies began to mew. They were *so* sorry

to leave me behind, but it was *quite* impossible to take me. They couldn't bear to think of my being unhappy, and didn't know where in the world to find me a home.

"I wish you would take him!" said my mistress.

I listened breathlessly for the gentleman's reply.

"Pets are not in the least in my line," he said.

"I am a bachelor, you know, of very tidy habits. I dislike trouble, and have a rooted objection to encumbrances."

"We hear you have a pet mouse, though," said my mistress. He laughed awkwardly.

"My dear young lady, I never said that my practice always squared with my principles. Helpless and troublesome creatures have sometimes an insinuating way with them, which forms an additional reason for avoiding them, especially if one is weak-minded. And——"

"And you *have* a pet mouse?"

He sat suddenly upright with another jerk, which nearly shot me into the fireplace, and said:

"I'll tell you about it, for upon my word I wish you could see the little beggar. It was one afternoon when I came in from riding, that I found a mouse sitting on the fender. I could only see his back, with the tail twitching, and I noticed that a piece had been bitten out of his left ear. The little wretch must have heard me quite well, but he sat on as if the place belonged to him.

"'You're pretty cool!' I said; and being rather the reverse myself, I threw the Queen's Regulations at him, and he disappeared. But it bothered me, for

I hate mice in one's quarters. You never know what mischief they mayn't be doing. You put valuable papers carefully away, and the next time you go to the cupboard, they are reduced to shreds. The little brutes take the lining of your slippers to line their nests. They keep you awake at night—in short, they are detestable. But I am not fond of killing things myself, though I've a sort of a conscience about knowing how it's done. I don't like leaving necessary executions to servants. As to mice, you know—poisoning is out of the question, on sanitary grounds. 'Catch-'em-alive' traps are like a policeman who catches a pickpocket—all the trouble of the prosecution is to come; and as to the traps with springs and spikes—my man set one in my bedroom once, and in the middle of the night the mouse was caught. For nearly an hour, I doubt if I was much the happier of the two. Every moment I thought the poor wretch would stop screaming, for I had ordered the trap in the belief that death was instantaneous. At last I jumped up, and put the whole concern into my tub and held it under water. The poor beast was dead in six seconds. A catch-'em-alive trap and a tub of water is the most merciful death, I fancy; but I am rather in favor of letting one animal kill another. It seems more natural, and *fairer*. They have a run for their lives, so to speak."

"And who did you get to kill your mouse?"

"Well, I know a youngster who has a terrier. They are a perfect pair. As like as two peas, and equally keen about sport—they would go twenty miles to chase a bluebottle round an attic, sooner than not

hunt something. So I told him there was a mouse *de trop* in my rooms, and he promised to bring Nipper next morning. I was going out hunting myself.

“The meet was early and my man got breakfast at seven o’clock for me in my own quarters; and the first thing I saw when I came out of my bedroom, was the mouse sitting on the edge of my Indian silver sugar-basin. I knew him again by his ear. And there he sat all breakfast-time, twitching his tail, and nibbling little bits of sugar, and watching me with such a pair of eyes! Have you ever seen a mouse’s eyes close? Upon my word, they are wonderfully beautiful, and its uncommonly difficult to hurt a creature with fine eyes. I didn’t touch it, and as I was going out I looked back, and *the mouse was looking after me*. I was a fool for looking back, for I can’t stand a pitiful expression in man or beast, and it put an end to Nipper’s sport, and left me with a mouse in my quarters—a thing I hate. I didn’t like to say I’d changed my mind about killing the mouse, but I wrote to Nipper’s master, and said I wouldn’t trouble him to come up for such a trifling matter.”

“So the mouse was safe?”

“Well *I* thought so. But the young fellow (who is very good-natured) wrote back to say it was no trouble whatever, and the letter lay on my mantel-piece till I came home and found that he and Nipper had broken a chair-leg, and two china plates.”

“*Did* they kill the mouse?”

“Well, no. But I nearly killed Nipper in saving him; and the little rascal has lived with me ever since.”

The ladies seemed highly delighted with this anecdote, but, for my own part, I felt feverish to the tips of my claws, as I thought of the miserable creature who had usurped the place I wished to fill, and who might be the means of my having to fall back after all on the Deserted Cats' Fund. What bungling puss had him under her paws, and allowed him to escape with a torn ear and the wariness of experience? Let me but once catch sight of that twitching tail!—

At this moment the gentleman got up, stretched his long—

But I will *not* allude to them! It annoys me as much as the thought of that bungling cat, or of Nipper's baulked attempt. He put up his hands and lifted me from his shoulder, and my heart sank as he said, "If I am to catch my train, I fear I must say good-by."

I believe that, in this hopeless crisis, my fur as usual was in my favor. He rubbed his cheek against mine before putting me down, and then said, "And you've not told me after all, where poor Toots is really going."

"We have not found a home for him yet, I assure you," said my mistress. "Our washer-woman wants him, and she is a most kind-hearted and respectable person, but she has got nine children, and——"

"Nine children!" ejaculated my friend. "My poor Toots, there will not be an inch of that magnificent tail of yours left at the end of a week. What cruelty to animals! Upon my word, I'd almost rather take Toots myself, than think of him with a

washer-woman with nine children. Eh, Toots! would you like to come?"

I was on the carpet, rubbing against his—yes, long or short, they were *his*, and he was kind to me!—rubbing, I say, against his legs. I could get no impetus for a spring, but I scrambled straight up him as one would scramble up a tree (my grandmother was a bird-catcher of the first talent, and I inherit her claws), and uttered one pitiful mew.

The gentleman gave a short laugh, and took me into his arms.

"Oh, *how* good of you! Jones shall get a hamper," cried the ladies. But he shook his head.

"Three of the fourteen parcels I've got to pick up at the station, are hampers. I wouldn't have another on my mind for a fortune. If Toots comes at all, he must come like a Christian and look after himself."

I will not dwell on our departure. It was a sadly flurried one, for a cat of my temperament. The ladies saw us off, and as my young mistress covered me with farewell kisses, I felt an unquestionable pang of regret. But one has to repress one's affections, and consider one's prospects in life, if one does not want to come upon the Deserted Cats' Fund!

My master put his hat on the back of his head on the steps, and knocked it off in shouting through a hole in the roof of the cab that we were to drive like the wind, as we were late. At the last moment several things were thrown in after us. A parcel of books he had lent the young lady, and a pair of boots he had left behind on some former occasion. The books were very neatly packed, and addressed, but the

boots came "like Christians, and looked after themselves." And through all, I clung fast and blessed the inherited vigor of my grandmother's claws.

At the parcels office, I certainly risked nine lives among the fourteen parcels which were dragged and pitched, and turned over in every direction; but though he paid me no other attention, my master never forgot to put back a hand to help me when we moved on. Eventually we found ourselves alone in a very comfortable carriage, and I suppose the fourteen packages were safe too, thanks to the desperate struggles of five porters, who went off clutching their paws as if they were satisfied with the result.

After incommoding me for some time by rustling newspapers, and making spasmodic struggles to find a posture that suited him, my master found one at last and fell asleep, and I crept up to the velvet collar of his great-coat and followed his example.

CHAPTER III.

I LIKE living with bachelors. They have comfortable chairs, and keep good fires. They don't put water into the tea-pot: they call the man-servant and send for more tea. They don't give you a table-spoonful of cream, fidgeting and looking round to see if anybody else wants it: one of them turns the jug upside-down into your saucer, and before another can lay hold of it and say, "Halloa! The milk's all gone,"—you have generally had time to lap it up under the table.

I prefer men's outsides, too, to women's in some respects. Why all human beings—since they have no coats of their own, and are obliged to buy them—do not buy handsomely marked furs whilst they are about it, is a puzzle to a cat. As to the miserable stuff ladies cover themselves with in an evening, there is about as much comfort and softness in it, as in going to sleep on a duster. Men's coats are nothing to boast of, either to look at or to feel, but they *are* thicker. If you happen to clutch a little with gratification or excitement, your claws don't go through; and they don't squeak like a mouse in a trap and call you treacherous because their own coats are thin.

I was very comfortable in my new home. My master was exceedingly kind to me, and he has a fearless and friendly way of tickling one's toes which is particularly agreeable, and not commonly to be met with.

Yes, my life was even more luxurious than before. It is so still. To eat, drink, and sleep, to keep oneself warm, and in good condition, and to pay proper attention to one's personal appearance; that is all one has to do in a life like mine in bachelors' quarters.

One has unpleasant dreams sometimes. I think my tea is occasionally too strong, though I have learned to prefer it to milk, and my master always gives it to me in his own saucer. If he has friends to tea, they give me some in their saucers. One can't refuse, but I fancy too much tea is injurious to the nerves.

The night before last, I positively dreamed that I was deserted. I fancied that I was chased along a housetop, and fell from the gutter. Down—down—but I woke up on the bear-skin before the fire, as our man-servant was bringing in candles.

It made me wonder how Mrs. Tabby was getting on. I had never done anything further in that matter; but really when one's life goes in a certain groove, and everything one can wish for is provided in abundance, one never seems to have time for these things. It is wonderful how energetic some philanthropic people are. I daresay they like the fuss. (I can't endure fuss!) And Mrs. Tabby's appearance—excellent creature!—would probably make her feel ill-at-ease in bachelor quarters, if we could change places. Her fur is really almost mangy, and she has nothing to speak of in the way of a tail. But she is a worthy soul. And some day, when the Captain and I are going to town without much luggage—or if she should happen to be collecting in the country,—I will certainly *look up a few of my worst bones for the Fund.*

I really hesitate to approach the subject of my one source of discontent. It seems strange that there should be any crook in a lot so smooth as ours. Plenty to eat and drink, handsome coats, no encumbrances, and a temperament naturally inclined—at least, in my case—towards taking life easy. And yet, as I lay stretched full-length down one of my master's knees the other night, before a delicious fire, and after such a saucerful of creamy tea which he could not drink himself—I kept waking up with

uncomfortable starts, fancying I saw on the edge of the fender—but I will tell the matter in proper order.

I turned round to get my back to it, but I thought of it all the same; and as every hair of my moustaches twitched with the vexation of my thoughts, I observed that my master was pulling and biting at his, and glaring at the fire as if *he* expected to see—however, I do not trouble myself about the crumples in *his* rose-leaves. He is big enough to take care of himself. My own grievance I will state plainly and at once. It may be a relief to my mind, which I sometimes fear will be unhinged by dwelling on the thought of—but to begin.

It will easily be understood that after my arrival at my new home, I waited anxiously for the appearance of the mouse; but it will hardly be credited by any one who knows me, or who knew my grandmother, that I saw it and *let it escape me*. It was seated on the sugar-basin, just as the Captain had described it. The torn ear, the jerking tail, the bright eyes—all were there.

If this story falls into the paws of any young cat who wishes to avoid the mortifications which have embittered my favored existence, let me warn him to remember that a creature who has lived on friendly terms with human beings cannot be judged by common rules. Many a mouse's eye as bright as this one had I seen, but hitherto never one that did not paralyze before my own.

He looked at me—I looked at him. His tail **jerked**—mine responded. Our whiskers twitched—

joy filled my brain to intoxication—I crept—I crouched—I sprang—

He was not spell-bound—he did not even run away. With a cool twinkle of that hateful eye, and one twitch of the ragged ear, he just overbalanced the silver sugar-pot and dropped to the ground, the basin and sugar falling on the top of him with a crash which made me start against my will. I think that start just baulked the lightning flash of my second leap, and he was gone—absolutely gone. To add insult to injury, my master ran in from his bedroom and shouted—“Stealing, Toots? confound you you’ve knocked down my sugar-pot,” and threw both his hair-brushes at me.

I steal?—and, worse still, *I* knock down anything, who have walked among three dozen wine-glasses, on a shelf in the butler’s pantry, without making them jingle! But I must be calm, for there is more to tell.

The mouse never returned. It was something, but it was not enough. My pride had been deeply hurt, and it demanded revenge. At last I felt it almost a grievance that I *did* reign supreme in the Captain’s quarters, that the mouse did not come back—and let me catch him.

Besides our in-door man, my master had an Irish groom, and the groom had a place (something between a saddle-room and a scullery) where *he* said he “kept what the master required,” but where, the master said, Terence kept what was not wanted, and lost what was.

There certainly were, to my knowledge, fifteen empty Day and Martin’s blacking-bottles in one cor-

ner, for I used occasionally to walk over them to keep my feet in practice, and it was in this room that Terence last had conscious possession of the hunting-breeches which were never seen after the Captain's birthday, when Terence threw the clothes-brush after me, because I would not drink the master's health in whisky, and had to take the cleanest of the shoe brushes to his own coat, which was dusty from lying in the corn-chest.

But he was a good-natured creature, and now and then, for a change, I followed him into the saddle-room. I am thankful to say I have never caught mice except for amusement, and a cat of daintier tastes does not exist. But one has inherited instincts—and the musty, fusty, mousey smell of the room did excite me a little. Besides, I practiced my steps among the blacking-bottles.

I was on the top of the most tottering part of the pile one afternoon, when I saw a pair of bead-like eyes, and—yes, I could swear to it—a torn ear. But before I could spring to the ground they vanished behind the corn-chest.

This was how it came about that when the Captain's room was cosiest, and he and his friends were kindest, I used to steal away from luxuries which are dear to every fibre of my constitution, and pat hastily down to the dirty hole, where Terence accumulated old rubbish and misused and mislaid valuables—in the wild hope that I might hear, smell, or see the ragged-eared enemy of my peace.

What hours I have wasted, now blinking with sleep, now on the alert at sounds like the revelries of **mocking mice.**

When I say that I have even risked wet feet, on a damp afternoon, to get there—every cat will understand how wild must have been the infatuation!

I tried to reason myself out of it. "Toots," I would say, "you banished him from your master's room, and you have probably banished him from Terence's. Why pursue the matter farther? So pitiful an object is unworthy of your revenge."

"Very true," I would reply to myself, "but I want a turn in the air. I'll just step down as far as the saddle-room once more, and make myself finally comfortable by looking behind the old barrel. I don't think I went quite round it."

There is no delusion so strong when it besets you, or so complete a failure in its results—as the hope of getting relief from an infatuation by indulging it once more. It grows worse every time.

One day I was stealing away as usual, when I caught my master's eye with a peculiar expression in it. He was gnawing his moustaches too. I am very fond of him, and I ran back to the chair and looked up and mewed, for I wanted to know what was the matter.

"You're a curious cat, Toots," said he; "but I suppose you're only like the rest of the world. I did think you did care a little bit for me. It's only the cream, is it, old fellow? As a companion, you prefer Terence? Eh? Well, off with you!"

But I need hardly say that I would not leave him. It was no want of love for him that led me to the saddle-room. I was not base enough to forget that **he had been my friend in need, even if he had been**

less amiable to me since. All that evening I lay on his breast and slept. *But I dreamed of the mouse!*

The next morning he went out riding.

“He will not miss me now,” thought I. “I will devote the morning to hunting through that wretched room inch by inch, or the last time. It will satisfy me that the mouse is not there, and it really is a duty to try and convince myself of this, that I may be cured of an infatuation which causes annoyance to so excellent a master.”

I hurried off as rapidly as befitted the vigor of the resolution, and when I got into the saddle-room I saw the mouse. And when the mouse saw me he fled like the wind.

I confess that I should have lost him then, but that a hole on which he had reckoned was stopped up, and he had to turn.

What a chase it was! Never did I meet his equal for audacity and fleetness. But I knew the holes as well as he did, and cut him off at every one. Round and round we went—behind the barrel, over the corn-chest, and then he made for the middle of the room.

Now, amongst all the rubbish which Terence had collected about him, there were many old articles of clothing belonging to the Captain, including a pair of long riding-boots, which had been gathering mildew, and stiffening out of shape in their present position ever since I came. One of these was lying on the floor; and just as I was all but upon the mouse, he darted into the boot.

A quiver of delight ran through me. With all his

unwonted sagacity, Master Mouse had run straight into a trap. The boot was wide, and head and shoulders I plunged in after my prey.

I scented him all the way down the leg, but the painful fact is that I could not quite get to the bottom. He must have crouched in the toe or heel, and I could get no farther than the calf. Oh, if my master's legs had but been two inches shorter! I should have clawed into the remotest corner of the foot. As it was, I pushed, I struggled, I shook, I worried the wretched boot—but all in vain.

Only when I was all but choked did I withdraw my head for a gasp of fresh air. And there was the Captain himself, yelling with laughter, and sprawling all over the place in convulsions of unseemly merriment, with those long legs which—but they are not his fault, poor man!

That is my story—an unfinished tale, of which I do not myself know the end. This is the one crook in my luxurious lot—that I cannot see the last of that mouse.

Happily, I don't think that my master any longer misunderstands my attachment to the saddle-room. The other day, he sat scribbling for a long time with a pencil and paper, and when he had done it, he threw the sketch to me, and said, "There, Toots, look at that, and you will see what became of your friend!"

It was civilly meant, and I append the sketch for the sake of those whom it may inform. I do not understand pictures myself



TOOTS AND BOOTS.

"Master Mouse had run straight into a trap. The boot was wide, and head and shoulders I plunged in after my prey." — PAGE 100.

Those boots have a strange fascination for me now. I sit for hours by the mouth of the one where he went in and never came back. Not the faintest squeak from its recesses has ever stirred the sensitive hairs of my watchful ear. He must be starving, but not a nibble of the leather have I heard. I doze, but I am ever on the alert. Nightmares occasionally disturb me. I fancy I see him, made desperate by hunger, creep anxiously to the mouth of the boot, pricking his ragged ear. Once I had a terrible vision of his escaping, and of his tail as it vanished round the corner.

But these are dreams. He has never returned. I suspect that the truth is, that he had a fit from fright, in the toe of the boot, and is dead. Some day Terence will shake out his skeleton.

It grows very cold. This place is full of draughts, and the floor is damp.

He *must* be dead. He never could have lasted so long without a move or a nibble.

And it is tea-time. I think I shall join the Captain.

THE HENS OF HENCASTLE.

(Translated from the German of VICTOR BLÜTHGEN.)

WHAT a hot, drowsy afternoon it was. The blazing sun shone with such a glare upon the farmyard that it was almost unbearable, and there was not a vestige of grass or any green thing to relieve the eye or cast a little shade.

But the fowls in the back yard were not disturbed by the heat the least bit in the world, for they had plenty of time in which to doze, and they were fond of taking a *siesta* in the hottest place that could be found. Certainly the hottest place that afternoon by far, was the yard in which they reposed.

There were five of them—a cock and four hens. Two of the hens were renowned throughout the whole village, for they wore tufts of feathers on their heads instead of the usual red combs ; and the cock was very proud of having such distinguished-looking wives.

Besides which, he was naturally a very stately bird himself in appearance, and had a splendid blackish-green tail and a golden speckled hackle, which shone and glistened in the sun. He had also won many sharp battles with certain young cocks in the neighborhood, whom curiosity about the tufted foreigners had attracted to the yard. The consequence of these triumphs was that he held undisputed dominion

as far as the second fence from the farmyard, and whenever he shut his eyes and sounded his war-clarion, the whole of his rivals made off as fast as wings and legs could carry them.

So the five sat or stood by themselves in the yard, dozing in the sunshine, and they felt bored.

During the middle of the day they had managed to get some winks of sleep, but now the farmer's men began to thresh in a barn close by, making noise enough to wake the dead, so there was small chance of well-organized fowls being able to sleep through the din.

"I wish some one would tell a story," said one of the common hens, as she ruffled all her feathers up on end, and then shook them straight again, for coolness. "I am tired of scrabbling in the dust, and fly-catching is an amusement only suited to sparrows and such vulgar birds."

This was a hit at one of the foreign hens, who had wandered away a little and was pecking at flies on the wall. The two common hens were very fond of vexing the foreign ones, for their feelings were hurt at being reckoned less beautiful and rare.

The tufted fair one heard the remark, and called out spitefully from a distance: "If certain people were not ignorant country bumpkins, they would be able to tell a good story themselves."

"That remark can't apply to me, for I know a great number of stories," replied the common hen, turning her head on one side to show her contempt. "For instance: once upon a time there was a hen who laid nothing but soft-shelled eggs——"

“You can’t mean *me* by that story,” said the tufted one, “for I have only laid one soft-shelled egg in my whole life. So there! But do tell me how your interesting story ends—I am so anxious to hear the end.”

“You know that best yourself,” retorted the other.

“Now I’m sure, dear Father Cock, you could tell us something really amusing if you would be so kind,” said the second common hen, who was standing near him. “Those two make one’s life a burthen, with their everlasting wrangling and bickering.”

“Hush!” said the cock, who was standing motionless with one leg in the air, an attitude he often assumed when any very hard thinking had to be done; “I was just trying to recollect one.”

After a pause, he said in a solemn voice: “I will tell you the terrible tale of the troubles of ‘The Hens of Hencastle.’”

Once upon a time—it was the village fair week when, as you know, every one eats and drinks as much as he possibly can, and consequently a great many animals are killed,—the farmer’s cook came into the fowlyard, and after carefully looking over all the chickens, remarked that seven of them would be twisting merrily on the spit next morning. On hearing this, all the fowls were plunged into the deepest despair, for no one felt sure that he would not be of the seven, and no one could guess how the victims would be chosen. Two young cockerels, in their deep perplexity, at last went to the yard-dog, Flaps by name, who was a very great friend of theirs, and to him they cackled out their woes.

“‘Why do you stop here?’ asked Flaps. ‘If you had any pluck at all you would run away.’

“‘Ah! Perhaps so—but who has enough courage for such a desperate step?’ sighed the young cockerels. ‘Why, you yourself are no more courageous than we, else why do you stop here chained up all day, and allow those tiresome children to come and tease you?’

“‘Well,’ replied the dog, ‘I earn a good livelihood by putting up with these small discomforts, and besides that, *I* am not going to be set twisting on a spit. However, if you particularly wish it, we can go away somewhere together; but if we do, I may as well tell you at once, that you will have to feed me.’

“The cockerels, fired by this bold advice, betook themselves at once to the henroost with the courage of young lions; and after a short but animated discussion, persuaded the whole of the cocks and hens to run away and to take Flaps as protector of the community.

“When darkness fell, the dog was unchained for the night as usual, and as soon as the coast seemed clear, he went to the henhouse, pushed back the sliding door with his nose, and let them all out.

“Then he and the whole company stole away as quietly as possible through the yard-gate away out into the open country.

“The fowls flew, and wandered on, the livelong night, perfectly happy in their freedom, and feeding themselves from the sheaves of corn that stood in the stubble-fields.

“Whenever Flaps felt hungry, the hens laid him a

couple of eggs or so which he found far nicer than barley-meal and dog-biscuit.

“When they passed through thinly-populated places where they were not likely to be observed, they marched gaily forward; but whenever there was a chance of danger, they only traveled by night.

“Meanwhile the cook went early in the morning to kill the chickens; but on finding the whole place as empty as Mother Hubbard’s cupboard, she fell into a violent fit of hysterics, and the kitchen-maid and pig-boy had to put her under the pump, and work it hard for a quarter of an hour before they could revive her.

“After some days’ journeying, the wanderers arrived at a large desolate-looking heath, in the middle of which stood an old weather-beaten house, apparently uninhabited. Flaps was sent forward to examine it, and he searched from garret to cellar without finding a trace of a human being. The fowls then examined the neighborhood for two whole days and nights with a like result, and so they determined to take up their abode in the dwelling.

“In they trooped, and set themselves to work to turn it into a strong castle, well fortified against all danger. They stopped up the holes and cracks with tufts of grass, and piled a wall of big and little stones right round the house. When the repairs were completed they called it Hencastle.

“During the autumn some of the fowls ventured forth into the cornfields that lay near the haunts of men, and collected a store of grain to supply them with food during the winter. They kept it on the

floor of a loft, and when spring came they sowed the remainder of the stock in a field, where it produced such an abundant crop that they had plenty of provisions for the following winter.

“Thus they lived a peaceful and happy life, which was so uneventful that it has no history; and Marks, the watchman, who always stood on the coping-stone of the highest chimney to act as sentinel, used constantly to fall asleep, partly from sheer boredom, and partly from the combined effects of old age, good living, and having nothing on earth to do. Flaps, too, had undertaken to guard the castle against intruders, and who at first used to patrol the house carefully inside and out every night, soon came to the conclusion that the game was not worth the candle.

“One chilly evening, about the time of the first snows, when the wind was beginning to whistle over the heath and make strange noises in the castle, two old hens were up in the loft having a chat and picking up a few stray grains of corn for supper. All of a sudden they heard a mysterious ‘Piep.’ ‘Hollo!’ said one, ‘what’s that? no one can be hatching out at this time of the year—it’s impossible; yet surely something said ‘Piep’ down there in the corner.”

“Just then another ‘Piep’ was heard.

“‘I don’t think it sounds *quite* like a young chicken,’ replied the other hen.

“In the middle of their discussion on this knotty point, they descried a couple of mice at the edge of the corn-heap. One of them was sitting on his hind legs, washing his ears and whiskers with his fore-paws, but his wife was gobbling up corn at a rapid

rate, and in this sight the wise and far-seeing old hens discerned the probability of future troubles.

“‘Hollo there! that’s our corn,’ they cried; ‘you musn’t steal it. Of course you may have a few grains in the depth of winter to keep you from starving; but remember, when spring comes again, this sort of thing must stop, and you must go away and never come here any more.’

“‘Piep,’ said the mice, and vanished.

“The two hens told the rest what had happened, but nobody troubled themselves about such an insignificant matter, and some said that the poor old things made mountains out of molehills. Anyhow, in two days everybody, including the wise hens themselves, had forgotten all about it. Later on, that winter, the mice had seven young ones—seven such skinny, thread-limbed, beady-eyed little beasts that no one noticed their arrival.

“Very soon after, almost before any hen had time to look round or think, behold! mice were squeaking in every corner, and there were holes behind every wainscoat, plank, and rafter.

“A year passed away, and when winter returned again the mice came and took the stored corn away in such quantities that every body saw none would be left to sow in the spring.

“Matters had come to a crisis; many and anxious discussions were held amongst the fowls, for good counsel was a thing much sought after at Hencastle.

“At first they took very energetic measures, and many a mouse fell a victim to a well-aimed peck from a cock’s beak; but alas! the mice took energetic

measures also, and resisted to the death, so that many a fowl's leg was bitten to the bone. Much had been said, and much was done, but the mice were more numerous than before.

"The commonwealth then decided on sending three experienced cocks out into the world, to try and find some means for getting rid of the plague of mice.

"The cocks journeyed for one whole day without finding anything to help them in their trouble, but towards evening they came to a wild, rocky mountain side, full of caves and clefts, and made up their minds to stay there for the night; so they crept into a hole under a ledge of rock, put their heads under their wings, and went to sleep.

"In the middle of the night they were roused by the sound of flapping wings, followed by a whispering voice, saying, 'whist—ish,' which soon broke out into a loud 'Whoo—hoo! whoo—hoo!' They popped their heads out of the hole to see what was the matter, and they perceived a great owl sitting on a stump flapping its wings up and down, and rolling its great round eyes about, which glared like red-hot coals in its head.

"'Mice here! Mice here! Whoo—hoo!' it shrieked.

"On hearing this the cocks nudged one another, and said, 'We are in luck's way at last.' Then as the owl still continued to call for mice, one of them plucked up courage and addressed it: 'If you will only come with us, sir, you shall have as many mice as you can eat—a whole house-full, if you like.'

“‘Who may you be?’ hissed the owl, and glared with its fiery eyes into the cleft.

“‘We come from Hencastle, where there are hundreds of mice, who devour our corn day and night.’

“‘Whoo—hoo! I’ll come, I’ll come,’ screamed the owl, snapping its beak with pleasure.

“In the gray of the dawn the fowls sat on the roof-tree, listening to Mark the watchman, who stood on the top of his chimney, and cried :

‘What do I see?
Here come the three!
And with them, I reckon,
A bird with no neck on.’

“Thereupon the owl and the three messengers flew up with a rush to the top of the castle.

“‘Ha! ha! I smell mice,’ shrieked the new comer, and dashed through a hole in the roof from whence it shortly reappeared with a mouse in its claws.

“This sight filled all the fowls with joy; and as they sat on the edge of the roof in a row, they nudged each other, and remarked :

“‘This has indeed been a happy venture.’

“For a few days everything went as smoothly as possible, but after a time the mice began to find out that the owl could only see really well at night, that it saw badly by day, and hardly at all when the mid-day sun was shining through the window into the loft. So they only came out at noon, and then dragged enough corn away into their holes to last them till the following day.

“One night the owl did not catch a single mouse,

and so, being very hungry, drove its beak into some eggs that lay in a corner, and ate them. Finding them more to its taste than the fattest mouse, and much less trouble to catch, henceforth the owl gave up mouse-hunting, and took to egg-poaching. This the fowls presently discovered, and the three wise cocks were sent to tell the owl to go away, as it was no longer of use to anybody, for it never caught mice but only ate eggs.

“‘Whoo—hoo! whoo—hoo! More eggs—give me more eggs, or I’ll scratch your eyes out,’ shrieked the owl, and began to whet its beak on a beam in such a savage manner that the three cocks fled in terror to the top of the chimney.

“‘Having somewhat recovered from their alarm, they went down and told Flaps, who was basking in the sunshine, that the owl must be got rid of.

“‘What, are all the mice eaten, then?’ inquired he.

“‘Alas! answered one of the cocks, ‘the brute will eat nothing but eggs now, and threatens to scratch our eyes out if we don’t supply as many more as it wants.’

“‘Wait till noonday,’ said the dog, ‘and I’ll soon bring the rascal to reason.’

“‘At twelve o’clock Flaps quietly pushed the door open and went up into the loft. There sat the old owl winking and blinking in a corner.

“‘So you are the robber who is going to scratch people’s eyes out,’ said Flaps. ‘For this you must die!’

“‘That remains to be seen,’ sneered the owl; ‘but

eyes I will have, and dogs' eyes too!' and with that it swooped down upon Flaps' head; but the old dog seized the bird between his teeth and killed it, though not before one of his own eyes had been scratched out in the struggle.

"'No matter,' said Flaps; 'I've done my duty, at any rate, and I don't know why I should want more than one eye to see with;'" and so saying, he went back to his post.

"The fowls made a great feast, which lasted the whole day, to celebrate the owl's death.

"But the mice remained in the castle, and continued to increase and multiply. So the three wise cocks had to go forth on a second voyage of discovery, in order to try and find a remedy against the intruders.

"They flew on for a night and a day without any result; but towards morning, on the second day, they alighted to rest in a thick wood, and there, in one of the forest glades, just as the sun was rising, they saw a red-coated animal watching a mouse-hole. It was a fox, who had come out to find something for breakfast. They soon saw him catch a mouse and eat it, and then heard him say, 'Heaven be praised for small mercies! I've managed to secure a light breakfast at last, though I've been hunting all night in vain.'

"'Do you hear that?'" said one of the messengers. 'He considers himself very lucky to have caught a single mouse. That's the sort of animal we want.'

"So the cock called down from the tree: 'I say! below there! Mr. Mouse-eater! you can have a whole

loft-full of such long-tailed vermin as that, if you will come with us. But you must first solemnly swear that you will never eat eggs instead of mice.'

" 'Nothing on earth shall ever tempt me to touch an egg. I swear it most solemnly,' said the fox, staring up into the tree. 'But whence do you come, my worthy masters!'

" 'We live at Hencastle, but no one knows where that is except the mice, who eat us out of house and home.'

" 'You don't say so,' said the fox from below, licking his lips. 'And are there many more such handsome, magnificent birds as you are, at Hencastle?'

" 'Why, of course, the whole place is full of them.'

" 'Then I'll come with you,' said the fox, lowering his eyes, lest the cocks should discern the hungry look in them. 'And if there are a thousand mice in the loft, they shall all soon lick the dust. Ah! you don't know what delicious dainties such—mice—are.'

"This time the fowls had to wait till evening before they heard Mark, the watchman, crowing from his chimney, and calling forth:

· 'Here comes the three!
But what do I see?
Why, the friend that they bring
Is a four-legged thing.'

When the fox got to the outer wall, he sniffed about uneasily and said:

" 'I smell a dog, and I am not fond of the race, nor do they as a rule like me.'

" 'You need not be alarmed,' replied the cocks;

‘there is only one of them here—our friend Mr. Flaps,—and he is always stationed outside the castle ; besides, he is just as glad as we are that you have come to kill the mice.’

“ But in spite of this assurance, the fox did not at all like the idea of going in past Flaps, who stood at the door, showing his teeth, and with the hair down his back standing on end ; but at last, catching sight of a number of plump young chickens looking out at a window, Reynard could resist no longer, and with his mouth watering in anxiety to be among them, he slipped past Flaps like lightning, and scampered up into the loft. Once there, he behaved so affably to the fowls, and especially to some of the oldest and most influential hens, that very soon everyone looked on him as their friend in time of need, and their enthusiasm was brought to a climax when they saw him catch four mice in half as many minutes.

“ In the dead of the night, when all were asleep, Reynard crept up to where the fowls roosted, and finding out where the youngest and fattest were perched, he snapped off the heads of a couple before they had even time to flutter a feather. He then carried them to the window, opened it very gently, dropped the dead bodies out on to the ground beneath, and then sped away down to the house-door and bolted it.

“ When he had done this, he returned to the old hens and woke them by groaning in such a heart-broken manner, that all the fowls crowded round him to know what was amiss.

“ ‘ Alas ! ’ cried he, ‘ it has been my sad lot to

witness a most fearful sight. That dog whom you keep down below to guard the house slipped in at the door, and going to the corner where the lovely young chickens roost, quicker than thought killed two that were more beautiful than angels. I was chasing a mouse under the stairs at the time, and happened to come up just as the dreadful deed was done, and I saw the robber making off with his booty. Only come with me a minute, and you shall see that I have spoken the truth.'

"He took the scared and frightened fowls to the window, and when they looked out, they saw to their horror their guardian Flaps sniffing at the dead bodies on the ground outside.

"'Who would have thought it! said the hens, in an awe-stricken whisper.

"'You may thank me,' said the fox, 'for my presence of mind in bolting the house-door when he ran out, or no one knows how many more he would have killed! If you will take my advice, you will send him about his business; and if you will put me in his place, I can assure you that you shall be protected in quite another manner.'

"'Hi! open the door,' cried Flaps, who saw something was wrong; 'you've got another King Stork, I'll be bound.' But though he rattled and shook the door, no one unbolted it. 'Ah!' sighed Flaps, 'before long the whole pack of idiots will be killed and eaten.' So he scratched open an old hole in the wall that had been stopped up, and crept in. He arrived just in time to hear the old hens giving orders that no more eggs were to be given him, and

that the door was to be kept bolted, in order that he might be obliged either to leave the place or to starve.

“They were all talking at once, and so eagerly, that no one noticed the dog come up behind them. He gave one spring and seized the fox by the throat. The attack was quite unexpected, but the fox fought, writhed, and wriggled like an eel, and just as he was being borne down, he made one desperate snap, and bit off the dog’s ear close to the head.

“‘Well, my ear is done for, but so is this blood-thirsty villian,’ said Flaps, looking down at the fox, which lay dead at his feet; ‘and as for you, you pack of ungrateful fools, one ear is quite enough to listen to you with. Here have I been your faithful comrade for all these years, and yet you believe that I have turned murderer in my old age on the word of this rogue, who did the evil deed himself last night.’

“Now that the panic was over, the fowls felt heartily ashamed of themselves for having been deceived by the fox, and done Flaps such great injustice. So they all asked his pardon, and the feast which they held to celebrate their deliverance from the fox was even more magnificent than the last, and it went on for two whole days.

Hencastle was *en fête* for a time, but it was a very short time. For the mice were no less glad than the fowls that their enemy was dead; and now that both he and the owl had disappeared, they came out fearlessly at all hours of the day, and lived a life quite free from trouble and care.

“Not so the fowls. What was to be done with the ever-increasing colony of corn-stealers? The more the fowls meditated, the more the mice squeaked and played about, and the more corn they dragged away into their holes. There was even a rumor that some one meddled with the eggs.

“There was nothing for it but to despatch the three messengers a third time, with directions to be more vigilant and careful than before. Away they flew, farther than ever. The first chance of help that arose was from a couple of cats and a kite, who seemed likely to perform the required work, but the cocks declined to accept their aid, feeling that the Hencastle had suffered too much already from two-winged and four-legged protectors.

“At length the messengers reached a bit of waste ground close to a village, and there they saw an extremely grimy-looking gipsy sitting on a bank. He knocked the ashes out of his black pipe, and muttered, ‘I’ve the luck of a dog! Here am I with a lot of the best mouse-traps in the world, and I haven’t sold one this blessed day!’

“‘Here’s luck!’ said the wise birds. ‘That is exactly the man for us; he is neither two-winged nor four-legged, so he will be quite safe.’

“They flew down at once to the ratcatcher and made their proposition. He laughed softly and pleasantly to himself, and accepted their invitation without any demur, and started at once with a light step and lighter heart for Hencastle.

“Two days after this, the fowls heard Mark the watchman, crowing away lustily from his chimney-pot:

What do I see?
Here come the three!
And the black beast they bring
Has no tail and no wing.'

"But," added the sentinel in less official language, 'he carries a bundle of things that look like little houses made of wire.'

"The gipsy was at once taken up to the loft, and having, luckily, a few scraps of strong-smelling bacon left over from his last night's supper, he struck a light and managed to make a small fire in the long-disused grate with some bits of dry grass and chips. He then frizzled some bacon and baited his traps, and in less than ten minutes he had filled them all, for the mice had never smelt such a delicious thing as fried bacon before, and besides, they were new to the wiles of man.

"The fowls were wild with delight, and in their thankfulness they bethought them of a special mark of favor, and every hen came clucking up to him and laid an egg at his feet.

"For about a week the gipsy did nothing but catch mice and eat eggs; but all things must have an end, and the bacon ran out, just when the gipsy had come to the conclusion that he was heartily sick of egg-diet. Being a man of action, he put out his hand suddenly and caught the fattest and nicest young chicken within reach, and promptly wrung its neck.

"Oh, what a row there was in the henroost! The cocks began to crow loud enough to split their throats, and the hens to fly about and cackle. The man was nearly deafened, and yelled out at the top

of his voice, 'What do you expect, you fools? Mice can only be caught with meat, and meat I must and will have too. He then let them rave on, and quietly and methodically continued to pluck his chicken. When it was ready, he made a fire and began to roast it.

"In the meanwhile, Flaps had heard all the noise and outcry, and as it showed no signs of abating, he thought the man was most likely in mischief, so he went into the castle.

"'Oh! Woe! Misery! Horror! Despair!' cried all the fowls at once as soon as they saw him. 'The murderer has slain young Scratchfoot the cock, and is just going to roast him!'

"'You're a dead man,' growled Flaps to the rat-catcher, as soon as he got up to the loft.

"'I'm not so sure of that, my fine cur,' said the man, taking hold of the cudgel he had brought with him, and tucking up his sleeves.

"But the brave old dog sprang at him and bit him so severely that he uttered a savage groan, and dealt Flaps a heavy blow with his cudgel. This nearly broke the dog's leg and obliged him to relax his hold, on which the gipsy dashed downstairs and ran away with such speed that Flaps on three legs had no chance of overtaking him.

"'Wait a bit!' cried the man from afar. 'I'll remember you!' And then his retreating figure became smaller and smaller on the heath until at last it disappeared altogether.

"This time the fowls had no heart for a feast. They sat brooding and moping in rows on the raf-

ters, for they began to see very clearly that it was quite hopeless to try and get rid of the mice.

“Poor old Flaps, too, was very ill. A good many days elapsed before he could get about, and for years he walked lame on his injured leg.

“One morning as the fowls were listlessly wandering about, wondering what was to happen next, Mark, the watchman, was heard crowing away in a very excited manner :

‘What do I see?
Twenty and three!’

“‘What do you see?’ cried they all in a great fright. ‘Twenty and three what?’

“‘An army of soldiers dressed in smock frocks. They are armed with pitchforks, and the black gipsy is their general.’

“The fowls flew up like a cloud to the roof, and sure enough they saw the rat-catcher coming across the heath with a crowd of villagers towards the castle.

“When they broke the doleful news to Flaps, he said, ‘That scoundrel of a man has betrayed our hiding-place, and we must wander forth again. Get ready, and keep up your spirits, and remember that in any case we should not have been able to stay here much longer, on account of the mice.’

“So the hens filled their crops as full as possible, and escaped with Flaps out at the back door.

“When the country-folk got to the house, they found nothing in it but a small heap of corn ; so they fell upon the gipsy and half killed him for having

brought them on a fool's errand. Then they divided what little corn there was left, and went away.

"As to the mice they were left to whistle for their food.

"So ends the tale of the Hens of Hencastle."

'And a very fine tale it is, too," said one of the stranger-hens who had been asleep all the time, and woke up with a jump. "It was deeply interesting." The threshers happened to have stopped to rest for a moment, or she would never have woke at all.

"Of course it was!" said the cock, full of dignity; and he shook his feathers straight.

"But what became of the fowls afterwards?" asked one of the common hens.

"I never tell a hen a secret," said the cock; and he strutted off to hunt for worms.

FLAPS.

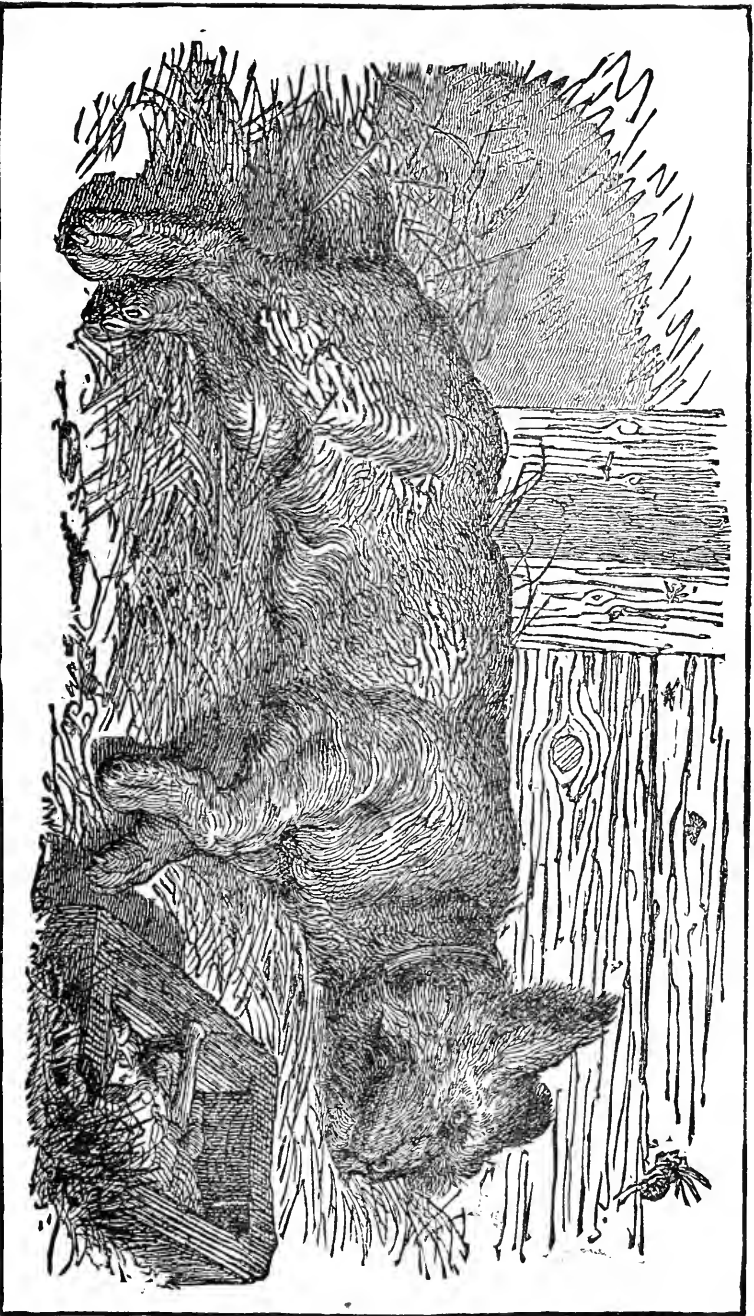
A SEQUEL TO "THE HENS OF HENCASTLE."

AND what became of Flaps after they all left Hencastle? Well, he led his company on and on, but they could find no suitable place to settle in; and when the fowls recovered from their fright, they began to think that they had abandoned the castle too hastily, and to lay the blame on Flaps

Mark himself said that possibly he might have over-estimated the number of the invaders. There might not have been twenty-three, but really Flaps was in such a hurry for the news, and one must say something when it is one's duty to make a report.

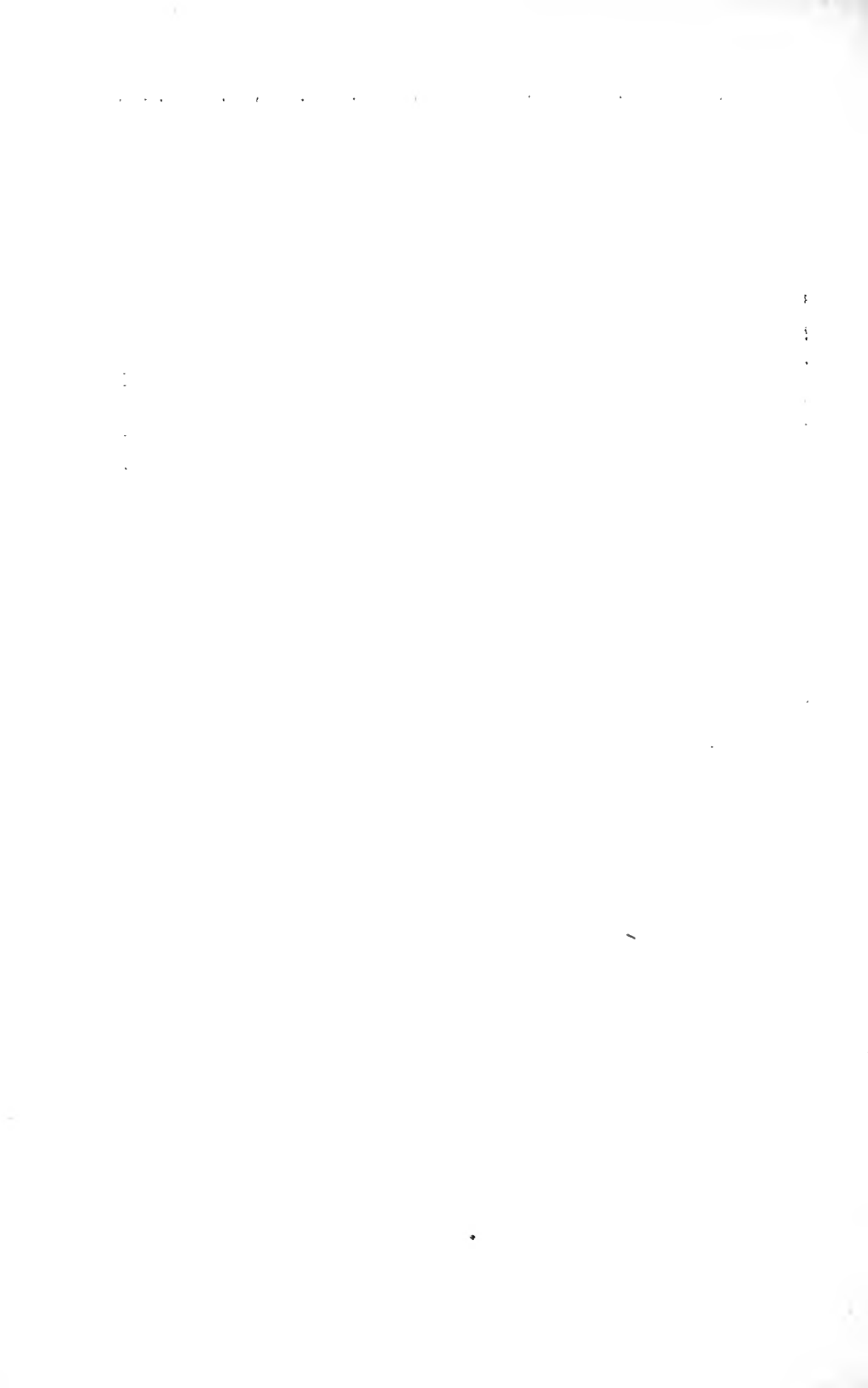
The three wise cocks objected to speak of themselves or their services, but they had had some experience on behalf of the community in times of danger, and in their opinion there had been a panic, and the hasty action taken by Flaps was injudicious and regrettable.

The oldest hen of Hencastle shook her feathers to show how much Flaps was in the wrong, and then puffed them out to show how much she was in the right; and after clearing her throat almost as if she were going to crow, she observed very shrilly that she "didn't care who contradicted her when she said that the common sense of the Mother of a Family



FLAPS.

“First an eye, then an ear, then a leg,” the old dog growled to himself; “and there’s not a fowl with a feather out of him. But I’ve done my duty, and that’s enough.” -- PAGE 123.



was enough to tell *her* that an old dog, who had lost an eye and an ear and a leg, was no fit protector for the feminine and the young and the inexperienced."

The chief cock was not so free of his opinions as the chief hen, but he grumbled and scolded about everything, by which one may make matters amply unpleasant without committing oneself or incurring responsibility.

Another of the hens made a point of having no opinion. She said that was her way, she trusted everybody alike and bore her share of suffering, which was seldom small, without a murmur. But her good wishes were always at anyone's service, and she would say that she sincerely hoped that a sad injustice had not been done to the red-haired gentleman with the singularly agreeable manners, who would have been gatekeeper of Hencastle at this moment if it had not been for Flaps.

Poor Flaps! Well might he say, "One ear is enough to listen to you with, you pack of ungrateful fools!"

He was beginning to find out that, as a rule, the Helpless have a nice way with them of flinging all their cares upon the Helpful, and reserving their own energies to pick holes in what is done in their behalf; and that they are apt to flourish, in good health and poor spirits, long after such friends as Flaps have been worn out, bit by bit, in their service.

"First an eye, then an ear, then a leg," the old dog growled to himself; "and there's not a fowl with a feather out of him. But I've done my duty and that's enough."

Matters went from bad to worse. The hens had no corn, and Flaps got no eggs, and the prospect of either home or food seemed very remote. One evening it was very rainy, the fowls roosted in a walnut-tree for shelter, and Flaps fell asleep at the foot of it.

“Could anything be more aggravating than that creature’s indifference?” said Hen No. 2. “Here we sit, wet to the skin, and there he lies asleep! Dear me! I remember one of my neck feathers got awry once, at dear old Hencastle (the pencilling has been a good deal admired in my time, though I say it that shouldn’t), and the Red-haired Gentleman noticed it in a moment. I remember he put his face as close to mine as I am to you, but in the most gentlemanly manner, and murmured so softly:

“Excuse me—there’s just one of those lovely little feathers the least bit in the world——”

“I believe it was actually between his lips, when we were interrupted, and I had to put it tidy myself. But we might all be plucked as bare as poor young Scratchfoot before Flaps would think of smoothing us down. Just hear how he snores! Ah! it’s a trying world, but I never complain.”

“I do, though,” said the chief hen. “I’m not one to put up with neglect. Hi, there! are you asleep?” And scratching a bit of the rough bark off the walnut-tree, she let it drop on to Flaps’ nose.

“I’m awake,” said Flaps; “what’s the matter?”

“I never knew anyone snore when he was awake before,” said the hen; and all the young cockerels chuckled.

“Well I believe I was napping,” said Flaps. “Damp weather always makes me sleepy, and I was dreaming of the old farmyard.”

“Poor old farm!” sighed Hen No. 2. “We had board and lodging there, at any rate.”

“And now we’ve neither, said Hen No. 1. “Mr. Flaps, do you know that we’re wet to the skin, and dying of starvation, whilst you put your nose into your great-coat pocket and go to sleep?”

“You’re right,” said Flaps. “Something must be done this evening. But I see no use in taking the whole community about in the rain. We will send out another expedition.”

“Cock-a-doodle-doo!” screamed the three wise ones; “that means that we’re to face the storm whilst you have another nap, eh?”

“It seems an odd thing,” said the chief cock, scratching his comb with his claw, “that Flaps never thinks of going himself on these expeditions.”

“You’re right,” said Flaps. “It is an odd thing, for times out of mind I’ve heard our old friend, the farmer, say, ‘If you wan’t a thing done—Go; if not—Send.’ This time I shall go. Cuddle close to each other, and keep up your spirits. I’ll find us a good home yet.”

The fowls were much affected by Flaps’ magnanimity, and with one voice they cried: “Thank you, dear Flaps. Whatever you decide upon will do for us.”

And Mark added, “I will continue to act as watchman.” And he went up to the top of the tree as Flaps trotted off down the muddy road.

All that evening and far into the night it rained and rained, and the fowls cuddled close to each other to keep warm, and Flaps did not return. In the small hours of the morning the rain ceased, and the rain-clouds drifted away, and the night-sky faded and faded till it was dawn.

“Cock-a-doodle-doo!” said Mark, and all the fowls woke up.

“What do you see and hear from the tree-top, dear Mark?” said they. “Is Flaps coming?”

“Not a thing can I see
From the top of the tree,
But a long, winding lane
That is sloppy with rain;”

replied Mark. And the fowls huddled together again, and put their heads back under their wings.

Paler and paler grew the gray sky, and at last it was broken with golden bars, and at the first red streak that caught fire behind them, Mark crowed louder than before, and all the hens of Hencastle roused up for good.

“What do you see and hear from the tree-top, dear Mark?” they inquired. “Is Flaps coming?”

“Not a sound do I hear,
And I very much fear
That Flaps, out of spite,
Has deserted us quite;”

replied Mark. And the fowls said nothing, for they were by no means at ease in their consciences.

Their delight was proportionately great when, a

few minutes later, the sentinel sang out from his post :

“ Here comes Flaps, like the mail
And he’s waving his tail.”

“ Well, dear, dear Flaps ! ” they all cackled as he came trotting up, “ Where is our new home, and what is it like ? ”

“ Will there be plenty to eat ? ” asked the cocks with one crow.

“ Plenty,” replied Flaps.

“ Shall we be safe from mice, owls, wild beasts, and wild men ? ” cried the hens.

“ You will,” answered Flaps.

Is it far, dear Flaps ? ”

It is very near,” said Flaps ; “ but I may as well tell you the truth at once—it’s a farmyard.”

“ Oh !—” said all the fowls.

“ We may be roasted, or have our heads chopped off,” whimpered the young cockerels.

“ Well, Scratchfoot was roasted at Hencastle,” said Flaps ; “ and he wasn’t our only loss. One can’t have everything in this world ; and I assure you, if you could see the poultry-yard—so dry under foot, nicely wired in from marauders ; the most charming nests, with fresh hay in them ; drinking-troughs ; and then at regular intervals, such abundance of corn, mashed potatoes, and bones, that my own mouth watered at—are served out—”

“ That sounds good,” said the young cockerels.

“ Ahem ! ahem ! ” said the chief cock. “ Did you see anything very remarkable—were the specimens

of my race much superior in strength and good looks?——”

“My dear cock!” said Flaps; “there is not a tail or a comb or a hackle to touch you. You’ll be cock of the walk in no time.”

“Ahem! ahem!” said the chief cock modestly. “I have always had a sort of fatality that way. Pray, my dears, don’t look so foolish and deplorable, but get the young people together, and let us make a start. Mr. Flaps is a person of strong common sense, a quality for which I myself have always been remarkable, and I thoroughly endorse and support his excellent advice, of which I am the best judge. I have very much regretted of late to observe a tendency in this family (I say a tendency, for I hope it goes no further) to undervalue Mr. Flaps, and even (I hardly like to allude to such reprehensible and disgusting absurdity) to recall the memory of a vulgar red-haired impostor, who gained a brief entrance into our family circle. I am not consulted as I should be in these fluctuations of opinion, but there are occasions when it is necessary that the head of a family should exercise his discretion and his authority, and, so to speak, put down his claw. I put down my claw. We are going to Mr. Flaps’ farm-yard. Cock-a-doodle-doo! Cock-a-doodle-doo!”

Now, when the head of a family says “Cock-a-doodle-doo!” there is nothing more to be said. So to the farm-yard the whole lot of them went, and were there before the sun got one golden hair of his head over the roof of the big barn.

And only Mark, as they all crowded into their new

home, turned his head round over his back to say "And you, Flaps ; what shall you do ?"

"Oh, I shall be all right," said Flaps. "Good-by and good luck to you."

It cannot be said that Flaps was positively in high spirits when he had settled his protégés in their new home in the farm-yard, and was left alone ; but there are some good folk who contrive to make duty do the work of pleasure in this life, and then a piece of business fairly finished is as good as a treat.

It is not bread and bones, however, and Flaps was very hungry—so hungry that he could not resist the temptation to make his way towards the farm-house, on the chance of picking up some scraps outside. And that was how it came about, that when the farmer's little daughter Daisy, with a face like the rosy side of a white-heart cherry set deep in a lilac print hood, came back from going with the dairy lass to fetch up the cows, she found Flaps snuffing at the back door, and she put her arms round his neck (they reached right round with a little squeezing) and said : "Oh, I never knew you'd be here so early ! You nice thing !"

And Flaps' nose went right into the print hood, and he put out his tongue and licked Daisy's face from the point of her chin up her right cheek to her forehead, and then from her forehead down her left cheek back to her chin, and he found that she was a very nice thing too.

But the dairymaid screamed, "Good gracious ! where did that nasty strange dog come from ? Leave him alone, Miss Daisy, or he'll bite your nose off."

“He won’t!” said Daisy indignantly. “He’s the dog Daddy promised me;” and the farmer coming out at that minute, she ran up to him crying, “Daddy! Isn’t this my dog?”

“Bless the child, no!” said the farmer; “it’s a nice little pup I’m going to give thee. Where did that dirty old brute come from?”

“He would wash,” said little Daisy, holding very fast to Flaps’ coat.

“Fine washing too!” said the dairymaid. “And his hair’s all lugs.”

“I could comb them,” said Daisy.

“He’s no but got one eye,” said the swineherd. “Haw! haw! haw!”

“He sees me with the other,” said Daisy, “He’s looking up at me now.”

“And one of his ears gone!” cried the dairy lass. “He! he! he!”

“Perhaps I could make him a cap,” said Daisy, “as I did when my doll lost her wig. It had pink ribbons and looked very nice.”

“Why, he’s lame of a leg,” guffawed the two farming-men. “See, missy, he hirkles on three.”

“I can’t run very fast,” said Daisy, “and when I’m old enough to, perhaps his leg will be well.”

“Why, you don’t want this old thing for a playfellow, child?” said the farmer.

“I do! I do!” wept Daisy.

“But why, in the name of whims and whamsies?”

“Because I love him,” said Daisy.

When it comes to this with the heart, argument is wasted on the head; but the farmer went on:

“Why he’s neither useful nor ornamental. He’s been a good dog in his day, I daresay ; but now——”

At this moment Flaps threw his head up in the air and sniffed, and his one eye glared, and he set his teeth and growled.

He smelt the gipsy, and the gipsy’s black pipe, and every hair stood on end with rage.

“The dog’s mad !” cried the swineherd, seizing a pitchfork.

“You’re a fool,” said the farmer (who wasn’t). “There’s some one behind that haystack, and the old watch-dog’s back is up. See! there he runs ; and as I’m a sinner, it’s that black rascal who was loitering round, the day my ricks were fired, and you lads let him slip. Off after him, for I fancy I see smoke.” And the farmer flew to his haystacks.

Hungry and tired as he was, Flaps would have pursued his old enemy, but Daisy would not let him go. She took him by the ear and led him indoors to breakfast instead. She had a large basin of bread-and-milk, and she divided this into two portions, and gave one to Flaps and kept the other herself. And as she says she loves Flaps, I leave you to guess who got most bread-and-milk.

That was how the gipsy came to live for a time in the county gaol, where he made mousetraps rather nicely for the good of the rate-payers.

And that was how Flaps, who had cared so well for others, was well-cared for himself, and lived happily to the end of his days.

* * * * *

“Why, it’s in print !” said Father Cock ; “and I

said as plain as any cock could crow, that it was a secret. Now, who let it out?"

"Don't talk to me about secrets," said the fair foreigner; "I never trouble my head about such things."

"Some people are very fond of drawing attention to their heads," said the common hen; "and if other people didn't think more of a great unnatural-looking chignon than of all the domestic virtues put together, they might have their confidences respected."

"It's all very well," said Father Cock, "but you're all alike. There's not a hen can know a secret with out going and telling it."

"Well, come!" said a little Bantam hen, who had newly arrived; "whichever hen told it, the cock must have told it first."

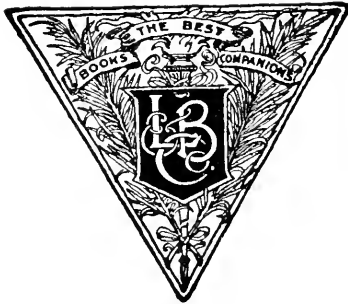
"What's that ridiculous nonsense you're talking?" cried the cock; and he ran at her and pecked her well with his beak.

"Oh! oh! oh!" cried the Bantam.

Dab, dab, dab, pecked the cock.

"Now! has anybody else got anything to say on the subject?"

But nobody had. So he flew up on to the wall, and cried "Cock-a-doodle-do!"



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