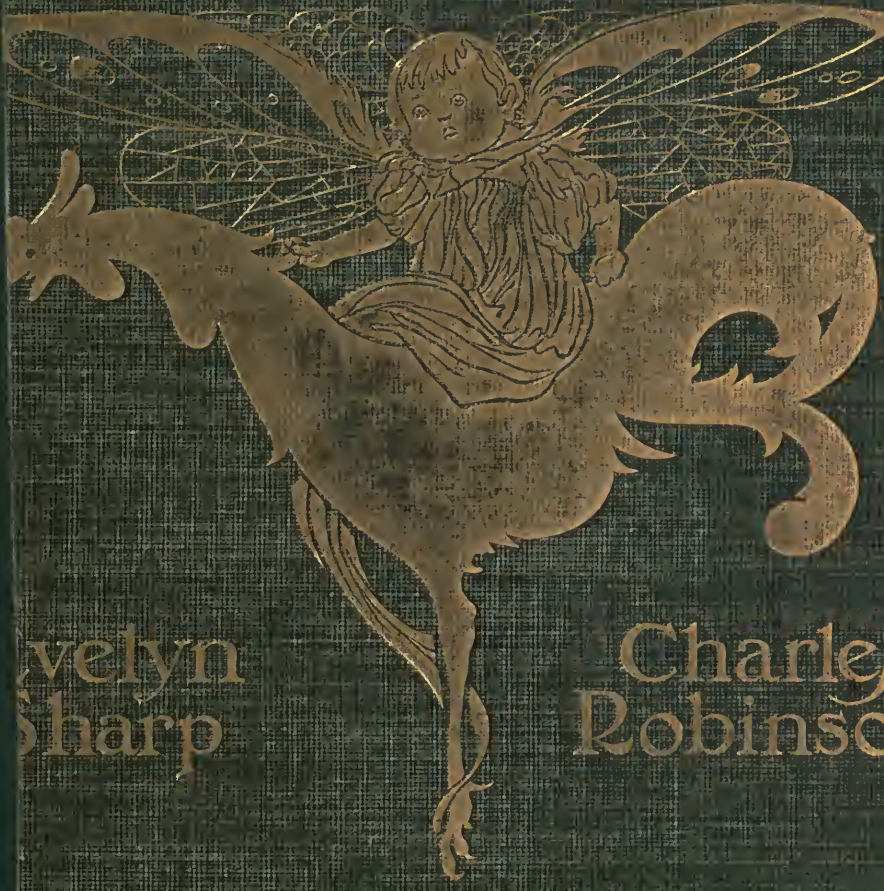
HE STORY OF THE VEATHERCOCK



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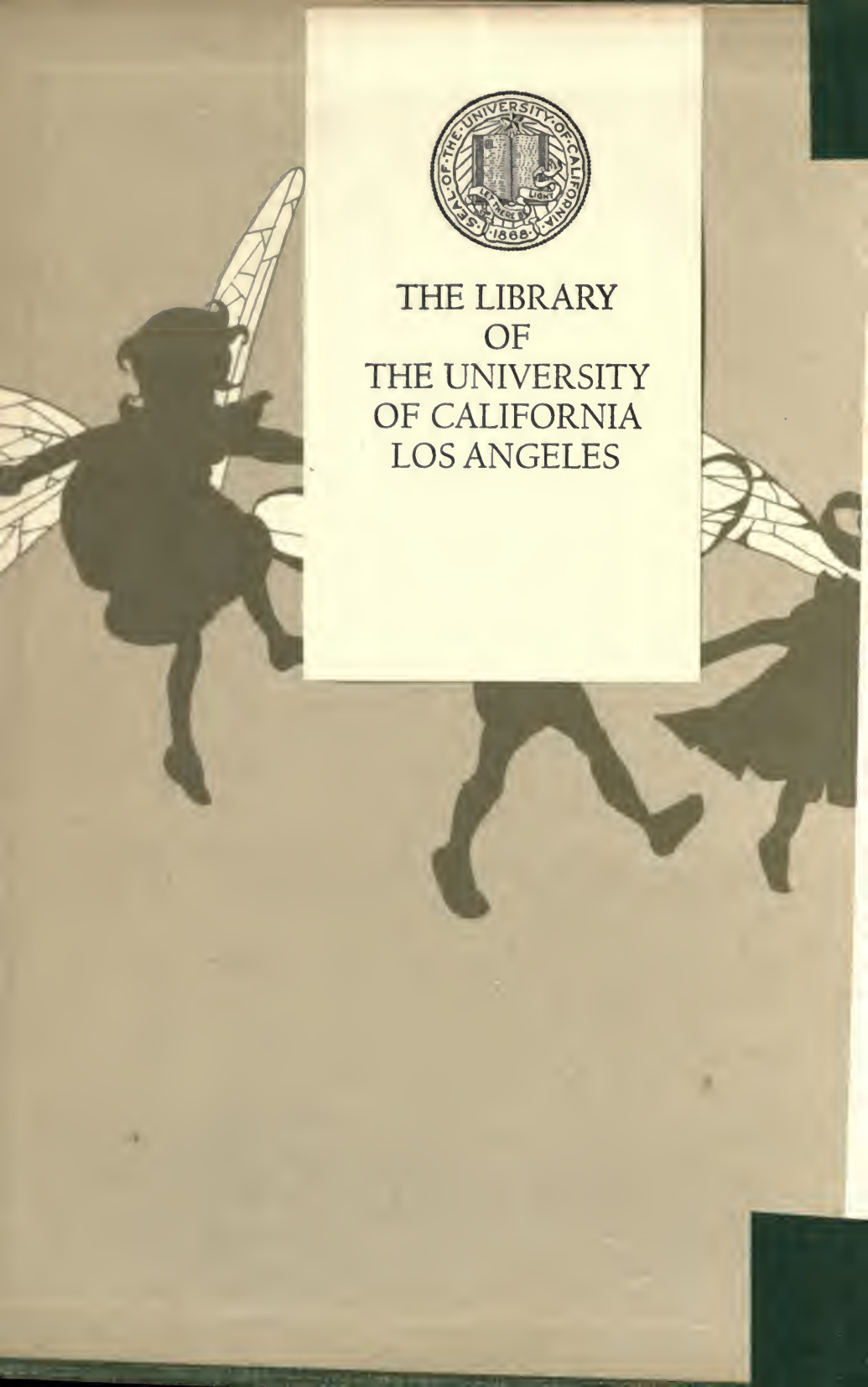


The
Story
of
the
Weathercock

To
Leila Hyams

Wishing you a
life time of Happy New
years and an eternity
of Merry Christmas days.

Alice Hills

Kindness of Santa Claus.

THE WEATHERCOCK WAS MUCH TALLER THAN HIMSELF;

THE STORY of the WEATHERCOCK

TOLD BY

Evelyn Sharp

ILLUSTRATED BY

Charles Robinson

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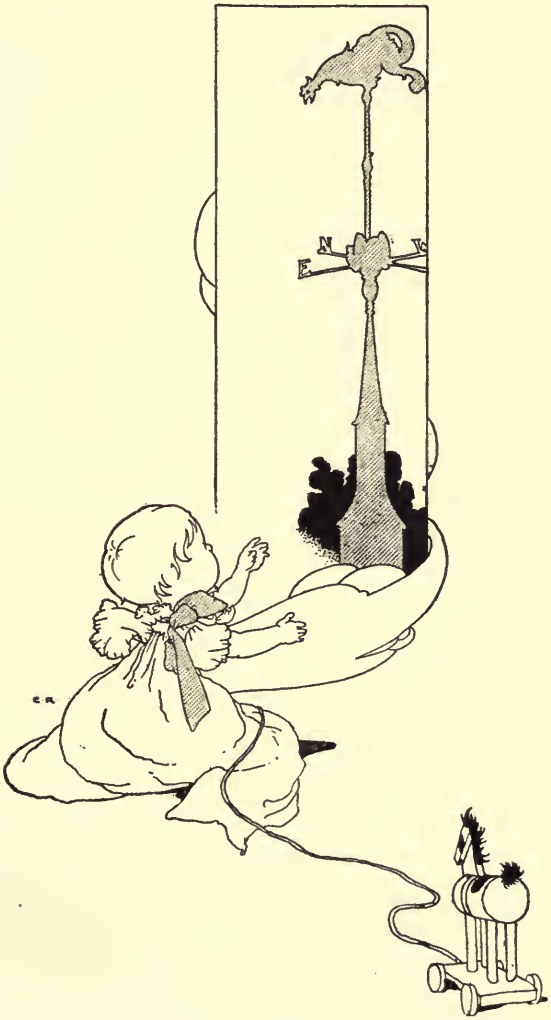
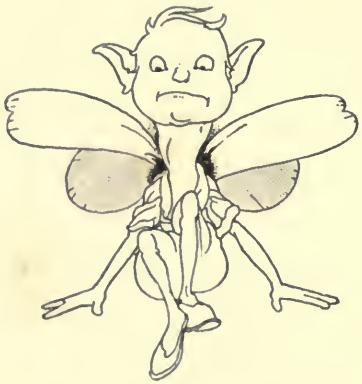
To the One
who understood





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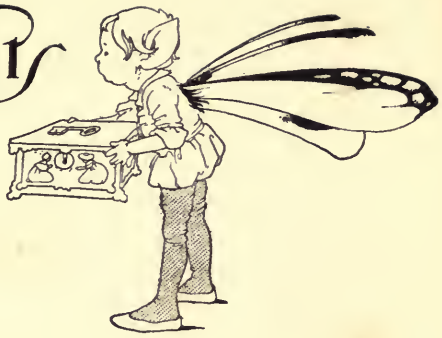

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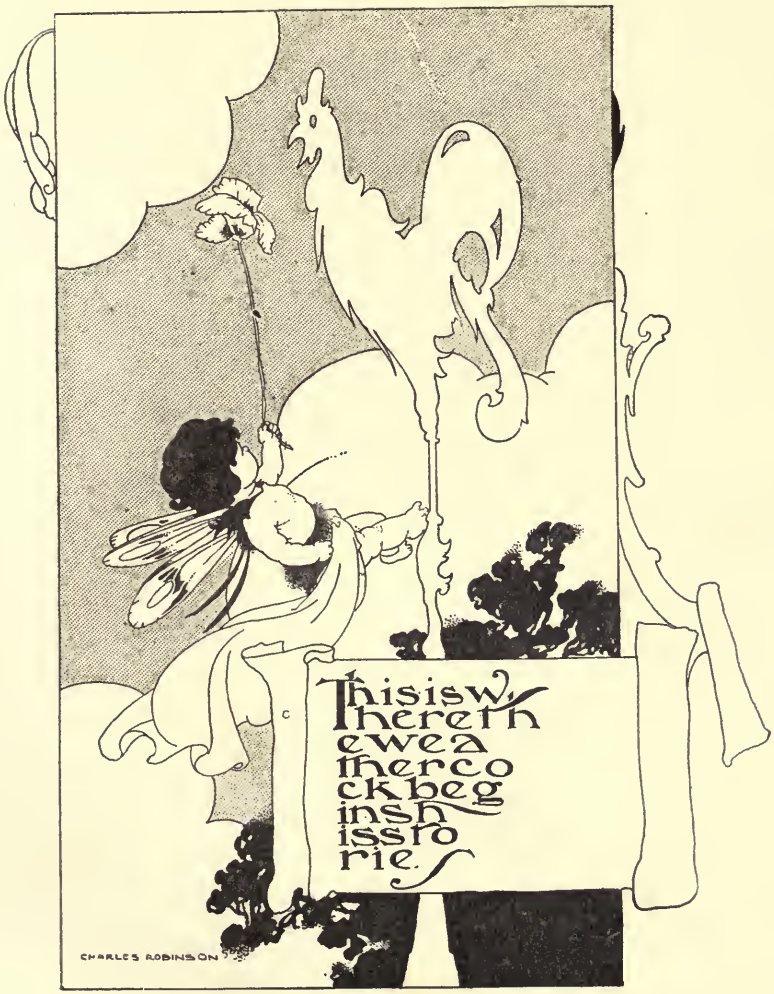
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CHARLES ROBINSON

To Begin With

IN a little village there was a church, and on the top of the church stood a Weathercock. He did not stand still; at least, not very often. Most of the time he turned about, first this way, and then that way, as if he wanted to see what was going on in all parts of the world at once. He certainly saw more than other people; but then, other people are just as tall as themselves and no taller, so they do not see very far. The Weathercock was much taller than himself; he was as tall as the church spire, and only a giant could see as far as he could. But there were no giants in that part of England just then, so the Weathercock saw more than anybody else; and he was very proud of himself.

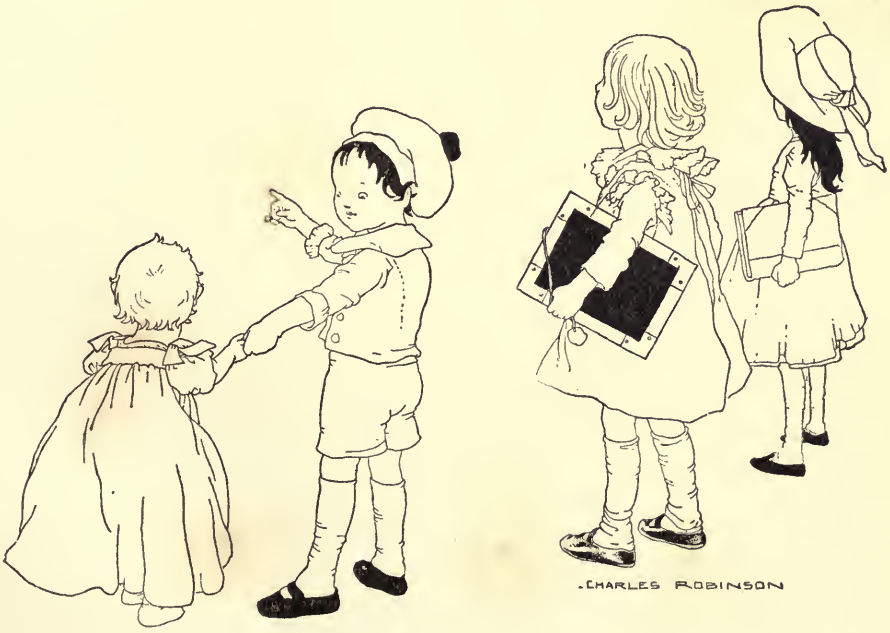
"Look at me, look at me!" he crowed, as the children came running out of school. "I can see right over the edge of the world; I can see all round the sun and all round the

moon. Nobody can see as far as I can. I am a most important bird."

But the children did not seem to hear a word he said. "Why does the Weathercock live so far off?" they wondered.

"Because he is out of the way up there, and a good job too!" said the schoolmaster's wife, as she brought out her Baby in his cradle and set it on the doorstep. The schoolmaster's wife was busy, and had no time to talk to idle children, especially when they danced round her and asked questions she could not answer.

The schoolmaster was not busy, because school was just



over. Besides, he had been asking questions himself all the morning, so it was only fair that he should answer one for a change.

"The Weathercock is there to show which way the wind blows," he said with an air of great wisdom. "When his head is pointing westwards, the wind is coming from the west. When it points northwards——"

The schoolmaster did not say any more, for the children ran away. They were very fond of the schoolmaster, but they did not want lessons out of school hours. No more did the Weathercock. In fact, he was so much upset by the schoolmaster's explanation that he spun round and round several times before he could trust himself to speak.

"Don't listen to him!" he screamed out to the children. "There is not a word of truth in what he says. I live up here because I want to, and it is only by accident that I show which way the wind blows. The wind brings the news, and I should not dream of turning my back on it, like any common chimney-cowl!"

But the children went on playing, for they could not understand what the Weathercock said; and the schoolmaster's Baby lay and blinked in the sunshine. The Weathercock felt much depressed.

"No one would say that I was a royal bird," he complained. "No one would say that I came here straight from the Fairy Queen's own farmyard. I might be a plain barn-

door fowl, instead of a magic cock with golden feathers and a golden brain. You will never have any golden brains, you silly little girls and boys down there!"

Having reminded himself of his own importance, the Weathercock felt better, and was even able to take some interest in the schoolmaster's Baby, who at that moment stretched out his fists and began to roar. The schoolmaster's wife seemed to understand the Baby's conversation perfectly, for she hastened out of the house with a bottle, which she put into the Baby's cradle; and the Baby stopped roaring.

"It's a pity he's so backward in talking," remarked the neighbour's wife, who sat sewing on the next doorstep.

"He speaks plainly enough for me," said the schoolmaster's wife, as she went indoors again.

"The schoolmaster's Baby is backward!" said the children to one another; and they wondered how this could be, for the Baby lived in the same house as the schoolmaster, and could surely have lessons all day long without stopping.

"He has about as much sense as that Weathercock," said the neighbour's wife, as soon as the schoolmaster's wife was out of hearing.

Just as she said this, the Baby behaved in a most peculiar way. He let the bottle drop out of his mouth, kicked his legs in the direction of the Weathercock, and crowed.

"Pretty bird!" crowed the Baby. "Shining bird, all gold! I like you, pretty gold bird."

The Weathercock could hardly believe his ears for joy. "At last I am appreciated!" he exclaimed.

"What silly noises that Baby makes!" remarked the neighbour's wife from her doorstep.

The Weathercock did not agree with the neighbour's wife.

He had grave personal reasons for thinking that her conversation was much more foolish than the conversation of the schoolmaster's Baby.

"How is it that the other children cannot understand what I say to them?" wondered the Weathercock.

"The other children have learnt the grown-up language," explained the schoolmaster's Baby; "so they have forgotten yours."

"Can you speak the grown-up language?" asked the pretty gold bird.

"No," answered the Baby; "I can only crow."

"Exactly my case!" exclaimed the Weathercock. "No doubt, that is why we understand each other so well. Can all the babies crow in this place?"

"Not a bit of it!" said the Baby. "All the other babies talk. I am the only backward baby."

"You are the only baby in the village who has any sense," declared the Weathercock; "and, if you like, I will tell you my story."

"Oh, do make haste!" cried the Baby in great excitement. "If you are not quick, they may come and take me away. I never know when I am going to be popped into a bath, or dressed up in a tight hot bonnet and taken out to tea."

"Ah," said the Weathercock sympathetically, "that is the sort of thing that used to happen to me in the Fairy

"That is true," said the Weathercock; "I hold a very high position. Anybody can be a messenger bird, and do as he is told; but, as the Fairy Queen said when she sent me up here, only a bird with golden feathers and a golden brain can see right over the edge of the world and all round the moon and all round the sun. There is nothing I cannot see, and that is a great help sometimes to the Fairy Queen."

"Do you ever go back to Fairyland?" asked the Baby.

"Only once a year," answered the Weathercock; "on the longest night, which belongs to the shortest day. But that is not until winter comes, and this is only spring-time. I shall have to wait till all the pink blossoms on your apple tree have turned to apples, and till all the apples have been picked, and till all the leaves have turned brown and dropped off. It is a long time to wait!" And the Weathercock dropped a golden tear and turned his back for a moment on the schoolmaster's Baby.

"How that Weathercock wants oiling!" said the neighbour's wife from the next doorstep. "And if that was my baby I shouldn't allow him to lie there in the sun, staring up at nothing, like that. No wonder he's backward!"

But the backward Baby lay in his cradle and kicked for happiness. At last he had somebody besides his mother to talk to. He thought that if he kicked hard enough he would be able to reach the sun and the blue sky.

"Are there any more weathercocks up in the blue sky?" he asked, when the pretty gold bird swung round again.

The Weathercock stood suddenly very stiff and still. It was easy to see that he was most annoyed at the Baby's question.

"There may be," he answered coldly; "but I certainly do not know them."

The Idle Boy

I WISH I could see as far as you can, pretty gold bird," sighed the Baby, one sunny spring day. "I am growing dreadfully tired of this doorstep."

The Weathercock smiled in a superior manner. "I, as I mentioned before, can see right over the edge of the world," he crowed.

"Is that as far as the road over the bridge?" asked the Baby. He had often heard people mention the road over the bridge, though they never said anything about the edge of the world.

The Weathercock span round two or three times, just to show that he was not fixed to a doorstep, like some people. "Dear me, yes," he answered; "the road over the bridge is

so near at hand that it is scarcely worth while even to look at it."

"What is it like?" asked the Baby eagerly. He thought that if he could once see round the corner of the street, to where the road went over the bridge, he would be the happiest baby in the whole world.

The Weathercock made a polite effort, and condescended to look down at the road over the bridge, though it was so close that anybody who was not a fairy bird could have seen it just as well. "Oh, it curls and twists out of sight over the brow of the hill, like any other fairy road!" he said carelessly.

"What!" cried the Baby, thrilling all over with excitement. "Is it a fairy road?"

"Why, yes," answered the Weathercock. "Every road that curls and twists until it is out of sight is a fairy road. If the right person were to follow that road over the bridge, he would be certain to get to Fairyland in the end. But, very likely, the right person will never think of it."

"I shall think of it," said the Baby to himself very softly. "I am sure I shall be the right person!"

At that moment the Idle Boy came whistling up the street. The Idle Boy was called Jerry. He never knew his lessons. He was nearly always late for school. He gave the schoolmaster more trouble than any other boy in the village. But he knew how to make the schoolmaster's Baby laugh, and that was enough for the schoolmaster's wife. So she made excuses

(B 807) JERRY PLAYS WITH THE SCHOOLMASTER'S BABY 4

for Jerry when people called him idle; she gave him apples and nuts when he was kept in school and had to go without his dinner; she looked the other way when he put a fat bunch of

thistles in the schoolmaster's desk, and she took them out again before the schoolmaster had time to prick his fingers with them. It was no wonder that the Idle Boy loved the schoolmaster's wife.

"Hillo, youngster, aren't you getting tired of that old doorstep?" asked the Idle Boy. It was a half-holiday, or he might

not have been so anxious to stop in front of the school-house.

It was really wonderful, thought the schoolmaster's wife, how that Idle Boy always made her Baby laugh! The other boys, the boys who knew how to read and were never kept in after school, only made him cry.

"You may take him up the road for a bit, if you like, Jerry," she said. "It's such a warm day, it can't hurt him. Wait while I fetch a shawl for his head."

"I don't want a shawl over my head," roared the Baby in a temper. "I want to see the road over the bridge."

"He won't need a shawl if I put him inside my coat, and he'll like to see what is going on," said Jerry, who always seemed to understand what the Baby said, though he could not crow himself. No doubt, though, he knew that it is no fun to go for a walk unless you can see where you are going.

"That's true," said the schoolmaster's wife; and the Baby immediately stopped roaring, though it was not really a bit comfortable inside Jerry's coat, and he could not see very much or very far, because of Jerry's elbow. Still, he was going out into the world for the first time in his life without being covered up with a shawl, and that made him forget everything else.

"Look!" said Jerry. "That's the Blue Griffin up there. Jolly old bird, isn't he?"

The Baby was much obliged to him for this information. He had often heard the Blue Griffin mentioned in conversation,

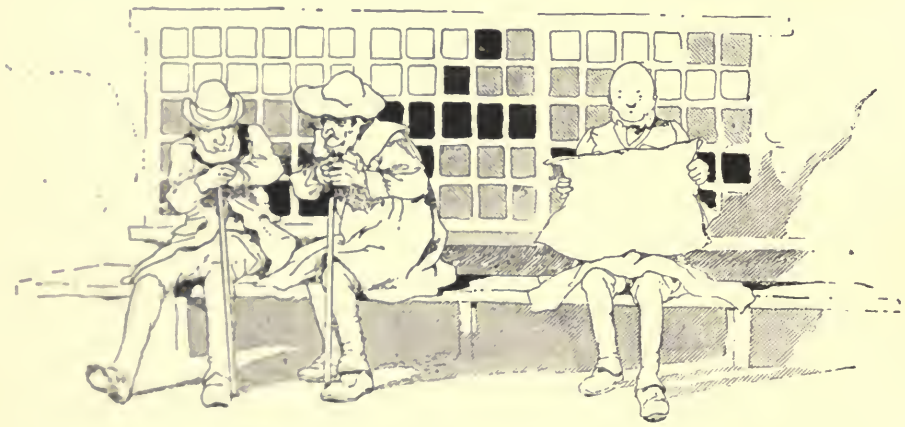
but nothing had ever been said to make him think that the Blue Griffin was a bird. Indeed, from the way people spoke of him, anybody might have thought he was a house. For that matter, he was a very peculiar bird, with his sharp claws, and his funny tail at each end of him; and for a moment or two the Baby thought Jerry must have made a mistake. Then he discovered that the smaller tail, the one that came out of the Blue Griffin's mouth, was really a tongue; so he was a bird with only one tail, after all.

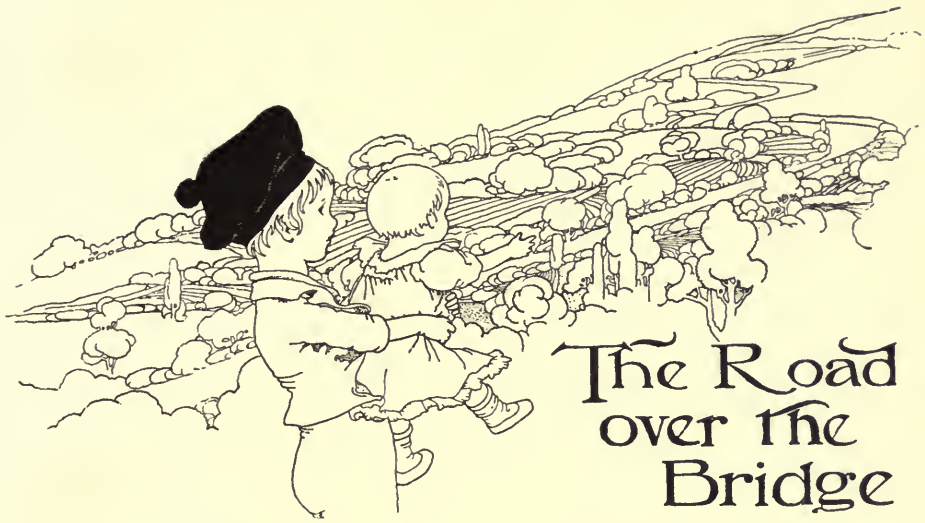
"Can you crow, funny bird with a tail instead of a tongue?" asked the Baby, peeping over the edge of Jerry's arm.

But the Blue Griffin could not crow. He could only creak, as the wind blew him to and fro in the air; and no one in the

village who was under seventy could understand a word he said. That, no doubt, was why there was always a row of old men sitting on the bench in front of the Blue Griffin.

Then the schoolmaster's Baby forgot all about the Blue Griffin, for he had just turned the corner of the street—and he was the happiest baby in the whole world.





The Road over the Bridge

THE road over the bridge was far more exciting than the Weathercock had led the Baby to suppose. It curled and twisted backwards and forwards in the most leisurely manner, so that, when you had been walking along it for quite a long while, you were still only a little way up the side of the hill. The road over the bridge was certainly not in any hurry to get to Fairyland.

The Idle Boy was in no more of a hurry than the road was. He soon stopped walking in the direction of Fairyland, and sat down on the grass at the side of the road. The Baby supposed that this was because he did not know the road was a fairy road.

"Make haste, Idle Boy!" he crowed, stretching out his hands in the direction of Fairyland. "We shall not get there and back before tea time unless we are quick."

"Steady on, my lad," answered the Idle Boy, who evidently did not understand about its being a fairy road. "Don't be in such a hurry. It's much pleasanter to lie here and rest." And he rolled over on his face, and kicked his heels in the air. That was what the Idle Boy liked doing better than anything else in the world.

The Baby lay on his back and kicked too. He rather wished he could make Jerry understand about the road being a fairy road; still, he could not expect everything to happen on the same afternoon, and it was something to be lying on the hillside instead of on that doorstep.

Then the Poet came strolling over the brow of the hill. The Poet lived in the smallest house in the village, close to the bridge. It did not really matter, though, what house the Poet lived in, because he was always out of it.

"You don't look as though you were going far to-day,"

he observed, when he saw two people kicking their heels in the air by the side of the road.

"You can't go far along this road," explained Jerry. "It is such a curly road that it never gets anywhere."

"That is the only kind of road that does get anywhere,"

said the Poet, also lying down and kicking his heels in the air. "The new straight road down in the valley is the one that never gets anywhere. Now, this road takes you to——"

"It takes you to Fairyland," interrupted the Baby, who was tired of being left out of the conversation.

"What is that Baby saying?" enquired the Poet, who evidently did not know how to crow. "He looks as though he can see farther along the road than we can."

"So I can," crowed the Baby. "I can see fairies coming."

And this was true. Down the hillside, from every direction, fairies came dancing. The news had reached Fairyland that there was a baby on the road over the bridge, and when a baby goes travelling on a fairy road the whole of Fairyland turns out to welcome him. There were snowdrop fairies, and primrose fairies, and daffodil fairies; there were merry fairies and serious fairies; there were talkative fairies and silent fairies; there was every kind of fairy except a cross fairy. The Baby stretched out his hands to them and crowed, and they were just making a fairy ring round him, when—the Poet's little daughter came panting up the hillside.

The fairies turned and scampered back to Fairyland. The Idle Boy stopped kicking his heels in the air, and remembered that he did not know how to read. The Poet sat up and forgot that he knew how to make poems. "Daddy, what a lot of trouble you do give me, to be sure!" sighed the Poet's

daughter, who was called Elspeth. "You have forgotten every one of your meals to-day. First I added the breakfast to the dinner, and now I've added the dinner to the tea; and you must come home and eat them all three at once!"

"I would much sooner stay here and dream, Elspeth," said the Poet.

"Wait a moment and have a game with me, Elspeth," begged the Idle Boy.

"If you'll sit down and be quite still, Elspeth, the fairies will come back," said the schoolmaster's Baby.

But the Poet's little daughter had no time to think about fairies. If she were to stop and look for fairies, her father would never get his meals at all.

"If this were a sensible road that didn't tie itself into knots, I should have been here by dinner time, and then you would have had only two meals to catch up," remarked Elspeth, as she took the Poet home to the house on the bridge.

"But it is a fairy road!" crowed the Baby at the top of his voice.

"I wonder when that Baby will learn to talk!" was all the Poet's daughter said, as she disappeared down the hillside.

The road over the bridge seemed to have changed completely since Elspeth came along it. The sun had sunk behind the hill. There were no fairies to be seen. Neither the Baby nor the Idle Boy wanted to kick his heels in the air another minute.

"Come home to tea! Your mother wants you!" called the Weathercock. His voice would never have reached as far as the hillside had not the west wind most obligingly carried it for him.

"I want my bottle!" roared the Baby, the moment he was reminded of it by the Weathercock.

"Come on!" said the Idle Boy, packing him away under his coat once more. "Perhaps, if we are quick, we shall catch up the Poet and Elspeth."

The Baby's Bath

AT last you have come back, my precious!" said the schoolmaster's wife, when the Idle Boy brought her Baby home again. "Just in time for your bath!"

The Baby had no objection to being taken from the Idle Boy. The Idle Boy, in his hurry to catch up the Poet's little daughter, had jogged the Baby dreadfully all the way home; and to be tucked inside the coat of somebody who is running downhill at full speed is not a pleasant experience. At the same time, he was not at all anxious for his bath. A great many things happened in his bath that the Baby did not appreciate.

They all happened this evening, as usual. First of all, the water was not right. His mother certainly put her elbow into

it, to feel how hot it was; and the Baby knew that if his mother's elbow liked the water, he ought to like it too. But he never did. Sometimes it was too hot, and sometimes it was too cold. To-night it was too hot.

"Take me out again!" he crowed in a most disappointed tone.

His mother understood and took him out at once, and she did not put him back again until she had added some cold water and made it quite a comfortable bath. But his father did not understand a word he said. His father was very learned, and he knew four languages besides his own; but he was strangely backward in crowing.

"Dear me!" he said, looking at the Baby through his spectacles. "What a very unreasonable disturbance to make over a mere bath!"

The Baby entirely disagreed with him. "Nothing could

be more reasonable than to complain when the water is too hot," he pointed out. "Otherwise nobody would know how much I dislike it."

His father smiled and pinched his cheek. "Pitty ickle boy-boy!" he remarked in one of the four languages that he knew besides his own.

The Baby sighed. He understood his father's conversation no better than the schoolmaster understood his. Indeed, the schoolmaster's conversation was one of the hardest things he had to bear as he lay helpless in his evening bath.

It was not the hardest thing of all, though. Something worse happened sometimes; and it happened to-night.

"Just go on soaping him while I fetch the towel," suddenly said his mother; and she handed the sponge to the schoolmaster and hurried out of the room.

The schoolmaster seemed to think that soapiness was required in the most out-of-the-way places, and he had not been alone with his son more than a minute before he had

thoroughly soaped the inside of the Baby's mouth, to say nothing of both his eyes. He was greatly surprised when the Baby objected to this, and splashed so vigorously with his hands and feet that the schoolmaster became very nearly as soapy as the Baby.

The schoolmaster's wife guessed what had happened without being told. "My pet!" was all she said; and she washed the soap away from the out-of-the-way places, and let the Baby do some extra splashing to comfort him before she lifted him on to her lap.

"You always do that," sighed the Baby, his face beginning to pucker up again. "I don't ask you to plunge me into a bath, evening after evening, like this; I shouldn't mind if I never had another bath as long as I live; but when I have made the best of it and am just beginning to like it, why do you always choose that moment to lift me out again? One thing or the other would be so much easier to bear."

"Who wants his bottle?" was his mother's reply to this; and the puckers on her Baby's face turned to smiles.

"As soon as you like!" he replied with a particularly loud crow; and his mother handed him over to his father.

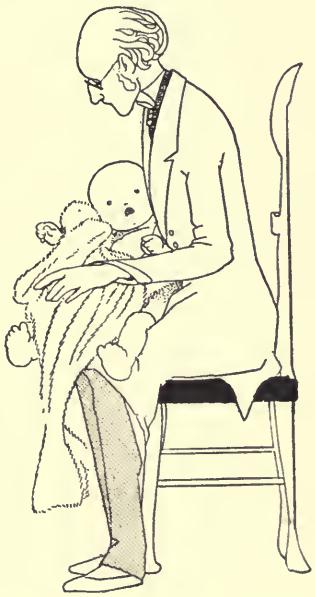
"I'll be getting his bottle ready, if you will finish rubbing him dry," she said.

"Oh, please don't let him rub me dry!" implored the Baby. "He flicks the fringe of the towel into my eye, and pinches up

"BABY WAS LEFT ALONE IN HIS CRADLE"

little bits of my skin. I like your way of rubbing me so very much better."

"Was it a bad sonny, then?" said his learned father, when he had done all the things the Baby said he would, and the Baby was protesting loudly. "Did it want its bottley-bottle, then?"



At last the horrible bath was over, and the Baby was left alone in his cradle, near the open window. High up in the sky, which was all red and gold with the setting sun, shone and glittered the Fairy Queen's messenger bird. It was a great relief, after enduring the incomprehensible conversation of the schoolmaster, to talk to some one who knew how to crow.

"Do you think my daddy will ever learn to crow?" he asked the Weathercock.

"Certainly not," said the Weathercock, spinning round with great rapidity to give effect to his words. "People who can talk four languages besides their own could never learn to crow."

"How many languages do you know besides your own, pretty gold bird?" asked the Baby.

"Not one," answered the Weathercock proudly. "Only

people who do not appreciate their own language ever want to learn other people's. Your language and mine is the language of Fairyland. You leave other people's languages alone, as I do."

"I mean to," crowed the Baby, who had no desire to copy the schoolmaster's language.

"When will that Baby learn to talk?" wondered the neighbour's wife, from the street below.

The Common Cock

"WHY do you turn your back on me, pretty gold bird?" asked the schoolmaster's Baby, the morning after his journey up the hillside.

"One is not always inclined for conversation," answered the Weathercock, without altering his position in the least. This, indeed, he could not have done if he had wanted to, for the wind was blowing from the west; and when the wind was blowing from the west the Weathercock was obliged to turn his back on the schoolmaster's house. He did not mention this to the Baby, though; he thought it would not sound well.

"When do you think you will be inclined for conversation?" sighed the Baby. "I shall have to wait a whole hour

before my next bottle comes; and if there is going to be no conversation to pass away the time, I shall spend an extremely dull morning. Besides, I want to tell you what I saw yesterday afternoon."

At this the Weathercock requested the west wind to leave off blowing for a minute; and, the west wind being only too glad to pause and take breath—when a wind has been blowing all night, it naturally feels out of breath in the morning—the Weathercock was able to turn round for a minute and talk to the schoolmaster's Baby.

"Well, what did you see yesterday afternoon?" he asked condescendingly.

"First I saw a very funny bird, with a curly tail coming out of his mouth," began the Baby rapidly. "He is called the Blue Griffin, and he creaks because he has never learnt how to crow, and I don't think he came from Fairyland. But, of course, one never knows."

"You may not know, but I do!" cried the Weathercock, bristling all over with indignation. "Young as you are, it is time you learnt that a signboard is not the same thing as a Fairy Queen's messenger bird. Why, the common cock in your neighbour's back yard knows more about Fairyland than the Blue Griffin does, though that is not saying much."

"What is that about me?" cried the neighbour's cock, as the Weathercock swung round again in obedience to the west wind. "Did I hear anybody mention me?"

THE BABY'S MOTHER CHASES THE COMMON COCK DOWN THE STREET

The Baby was unpleasantly startled by the sudden appearance of the common cock, who was in so great a hurry to join in the conversation that he tried to take a short cut through the neighbour's front parlour, an attempt in which he was unexpectedly assisted by the broom of the neighbour's wife. On his way into the road he nearly carried the Baby from the next doorstep with him.

"Go away, common cock!" crowed the Baby, unhappily. "I don't like common cocks flapping their wings in my face."

The schoolmaster's wife did not like common cocks any better than her Baby did. She came out, also with a broom in her hand, and swept the common cock away from her doorstep and down the street, until he fled out of sight round the corner.

"Cock-a-doodle-doo!" crowed the common cock dolefully,

when he found himself once more among his own people in the neighbour's back yard. "My attempt to join in the conversation was most unfortunate."

"I like pretty gold cocks best," said the Baby in a superior tone. "They stay up in the blue sky and do not flap their wings all over my face."

The pretty gold cock up in the blue sky was obliged to ignore this complimentary remark. The west wind had no intention of pausing again to take breath, and the Weathercock was unable to turn round. The Baby stopped being superior, and began to feel lonely instead. After all, the common cock was better than no cock at all.

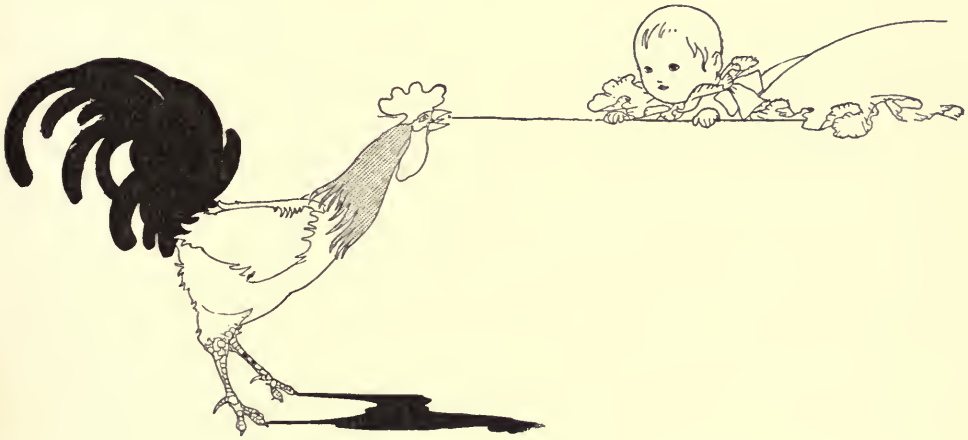
He gave a loud crow that also took a short cut through the neighbour's parlour and reached the ears of the common cock in the back yard.

"If you will promise not to flap your wings all over my face, you may come back," said the Baby.

"A bird in the face is worth two in the blue sky," answered the common cock, who never lost an opportunity of making a bad joke. Then he walked sedately round the house and came sedately up the street, doing his best to show how dignified he could be when people did not sweep him about with a broom. Nobody would have guessed that it was the same bird who had just flapped his wings in the Baby's face.

"Have you ever been to Fairyland, common cock?" asked the Baby.

"Cock-a-doodle-doo!" crowed the common cock in great surprise. "What should I be doing in Fairyland? I have quite enough to do in my back yard, without going to Fairyland. Who would teach the chickens manners, and keep the ducks in their place, and shed a glory over the whole village, if I



were not here? Oh, no doubt there is such a place as Fairyland; the blind dog in our kennel says he has even seen the fairies, though how he can see anything without eyes I do not know. But I have no time for such frivolities."

"You are like Elspeth, the Poet's daughter," said the Baby.

"A most sensible little girl!" said the common cock at once. "The only sensible little girl in the village! She can feed chickens better than any one I ever met."

"She drove the fairies away when they came to play with

me," said the Baby. "I don't like sensible little girls, and I don't like common cocks."

"Cock-a-doodle-doo!" said the common cock to this. There was some monotony about the common cock's conversation, the Baby thought.

The Picnic in the Daffodil Wood

THE Baby lay under the apple tree, catching the pink blossoms as they came falling down. Every one of them had a fairy inside, so it was not easy to catch them. They danced about in the air, this way and that, and just as the Baby thought he had caught one in his two hands, it was sure to float away sideways and drop out of his reach. Some of them fell near him, it is true; but when they did that, the fairies tumbled out of them and flew off again

in a great hurry, and the game had to begin all over again.

Suddenly, the apple-blossom stopped falling, and the pink and white fairies fled out of sight among the green branches, and the game came to an end.

"Oh dear!" sighed the Baby. "Why have the fairies gone away? That Poet's daughter must be somewhere about!"

Sure enough, at that very moment Elspeth's voice could be heard at the front door.

"Please," said Elspeth, "may the Baby come for a picnic in the daffodil wood on the hill? It is a half-holiday, and all the children in the village will be there, and I promise to take great care of him."

The Baby's mother looked up at the sky. There was not a cloud to be seen; the sun was shining with all its might into the schoolmaster's garden, and there was not a breath of wind. It was the sort of afternoon that makes everything in the garden try to grow up as fast as it can.

"It is certainly a good day for a picnic," said the schoolmaster's wife.

A chorus of garden voices broke out all round her.

"There is going to be a storm!" shrilled the pink and white apple-blossom fairies.

"There is going to be a storm!" barked the blind dog from next door.

"There is going to be a storm!" crowed the common cock at the top of his voice.

"There is going to be a storm!" crowed the Weathercock at the bottom of his voice, which is the only place in a weathercock's voice that is of any use to him if he wants to be heard down below. When he crows at the top of his voice, everything he says just goes wandering off into the clouds. "I can see the storm coming up over the edge of the world!" continued the Weathercock, twirling round and round in the air, though there was not a breath of wind to help him.

But neither Elspeth

nor the Baby's mother understood a word of all this; and the Baby took good care to say nothing about it, because he wanted to go to the picnic. He did not know what a picnic was; but anything that was going to happen in the daffodil wood on the hill was good enough for him. So he paid no attention to the Weathercock, or to anybody else who talked about storms and unpleasant things of that sort; and he clapped his hands for joy when Elspeth carried him off at the head of a long procession of children.

"Elspeth is a careful little girl; she will be good to my Baby," said the schoolmaster's wife, as she watched the procession going up the village street.

"She keeps the fairies away," said the Baby; and he rather wished that someone less careful than Elspeth—Jerry, for instance—had been taking him to the picnic. Still, it was true that Elspeth carried him very nicely, and did not jog him about as the Idle Boy always did.

Even without the fairies, the picnic in the daffodil wood was great fun. First of all, there was a magnificent tea to be spread on a table-cloth made of green moss and baby ferns and white violets. After that, the tea had to be eaten, which was a still more serious joy. It was so serious, indeed, that for several minutes there was no conversation at all in the daffodil wood. Buns and bread and jam and mugs of tea cannot possibly receive the attention they deserve if people waste time in talking. The Baby, fully occupied with his own bottle, was

THE PICNIC

glad that the picnic took such a sensible view of the beauties of silence.

The last bun and the last piece of bread and jam disappeared, and conversation broke out once more. Everybody talked at once, which is always a pleasant way of carrying on a conversation, because there is no need to listen to anybody else, and therefore no risk of disagreeing with anyone. Then the Idle Boy proposed a game of hide-and-seek.

"That is a splendid idea!" said Elspeth, who was tidying-up the daffodil wood by sweeping the crumbs into a little heap. "While you are playing, I will stay here and look after the Baby."

"Oh, no!" said the other children. "We will not play without you."

The other children were very fond of Elspeth. She could not see the fairies, it is true; but she knew how to cure a bruise by kissing the bad place, and she could tie up a cut finger without making it smart, and she did people's sums for

them. Besides, she could run faster than any boy in the village.

"The Baby can take care of himself. Can't you, old chap?" said Jerry.

"I greatly prefer doing so," crowed the Baby loudly. "When I take care of myself, the fairies come and play with me."

"See how jolly he looks when he is left alone!" said the Idle Boy, as he ran off to hide with Elspeth.

"I am not alone!" called the Baby after them; "I am only alone when you are all here.'

But nobody heard him—except, perhaps, the fairies.

But the sun did not come back. A great black storm was coming up over the edge of the world; and when the sun sees a black storm coming up over the edge of the world, he always runs away as fast as he can.

All the creatures of the wood ran away, too. The rabbits dived headlong into their holes; the birds tucked their heads under their wings and pretended it was bed-time; and the squirrels scampered up into the beech trees again. Only the fairies stayed with the Baby.

"He will get wet if we leave him here," said the daffodil fairies.

"We must put him under shelter," said the violet fairies.

"There is a hole in the bank near our clump of birch trees," said the green and silver birch fairies.

Then every fairy in the daffodil wood came and bent over the Baby. There were hundreds and hundreds of them, and not so much as an inch of the Baby was to be seen as they crowded about him. He looked just like a little fat mound of fairies.

Then they all moved away from him, and the Baby found himself lying in a glittering gold and silver spider's web.

"Now!" said all the fairies together. And five of them took hold of the edge of the spider's web and flew up into the air, carrying the Baby with them, and sailed along with him until they came to the green bank near the clump of birch trees. In the side of the bank was a hole, lined with moss. It was not a rabbit-hole, or a hole that anybody had dug out with a spade. It was just a fairy hole that had grown there because the fairies wanted it; and it was exactly the right size for the Baby.

They were only just in time. The storm had come up so fast from the edge of the world that the first big drops of rain began to fall as they laid him gently in his little fairy house.

"We must hurry back, or we shall be drowned ourselves," they told him. "We are fine-weather fairies, and if our wings get wet we cannot fly. But we have sent a message to the storm fairies, so you will not be alone for long."

In another minute all the daffodil fairies had flown back to the daffodils, and all the violet fairies had flown back to the violets, and all the birch-tree fairies had flown back to the birch trees. Nothing alive was to be seen in the daffodil wood except the hail fairies and the rain fairies, and they were so busy helping the storm to be a real bad storm that they had no time to play with the Baby. The Baby did not mind, though. He had never seen a storm before, and he found it even more exciting than a picnic.

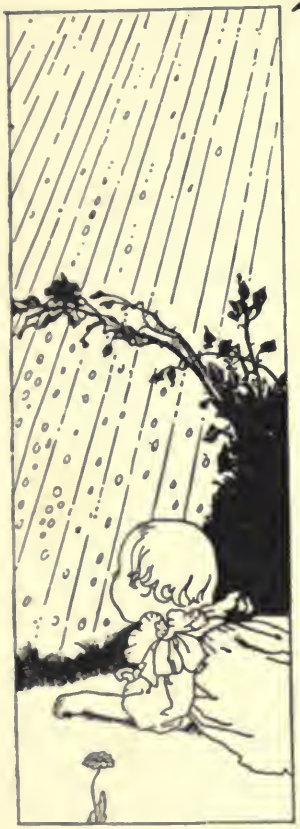
THE BABY IS CARRIED AWAY IN THE SPIDER'S WEB

Meanwhile, the picnic was running home as fast as it could. The Idle Boy ran home too, because he thought that Elspeth was on in front with the Baby. But Elspeth was not in front with the Baby. She had gone back to the place in the daffodil wood where she had left the Baby lying among the moss and the ferns and the white violets; and she found nothing but a fairy ring to mark the spot where he had lain.

"Baby, Baby! where are you?" she called.

"He is in the fairy hole near the clump of birch trees," answered everything in the wood that could speak the fairy language.

Unfortunately, Elspeth had never had time to learn the fairy language, so she did not understand a word they said.



The Storm Fairies

DOWN came the hail, so fast that the ground was white with it, and the poor little daffodils hung their heads, and the white violets and the baby ferns felt quite depressed. The schoolmaster's Baby was not at all depressed, though; and when the hailstones saw that, several of them rolled into his little fairy house, turned head-over-heels, sneezed seventeen times, and then sat up on their heels and grinned at him.

"Why, you are fairies!" cried the Baby. "I thought you were just hailstones!"

The hail fairies stopped grinning, and looked a little hurt. "We expect that kind of remark from anybody who is grown-up and has forgotten how to see," they complained; "but in a baby it is most disappointing."

They said this in hoarse, croaking voices that made the Baby feel most concerned for their health. "Have you got croup?" he asked politely. "Once, a long, long time ago—oh, quite four

weeks ago!—I had a funny voice like yours, and the doctor said it was croup."

"Croup, indeed!" they echoed indignantly. "*We* do not need croup in order to cultivate magnificent and distinguished voices like ours. If you prefer a silly soft voice like your own,

you had better be left to the rain fairies. *They* talk just as you do, so gently that it is enough to set anybody's teeth on edge! Ugh! Here they come, and we must be off to join another storm on the other side of the world. It's a very busy time of year for us, you know. Good-bye; and please do not say, as ignorant grown-up people always do, that we have melted!"

It was very difficult not to say that, when the daffodil wood turned green again, and the rain began to come down in long, straight, silver stripes. It made a beautiful sound as it crept through the green and silver birch branches and fell close to the little hole in the bank. This was not surprising; for every rain-drop was a fairy with a soft voice that sighed and crooned in the Baby's ear, and made him think of all the things he wanted to see, and all the things he wanted to know, and all the places he wanted to go to.

"There is a baby in the fairy house!" crooned the rain fairies, gliding round him as he lay kicking his legs in the air. "What wish shall we grant him? Tell us a wish,

Baby, tell us a wish! The first storm in the spring-time always grants a wish to the first baby it meets."

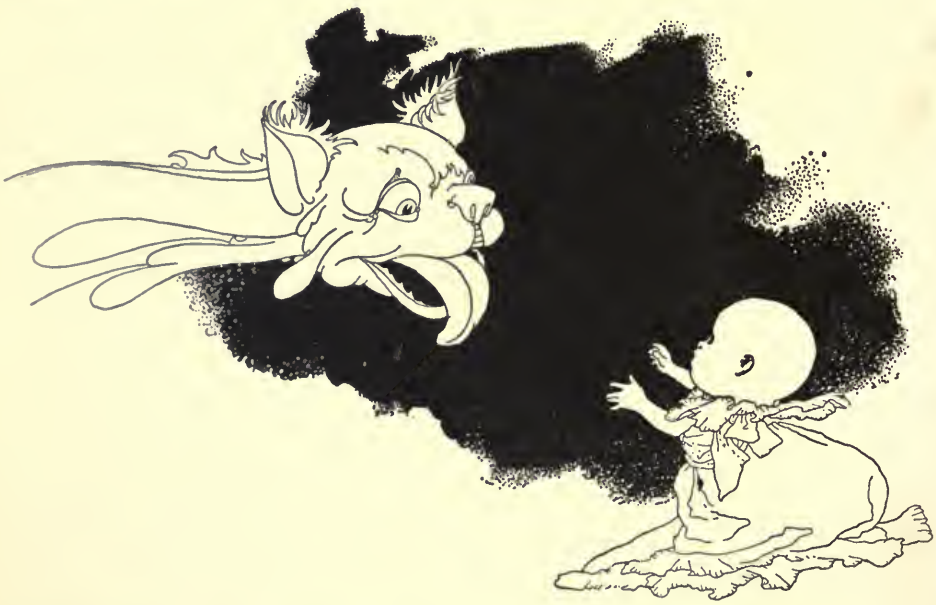
The Baby had not the slightest doubt about his wish. "I want to fly up in the air and all round the sky, so that I can see over the edge of the world, as the Weathercock does," he crowed.

The rain fairies put their heads together and held a consultation. They had granted a good many wishes to babies in the spring-time, but they had never before met such an ambitious Baby as the schoolmaster's. "We must fetch a Peal of Thunder for that," they told him, when their consultation was over. Then they sailed up again, and disappeared among the green and silver branches of the birch trees.

The daffodil wood also felt strangely happy when the rain fairies came into it, for they made the daffodil wood think of sunshine and summer-time. They made the daffodil wood think of bluebells and foxgloves and lilies of the valley. They made the daffodil wood forget that, when the storm was over, the daffodils and the white violets would not be able to lift their heads any more. They whispered to the daffodil wood that, when the storm was over, it would turn into a bluebell wood instead. The first storm in the spring-time is always full of whispers of that kind.

Suddenly the far-away hills began to talk. They talked in deep rumbling voices that grew louder and louder as the conversation spread to all the other hills as well. At first it sounded

to the Baby rather like the noise the children made in school when they pushed back their desks and ran out into the playground; then it came right into the daffodil wood on the side of the hill, and by that time it sounded like nothing



but itself. And Itself was an enormous, full-grown Peal of Thunder.

It is very difficult to describe a Peal of Thunder to anybody who has never met one. It is rather like a fog, and rather like a serpent, and rather like a Persian cat. Perhaps, on the whole, though, it is most of all like a Peal of Thunder.

"Are you the Peal of Thunder?" asked the Baby, holding

THE BABY RIDES ON THE PEAL OF THUNDER

out both his hands to it. "Will you take me for a ride round the world?"

"I can't do that," answered the Peal of Thunder. "But I will take you to the top of the church spire."

The Baby never knew how he climbed on to the back of the Peal of Thunder; but, perhaps, the rain fairies helped him. Anyhow, he found himself there a moment later, holding on tight with both hands; and he was flying up, up, up, through the green and silver branches of the birch trees, through crowds and crowds of rain fairies and wind fairies, straight towards the top of the church spire.

The Top of the Church Spire

IF we are not quick," rumbled the Peal of Thunder, "we shall never get to the church spire in time."

"In time for what?" asked the Baby.

"In time to catch up the lightning fairies," answered the Peal of Thunder. "That is my job in life—to catch up the lightning fairies; and a pretty breathless job it is, too! It would be all right if they always arrived at a place at the time they promised to be there; but they never do. Sometimes they are late; and sometimes—why, there they are already!"

The Baby peered over the Peal of Thunder's back, and saw the Weathercock disappearing in a blaze of light. A great

stream of golden fire ran at full speed down the church spire, and curled round it and then ran up it again, and vanished as suddenly as it had come. The next minute the Peal of Thunder had reached the Weathercock, and was hovering over him in the air, repeating all the gossip it had heard in the far-away hills.

"The daffodils and the primroses and the violets are gone, and the bluebells are coming!" it rumbled noisily. "This is the last day of spring, I am told; and to-morrow summer will be here! Are you listening? Summer will be here!"

"I am glad to hear it," answered the Weathercock. "Spring weather is so very unsettling. One day, you are kept staring in the same direction for hours at a time; and the next, you twirl round and round until all your good thoughts are mixed up with all your bad thoughts, and your conversation does not

make sense. Give me a nice stretch of summer weather, with a gentle wind that does not know its own mind;—a weathercock has some chance then of looking about him and making observations. Hillo! why, that is the schoolmaster's Baby!"

"I don't know whose baby it is; but if he is a friend of yours, perhaps I may leave him with you for a minute or two," suggested the Peal of Thunder. "The lightning fairies are on their way to the hills, and they won't like it if I keep them waiting a second time."

"All right! give him to me," said the Weathercock; "and don't forget to come back and fetch him."

The Peal of Thunder tilted up its own enormous fluffy back, and let the Baby roll on to the Weathercock's back; then it raced off at full speed to the hills. The Baby was delighted to find that the Weathercock's back was just as soft as the Peal of Thunder's, and not nearly so damp and cold. Indeed, to ride on the Weathercock's back was rather like lying in his nice warm cradle, but, of course, much more exciting; and he could not think how he had ever supposed that the pretty gold bird was hard and shining, like the ball that Widow Bunce, of the village shop, had given him last week.

"Several things have surprised me about this thunder-storm," he told the Weathercock. "For one thing, see how dry I am, after riding about in all this rain!"

"The rain fairies have looked after that," explained the Weathercock. "No doubt, they moved out of the way when

THE BABY RIDES ON THE WEATHERCOCK'S BACK

they saw you coming. I hope you do not mind turning round with such rapidity? This is the correct way for a weathercock to behave during a storm, and one must do the correct thing when one is a Fairy Queen's messenger."

"I do not mind at all," answered the Baby; "it makes a pleasant change from lying on one's back all day and kicking. I rather wish, though, that you would keep still long enough for me to look over the edge of the world."

"Ah!" said the Weathercock mysteriously. "You would not be allowed to do that, in any case. To look over the edge of the world is a privilege that few enjoy."

Their conversation was interrupted at that moment by a great commotion in the village below. The Poet's little daughter came running along the road over the bridge, and she was crying bitterly as she came.

"I've lost the schoolmaster's Baby!" she sobbed dolefully. "Nobody will call me a careful little girl any more."

All the doors in the village were flung open, and all the villagers came out on their doorsteps and began to chatter.

"Only think! Elspeth has lost the schoolmaster's Baby!" they said in shocked tones. "What will the schoolmaster's wife say?"

The Baby, who was spinning round in the air at the top of the church spire, suddenly stopped feeling happy. He stopped wanting to look over the edge of the world. He stopped wanting to talk to the Weathercock. There was only one thing in the world he wanted to happen; and he wanted that to happen very quickly, before Elspeth should have time to reach his mother's doorstep.

"I want to go home! I want to go home!" he roared miserably.

"You can't do that," said the pretty gold bird soothingly; "but you shall go back to the daffodil wood, and the fairies will do the rest. Hurry up there, you lightning fairies!"

"THE POET'S LITTLE DAUGHTER CAME RUNNING ALONG THE ROAD"

The lightning fairies came back with a flash and a blaze, and once more they ran up and down the church spire and curled round it, and then disappeared. And as they flew away to Fairyland the Baby found himself being carried off to the daffodil wood once more on the back of the Peal of Thunder.

Before he went, though, the Poet's little daughter reached his mother's doorstep.

THE schoolmaster behaved just as the other villagers had done, when Elspeth at last arrived on his doorstep.

"Dear, dear, dear!" he exclaimed a great many times. "How could you do such a careless thing as to lose a large and important baby like mine? What will his mother say? Really, I shall not like to tell her what has happened! What is to be done? What is to be done?"

"Dear, dear! What is to be done?" echoed the neighbour's wife from next door. "It's a pity you let the Baby go to the picnic at all, isn't it? You never know what will happen with a backward child like that."

Then the schoolmaster's wife came out on the doorstep too; and the schoolmaster's wife was the only person in the village who did not stand and make a fuss about the disappearance of the Baby.

"Lost my Baby, have you? Then the best thing I can do is to go and look for him!" was all she said. With that, she put her shawl over her head, and ran straight off in the direction of the daffodil wood.

Now, when the schoolmaster saw the Baby's mother run up the hillside to look for her Baby, he ran after her; and behind the schoolmaster ran all the grown-up villagers; and behind the grown-up villagers ran all the girls and boys; and behind the girls and boys ran all the grown-up dogs and all the little puppy dogs; until at last there was no one left in the village except Elspeth and the Idle Boy and the blind dog who belonged to the neighbour's back-yard.

"I have lost the schoolmaster's Baby, and no one will call me a careful little girl any more!" sobbed Elspeth.

The Idle Boy felt distinctly uncomfortable. He wished Elspeth would not cry; he did not know what to do when little girls like Elspeth, who were generally so properly behaved and so very superior, suddenly began to cry. He shuffled from

one foot to the other; he put his hands in his pockets and stared up at the Weathercock and blinked both his eyes furiously; he wondered if it would be very unkind to run up the hill after the others and leave Elspeth to cry alone. He decided immediately that this would be unkind; and, as things turned out, it was a very good thing he stayed where he was.

A cold nose was thrust into his hand, just to remind him that the neighbour's dog was standing there, wagging his tail as if to tell him that he knew quite well what he was thinking about — as, of course, he did. Dogs always know what boys and girls are thinking about, though boys and girls do not always know what dogs are thinking about.

"The schoolmaster's Baby is in the fairy hole near the green and silver birch trees!" he barked. "The Weathercock says so!"

The Weathercock was certainly crowing away with great energy, considering how breathless he must have felt after turning round and round all the afternoon without stopping. And this is what he was saying:

"The schoolmaster's Baby is in the fairy hole near the green and silver birch trees!"

"Yes, the Baby is in the fairy hole near the green and silver birch trees!" echoed the Common Cock, who always said what everybody else was saying, in preference to something that was new and original.

Elspeth stopped crying and looked up. "What are they all talking about?" she wondered. "Do you know, I feel so strange; I feel as though we might almost find out where the Baby is, if we could understand what those animals are trying to tell us!"

Jerry was most surprised to hear her say this. Generally, the Poet's little daughter was far too busy to notice that the animals were saying anything; and if he told her that they talked the fairy language, she always laughed at him.

"Say it again, Goblin, old chap," he said to the neighbour's dog, meaning to listen more attentively this time.

But Goblin did not say it again. Like the Baby's mother, he did not believe in talking.

"You come along with me," he barked. Then he put his nose to the ground and trotted off towards the road that led over the bridge.

"You go along with him, both of you!" crowed the Weathercock from the top of the church spire.

The Idle Boy took Elspeth's hand. "There is no harm in following him," he said; "and perhaps he does know where the Baby is."

"But he is blind; he can't see where anything is!" cried Elspeth.

"He's not so blind as some little girls are, though they may have two big eyes in their head," remarked the Weathercock, as the children ran up the street after Goblin.

"I shall not be sorry to get away from that Weathercock," said Elspeth, as they turned the corner of the street. "He is making such a noise this afternoon, and he scowls at me in such a very disagreeable manner."

"Perhaps the lightning has struck him," suggested Jerry. "He has turned a bit black, hasn't he?"

"THE IDLE BOY TOOK ELSPETH'S HAND"

THE BIRCH FAIRY ALIGHTS ON THE DOG'S HEAD

"Struck!" cried the Weathercock angrily. "Struck! Am I a common piece of gilded iron? Am I a common chimney-cowl? Am I a common cock?"

None of these questions received any answer from below, for at that moment a very wonderful thing happened on the road that led over the bridge. A green and silver birch fairy fluttered through the air and dropped lightly on the head of the neighbour's dog. That is just the wonderful sort of thing that may happen to anybody who has not two eyes in his head, especially when he is travelling on a fairy road.

How the Baby was found

LOOK!" whispered Jerry. "There is a fairy sitting on Goblin's head, and she is guiding him with green and silver fairy reins fastened to his ears. Just look!"

"I don't see any fairy," said Elspeth, as she trotted along beside him.

Jerry was not surprised. He had not really expected her to see the fairy; it was only stupid people like himself, who could not learn the way to read, who saw fairies. "You can spell words of three syllables, though," he mentioned politely, in case she should think he wanted to show off about the fairy.

"I would much rather see the fairy," answered Elspeth, rather unexpectedly. "Do you think, if I keep very still, that I shall be able to see her?"

Jerry had no time to answer this, for no sooner had Elspeth finished speaking than she saw the fairy, every bit of her, from her green and silver crown down to her little green and silver

shining shoes. "Oh, oh, oh!" cried Elspeth, clapping her hands with delight. "What a dear little fairy! Are there any more fairies like that, I wonder?"

"I should jolly well think so," answered Jerry, who had been seeing fairies all the time he ought to have been learning to read. "You wait till we get to the wood!"

Considering that she had lost the schoolmaster's Baby, Elspeth was a surprisingly happy little girl, just then. For the first time, she liked the curly road that tied itself into knots better than the new straight road down in the valley. For the first time, she saw how pretty the hill was, and how charmingly the daffodil wood clung to the side of it, as though it knew it would roll down into the village if it stopped holding

on for a minute. For the first time, she knew that there were fairies everywhere, as she ran into the daffodil wood with the boy who was too idle to learn to read, and the dog who saw more than other people did, though he had not two eyes in his head.

The wood was also full of grown-up villagers and of little villagers, and of grown-up dogs and of little dogs. There was scarcely room to move; and people kept on tumbling over one another as they ran hither and thither, wringing their hands and making a very great fuss about looking for the schoolmaster's Baby. But not one of them had thought of looking inside the hole in the bank near the clump of birch trees. That comes of having two eyes in one's head.

"Dear, dear, dear!" cried the villagers. "We shall never find him, never! What is to be done? What is to be done?"

"Come with us," said the Poet's little daughter. "Goblin is taking us straight to where the schoolmaster's Baby is."

"What nonsense is that?" asked the schoolmaster, who knew four languages but could not see the fairy on Goblin's head. "Little girls who lose other people's babies should not talk nonsense; they should look for the Baby they have lost."

"That's sense, that is," said the neighbour's wife approvingly.

"What a wise man is our schoolmaster!" cried all the villagers.

"AND THERE LAY THE SCHOOLMASTER'S BABY"

"But we *are* looking for the Baby!" said Elspeth. "Won't you come with us?"

The villagers, however, preferred to go on tumbling over one another and wringing their hands and looking in the same places over and over again. All this made them feel they were doing something; and that is always of great importance. But the blind dog did not tumble over anybody; he just led the two children straight to the fairy hole in the side of the bank near the clump of green and silver birch trees.

And there, lying on his back and kicking his legs in the air, lay the schoolmaster's Baby.

All the same, though, it was not Goblin, or Elspeth, or the Idle Boy, who really found the Baby; for, just as they reached the clump of birch trees, the schoolmaster's wife ran right in front of them and arrived first at the little fairy house. The schoolmaster's wife needed no fairy guide to show her where her Baby was.

Then all the villagers and the village children and the village dogs came running from every direction; and they made a ring round the Baby's mother, as she took her Baby out of his little fairy house and hugged him as though she never meant to let him go again.

"Why, he is not even wet! No one would say he had been left out in the rain!" exclaimed the villagers. "He looks almost as if he had enjoyed the storm!"

"Of course I have enjoyed the storm!" answered the Baby.

"I have been for a ride on a Peal of Thunder, and the rain fairies moved out of my way so that I should not get wet!"

"No doubt he rolled down the slope into that hole, and kept dry by accident," said the neighbour's wife, who could not crow.

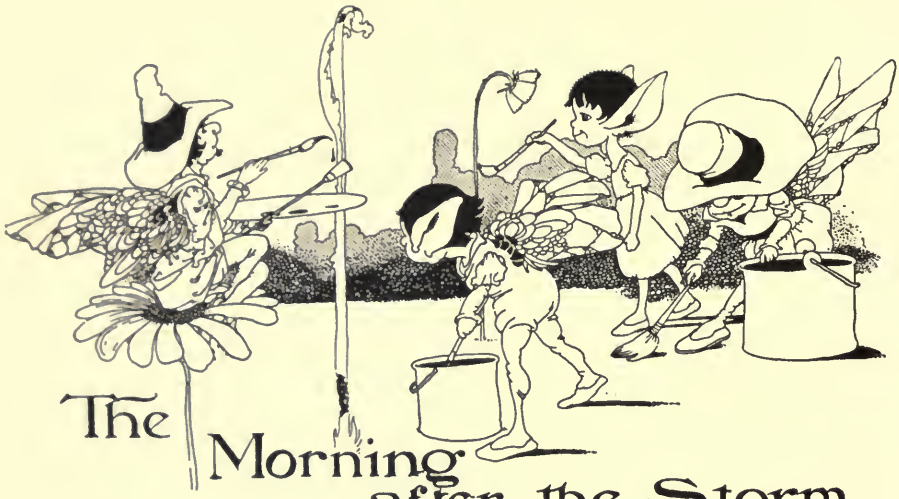
"My precious!" was all the Baby's mother said, as she wrapped him up in her shawl and ran down the hill with him.

The Baby did not object to this. It seemed to him a very long time since the picnic came to an end; and it is

impossible to ride to the top of a church spire on a Peal of Thunder without getting an appetite.

"I want my bottle!" he crowed as loudly as he could from the depths of his mother's shawl.

"Of course you do, my pet!" said his mother; which proved that she knew the fairy language as well as anybody.



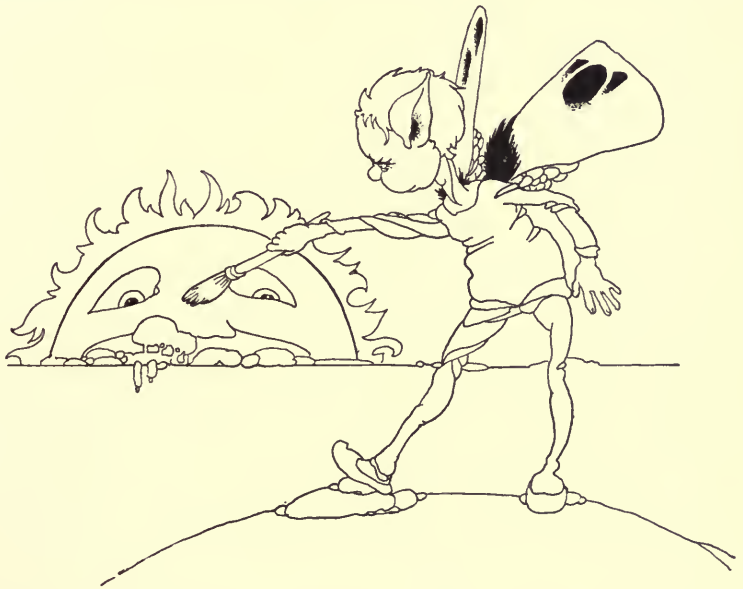
The Morning after the Storm

THE schoolmaster's Baby awoke very early on the morning after the storm. How could any baby go on sleeping when the sun had reached the top of the church spire and was bringing a golden smile from the Weathercock straight into his cradle? It would have been most impolite not to wake up at once and send a smile back by a return sunbeam.

"Good morning!" crowed the Baby, as he watched his best morning smile travelling back up the ray of sunlight to the top of the church spire. "How is the world looking this morning?"

"Very washed out," answered the Weathercock, shaking his head disapprovingly. "All the apple blossom is lying in a brown

heap under the apple tree, and all the daffodils and the primroses and the violets are pale and limp, and all the grass is grey instead of green. The world wants a fresh coat of paint very badly indeed. However, I have sent a message to Fairyland about it, and the fairies are already painting the world pale gold. They



are doing it with the very best gold paint—if you had been awake ten minutes earlier, you would have seen each one of them dipping his paint-brush into the very middle of the sun!—and that is good enough for a beginning."

When the Baby heard that all these exciting things were happening out of doors, he felt he could not bear to stay in his cradle another minute. So the schoolmaster, as well as the

schoolmaster's wife, also woke up very early on the morning after the storm. But it was not anything so quiet and peaceful as a golden smile that awakened them.

"How very tiresome of that Baby to rouse me out of my nice sleep!" grumbled the schoolmaster, when the Baby explained, a little noisily perhaps, that he could not bear to stay in his cradle another minute. "Why is he making such a hullabaloo?"

"He is not making a hullabaloo," answered his wife. "He wants to get up, that is all."

"Thank goodness, there is someone in this house who understands real language!" said the Baby, when his mother came and took him out of his cradle.

"That is as it may be," answered the Weathercock indifferently. "I do not find that she understands me; nor do I think that she understands you, as a matter of fact. She only guesses; and the fairies help her to guess right. Now, she never takes the trouble to guess at the meaning of what *I* say. However, the loss is hers, not mine!"

The schoolmaster's wife did not quite know what to do with the Baby when she had finished dressing him. "I do not want to lose you again," she said; "and if I put you on the doorstep——"

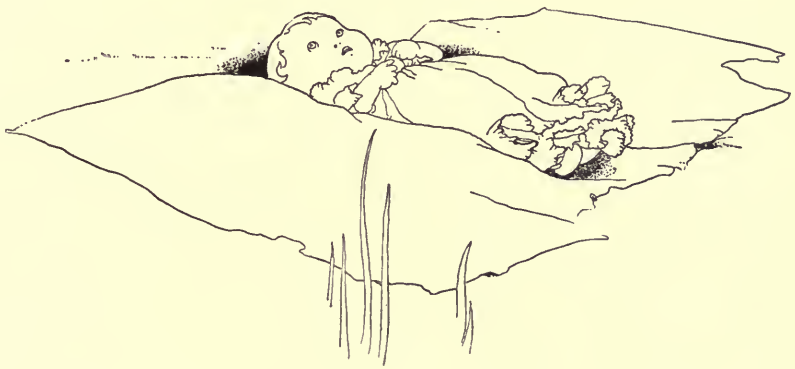
"Put me in the back garden," crowed the Baby. "I want to see the fairies painting the world pale gold."

"Why, of course, there is the garden!" exclaimed his

mother; and she hastened downstairs with him and laid him on a rug in the middle of the tiny grass plot.

"I am glad the fairies do help her to guess right," thought the Baby.

It is not often that anybody gets up early enough in the morning to see the fairies giving the world a fresh coat of paint after a storm has washed all the colour out of it. By the time



the Baby arrived in the back garden, they had finished covering everything with pale gold, and were beginning to put in great splashes of green. All over the world, from the schoolmaster's little back garden to the far-away hills, they were painting the grass and the trees and the bushes and the plants a beautiful fresh green. All the paint-boxes in the world could never mix a green like the fairy green that is spread over the world on the morning after a storm. And when they had used up all their green paint, they flew back to Fairyland and filled their paint-

pots with blue paint and red paint and yellow paint and purple paint, and every other paint they could think of; and then they began to paint the hyacinths and the mayblossom and the lilac and the bluebells, and all the other early summer flowers that had come out in the night to take the place of the poor little spring flowers that had been drowned the day before.

"It would never do for people to wake up and find a world

without any flowers in it," said the painter fairies, as they hurried from garden to garden, and from wood to wood, and from hedgerow to hedgerow, leaving a track of colour behind them as they went, until no one, not even the neighbour's wife, could have said that the world looked washed out.

"Why, you have all the colours of the rainbow in your brushes!" said the Baby to the fairies who were painting the schoolmaster's pansy bed.

"Of course we have," they answered. "We get all our paints from the rainbow; they stand the rain better than any

others. Would you like to take a hand in painting this pansy?" they added politely, handing him a brush.

The Baby did like! So when the schoolmaster came out into the garden after breakfast, he found all the colours of the rainbow crowded into one of his new pansies. There had never been such a pansy outside Fairyland before!

"Dear me!" exclaimed the schoolmaster. "What a very interesting and extraordinary specimen, to be sure!" And he took the pansy into school with him and laid it under the microscope, and gave the children a lesson on it that lasted an hour and a half. But the Baby, who lay kicking on the grass plot, was the only person who really knew how all the colours of the rainbow had crept into one pansy.

The Baby's Coat of Paint

THERE was still a little paint left when the fairies had finished giving the world its new coat; so, as Fairyland never likes anything to be wasted, they looked round for something else to paint—and they saw the schoolmaster's Baby. The schoolmaster's Baby looked a little washed out too, they thought, now that everything else in the world had been repainted.

"Would you allow me to give you this little drop of rose colour for your cheeks and your lips?" asked one fairy.

"This brushful of dark blue is just what you want in the middle of your eyes," said another.

THE PAINTER FAIRIES RIDE BACK TO FAIRYLAND

"Permit me to use my cream colour in filling up the crinkles in your neck where the paint has worn off," said a third.

"I have just enough gold and brown left to touch up your curls," said a fourth.

After that, turning their paint-pots upside down on their

heads to show that they were quite empty, the painter fairies rode back to Fairyland on their paint-brushes.

"My precious!" exclaimed the Baby's mother, when she saw how beautifully he had been painted by the fairies. "Getting up early has given you quite a colour!"

"A regular unhealthy flush, I call it!" said the neighbour's wife from the other side of the fence. "If I were you, I should feel anxious about a high colour like that."

"I am not at all anxious, thank you. I don't like pasty-faced

children myself," answered the schoolmaster's wife; and she took her Baby away from the back garden, where people made remarks about him, and laid him on the front door-step instead.

"Look at me, look at me!" crowed the Baby to the Weathercock. "The fairies have given me a fresh coat of paint."

"So I perceive," said the Weathercock, who was not nearly so interested in this piece of news as he might have been. "No doubt, if they had not been so ready to use up all their spare paint on the nearest Baby, they would have had some left for me!"

Then the Baby understood why the Weathercock was not interested in other people's coats of paint. He also noticed, for the first time, that the pretty gold bird was looking a little faded, not to say blackened, after yesterday's storm. He was much too polite, of course, to mention this.

"Why do you not send a message to Fairyland about it?" he asked.

"I have done so; but I should have preferred to be remembered by Fairyland without sending any such reminder," said the Weathercock stiffly. And he turned his back on the Baby to conceal how deeply he was hurt.

It was easy to see that the Weathercock was not inclined for conversation, so the Baby turned his attention instead to what was going on down below. And the first thing he noticed

was a man with a ladder and a pot of paint coming along the street.

"Good-morning, Anthony!" said the neighbour's wife, who was now whitening her doorstep. "Where are you going to?"

"I am going to paint the Blue Griffin on the sign-board," answered the village painter. "The rain washed all the colour out of him yesterday, and you can't tell his tail from his tongue!"

"I never can tell his tail from his tongue, unless I look to see which end of him it belongs to," crowed the Baby. Neither Anthony nor the neighbour's wife seemed to hear this remark.

"Well, I wish somebody would give a coat of paint to that

tarnished old Weathercock," said the neighbour's wife, going indoors. "He's a disgrace to the village!"

The Weathercock was just about to say what he thought of the neighbour's wife, when a most unusual thing happened. All the old men who usually sat in a row under the sign of the

Blue Griffin and creaked, came strolling up the street in a sort of procession. They thought they were doing this because the village painter had turned them off their bench so that he might repaint the sign-board; but they were really doing it because the Weathercock's message had just reached Fairyland.

"That Weathercock wants regilding," they creaked in a chorus. And they all shook their grey heads to show how true this was.

"It is most undesirable to have a tarnished Weathercock in an important village like ours," said the oldest of them, who was quite a hundred.

"When Anthony has finished painting the Blue Griffin, he must paint the Weathercock," added the next oldest, who was only ninety-nine.

But when Anthony had finished painting the Blue Griffin, he flatly refused to paint the Weathercock too. He simply said he could not get to the top of the church spire.

"And what is more," he added, thinking he saw dissatisfaction in the left eye of the oldest man in the village, "nobody else can get up there."

"I can! I have been up there!" crowed the Baby. But this remark of the Baby's also seemed to have been unheard.

The Man with the Gold Paint

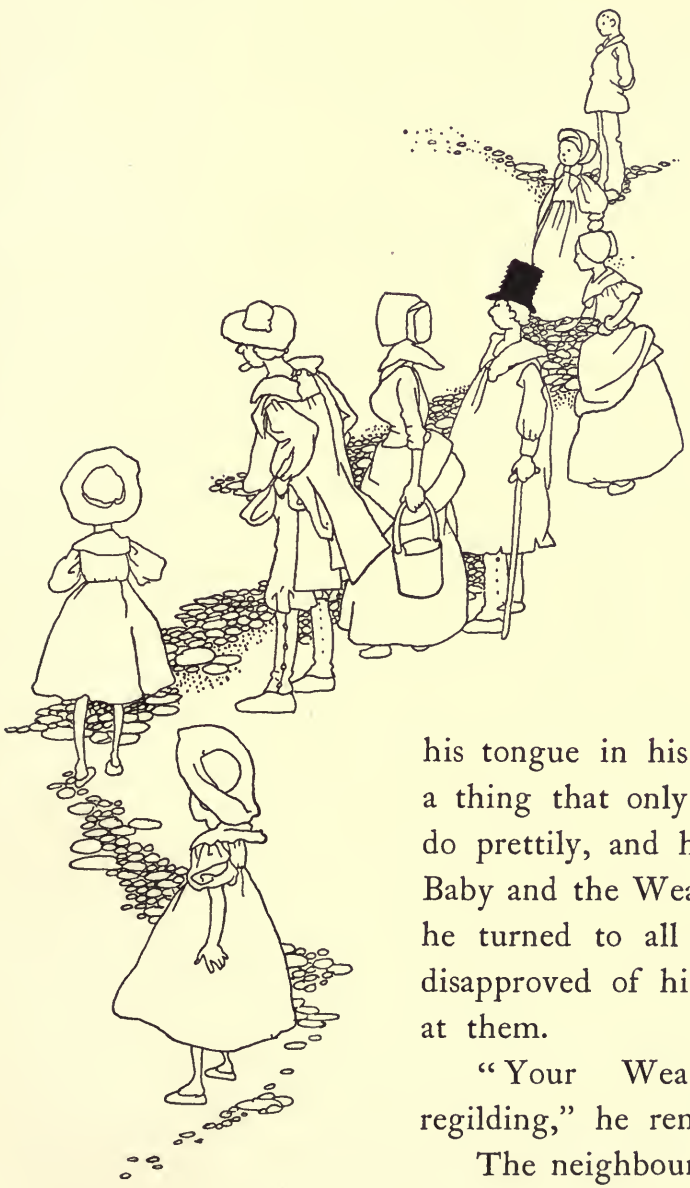
DOWN the hillside, along the curly road that came from Fairyland, walked a ragged little old man. He looked very poor and very hungry, and his face wanted washing and his clothes wanted mending. But all the fun and the frolic of Fairyland peeped out of his two little round brown eyes; and that was how the Baby and the Weathercock knew what country he had come from.

"Who is that untidy old tramp?" wondered the villagers, and they looked most disapprovingly at him. The villagers preferred clean old men, who washed their faces every day and not only once a year.

"What a funny old thing!" cried the children, as they ran out of school. "His wife must have forgotten to mend his clothes!"

"Send him away," said the neighbour's wife. "He is not fit to stay in a tidy village like ours."

"DOWN THE HILLSIDE WALKED A RAGGED LITTLE OLD MAN"



"Don't send him away," crowed the Baby and the Weathercock. "Can't you see he has come from Fairy-land?"

The little old man was the only person in the village who understood this last remark. He put his tongue in his cheek, which is a thing that only a fairy man can do prettily, and he winked at the Baby and the Weathercock. Then he turned to all the people who disapproved of him, and twinkled at them.

"Your Weathercock wants regilding," he remarked.

The neighbour's wife was most

indignant when he said this, though she had been saying the same thing herself all the morning. "That is our business, not yours, if you please!" she said haughtily.

The ragged little man pulled off his ragged old hat and made her a magnificent bow. "Then I can only say, madam,

that you do your business very badly," he replied. With that he took a pot of gold paint from under his coat, placed it on the ground, and sat down on the doorstep beside the Baby to smoke his pipe.

The villagers made a ring round the pot of gold paint and stared at it. Nobody had ever seen such gold paint before. It shone and glittered and sparkled like fire and precious stones; it looked as though a piece of the sun itself had been popped into it when it was being mixed. And that, indeed, is exactly

what had been done to it before the little old man brought it out of Fairyland.

"Our Weathercock would certainly be improved by a touch of that gold paint," said the oldest man in the village. "It is a pity, is it not, that no one can climb to the top of the church spire?"

"Rubbish!" said the man from Fairyland. "Anybody can climb to the top of the church spire! Is it not on the way to the stars?"

Now, as no one in the village had ever tried to get to the stars, this explanation did not help anybody to discover the way to the top of the church spire. The neighbour's wife felt this very strongly.

"Never mind about the stars, my good man," she said. "Can you climb to the top of the church spire? That is quite high enough for us."

"Why, to be sure I can," answered the little old man, puffing away at his pipe. "Pay my price, and your Weathercock shall shine like the brightest star in the sky."

"What is your price?" asked the villagers eagerly.

"An invitation to dinner and a lock of this Baby's hair," was the reply.

"I am sure I shall be delighted," crowed the Baby, who loved the little ragged old man, because he knew he was a fairy.

But nobody else seemed delighted. In fact, the villagers did not feel at all inclined to invite such a very untidy old man to

dinner. The neighbour's wife, however, thought of a way out of the difficulty.

"I will give you as good a dinner as you could wish for, and you shall eat it on the schoolmaster's doorstep," she said.

He shook his head, and went on puffing clouds of smoke into the air. "I must eat it at one of your tables, my good friend," he answered.

This was distinctly awkward. It is not pleasant to sit down to dinner with someone who has not washed his face since last year; and it sets a very bad example to the children. On the other hand, the Weathercock certainly did want regilding. What was to be done?

Just then, the Poet's little daughter ran out of school, where she had been helping the Idle Boy to do his sums. She gave a little jump of surprise when she saw the man from Fairyland sitting there beside the Baby.

"Why, you must be a Poet!" she exclaimed, looking at his rags and his hungry face. "But your daughter does not mend your clothes very nicely, does she?"

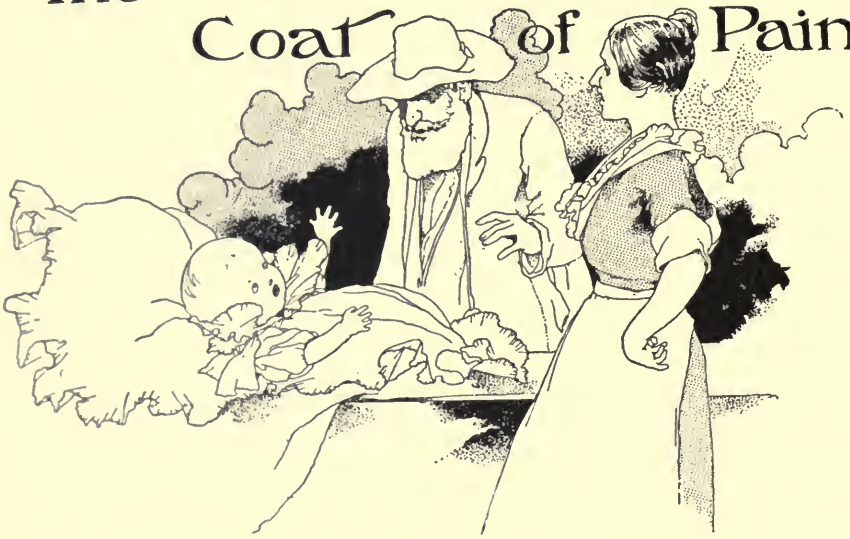
"I have no daughter, my little dear," answered the ragged old man.

When Elspeth heard this, she bent over him and took his hand in a business-like manner. "You come home with me," she said; "and I will give you all my dinner. I am quite sure you are a Poet, so you must have a great many meals to catch up!"

The little man from Fairyland rose to his feet, knocked the ashes out of his pipe and waved it slowly round Elspeth's head. "As long as you live, my little dear," he said, "you shall never know what it is to be hungry or cold, or without friends to play with!"

Then he turned and looked at the schoolmaster's Baby, and twinkled.

The Weathercock's Coat of Paint



NOW for my lock of hair, please!" said the little man from Fairyland.

The neighbour's wife laughed heartily. "You won't get that!" she said. "You don't know what a fuss the schoolmaster's wife makes over that Baby of hers!"

"I want him to have one of my curls! You go away!" roared the Baby, clenching his fists and waving them furiously at the neighbour's wife.

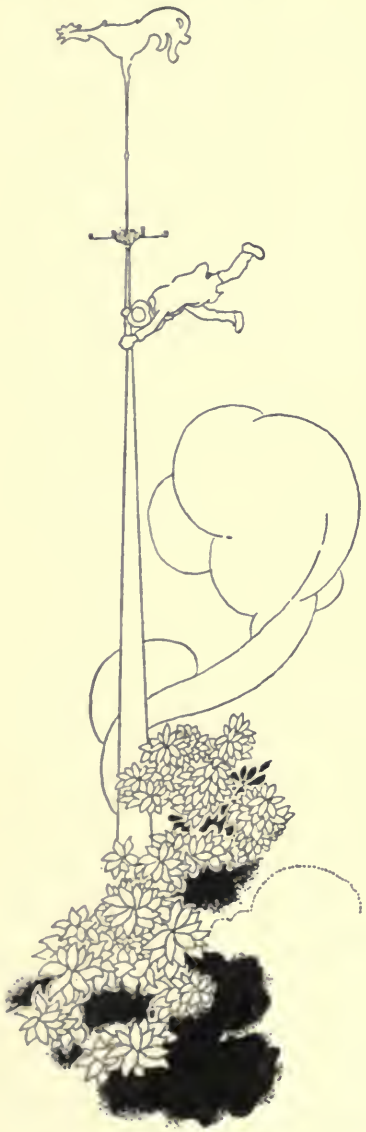
The schoolmaster's wife hurried out of the house and caught up her Baby and comforted him. "What was it they said to him, then?" she crooned soothingly in his ear. At the same

time she frowned fiercely at the neighbour's wife and made her feel most uncomfortable.

"It is not my fault that he is crying," said the neighbour's

wife. "He is upset because this old tramp wants one of his curls."

Now, when the Baby's mother heard that the ragged old tramp wanted one of her Baby's curls, she turned and smiled on him very sweetly.



"Indeed, I shall be most happy to oblige you, sir," she said. "It is not every day that one sees such beautiful curls as my Baby's." And, greatly to the surprise of the neighbour's wife, she fetched the scissors and cut off one of her Baby's best curls and gave it to the little man from Fairyland. And the man from Fairyland made her his most magnificent fairy bow, and went off to eat Elspeth's dinner in the Poet's house near the bridge.

Nobody, except the Baby and the Weathercock, saw how the fairy man got to the top of the church spire, that afternoon. He did not climb, and he did not fly; he just went up, head over heels, till he found himself astride of the Weathercock at the top; and he did this without spilling a single drop of the gold paint. It is not at all easy to turn somersaults up-hill and to carry a pot of gold paint at the same time; but when

one is used to travelling up to the stars, this kind of thing can be done.

"At last you have come!" exclaimed the Weathercock. "I hope you have brought plenty of gold paint with you, for I shall require a very great deal."

"So I perceive," answered the little man, dipping his brush into the gold paint and beginning to touch up the crest on the Weathercock's head. "You are almost as tarnished as the evening star that I had to polish up last night. It's a very busy time of year for me just now, with summer coming on so fast. If you give one star a thorough spring-cleaning, all the others seem to want it too. Head up, please!"

"Do not let the paint get in his eyes," begged the Baby, when he saw the Weathercock's face being gilded. "I have never been gilded myself, but I know how very painful it is when the soap——"

"This is not soap," interrupted the man from Fairyland with some dignity. "In Fairyland we never wash our faces with soap; we wash them with fairy paint instead; and if that gets into our eyes, it does not hurt at all—it merely helps people to see the fairies after they are grown up, and that is a great advantage. Just lift the left wing slightly, if you please."

"Cock-a-doodle-doo!" crowed the common cock from the neighbour's back yard. "I call that a great waste of gold paint! I should not dream of wasting my best feathers on

the inside of my wings; I keep them for the part that shows!"

"Pray do not compare yourself with me," said the Weathercock, turning his back on the common cock with such unexpected vigour that the little fairy man nearly fell off his back. "You are a mere barn-door fowl;—*I* am a Fairy Queen's messenger."

"Cock-a-doodle-doo! How can anybody be a messenger who is always fixed to the same church spire?" crowed the common cock.

The Weathercock was unable to reply to this because the roof of his mouth was being gilded, and by the time he could use his tongue again the common cock had been chased out of sight by the broom of the neighbour's wife. It was always impossible to hold much of a conversation with the common cock, because at any minute somebody might come along and chase him out of sight.

"In some ways it is an advantage to be chained always to the same church spire," remarked the Weathercock, as soon as the brush was taken out of his mouth.

At last there was not a feather on the Weathercock that had not been painted with the gold paint that came from Fairyland. He shone and glittered and sparkled like fire and precious stones; no common cock could have looked up at him without being dazzled. The ragged old man slid a little way down the church spire in order to get a good view of him; then he

turned a somersault on to the Weathercock's back again, and began to pack up his things.

"That's done!" he remarked, stowing away his pot of gold paint and his brushes under his tattered old coat. "I may as well go on to the stars, now I am so far on the way, and that will save me another journey after sunset. Good-bye, everybody!"

He took a dive up into the blue sky and disappeared. And the Baby and the Weathercock were the only two people in the village who ever knew what

became of the little man who was sent from Fairyland, on the first day of summer, with a pot of gold paint under his arm.

"HE TOOK A DIVE UP INTO THE BLUE SKY"

All the Other Cocks

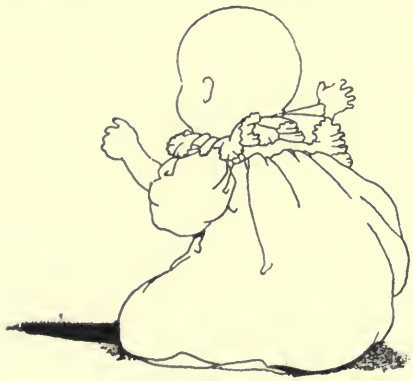
THAT Weathercock has been quite unbearable since he had his new coat of paint," grumbled the common cock, one hot day in June.

"I do not agree with you," said the Baby, who was lying on the grass plot at the moment. "I like him much better than any other kind of cock, myself. Other cocks are never painted with fairy paint."

"Cock-a-doodle-doo! You have never seen any other cocks," returned the common cock. "There are many cocks in the world besides myself and that impostor up there in the blue

sky. I will fetch some other cocks for you to see. Cock-a-doodle-doo! That's a first-rate idea of mine!"

He was so pleased with his idea that he scuttled over the fence and along the road at a pace that sent the dust flying through the air and into the Baby's eyes. "I don't like common cocks," complained the Baby, rubbing his eyes. "I greatly prefer cocks that stay in the blue sky and do not kick up the nasty dust!"



He crowed with delight, though, when the common cock returned and brought with him a turkey cock and a gamecock and a woodcock and a sparrow cock—all the cocks, indeed, that he had been able to collect in the neighbourhood at such a short notice. The Baby had never seen so many cocks in his life, and he was charmed with their appearance.

"Pretty cocks!" he crowed politely. "It is very kind of you to pay me a visit. Pray make yourselves at home."

The cocks were delighted with the Baby's manners. They at once made themselves at home in the schoolmaster's garden. They strutted about the schoolmaster's flower-beds; they scraped up the seeds, and uprooted the young plants, and flung the mould all over the grass and the gravel, and thoroughly enjoyed their visit.

"Look at them!" crowed the Weathercock contemptuously from above. "There is not a single golden feather among them!"

"Do not listen to him!" shrieked all the other cocks, bustling up to the Baby and making a circle round him. "We are much more important than the Weathercock. Do you not agree with us?"

"Let me look at you, one by one," begged the Baby, who did not like to be completely surrounded by cocks, especially when they all crowed in his face at once and hid the blue sky from him. "It is impossible to tell one cock from another in this crowd."

"Gobble-gobble!" said the turkey cock, walking up and down the little grass plot in front of the Baby. "What has a mere Weathercock to boast of? His feathers are glued so tightly on his back that he cannot raise one of them. Look at me, on the contrary!" Here the turkey cock puffed himself out to such an enormous size that the Baby was dreadfully alarmed.

"Go away!" he roared. "I don't like birds that swell themselves up and down. I prefer birds who do keep their feathers glued to their backs."

Then the game cock pranced daintily round, to show the Baby how beautifully he could point his toes. The game

cock had taken dancing lessons in his youth, and did not allow people to forget it.

"I am never in a hurry," he said in a superior tone. "Hurry is so very inelegant. See how gracefully I walk, and how well I turn out my toes!"

"It would take you a very long time to get to Fairyland, though," said the Baby, who did not think much of the game cock's way of walking.

Then the woodcock flew slowly and majestically round and round the little garden. "I do not waste my time in walking,"

he boasted. "I have wings, and, what is more, I can use them. The Weathercock has wings too, but he cannot so much as flap them to keep himself warm on a cold day. I am far more important than all the other cocks; there can be no doubt about that."

"You are not at all pretty to look at," said the Baby, as the woodcock flew back to the wood on the hillside.

The next cock was the little cock sparrow, who hopped backwards and forwards over the Baby's toes all the time he was chattering.

"I can never keep still," he chirped. "I hop from morning till night, except when I fly. But I do not fly long distances; that would be very dull. I like plenty of company, plenty of conversation, and plenty to eat. Fairyland? Not I! This world has good enough bread-crumbs in it for me." And he flew off to the back doorstep, where he had just caught sight of a particularly fat bread-crumb.

The Baby kicked his legs in the direction of the blue sky, and crowed. "It is best of all to be a Weathercock," he decided.

"The Weathercock cannot flap his wings, and he cannot hop over my toes, and he does not talk about bread-crumbs. He has a golden brain, and he thinks golden thoughts; and he has golden wings that take him to Fairyland once a year. It is better to know how to fly to Fairyland once a year than to fly over the fence every day."

"What a very disappointing Baby!" crowed all the other cocks. "He gave us such a different impression when he first spoke to us!"

Then the schoolmaster's wife came with her broom and drove them out of her garden. She agreed with her Baby that the best cock of all was the one who stayed at the top of the church spire and left people's gardens alone.

The Village Shop

THERE was only one shop in the Weathercock's village, but it contained everything that anybody could possibly want to buy. There were boots and chocolate and butter and tobacco and biscuits and shirts and buns and blacking and brooms and bacon and matches and lard and clay pipes and jam and dripping and tops and black-lead. These were only a few of the things that were to be found in Widow Bunce's shop. For all that, it was not a large shop. It was so small, indeed, that only one customer could with any comfort stand inside it. This was in some ways a great convenience, for everything was easily within reach; and it saved time, when someone wanted to buy boots and bacon, for instance, to find

that the boots were situated on the top of the bacon and were therefore quite easy to find.

In the window of the village shop were five glass jars. In the first jar were biscuits with little pink sugar spots all over them; in the second were peppermint sticks, painted with uneven stripes; in the third were three-cornered bull's-eyes; in the fourth were large, round, flat, black cough drops; and in the fifth was rat poison. The rat poison looked much nicer to eat than anything in the other four jars; but Widow Bunce was very careful not to sell the rat poison to anybody whose head did not reach to the top of her counter, so there was not a boy in the village who had ever been fortunate enough to taste it. Even Timothy, Widow Bunce's grandson, who actually lived under the same roof with the rat poison, had never tasted it. Timothy was a very little boy, and his head did not reach nearly to the top of the counter.

One day, Widow Bunce went to tea with the schoolmaster's

WIDOW BUNCE GOES OUT TO TEA

wife. This was a very important event; it happened only once or twice a year, and it entirely spoiled the appearance of Widow Bunce. Generally, when she stood behind her counter in a clean print dress and apron, with a starched white cap on her grey curls, she looked a sweet and pretty old lady. But when she put on the green silk gown in which she had been married half a century ago, and hid her soft white hair under an enormous poke bonnet, she looked a very different sort of old lady, and she frightened people dreadfully, especially the people whose heads did not reach up to the top of the counter. As for Timothy, his alarm at her terrific appearance did not die away until she was out of sight. Then he reminded himself that he was to keep shop in her absence, and he felt important instead.

"What can I do for you?" he said in a grand tone, when the Idle Boy came strolling along the street and flattened his nose against the shop window.

The Idle Boy was extremely astonished at being asked such a question. When Widow Bunce was in the shop, she knew better than to ask people what she could do for them if they came and rubbed their noses against her shop window. She merely told them what she would do *to* them if they did not run away at once. Widow Bunce knew quite well that people who had a hot penny clenched in one hand did not stand about outside her shop; they came inside and spent it.

"You can give me a ha'porth of rat poison, please," said the

Idle Boy, when he had recovered from his surprise at Timothy's question.

Timothy stopped being superior, and turned back again into a little boy whose head did not reach to the top of the counter.

"Granny won't let me," he said.

"Oh," was Jerry's answer to this; "I thought you were really keeping shop!"

"So I am," retorted Timothy indignantly. "I can sell you a clay pipe or a fly-paper ——"

"I don't want a clay pipe or a fly-paper," interrupted Jerry. "I want a ha'porth of rat poison."

"Where's the halfpenny?" asked Timothy, to gain time.

Jerry was not so much upset by this question as Timothy hoped he would be. "Of course, if you are not really keeping shop," he answered, "I suppose I must wait till Widow Bunce comes back. It's rather a pity she didn't leave a real shopman in her shop, isn't it?"

This kind of remark was more than Timothy could bear. After all, he had been left in charge of the shop; and where was the glory of being a shopman unless you could sell rat poison? Besides, he was just as anxious as Jerry was to taste the contents of the fifth glass jar. So he piled three fat sides of bacon on the top of a large round cheese, and, standing on the summit of this very shaky erection, reached out his hand towards the farthest of the five jars in the window.

At this moment the Weathercock put his head on one side and looked down into the village shop.

"Little boys who eat rat poison shrivel up and go off with a bang!" he crowed shrilly.

Timothy drew back his hand. "I say, supposing it isn't good to eat, after all?" he said doubtfully.

"Then you needn't eat it," answered the Idle Boy. "That will leave all the more for me."

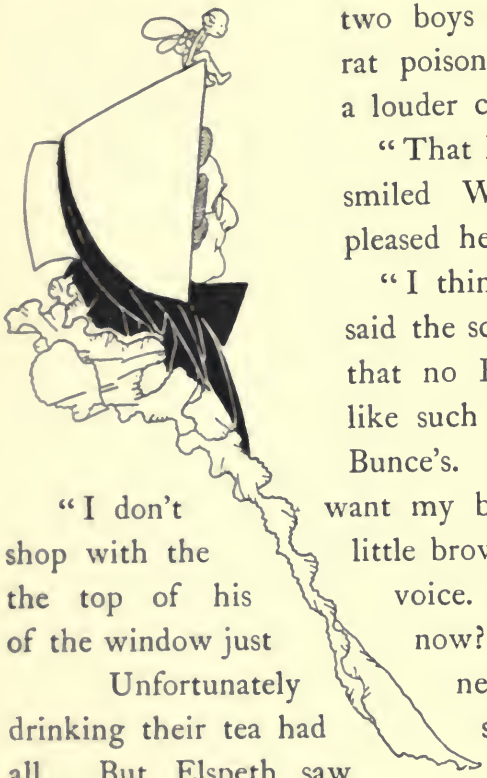
Timothy put out his hand again. The Weathercock spun round on his toes and sent a hasty message to Fairyland. And that was why the Baby suddenly stretched out his hands to Widow Bunce and crowed, just as she was passing up her cup for the fourth time.

What the Brownie did

"THERE'S a little brown fairy sitting on your bonnet," said the Baby.

"That's a pretty boy!" was all Widow Bunce said. It was seventy years since Widow Bunce had left off crowing, and she had never seen a fairy since then; so perhaps it was not strange that she should entirely misunderstand the Baby's remark.

"There's a fairy sitting on your bonnet, and he says that



two boys are just going to eat your rat poison!" repeated the Baby, with a louder crow than before.

"That Baby shows very good taste," smiled Widow Bunce. "See how pleased he is with my bonnet!"

"I think he must want his bottle," said the schoolmaster's wife, who knew that no Baby of hers could possibly like such a terrible bonnet as Widow Bunce's.

"I don't want my bottle; I want to go to the shop with the little brown fairy," roared the Baby at the top of his voice. "Didn't you see him fly out of the window just now?"

Unfortunately neither of the ladies who sat drinking their tea had seen the little brown fairy at all. But Elspeth saw him as he flew up the village street; and that helped her to guess what the Baby was saying.

"Shall I take him along to the shop with me?" she asked, putting her head in at the door. "It is a beautiful fine evening for a walk."

The schoolmaster's wife was only too glad to accept Elspeth's invitation. It was not easy to carry on a conversation with Widow Bunce while the Baby made loud remarks that no one

understood. The Baby was even more glad than the schoolmaster's wife.

"What kind of a fairy was it, pretty gold bird?" he asked, as Elspeth hoisted him up against her shoulder and carried him through the village.

"That was a brownie," explained the Weathercock. "Fairyland generally chooses a brownie to deal with this sort of thing. The outdoor fairies have enough to do out of doors in the summer time."

"He flies very fast," said Elspeth, just as though she were joining in the Baby's conversation with the Weathercock. "He is already out of sight."

The brownie, indeed, arrived in the village shop just in time to give a little

push to the large round cheese on which Timothy had piled the sides of bacon. Then the sides of bacon began to wobble. Timothy also began to wobble. Timothy had thick hob-nailed boots on, and it is difficult to stand in hob-nailed boots on a sloping side of bacon, especially when the side of bacon gives a jump. So Timothy did not stand upright. He made a last attempt to grasp the jar of rat poison, and he succeeded in sweeping all the other glass jars on to the floor. He then turned a somersault in the air amid a shower of broken glass, peppermint sticks, bulls'-eyes, cough drops, and pink sugar biscuits, and fell into a sack of flour. The only thing that remained quietly in its place was the jar of rat poison.

When Timothy scrambled out of the sack of flour, he was covered with white patches and strongly resembled a piebald pony. The Idle Boy gave a long whistle as he looked at him.

"What will Widow Bunce say?" enquired the Idle Boy.

Timothy knew only too well what Widow Bunce would say. He knelt down on the floor and tried to pick up some of the pieces, and several tears rolled out of his eyes and fell among the broken glass.

"Serves you right, young man!" said the brownie, who had flown up to the top shelf and was sitting cross-legged on a pot of strawberry jam.

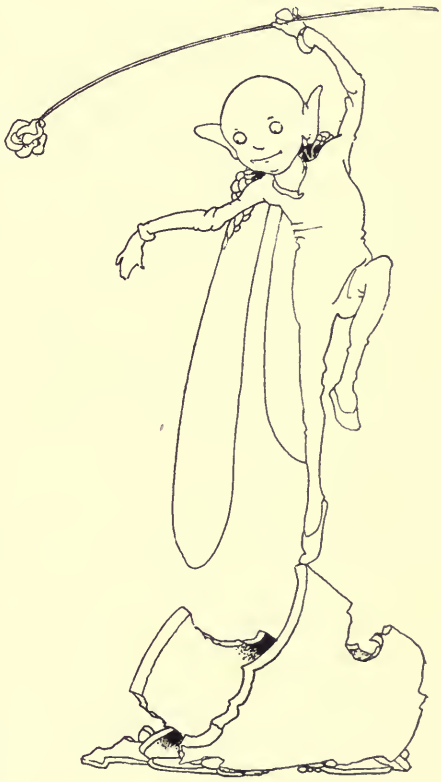
Elspeth and the Baby arrived in the doorway just in time to hear the brownie's cheerful remark.

"Oh, what an unkind fairy!" said Elspeth, when she saw

"SERVES YOU RIGHT, YOUNG MAN," SAID THE BROWNIE

the tears in Timothy's eyes; and she laid the Baby on the counter and stooped down to help to pick up the pieces.

"Nasty brown fairy! Go back to Fairyland! Don't want you!" said the Baby.



Now, the little brown fairy did not like to be called unkind and nasty. He did not like to be disapproved of by a baby. In Fairyland it is always considered of the first importance to win the friendship of babies. So he floated down from his pot of strawberry jam and stood on one leg among the broken glass. "You don't deserve it, you young rascals; but here goes!" he said, and he waved his wand round his head.

Instantly, all the broken glass joined together and turned into four glass jars again. The peppermint sticks and cough drops and sugar biscuits and bulls'-eyes all joined together again, too, and jumped into their right jars; and the four jars sprang immediately into their right places in the shop window. The white patches on Timothy's clothes raced back at full speed

into the sack of flour, and Timothy stopped looking like a piebald pony. And all this happened only just in time; for at that moment in walked Widow Bunce.

"You have kept the shop very nicely, Timothy," said Widow Bunce, "and here is a whole peppermint stick as a reward."

"That peppermint stick is mine!" said the brownie; and he took it out of Timothy's hand before he had a single bite, and rode back to Fairyland on it.

"Quite right!" crowed the Weathercock approvingly.

The Overworked Sun Fairies

"WHAT a beautiful summer we are having!" said the schoolmaster's wife, as she sat on the doorstep with her Baby. She always played with the Baby on Sunday afternoon; that was why he liked Sunday better than any other day in the week.

The neighbour's wife also sat on her doorstep on Sunday afternoon; but she had no baby to play with. Her husband, it is true, sat beside her and smoked; but he was a very silent man, and left his wife to do all the talking. She never seemed

to mind how much of the talking she was left to do; and to-day, as usual, she began by disagreeing with the Baby's mother.

"Beautiful summer?" she echoed. "Unhealthy, *I* call it. We haven't had a bit of rain for three months, and soon there won't be a drop of water in the place."

"Hooray!" crowed the Baby. "When there isn't a drop of water in the place they won't be able to plunge me into a boiling hot bath every night!"

"Do you really mean that?" said his mother to the neighbour's wife. "Shall I not be able to wash my own Baby?"

"Not unless you wash him in ginger-beer," said the neighbour's wife. She meant this for a joke, and the Baby's mother

laughed politely. But the Baby did not laugh. He had seen how much enjoyment the Idle Boy managed to extract from one bottle of ginger-beer, and he thought a whole bath of ginger-beer would be a most thrilling experience. So when his mother went on to say that this was the hottest summer within her recollection, he hastened to agree with her.

"It is the hottest summer within my recollection too," he said.

"My precious! You can't remember any other summer, can you?" his mother happened to say, just then.

"I should think not, from the vacant look in his eyes," observed the neighbour's wife. "I never saw such a backward baby for his age. He can't speak a word yet, can he?"

"He'll talk quite soon enough," said the neighbour, which was the first remark the Baby had ever heard him make.

"I don't hold with forward babies myself," said the schoolmaster's wife with great dignity. "Forward babies go off as they grow older."

"Your Baby will not go off, then," remarked the neighbour's wife.

Fortunately, the schoolmaster joined them at that moment. The schoolmaster was in one of his most learned moods.

"Extremely interesting meteorological conditions are now prevailing over the globe, are they not?" he began. This was the schoolmaster's way of saying that it was a hot summer. "No doubt, the sun-spot which has just been discerned——"

"I must get ready for church," said the neighbour's wife hurriedly, and she went indoors.

"I must put on the kettle for Baby's bath," said the schoolmaster's wife, and she went indoors too.

When the schoolmaster found that nobody was there to listen to him, he went away too; and the Baby was left alone on the doorstep.

"Sun-spots indeed!" scoffed the Weathercock. "As if everybody didn't know that the specks on the sun are just sun fairies, and that everything they do is in obedience to the Fairy Queen. Hillo! Here come some of them now!"

The Baby looked up just in time to see hundreds and hundreds of sun fairies crowding round the church spire. They were all made of flame and fire, and in their hands they carried red-hot pokers instead of wands, and they dragged themselves along as though they were almost too tired to flap one wing after the other.

"Oh, how overworked we are!" they gasped. "For two whole months have we been scorching up the grass and the flowers and the fields, and drying up the wells and the streams, and taking all the colour out of people's hats and bonnets and frocks, and sunburning people's cheeks, and ripening the corn and the fruit before it is properly grown-up, and doing all sorts of things for which we get no thanks at all!"

"You get plenty of thanks from the children," said the Weathercock.

"Indeed you do!" crowed the Baby. "I love you, little sun fairies. You make the world a warm dry place for me to play in. When the storm fairies come I have to lie indoors in a stuffy parlour, with nothing to talk to but an exceedingly proud bird under a glass case, who never answers when he is spoken to. I love you, little sun fairies!"

The sun fairies tried to look pleased at the Baby's remarks, but they were almost too weary to smile. "Can you not help us?" they said imploringly to the Weathercock. "There is no time to be lost, for we are under orders now to go down into the valley and dry up the last pond before sunset."

The Weathercock spun round on his toes, which he always did as an aid to reflection. "I will mention it to the Fairy Queen," he said condescendingly at last.

The Baby suddenly gave a loud crow. "Please go on

working, dear little sun fairies, till the day after to-morrow," he begged them. "The Poet's hay is going to be carried to-morrow."

Now, no true fairy can refuse a Baby's request. So the sun fairies smiled down at the Baby on the doorstep, and they tried hard to forget how overworked they were. "If we shrivel into cinders, we will go on working till the Poet's hay is carried!" they promised him.

The Poet's Hay

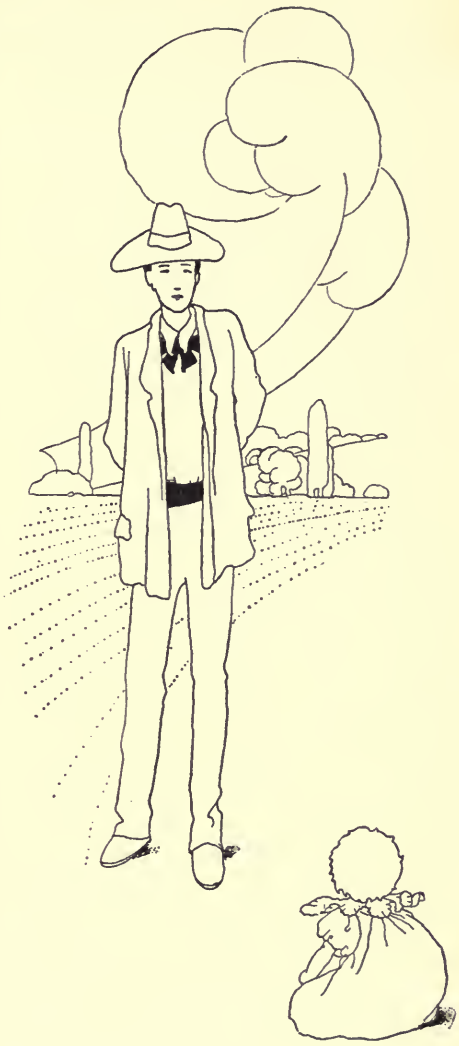
THE Poet's hay lay spread out in long straight rows in the meadow that sloped down to the river. Everybody else's hay had been carried long ago; but the Poet loved the long meadow grass, and he wanted to write so many poems about it that he put off cutting it until the very last minute. And when the very last minute came, Elspeth went to fetch Jerry's father early in the morning, before the Poet was out of bed; and Jerry's father arrived with a scythe, and by the

time the Poet came out of his little house by the bridge, the long meadow grass was falling over on its side with a steady swish, swish, swish! The Poet felt very sad, but he thought of another poem immediately and went up on the hillside to write it down; and by the time he came back again Jerry's father had finished his work, and not a single piece of waving meadow grass remained upright. Then the sun fairies came and danced over it for three days, and on the fourth day Elspeth invited all the boys and girls in the village to come and help her to carry it.

The Baby came too, but he did not help much. He lay under the hedge and talked in a loud voice about all the fairies

he saw among the hay. Nobody listened to him; but that did not trouble him. When people did listen, they generally misunderstood what he was saying; and that was much more annoying.

The Poet did not help much either. He came and sat beside the Baby, and he looked so happy that he must have seen the fairies too. But he did not mention the fairies in his conversation.



"How glorious everything is!" he murmured dreamily. "See the blue mist over the hills, creeping, creeping down into the valley, like a beautiful lady clad in fairy dew——"

"A sign of rain, that is," said the neighbour's wife.

The Poet went on talking dreamily. "Sweet hay!" he murmured. "Glorious new-mown hay! Grey and silver in the sunlight, rich purple in the shadow——"

"Now, you do look on the worst side of things," interrupted the neighbour's wife. "Purple, indeed! One would think the hay was mouldy, to hear you talk!"

The Baby stretched out his hands and battered as much of the Poet as he could reach with them. "*I* shouldn't think anything of the kind," he told the Poet. "I like the way you talk. If the grown-up language were always like that, I should be quite ready to learn it."

The Poet, who had been slightly depressed by the remarks of the neighbour's wife, smiled happily again. "The schoolmaster's Baby will be a poet when he grows up. He seems quite to understand what I say," said the Poet.

The other children paid no attention to the Poet's conversation. They were far too much occupied in getting in people's way. They made castles of hay and little houses of hay; they buried Goblin, the old blind dog, in hay; they tossed hay over one another. All this, however, did not help anybody to carry the hay; and at last Elspeth declared that it was time to stop playing, and she set a good example by making a round smooth haycock right in the middle of the field. Then she set the Baby on the top of it, and the other children made haycocks all round the Baby, until the field was quite a neat and tidy field, and the hay was all ready to be carried.

"Look!" said Elspeth. "The Baby is king of the hayfield."

ELSPETH MAKES THE BABY THE KING OF THE HAYFIELD

"I don't want to be a king!" complained the Baby. "The hay prickles!"

Fortunately, the Poet, who was the only person in the meadow who was disengaged at the moment, heard him say this; and he took the Baby in his arms and carried him down to the river bank, and talked to him in the grown-up language for the rest of the afternoon.

"Why doesn't that Poet come and carry his own hay?" grumbled the neighbour's wife, as she pitchforked a whole hay-cock at once into the cart.

"Anybody can carry hay," crowed the Baby; "but only the Poet knows how to talk beautifully in the grown-up language."

"I believe he encourages that Baby to make silly noises,' said the neighbour's wife disapprovingly.

The blue mist, that looked like a beautiful lady clad in fairy dew, was creeping, creeping, down into the valley. It crept upwards too, and threw a curtain across the sun. There had not been a curtain across the sun for three whole months.

"Look, look!" crowed the Baby. "The sun fairies are beginning to fly back to Fairyland. Can you not hear them fizzling as they rush through the mist? And see, here come the rain fairies, riding on the cloud horses!"

"Make haste!" called Elspeth. "If we are not quick, the rain will come before the hay is carried."

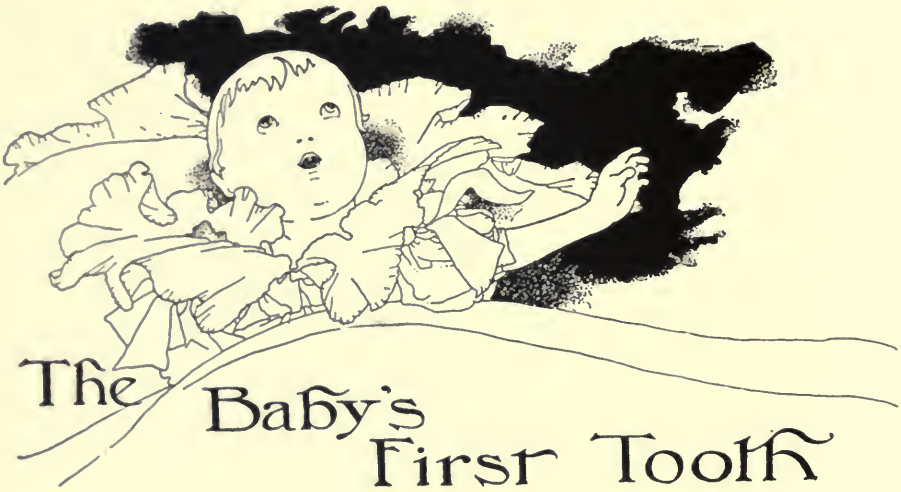
"The rain won't come till the hay is carried," the Baby

assured her. "Fairyland has given me a promise." But nobody paid any attention to this. They all worked harder than ever, while the neighbour's wife said at intervals that the Poet

did not deserve to have his hay carried at all. As the Poet never pretended for one moment that he did deserve to have his hay carried, this did not matter really to anyone. And so the last wisp of hay was flung on the top of the Poet's stack just as the first rain fairy arrived, very much out of breath, from Fairyland.

"That's a good thing!" said the villagers, hurrying home.

"That's a good thing!" sighed the sun fairies, as they put their heads under their wings and went to sleep in Fairyland.



The Baby's First Tooth

"YOU seem hugely pleased with yourself this morning," remarked the Weathercock, when the Baby was brought out as usual and placed on the doorstep in his cradle.

"So I am," crowed the Baby. "So would you be if you had a tooth like mine." And he opened his mouth wide in order to show the Weathercock his first tooth.

The Weathercock did not seem particularly excited about it. "That means that you will soon be quite grown-up, and then I shall have no one to talk to," he sighed.

The oldest man in the village, who came hobbling along with his stick, was much more appreciative. He, too, had only one tooth in his head, and that helped him to sympathize with the Baby.

"Let me look at it," he creaked in a whisper, bending over the cradle on the doorstep. "The Blue Griffin, who knows all the news, told me about it directly I got up this morning."

So the Baby showed him his first tooth, and the oldest man in the village smiled so broadly that he showed the Baby his own last tooth in return. After that he hobbled off again, for he saw there was going to be a cricket match in the road just opposite, and he did not want to lose the only tooth that remained in his old head.

The road in front of the schoolmaster's house was not the most convenient place in the world for a cricket match, for the stumps had to be propped up against the neighbour's fence, and every now and then the baker's cart, or a farmer's dray, drove right through the cricket match and scattered it in all direc-

tions. But it always rearranged itself and went on playing again as if nothing had happened; and not one of the players would have exchanged the village street for the finest green field in the world. This puzzled the Weathercock very much. The Weathercock was not really a sportsman.

"I can see hundreds and hundreds of cricket matches going

on all over the land," he said, twirling round as he spoke; "and nearly all of them are being played in busy places like street corners. I can see windows being broken, and the front teeth of respectable citizens being knocked out. I am glad that my exalted position places me out of the reach of cricket matches."

"My position doesn't," said the Baby, who was in great danger from the cricket match every time that a ball was bowled at the

neighbour's fence. "And when you have only one tooth, it is just as well to keep it in your head."

"Just hark at that Baby," said the neighbour's wife, as she came out to shake a mat. "Never did I hear such silly noises as he makes. He can't even say 'Daddy'. Baby, try and say 'Daddy'."

The Baby did not make the least effort to say "Daddy". "I would sooner not try, thank you," he crowed. "If I learn to say that sort of thing, I shall not be able to talk to the Weathercock any more."

"I don't suppose he has so much as a tooth in his head," continued the neighbour's wife; and she dropped the mat and put her finger into the Baby's mouth. This annoyed the Baby so much that he bit the finger as hard as anyone could bite a finger with one tooth.

"He certainly has a tooth," said the neighbour's wife; and she hastily drew her finger out of his mouth and rubbed it. Then she turned round and caught sight of the cricket match.

"Be off with you!" she cried, taking the stumps away

from her fence and throwing them across the road. "What next, indeed!"

The cricket match was used to attacks of this kind, and was not disturbed by them. So, as soon as the neighbour's wife had gone indoors, the stumps were propped up against the barn on the opposite side of the road, and the cricket match began again. This time, every ball that was hit by the batsman went towards the Baby.

"That is much more dangerous than before," said the Weathercock. "Fairyland must look into this." So he sent a hasty message to the Fairy Queen by the west wind. And when the Fairy Queen heard that a Baby who had just cut his first tooth was lying opposite to a cricket match, she at once sent off a troop of fairy guards to protect him; and the fairy guards arrived at the schoolmaster's house just as the cricket match was being turned into a dispute.

"Out!" said Jerry, who was bowling.

"Not out!" returned Timothy, who was batting. "The stump fell down of its own accord."

Naturally, a cricket match that had turned into a dispute was not likely to see the fairy guards. But the Baby saw them as they came riding towards him on their fairy horses; and when they made a circle round him, with their spears pointed towards the cricket match, he knew his first tooth was no longer in danger. They were only just in time, for at that instant Jerry lost his temper and threw the ball at Timothy.

"OUT!" SAID JERRY, WHO WAS BOWLING

Straight towards the Baby it came. The whole of the cricket match cried out in alarm. It looked as though not only the Baby's first tooth, but the whole of the Baby, was going to be crushed by the horrid hard red ball. But the Baby was quite safe. One of the fairy guards just caught the ball on his spear and tossed it aside, and it rolled harmlessly down the road.

"Must have had a break on it," said the cricket match in a tone of experience.

"There wasn't a break on it," said Jerry. He had stopped losing his temper, and that, no doubt, was why he was able to see the fairy guards standing round the Baby on the doorstep.

Painting the World Red and Gold

THE Baby lay under the apple tree once more. This time, he was not playing with the apple blossom, for all the apple blossom had gone long ago, and the little round green balls that came after the apple blossom and used to drop down on the Baby's head in the summer-time, had turned into big round red apples, and Jerry was up in the tree picking them. The Poet's little daughter stood below, catching them in her pinafore as Jerry threw them down, and the schoolmaster's wife packed them into a basket and carried them indoors. The

schoolmaster walked about the garden and talked in a learned manner, just to show that he was still a schoolmaster, though it was out of school hours.

"The equinox is approaching; the trees will soon revert to their annual habit of casting their leaves," observed the schoolmaster.

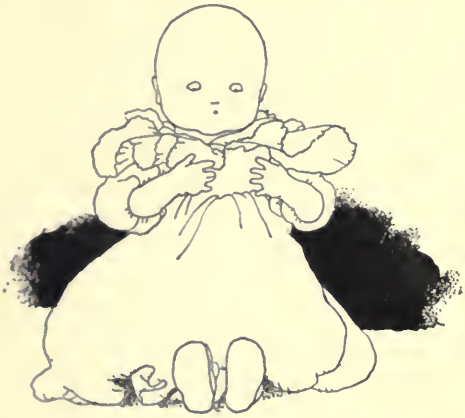
The Weathercock expressed this far more simply. "I can see right over the edge of the world, and all round the moon, and all round the sun," he boasted; "and the fairies are painting everything red and gold. That's for autumn."

"What is autumn?" asked the Baby.

"It is something that comes to make us forget summer and think kindly of winter," said the pretty gold bird. "It is red and gold, like the schoolmaster's apples."

"I want to come up there too," crowed the Baby, stretching his hands up to the blue sky. "I want to see the fairies painting the world red and gold."

"Give him to me," said the Idle Boy. "He will be quite safe up here in the fork of the tree."



The apple tree was not quite so high up as the blue sky, but it was better than nothing, and the Baby was delighted with what he saw up there. In every direction the fairy painters were at work, as they had been in the spring-time; but the paint in their paint-pots was much deeper and richer than it was at the beginning of the year. He saw them flitting over the fields, painting the corn deep gold; he saw them fly up to the wood on the hillside and paint the wild raspberries crimson; he saw them fly down again into the valley and leave great splashes of red and brown paint on the beech trees and the maple trees and the hazel bushes; he saw them scrambling all over the hedgerows, painting the blackberries black and the

cob-nuts brown and the crab-apples red and gold. And last of all, he saw them dancing all round him as he sat up in the apple tree; for the schoolmaster had been in a great hurry to pick his apples this year, and the fairies had not yet finished painting them.

"We should have done better to wait a week, after all," said the schoolmaster's wife, as the Idle Boy threw down a very green apple.

"If you had waited just one minute more, the fairies would have painted that apple properly," crowed the Baby. "They were just beginning it when Jerry picked it and frightened them away."

"My precious!" said his mother from below.

"Don't be in too great a hurry, you painter fellows!" crowed the Fairy Queen's messenger bird. "Jerry won't thank you if you don't leave one or two nice green apples for him."

It was a fact that the schoolmaster's wife sorted out all the unripe apples from Elspeth's pinafore and carried only the red and gold ones into the house; and the apples that the fairies had not had time to finish painting she made into a little heap for Jerry to take away with him. The schoolmaster's wife knew as well as any weathercock that the Idle Boy preferred green apples to red ones.

"Possibly," the schoolmaster was ruminating, "the equinoctial gales would have spoilt the apples if we had waited another week."

"What is an equinoctial gale?" asked the Baby. "Is it a bad fairy?"

The Weathercock shuddered. "Don't ask me to describe it," he begged. "The mere mention of it makes me feel uncomfortable. I once had the misfortune to fall upon a ship during an equinoctial gale, while performing an errand for the Fairy Queen, and I do not wish to repeat the experience. To make things worse, a stupid passenger mistook me for a sea-gull, and I was very nearly shot and placed under a glass case. Don't speak to me of equinoctial gales!"

The Baby did not speak of them. The Idle Boy had just given him a hard green apple to play with, and he was trying to follow Jerry's example and bite a hole in it. Unfortunately, although he now had four teeth, they were scattered all over his mouth; and two teeth that meet are far more useful in a mouth than four teeth that do not meet. So, after trying to put the whole apple into his mouth at once, he threw it down in disgust.

"My precious!" said his mother, as the apple struck her on the head.

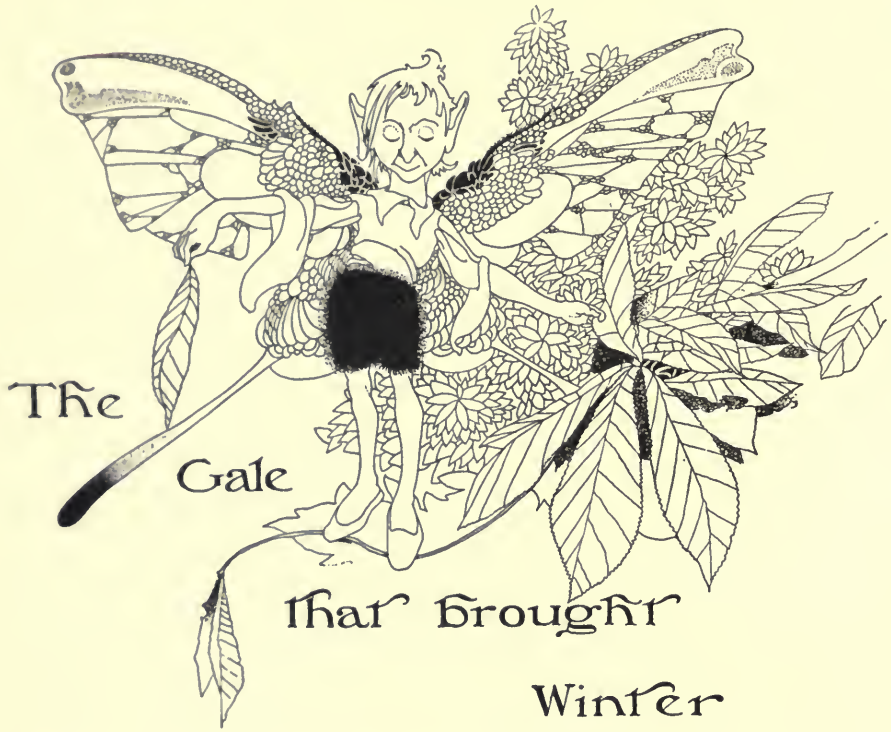
"Our son has not yet grasped the law of gravity," re-

marked the schoolmaster with a chuckle. He meant this for a joke.

"I won't have my Baby made fun of!" cried the Baby's mother, who did not know what the law of gravity was, any more than her Baby did.

"The Baby shall not be made fun of," said the painter fairies; and they rolled the little green apple under the schoolmaster's foot.

"How about the law of gravity now?" crowed the Weathercock and all the little painter fairies in a chorus, as the schoolmaster sat down suddenly in the middle of the bag of apples.



THE fairies had finished painting the world red and gold. The whole of the village, except the Poet and the Baby, had gone harvesting; and now, all the corn was gathered in and the fields were ready for ploughing. All the fruit was gathered too, and all the blackberries had been made into jam, and all the nuts that the boys had not eaten were stored up for the winter by the squirrels. There was nothing left on the trees but leaves, and everything all over the

world was waiting for winter. But winter did not seem in any hurry to come.

"I cannot understand it at all," said the Weathercock, looking first this way and then that way. "I do not see the least sign of winter; and if it does not make haste, the seasons will get terribly confused."

"What is winter like?" asked the Baby.

"Winter is not like anything except itself," answered the Weathercock, "and it means a great deal of extra work for me—with a wind that never knows its own mind from one day to another! But there is one pleasant thing about winter——" And the Weathercock paused, with a golden tear in each of his eyes waiting to fall.

"And what is that?" asked the Baby.

"The longest night that belongs to the shortest day comes in the middle of winter," answered the Weathercock softly, "and that is when I shall fly to Fairyland."

The neighbour's wife came out to throw a pail of soapy water into the street. It was washing-day, and she was rather more dissatisfied than usual.

"It is too late in the year for that Baby to stay out in the open air," she remarked.

"My Baby is an exceptionally strong baby," explained the Baby's mother. "Besides, winter is not here yet."

"No, but it ought to be," said the neighbour's wife, who always fell back on Nature if there was nobody else to complain of.

"What!" cried the Baby in dismay. "Shall I have to stay indoors, all alone with that proud and silent bird under the glass case, when winter comes? Dear, pretty, gold bird in the blue sky, do not let winter come at all this year! Let us have a year without any winter in it."

"That is all very well for you," said the Weathercock; "but the summer fairies cannot be expected to go on working for ever. Let the snow and the frost fairies take their turn."

The snow and the frost fairies seemed in no hurry to take their turn, for the world went on looking red and gold, and the Baby went on lying in the open air, and the neighbour's wife went on complaining about him, and the Baby's mother went on standing up for him. Everything went on just as though there were really going to be a year without any winter in it, until, one day, the oldest man in the village hobbled up

the village street and told the schoolmaster that there was going to be a change in the weather at last.

"I feel it in my bones," said the oldest man in the village.

The Weathercock was gazing searchingly towards the north-west, and he agreed with the oldest man in the village. "The wind is rising," he announced in great excitement.

"Do you feel it in your bones, pretty gold bird?" asked the Baby.

"Certainly not," answered the Weathercock indignantly. "When you can see as far as I can, there is no need to feel things in your bones. I can see the wind rising over the edge of the world; and soon, the gale that brings winter will be here."

"Oh dear!" sighed the Baby, who was thinking of the proud and silent bird under the glass case.

Then all the fairies in all the trees far and wide began to sigh.

"Whew-w-w!" sighed the fairies in the beech trees.

"Whew-w-w!" sighed the fairies in the elm trees.

"Whew-w-w!" sighed the fairies in all the other trees.

The Baby had never heard so much sighing all at once before, and it made him feel quite chilly. The Baby's mother, who stood at her wash-tub, felt chilly too; and she fetched the Baby round to the back of the house, and rolled him up in a thick shawl and put him under the apple tree.

It was very exciting under the apple tree. The fairies in the apple tree were sighing louder than anybody, and they were pulling off the leaves with both hands and throwing them down to the Baby. The Baby was soon covered with yellow leaves, and the apple tree stood gaunt and bare. There were no leaves on it, and no apples on it, and no apple blossom. The Baby had never seen it look like that before.

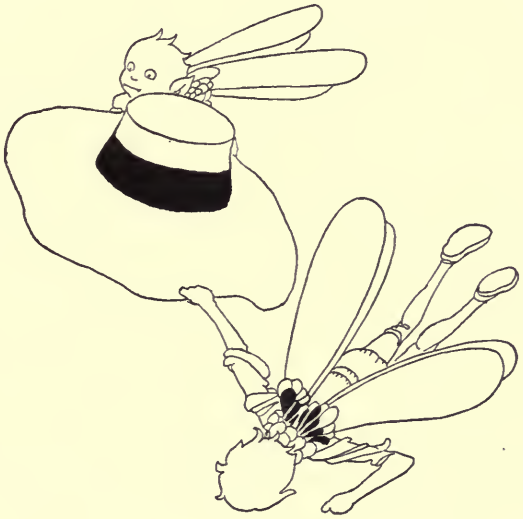
"Whew-w-w!" sighed the apple-tree fairies, as they flew home to Fairyland.

The air was thick with flying leaves. In every tree the fairies were pulling off the leaves with both hands and throwing them away. Red leaves and yellow leaves and brown leaves and golden leaves, crisp leaves and limp leaves, whole leaves and tattered leaves, all danced in the air and played at hide-and-seek with the Baby. And every now and then another tree stood bare, and all the fairies that had lived in it since the spring-time flew back to Fairyland.

"THE FAIRIES WERE PULLING OFF THE LEAVES"

"Dear me!" said the schoolmaster, as the wind fairies took his hat and tossed it down the street. "I fancy this must be an equinoctial gale."

"It is the gale that brings winter," the Baby corrected him.



The Naughty Little Wind Fairies

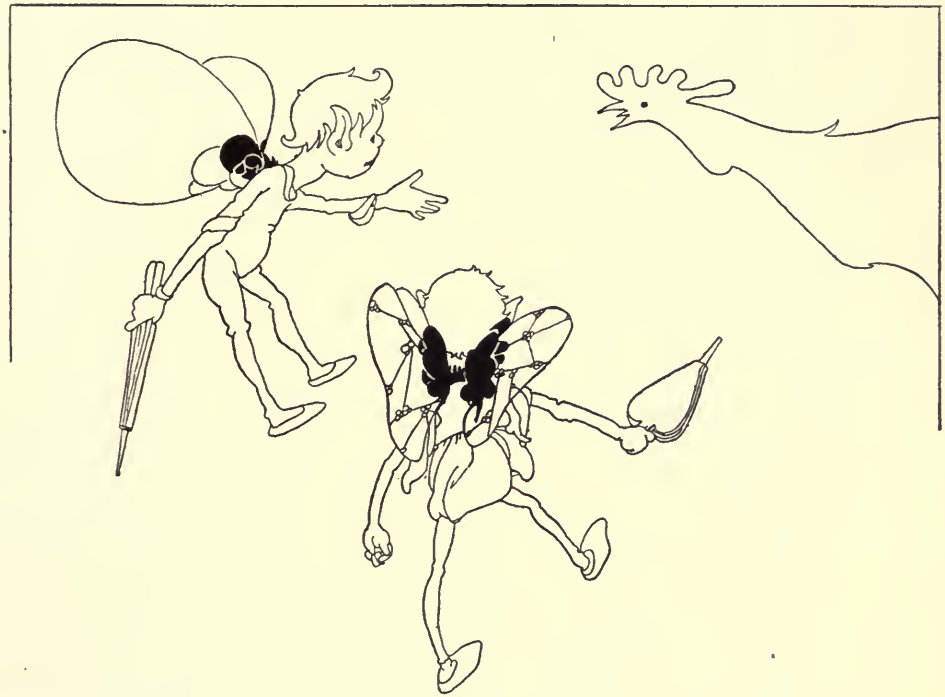
"THERE has not been such a gale for a hundred years," said the oldest man in the village.

Nobody contradicted him, for the other old men were not old enough to remember what had happened a hundred years ago. The Weathercock was the only person in the village who could have contradicted him, and the Weathercock was far too busy to waste any time in conversation. A gale like this one required all his attention.

"What orders?" panted the little wind fairies, as they

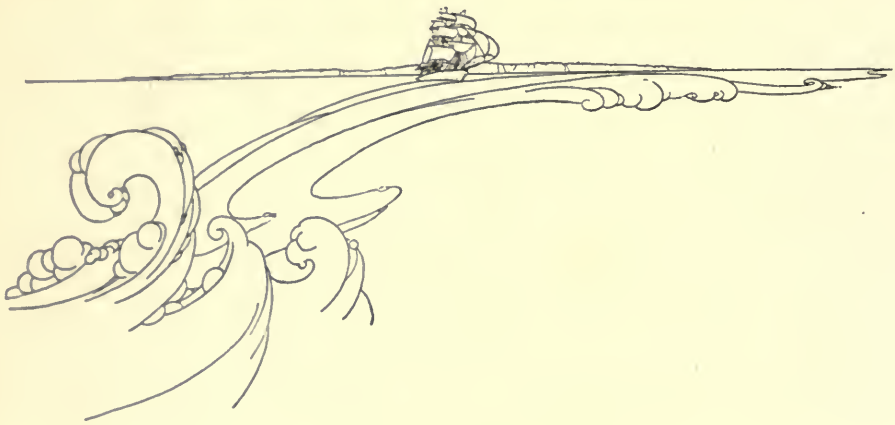
whirled round and round the Weathercock, each one with a pair of bellows in his hand.

"Blow down every leaf you can find," commanded the Weathercock. "Blow away every flower that is left blooming



in the gardens. Blow back to Fairyland everything that looks like summer and autumn. Let us have winter, and nothing but winter, now that it has come at last."

The wind fairies flew away and did what the Weathercock told them. Before sunset the still, quiet, red and gold world



was gone, and in its place was a rocking, sighing, bedraggled, tattered, bare, untidy world.

"What else?" they panted, when they rode back again on their bellows to the top of the church spire.

"Now go and blow down every chimney-cowl in the place, except the schoolmaster's," commanded the Weathercock. "Poor conceited creatures, they think they are of immense importance because they can turn their backs on the wind! Let them learn that it takes a Fairy Queen's messenger to face the wind boldly, as I do."

"What else?" panted the wind fairies again, when the chimney-cowls were clattering down the street, and all the fires in the village, except the schoolmaster's, were smoking furiously.

"That will do for the present," answered the Weathercock.

THE WIND FAIRIES HAVE A GAME WITH THE SEA

"You can go back now to the edge of the world, where you came from. It would greatly oblige me, though, if you were to pitch that Blue Griffin into the road on your way. It may teach him not to call himself a bird any more!"

On their way back to the edge of the world, the wind fairies did a good deal more, though, than to pitch the Blue Griffin into the road. They rushed across the valley, and up the hills, and down the other side to the sea shore; and they hurled themselves at the sea, and whipped it as if it had been cream, and churned it as if it had been butter, and tossed it hither and thither, until it rose high into the air and plunged deep down into the hollows, and behaved altogether like a very alarming and unpleasant sort of sea.

"Stop!" cried the Weathercock, turning round and round in great agitation when he saw what the naughty little wind fairies were doing on the other side of the hills. "I did not tell you to do that!"

But the wind fairies were having such a splendid game with the sea that they did not listen to the Weathercock. They had just found a ship to play with, and it is not every day that the wind fairies find a ship to play with.

"Let us play at ball with this ship!" said the naughty little wind fairies; and they played at ball with it all night long.

"How that Weathercock does want oiling!" grumbled the neighbour's wife, every time she woke up and heard the Weathercock turning about in his agitation.

"It would not surprise me to find the Weathercock blown down in the morning," said the schoolmaster, as he sat up late over his books and read about equinoctial gales in five languages at once.

But the Weathercock was not blown down; and very lucky this was for the ship that was being played with by the naughty little wind fairies. For the first gleam of sunlight that shone over the hilltops in the morning struck upon the pretty gold bird at the top of the church spire, and the captain of the ship saw it through his telescope.

"That must be a Weathercock," said the captain of the ship. "Where there is a Weathercock, there must be a church; and where there is a church, there must be a

village; and where there is a village, there must be dry land. Steer towards that gleam of gold!"

Then the Weathercock sent a message to Fairyland about the naughty little wind fairies, and the Fairy Queen sent out her swiftest messengers to call them home; and the naughty little wind fairies slunk back to Fairyland in disgrace, and were not allowed to see the Fairy Queen's smile for a whole year, which was the worst punishment she could invent on the spur of the moment. And the sea stopped behaving like whipped cream, and turned into a charming playtime sea again; and the ship sailed towards the gleam of gold, and found a port on the other side of the hills, and went into it. The ship wanted a rest badly, after behaving like an india-rubber ball all night long.

"There has certainly not been such a gale for a hundred years," said the oldest man in the village, as he watched the Blue Griffin being hoisted up into its place again by the village carpenter.

"Rubbish!" crowed the Weathercock, who now had time to join in the conversation. "There is a gale like it every autumn."

"Dear me!" remarked the schoolmaster, glancing up at the Weathercock as he said this. "That bird was not blown down after all."

"Does he take me for a common chimney-cowl?" crowed the Fairy Queen's messenger bird indignantly.

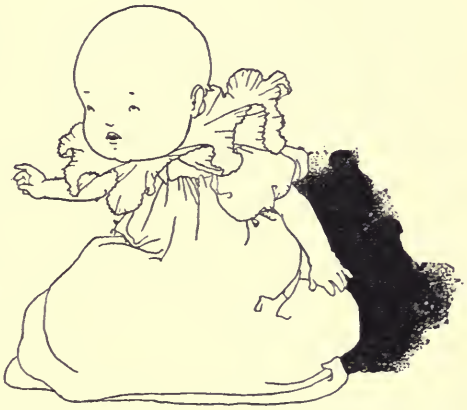
The Bird under the Glass Case

THE bird under the glass case never moved a feather from one year's end to another. He looked straight in front of him with round shiny eyes that neither blinked nor twinkled; he stood with one foot on a frosted twig, and the other foot on a little lump of stiff grey moss; and he did not seem in any hurry to eat the worm that dangled from his beak. The worm was a dusty tin worm, and certainly did not look tempting.

"Do please turn this way for a change," implored the Baby, when he had been shut up in the parlour with the bird under the glass case for several days. "Do please blink your eyes just once, and put the other foot on the twig, or else put both feet on the piece of moss."

But the bird under the glass case did not move a claw or blink an eye.

"Why did you pick up that worm if you did not mean to eat it?" asked the Baby. "I do not think it looks a nice worm; but, perhaps, if you were to try and swallow it, you would feel better."



But the bird under the glass case did not attempt to swallow the worm.

Then the Baby grew frightened and began to cry. "Take him away!" he roared, clenching his fists and shaking them at the proud and silent bird. "I don't like him! He never blinks his eyes, and he doesn't eat his dinner. There must be something very wrong with him if he won't eat his dinner."

"Well, well!" exclaimed the schoolmaster, hurrying into the parlour to see what the noise was about. "What does Baby want, then? Is he so fond of the pitty birdie, then? He shall be put closer to the pitty birdie, that he shall!" And the schoolmaster moved the Baby's cradle so close to the bird under the glass case that the Baby was able to touch it. No doubt, that was why there was a loud crash the next minute, and the bird in the glass case lay rolling on the ground.

Then the schoolmaster was very angry because the Baby had pushed the bird off the table and covered the floor with broken glass and bits of bird; he was very angry because the worm broke into several pieces, and because the head of the bird came off, and because the rest of him fell apart from the frosted twig and left one of his claws sticking to the lump of moss. But the Baby stopped crying, and did not feel frightened any more. It was impossible to feel frightened of a silly bird that broke into bits directly he was touched. The Baby thought he had never seen anything look so silly as that bird did, as he lay on his back without a head and short of one claw.

The Baby's mother was not nearly so angry as the Baby's father was. "Naughty Baby!" she said; but she said it with such a smile that, of course, the Baby only laughed. Then she fetched a broom and swept all the broken pieces into a dust-pan. "I shall not be sorry to see the last of it," she said cheerfully. "It harboured dust and took up a great deal of room. Besides, the Baby was frightened of the horrid thing."

"THE LITTLE BROWN FAIRY SAT ON THE TOP OF THE CLOCK"

"I am glad the fairies do help mothers to guess right," said the Baby, when he found himself alone in the parlour once more. "I wish they sometimes helped fathers to guess right, too."

"If your father hadn't guessed wrong just now, you wouldn't have been able to break that bird into bits," observed the little brown fairy, who sat cross-legged on the top of the clock.

"Oh!" crowed the Baby, dancing up and down with glee. "Where did you come from? Why didn't you come before? I've been shut up in this dull old parlour ever since the gale brought winter."

"I couldn't come until you had got rid of that thing under the glass case," explained the brownie, turning somersaults through the air until he landed in the Baby's cradle. "You couldn't expect any fairy to stay in the same room with a horrible creature of that sort."

"Will you stay now?" asked the Baby anxiously. "It is

so dull in here; and now that they have shut up all the windows, I cannot even talk to the Weathercock."

"I'm only too glad to stay," answered the brownie, standing on his head, just to make a change. "Ever since the gale brought winter I have been sitting on the top of the chimney outside, which is not at all an agreeable situation. Of course, it helps one to learn the news."

"What news have you learnt?" asked the Baby.

"Oh, all the news in the village," answered the brownie. "The common cock has a cold, and cannot say so much as 'Cock-a-doodle-doo!' without sneezing. Goblin sleeps indoors now; and the Poet wanders over the hills only in the daytime, so he has time to catch up his meals every evening. Widow Bunce is giving a tea-party next Saturday; and the Idle Boy is thinking seriously of learning to read at last. Everybody will be grown-up soon, including yourself."

"Oh, no," answered the Baby, positively. "Do you think I want to be grown-up, like the schoolmaster and the village painter and the neighbour's wife? Never!"

"Yes, you will," said the brownie. "You have begun already. To feel bored is the first sign of growing up, and you have been feeling bored ever since the gale brought winter. The Weathercock has sent a message about it to Fairyland this very morning; so there!"

The Baby felt most depressed.

"I DON'T want to go out to tea!" objected the Baby, when his mother took him on her knee and began to put on his outdoor things. The Baby had grown quite attached to the parlour since the proud and silent bird had been swept away in the dust-pan and the brownie had come to take its place. Besides, he could not bear his outdoor things.

First, there was a woollen jacket. The difficulty of steering five little crumpled pink fingers down the sleeve of a woollen jacket, without letting one of the nails catch in the wool, was enormous. After that, there were woollen gaiters and brown shoes to be put on. Those were not so bad, though the Baby found that to lie on his back, with his head hanging over the edge of his mother's knee, while she captured his plunging legs and buttoned things over them, was a most uncomfortable

position. He was nearly purple in the face and very cross by the time she hoisted him upright again, and he protested loudly while his already overheated little body was being encased in a tight cashmere mantle with a satin ruffle that scrubbed his neck. But when to this was added a weighty satin bonnet that he had outgrown, the Baby completely lost patience.

"I won't have it on!" he roared. "Take it away! There is no room under my chin for any more strings. I am nearly throttled as it is!"

"My precious!" was all his mother said; and she proceeded to tie the bonnet-strings into a magnificent bow. "There!" she added, as she carried him up the village street. "There is not another baby in the village who is so handsomely dressed as my Baby."

"I wish I were one of the other babies," sighed her Baby.

Widow Bunce's little parlour at the back of the shop was full of ladies by the time the schoolmaster's wife arrived in it. They were all very glad to see her, and they at once began to say polite things about the Baby.

THE BABY GOES TO THE TEA-PARTY

"What beautiful eyes he has, just like his father's!" said one.

"He has his mother's nose, beyond any doubt!" added another.

"I don't see any likeness to anybody myself," said the neighbour's wife. "There is no expression at all in the child's face, in *my* opinion."

Widow Bunce hastily changed the conversation. "What a pretty bonnet!" she exclaimed. "And such a handsome cloak, too! How well you dress him, to be sure!"

"Handsome is that handsome does," remarked the neighbour's wife, "and that Baby can't do anything. He hasn't begun to crawl yet; and as for talking—well, he can make silly noises, and that is all. An exceedingly backward child, *I* call him!"

Before the Baby's mother could say what she really thought of the neighbour's wife, Widow Bunce set an enormous black teapot on the table, and that fortunately stopped the conversation for quite ten minutes. In fact, if the neighbour's wife had not given the Baby a piece of crust to suck when his mother was not looking, the tea-party might have passed off quite pleasantly. As it was, that piece of crust went dreadfully astray; and the Baby had to be turned over on his face and thumped hard on the back before the piece of crust was found again.

"I always think it is wiser for those that haven't had any

experience of children to leave other people's babies alone," said the schoolmaster's wife cheerfully, when the tea-party was able to breathe again.

"I'm sure I am very sorry," said the neighbour's wife, who had not really meant to choke the Baby. "I naturally thought a child of that age would know what to do with a bit of crust. I had no idea he was still fed on bottles—and him a year old, too!"

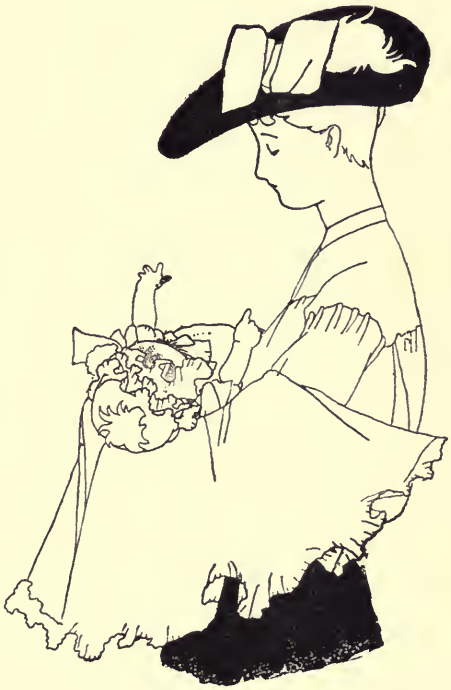
"Eleven months, two weeks, and one day," corrected the Baby's mother. "It's only those who haven't got a baby of their own who expect a child of that age to behave like a big boy of two. You said he was backward at four months, because he couldn't make a speech! And as it is getting on for his bed-time, I'll be wishing you good-night, Widow Bunce, though I've no doubt that I'm wrong in putting him to bed at all. Those that know more than I do about my own Baby would say, very likely, that he should have a pipe and a drop of beer for his supper, and sit up till midnight. But there! I'm old-fashioned, that's what it is, I suppose. Come along, my pet!"

The Baby's mother smiled so pleasantly while she said all this that no one would have guessed she was feeling annoyed. Yet, when she reached her own doorstep, she looked down at her Baby quite gravely and kissed him several times; and the Baby noticed that there was something queer about her eyes.

"My precious!" she said. "There never was such a baby

as my Baby, never, never! But—I wonder!—*are* you a backward Baby?"

"Of course, I am a backward Baby!" crowed her Baby. "That is why I can talk to the Weathercock. Surely, you do not want me to grow into an ordinary baby, do you?"



His mother did not reply to this. For once, the fairies did not seem to be helping her to guess what he was saying; and for once, the Baby was not sure that he was proud of being a backward Baby.

"Look here!" he called up to the Weathercock, while the schoolmaster's wife was unlocking the door, "if those people are going to make my mother cry, I must just grow up into an ordinary baby, that's all."

"I know. I have been thinking that for some time," answered the pretty gold bird, with a sigh. He turned his back on the schoolmaster's house, and two golden tears rolled down the church spire and fell on to the stained-glass window.

IT was the hour before sunrise on the morning of the shortest day in the year, and the Weathercock had called a council at the top of the church spire. He had invited all the fairies who had been present at the Baby's christening a year ago, and they sat on the pinnacles of the church spire in little groups and flapped their wings to keep themselves warm.

"To-day is the Baby's birthday," announced the Weathercock in a very important voice. "The Baby is a year old, and it is time for him to grow into an ordinary baby."

The christening fairies covered their faces with their hands

and sighed. "It is time for our Baby to grow up," they repeated dolefully.

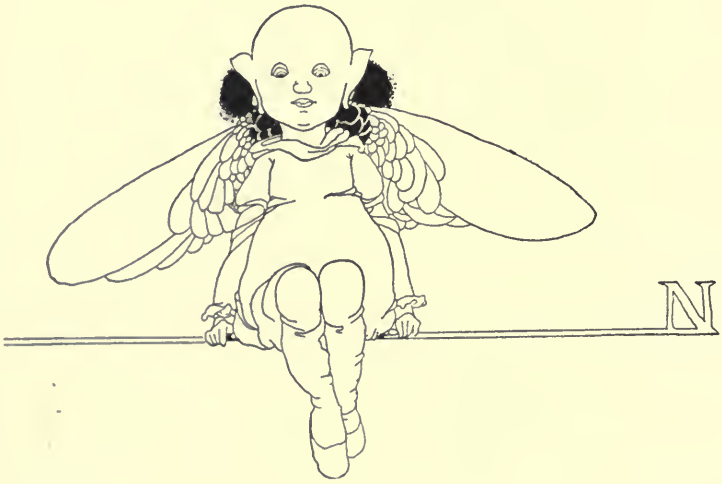
The Weathercock, who had been turning gently round and round, suddenly stood very stiff and still. "If you are merely going to groan over what cannot be helped, you had better go back to Fairyland at once," he said severely. "Groaning will not help me at all."

"What do you want us to do, then?" asked one of the fairies, who had given the Baby Common Sense for a christening present. "The Baby has five teeth and a good appetite. How much faster do you wish him to grow up?"

"Our Baby can see the fairies," added another fairy, who had given the Baby Dreaminess for a christening present. "Do you want him to see sums and alphabets instead?"

"You are wandering from the point," the Weathercock reminded them. "That is the worst of you people who live

in Fairyland all the year round, and only come out of it for an occasional christening. You get into the way of thinking that children have to stay in the cradle for ever. Now, that Baby of ours is beginning to cause trouble down below. His backwardness is the talk of the village; he is even beginning



to worry over it himself; and his mother cries about it. I can't allow this kind of thing to go on in my village; I won't have nice mothers crying because their babies cannot bite crusts, or crawl, or say 'Daddy'. You fairies must put things right, if you please, or I will know the reason why."

The Weathercock twirled round at such a terrific speed when he said this that the christening fairies were much impressed. The fairy who had given the Baby Love-of-his-mother

for a christening present was quite upset by what she had just heard.

"The Baby's mother must not cry any more," she said. "I will give him the Power-to-please-his-mother for his birthday present to-day."

"And I," added the fairy who had given him Common Sense, "will give him the desire to eat grown-up food for his birthday present."

"And I," added the fairy who had given him Dreaminess, "will give him the power to think beautiful grown-up thoughts instead of beautiful baby thoughts."

"And I," added another, "will give him the power to crawl." This fairy had given him Health and Strength, a year ago.

When all the fairies had spoken, each one promising the Baby a gift that should help him to grow into an ordinary baby, the Weathercock spun round on his toes once more.

"But not one of you has given him the grown-up language!" he exclaimed. "That is the most important thing of all."

It was the fairies' turn to be superior now. "Is it possible that you have forgotten?" they asked in a chorus. "Why, no

one but the Fairy Queen can give a baby the grown-up language!"

"True, true! A mere slip of the memory," said the Weathercock hastily. "Well, I shall be going to Fairyland myself this evening, and I will be sure to mention it to her Majesty. Now, make haste and give the Baby your presents before he wakes up. I can already see the sun beginning to come up over the edge of the world."

"But what is your present to the Baby?" asked the fairies.

The Weathercock smiled mysteriously. "My present will not be given till the moon rises to-night," he said; and he turned his back on them to show that the council was over.

The fairies flew down the Baby's chimney into the Baby's bedroom. Then they stood round the edge of his cradle, and pointed at him with their wands, and gave him the gifts that were to help him to grow into an ordinary baby. And just as they finished speaking, the sun came up over the edge of the world, and the Baby's pillow turned pale pink.

"Many happy returns of the day!" said all the fairies, as they flew up the chimney and away to Fairyland.

"Many happy returns of the day!" said the sun, as it came up over the edge of the world.

"Many happy returns of the day!" crowed the Weathercock. "This is the happiest day in the year for you and me."

The Baby rubbed his fists in his eyes and yawned. He opened first one eye and then the other. He saw the Weather-

cock, and laughed. He saw the pale pink winter sun coming up over the hills in the distance, and laughed again. Then he kicked all the bed-clothes on one side and flourished his legs in the air. He felt surprisingly strong in the back, this morning.

"Want to get up!" crowed the Baby at the top of his voice.

The Shortest Day

"MY precious!" said the Baby's mother, as she carried him downstairs to breakfast. "If you jump about like that, you will jump out of Mother's arms. Why, what a strong Baby it is this morning, to be sure!"

"I want to jump out of your arms; I want to jump on to the floor!" crowed the Baby.

This time, his mother did not guess right. "I think I shall try him in the high chair, just to see if he can sit up," she said. "He seems so very strong in the back, this morning."

Now, when the Baby found himself fixed into a high chair with a bar, sitting between his father and his mother, he felt so grown-up and important that he seized the nearest tea-spoon and hit the nearest tea-

cup with it, and made such a noise that his parents could scarcely hear themselves speak.

"Look at that, now!" said his mother admiringly.

"I do not mind looking at it, but I have a great objection to listening to it," mentioned the schoolmaster; and he took the spoon away from the Baby, and saved the tea-cup from being broken.

The Baby looked about him for another occupation. It was very dull to sit up at the table between two people who did nothing but eat. He bore it as long as he could, and then made a grab at the nicely buttered piece of toast that his father was just going to eat.

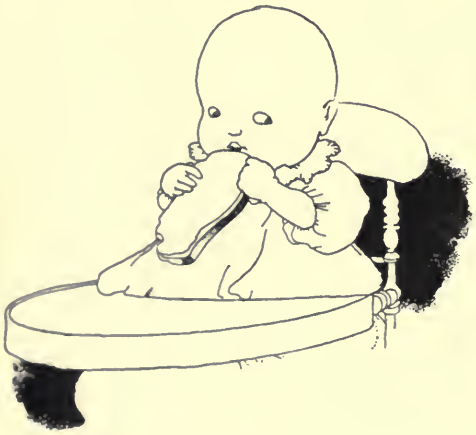
"I want that piece of toast," crowed the Baby; and he aimed it rapidly at his own mouth. Being in such a hurry, he made a very bad aim and buttered the whole of his face instead.

"He must want his bottle," said his mother; and she went to fetch it as soon as she had wiped his face and returned the piece of toast to the schoolmaster. But the Baby was most indignant at being offered a bottle when what he really wanted was a piece of grown-up toast. He was so indignant, indeed, that he flung the bottle on the floor; and while his mother was wiping up the spilt milk, he took the opportunity to steal her bread and butter.

"That Baby wants a whipping," said the schoolmaster sternly. The schoolmaster was a man who liked to have his meals in peace.

"My pet!" exclaimed the schoolmaster's wife, when she got up from the floor with a heated face and found the Baby munching her bread and butter. "I do believe you are beginning to grow up at last."

"I liked him better before he began to grow up," remarked the schoolmaster, who had never had such a disturbed breakfast before. He was just saying this, when the neighbour's wife came in to borrow a saucepan.

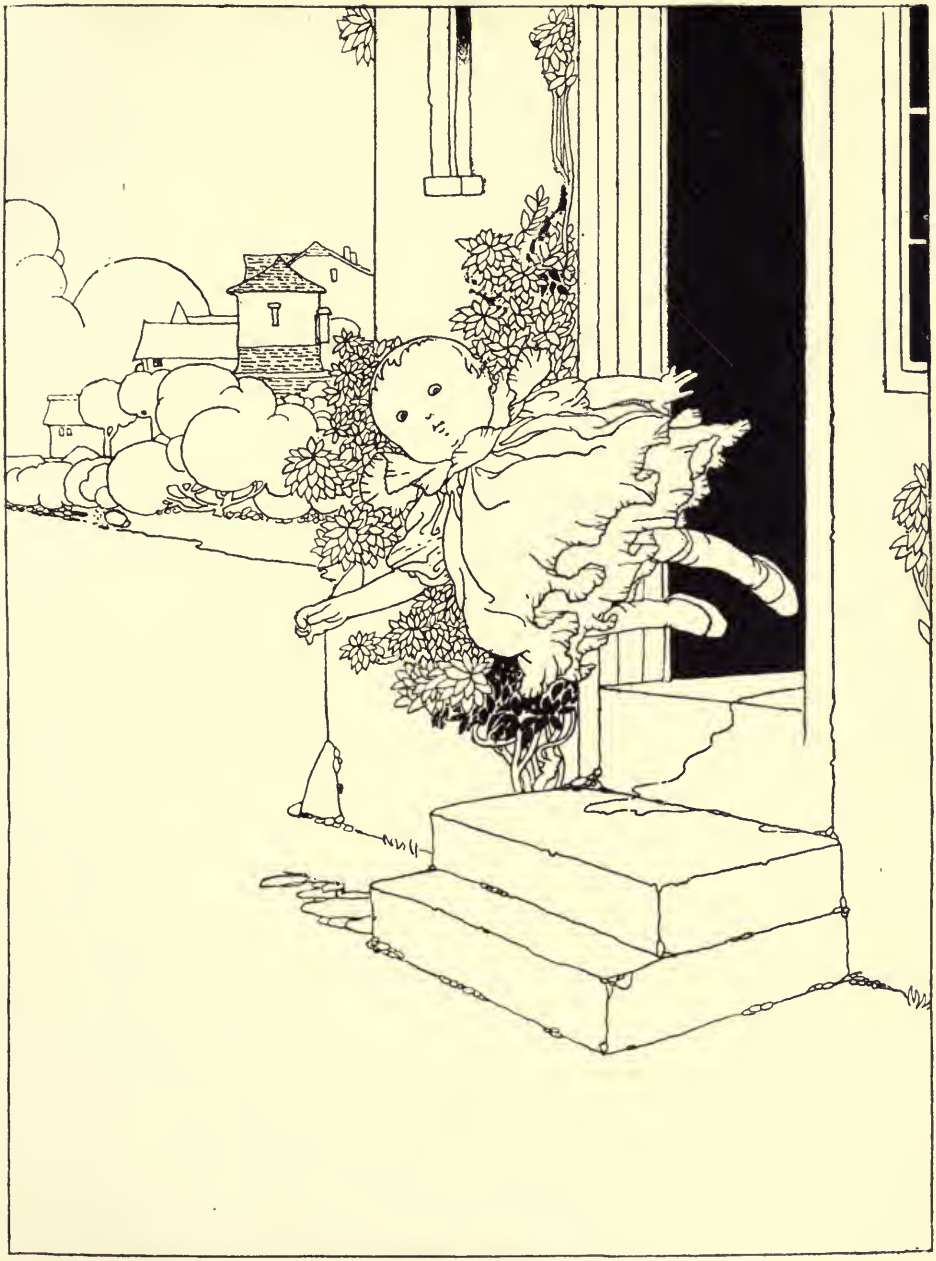


"Look at that, now!" she exclaimed, just as the Baby's mother had done. "Why, the child is eating bread and butter, just as you or I might be doing! And he's actually sitting up in a chair!"

"What of that?" asked the Baby's mother carelessly. "You are never tired of reminding me that he is a year old."

"He never behaved as if he was a year old until to-day," said the neighbour's wife.

"He never was a year old until to-day, you see," answered the Baby's mother. "Would Baby like a drop of Mother's tea?" she added, putting her cup to the Baby's lips. She did not really approve of giving grown-up tea to babies; but she wanted to astonish the neighbour's wife still further. She suc-



THE BABY FALLS INTO THE ROAD

ceeded in astonishing the neighbour's wife so much that she went away without borrowing her saucepan at all. This was just as well, for had she waited another minute, she would have seen the Baby choke dreadfully over his mouthful of grown-up tea.

The Baby's back grew stronger and stronger as the day went on. At last it felt so strong that he could not lie still in his cradle another minute. He waited till his mother had gone out of the parlour to fetch something, and then he just raised himself up on his elbows and rolled out of the cradle on to the floor. This was a great effort, and it took him a second or two to get over it. When he had got over it, he rolled on to his face to see what that felt like. It felt so jolly that he determined to discover what it felt like in another part of the floor. It was not easy to get to another part of the floor all at once; still, with determination it was to be done; and so, when his mother came back into the parlour, her Baby was gone!

She turned and rushed into the passage, and was just in time to see him shooting head first down the doorstep into the road. In getting from one place in the floor to another place in the floor, it is always well to allow for the floor being uneven. The

Baby had not allowed for the floor being uneven; and that was why he took an unexpected header into the road.

"Oh, oh!" screamed the neighbour's wife. "The schoolmaster has thrown his Baby into the road!"

The schoolmaster's wife followed her Baby into the road, and picked him up and kissed all the sore places and made them well before he had time to discover that there were any sore places.

"Do not be alarmed," she smiled over her shoulder to the neighbour's wife, as she carried her Baby indoors. "Crawling babies constantly do this sort of thing, you know."

"Bravo!" chuckled the Weathercock from the top of the church spire.

The Longest Night

THE Weathercock's village was sound asleep. The Poet was dreaming of his new poem; Elspeth was dreaming of the Christmas puddings she was going to make to-morrow; the Idle Boy was dreaming of words of three syllables; the common cock was dreaming of the broom of the neighbour's wife. Everybody was asleep and dreaming—except the Baby and the Weathercock.

The Baby was a little sad because the Weathercock had taken no notice of his birthday. He was even afraid that the Weathercock meant to have nothing more to do with him, now that he was a year old and could crawl. So he lay awake and puzzled over it while the rest of the village slept, and he looked through the window at the stars, and tried to see the Weathercock standing up there against the black frosty sky.

It was very dark outside, and he could only just see the top of the church spire. The pretty gold bird looked like a blot of ink—that was all. Then a pale white light spread itself over

the Weathercock's village, and the moon came slowly up over the hills.

The blot of ink at the top of the church spire turned first silver and then gold. It seemed to grow bigger and bigger as

THE WEATHERCOCK SOARED HIGH UP INTO THE AIR

the Baby gazed at it; it seemed to come nearer and nearer, until—until—until the Baby felt he could touch it if he stretched out his hands. And as he felt this, he saw that the pretty gold bird really was close to him, for he was sitting on the window-sill outside, pecking at the glass with his golden beak.

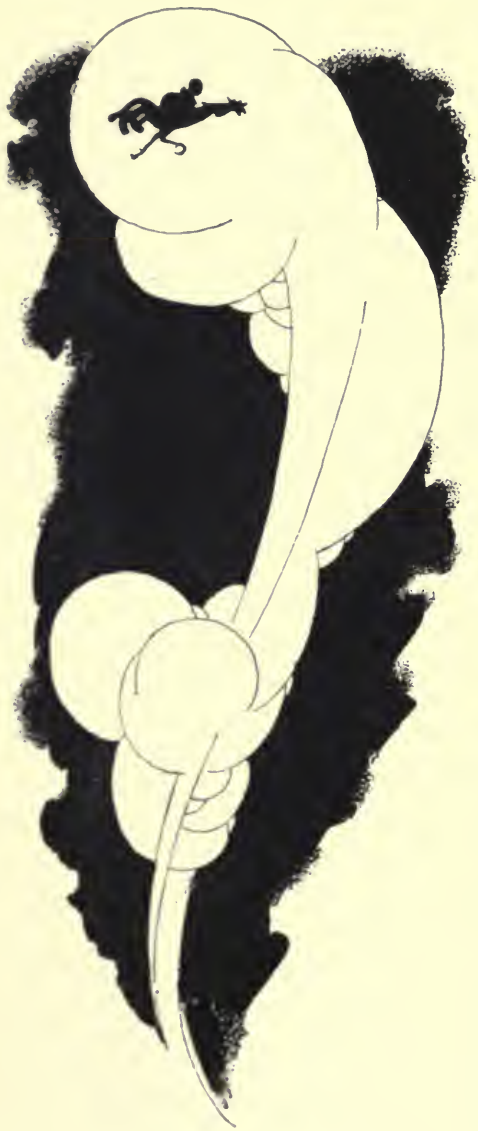
"I have come to bring you a birthday present," said the Weathercock.

The Baby crowed with delight. The Weathercock had not forgotten him after all! "What is it?" he asked. "What is it?"

"A ride to Fairyland on my back," answered the Weathercock. Then the glass of the window melted away, and the Fairy Queen's messenger bird hopped on to the Baby's cradle. "Make haste!" he whispered. "There is no time to lose, for we must be back again by sunrise."

The Baby was glad then that his back had grown so strong, for it was quite easy to climb on to the Weathercock and to clasp his hands round his neck and nestle down among the soft, warm, golden feathers. Then the Weathercock soared high up into the air, bent his head down and flew straight towards Fairyland.

It was a wonderful ride. All round them were the stars, bobbing about like fireworks; now and then they were so thick that the Baby could kick them out of the way with his little bare feet as they flew along. Behind them, creeping slowly up



the sky, was the yellow moon, staring at them with his big eyes, laughing at them with his big mouth.

"I see you!" said the moon. "Make haste, you two travellers, for if you are not back by the time I sink behind the hills on the opposite side of the world, the village will have to do without a Weathercock for the rest of its life, and the schoolmaster's wife will have to do without her Baby."

"Give us as much time as you can," begged the Weathercock. "My wings are a little stiff, and I have a passenger to carry to-night."

Before them lay hills and valleys and rivers and ponds and forests and woods; and through all these, winding its way in and out, was

the road that led over the bridge, the curly road that led to Fairyland.

"It is much quicker to fly to Fairyland than to get there by road," observed the Baby.

"This, of course, is an exceptional way of going to Fairyland," agreed the Weathercock. "Only a Fairy Queen's messenger bird, who was hatched out of an Easter egg in the Fairy Queen's own farmyard, can fly to Fairyland. But you, when you are grown up, will be glad enough to get there by road---if you can find the way."

"Of course I shall find the way," said the Baby. "I shall just follow the road over the bridge."

"Many people follow the road over the bridge, but they grow tired of it long before they get to Fairyland," said the Weathercock. "Look at the Idle Boy, now! He starts for Fairyland once a week at least, and he has never arrived there yet. The Poet, on the contrary, gets there every other day, and sometimes two days running."

"How strange!" cried the Baby. "I have never heard him say so."

"People who have the luck to find Fairyland don't go talking about it to people who are content to stay at home and be punctual for their meals," remarked the Weathercock.

"I shall talk to my mother about it," said the Baby. "I shall tell her exactly what the Fairy Queen looks like."

"What the Fairy Queen looks like!" gasped the Weathercock. "You bit of a Baby, you! D'you suppose you are going to see the Fairy Queen?"

"Why not?" asked the Baby. "What is the use of going to Fairyland if I am not to see the Fairy Queen when I get there?"

"But not one person in ten thousand ever sees the Fairy Queen," cried the Weathercock. "You have to be in the best fairy set; you have to be at least hatched out of an Easter egg; you have to be someone very particular indeed——"

"But that is what I am," interrupted the Baby, who had been told all his life by his mother that he was someone very particular indeed. "And I mean to see the Fairy Queen, after coming all this way on purpose—so there!"

At the Gates of Fairyland

SUDDENLY the Weathercock stopped flying, and floated on his wings instead.

"We have come to the edge of the world," he said. "We have left the sun and the moon behind us, and Fairyland is close at hand."

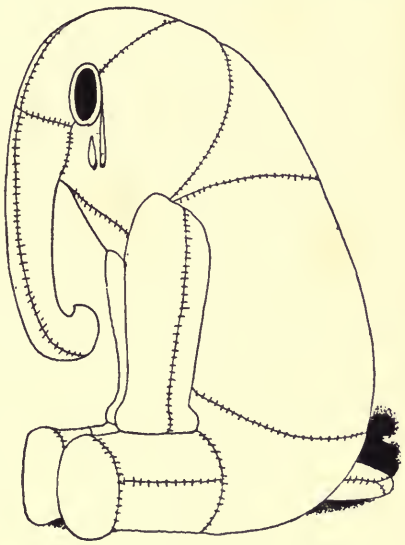
Then the Baby felt they were falling down, down, down, as he had sometimes fallen in his dreams. Only, when he had that sort of dream in his cradle at home, he always woke up before he got to Fairyland. And as they sank through the air, he looked back and saw the world floating about in the distance, and the sun lying just under the edge of it fast asleep, and the moon slowly creeping up the black frosty sky above it. Then, the next minute, they stopped falling down, and the Weathercock hopped at last on to solid earth, and the Baby found they

"HE SAW THE WORLD FLOATING ABOUT IN THE DISTANCE"

"LET ME IN!" CROWED THE BABY

were standing on the curly road which stretched from the edge of the world to Fairyland. And a little higher up the road stood the gates of Fairyland.

They were very little gates, no bigger than the gate that stood at the top of the stairs in the schoolmaster's house and kept the Baby from falling downstairs; and directly the Baby saw how small and unimportant they looked, he set off crawling towards them as fast as he could crawl.



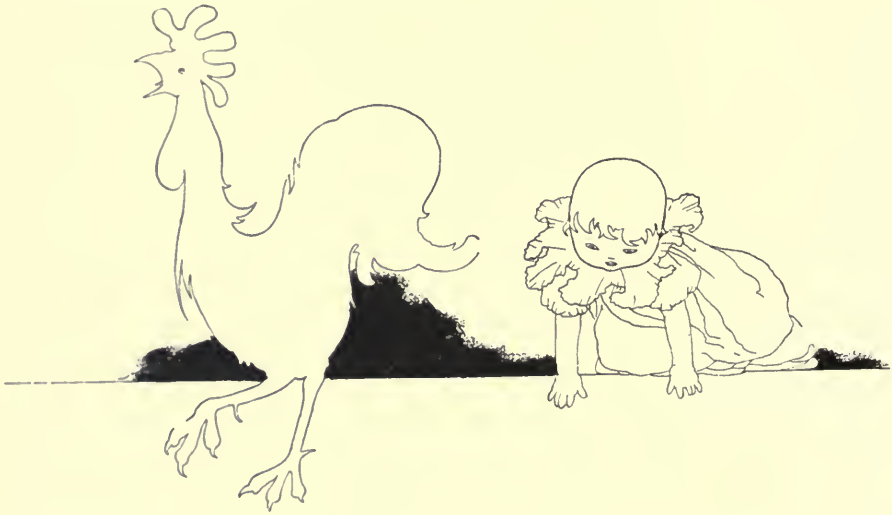
"Hold hard!" the Weathercock called after him. "Wait until I have recovered my breath."

But the Baby would wait for nothing, and long before the Weathercock had recovered his breath the schoolmaster's Baby was knocking at the gates of Fairyland.

"Let me in!" crowed the Baby. "Let me in *now*!"

Several other people who were waiting to be let into Fairyland were most surprised at the Baby's impatience. They had been waiting for quite a long time, some of them, and they would not have dreamed of knocking at the gates in that lordly manner. There was a wooden horse without a head, for instance, who had come straight from a spoilt little girl's nursery to end his days in the Fairy Queen's farmyard; and there was

a wax doll who had lost both arms, but hoped to become one of the Fairy Queen's ladies-in-waiting, when her Majesty's court physician had mended her up sufficiently; and there was a woolly elephant with a sad heart, who had come straight from



a rubbish heap, where he had been thrown by a little boy who was tired of him.

"We have been waiting much longer than you have," they said to the Baby. "You cannot expect to be let in so soon."

"But I do expect it," said the Baby, and he rattled at the gates more vigorously than before.

By this time the Weathercock had recovered his breath sufficiently to follow the Baby up the curly path that had wandered over from the edge of the world, and the Weather-

cock was tall enough to look over the top of the little gates and see what was going on in the Fairy Queen's farmyard.

"Hillo, there!" he crowed grandly. "Open the gates to the Fairy Queen's messenger bird!"

Immediately the gates flew open, and the Weathercock stalked proudly through them, his head carried very high indeed, his golden eyes shining like diamonds.

"Here I am!" crowed the Weathercock.

"And here I am too!" crowed the Baby, just behind him; and to the astonishment of all the people who were still waiting outside, he crawled into Fairyland at the heels of the pretty gold bird before anybody had time to shut him out. For that matter, no one, least of all anyone who lived in the Fairy Queen's farmyard, would have had the heart to shut a baby out of Fairyland.

The Weathercock shed golden tears of joy when he found himself once more among his old friends. The Fairy Queen's farmyard was full of his old friends. There was the aged rocking-horse that had limped there when the children in his nursery had forsaken him for a real pony; and there was the white wooden cow that had begun life as a red wooden cow in a Swiss village, but had been sucked by a baby and thrown out of a perambulator into Fairyland; and there was the tin goat with a dent in her chin that a naughty little boy had made when he stamped on her and kicked her up the chimney to Fairyland; and there was the india-rubber canary whose voice

had been ruined by a nightly wash in the children's bath, before she flew out of the nursery window in desperation and hopped over the edge of the world into Fairyland. There were new friends in the farmyard, too—little baby weathercocks, just out of their Easter eggs, all fluffy and golden. But the Fairy Queen's messenger bird was not nearly so much interested in these tiny weathercocks of the future as the Baby was.

"Yes, thank you," the Weathercock was saying in answer to his friends' enquiries, "I left my village very well indeed. It is, as you say, the most important village in the world; otherwise, I should not have been sent to preside over it. The Fairy Queen would not throw away anyone like myself who belong to the best fairy set. And, talking of my village, allow me to present to you the most important person in it—the schoolmaster's Baby!"

The Fairy Queen's Doorkeeper

THE inhabitants of the Fairy Queen's farmyard crowded round the schoolmaster's Baby and welcomed him most politely.

"What a charming Baby!" squeaked the india-rubber canary. "I am sure *he* would not spoil my voice by holding my head under soapy water."

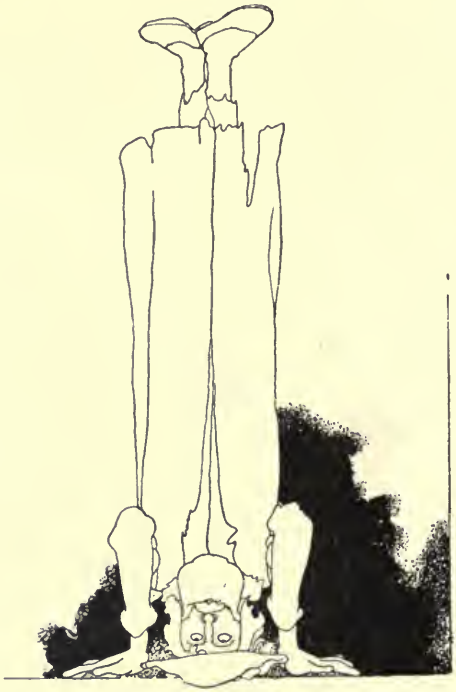
"He does not look as though he would suck a person's paint off," remarked the pale Swiss cow that had once been red.

"He would never forsake a highly-connected animal like myself for an ill-bred pony that could not rock," added the aged rocking-horse.

"He does not wear heels," said the tin goat, who, ever since she had been stamped upon, had felt nervous about heels.

"Besides," said the whole farmyard in a chorus, "is he not our messenger bird's particular friend? That stamps him at once."

"Oh, I hope not!" said the tin goat anxiously; and she looked at once to see if the Baby had a dent in his chin.



Just then, a little old man, with a hungry face and a ragged coat and a merry smile, came tumbling head over heels into the Fairy Queen's farmyard.

"The Fairy Queen is asking for the Weathercock," he announced.

THE BABY IN THE FAIRY QUEEN'S FARMYARD

"That is the Fairy Queen's door-keeper," whispered the Weathercock to the Baby.

"Oh, no!" contradicted the Baby, "that is the little old man who came from Fairyland with the pot of gold paint."

"So it is!" cried the Fairy Queen's door-keeper, standing on his head to show how pleased he felt at being recognized. "And what have you come here for, my friend of the golden brown curls?"

"I have come to see the Fairy Queen," answered the Baby with his best crow.

"What?" cried the whole farmyard. "You have come to see the Fairy Queen? But only one person in ten thousand——"

"He knows that," interrupted the Weathercock in a resigned tone. "I have told him till I am tired."

The tin goat turned to the Baby compassionately. "I am really afraid you must make up your mind to be disappointed," she said kindly. "The Fairy Queen never admits anybody to her palace without a passport—not even if he is barefooted like yourself, which is always a mark of great distinction."

"She doesn't really!" said the whole farmyard in a chorus.

At this point the Fairy Queen's door-keeper ceased to stand on his head, and brought his heels down to the ground instead and promptly sat on them.

"Oh, it's all right, my good people!" he said reassuringly. "I've got his passport." And he pulled out from one of his

ragged pockets a little golden brown curl. "If the Fairy Queen doesn't admit him when she sees this, I shall throw up my post as door-keeper," he added with a chuckle. Then he stood on his head again, and disappeared for exactly two minutes. At the end of two minutes there he was again, standing on his head as before, right in the middle of the farmyard.

"It is her Majesty's pleasure to see the Weathercock and the schoolmaster's Baby without delay," he said in a loud and pompous tone.

"You do surprise me!" gasped the Weathercock.

"He does surprise us!" gasped the farmyard.

"He doesn't surprise me at all," said the Baby calmly.

Then the little old man turned somersaults, and the Weathercock hopped behind him very solemnly, and the Baby crawled after them both; and they left the farmyard and made their way along a ginger-bread path through a forest of sugar-candy canes, till they came to the Fairy Queen's palace, which stood in a grove of preserved apricot trees, varied with stewed blackberry bushes and roast-chestnut trees. And the Fairy Queen's palace was not a bit what the Baby had expected to see.

"Why, it is just like Elspeth's dolls' house!" he exclaimed. "It has the same green door and brass knocker, and the same muslin curtains tied with blue bows, and the same little balcony on the first floor. I tried to get inside Elspeth's dolls' house yesterday, but I was too big."

"You will be able to get inside it now," said the little old

man; and he went up to the green door and threw it open with a flourish.

"The Weathercock and the schoolmaster's Baby, if it please your Majesty," announced the Fairy Queen's door-keeper. Then he turned heels over head backwards down the doorstep, and made way for them to pass in.

The inside of the Fairy Queen's palace was just like the inside of Elspeth's dolls' house. There were the same rows of blue plates in the kitchen, and the same red velvet chairs in the dining-room, and the same little wooden bedstead with real blankets and sheets in the bedroom; and the drawing-room, on the first floor, was furnished exactly in the same way, with a very hard pink sofa, and six very hard pink chairs, and a piano, and a vase of flowers, and a clock with a pendulum that swung when you

pushed it, and a sewing-machine that worked when you set it going. And in the middle of the hard pink sofa sat the Fairy Queen.

The Fairy Queen was dressed in sunshine and roses. She wore a crown made of babies' smiles and rubies, and a necklace made of babies' curls and diamonds; and her face was the face of the schoolmaster's wife.

When the Baby saw what the Fairy Queen's face was like, he knocked over the sewing-machine and the flower vase and one of the hard pink chairs in his hurry to get to her; and he climbed on her knees and crowed.

"My precious!" said the Fairy Queen.

In the Fairy Queen's Palace

AFTER this, it was not at all surprising to see Elspeth and the Idle Boy and the Poet all wandering about the Fairy Queen's palace too.

"Oh dear!" sighed Elspeth, picking up the hard pink chair and the sewing-machine and the flower vase that the Baby had knocked over. "I am always picking up these tiresome things!"

"Let me put a tinned tack through them," suggested the Idle Boy, who, of course, never went anywhere without loose nails in his pocket. "You know, the cook has not tumbled down again since I nailed her to the kitchen floor."

"Yes, but I've neglected my work ever since, you thoughtless boy!" the cook called up from below in a pained voice.

"The view from these windows is adorable, is it not, your Majesty?" said the Poet, stepping out on the balcony and looking down rapturously upon the preserved apricot trees and the stewed blackberry bushes.

The Fairy Queen turned to her messenger bird. "Now, what do all your children want?" she asked him. "The moon has begun to climb down the other side of the sky, and you have no time to lose."

"I do not know what the Poet wants, your Majesty," said the Weathercock. "I think he already has everything he wants."

"Everything," murmured the Poet from the balcony.

"The Idle Boy wants to learn to spell, your Majesty, because

Elspeth will not play with him any longer unless he knows how to read," continued the Weathercock. "At the same time, it would be a pity for him to forget how to dream his way to Fairyland, would it not, your Majesty?"

"Come here, Idle Boy," commanded her Majesty.

The Idle Boy hastily emptied his mouth of tacks, and came and knelt in front of the Fairy Queen. Then the Fairy Queen waved her wand over his head, and spoke.

"Idle Boy," she said, "you shall learn to spell words of three syllables—nearly right; and then you may still come to Fairyland, once a year, till the end of your days. If, however, you wish to spell them quite right, you will probably never find your way to Fairyland again. Take your choice, Idle Boy, when you get home, and let me know."

She turned to the Weathercock again, and the Weathercock pointed to Elspeth. "She can see the fairies sometimes, your Majesty," he said; "but she spells so very accurately and keeps house so perfectly, that she has scarcely any time to come to Fairyland. And that isn't right, your Majesty, in such a very little girl."

The Fairy Queen smiled sweetly on the Poet's little daughter, and touched her with her wand. "Let her be," she said to the Weathercock. "She gave her dinner to my ragged door-keeper; and if she has no time to come to Fairyland, she will always find time to see the fairies in the house. So she shall have the brownies to play with till the end of her days."

"And now," said the Weathercock, "there is the schoolmaster's Baby."

"Yes," echoed the Fairy Queen, "there is the schoolmaster's Baby. What does he want?"

"He wants to learn the grown-up language, please your Majesty," said the Weathercock.

"But he can speak the language of the fairies!" cried the Fairy Queen. "What more does he want?"

"Well, you see, your Majesty, it is like this," explained the messenger bird. "The whole of my village is upset because the Baby is so backward; he is only a year old, it is true, but they expect a great deal from babies in my village, and his mother cries about it——"

"Ah!" said the Fairy Queen. "His mother cries about it, does she?"

THE FAIRY QUEEN GIVES THE BABY A GIFT

"Yes, your Majesty," said the Weathercock. "In fact, if your Majesty declines to teach him the grown-up language, I really must ask to be transferred to another church spire. The matter is getting beyond me, your Majesty."

The Fairy Queen did not touch the schoolmaster's Baby with her wand. She just put her arms round him and gave him a hug; and her face grew more and more like the face of the schoolmaster's wife.

"You shall learn the grown-up language if you like," she said to the Baby, "and while you are learning it you will forget the language of the fairies. But some day, when you are grown up—oh! much more grown-up than the Poet, who is only a child still—you shall come along the road that leads over the bridge to Fairyland, and I will teach you the language of the fairies all over again. For there must be poets in the world, as well as mothers who do not cry."

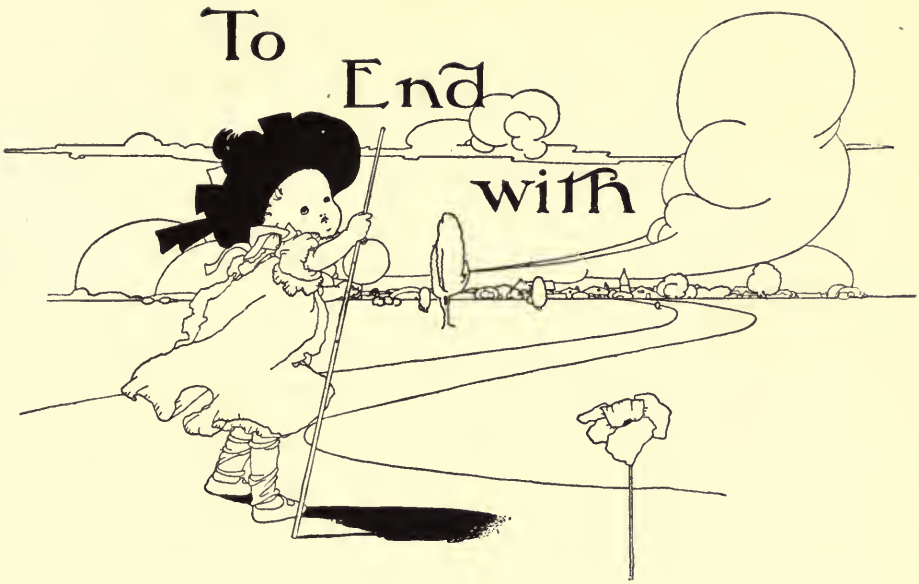
The Weathercock sighed. He was glad the Fairy Queen had been so kind about giving the Baby the grown-up language; but he felt sad, all the same.

"It will be a long time, your Majesty, before the Baby grows up," he ventured to point out. "Must I wait until then before I have anybody to talk to in my village?"

"Dear me, no!" laughed the Fairy Queen. "There are plenty of backward babies in Fairyland. I will have one sent down to your village at once. Now, be off, all of you! I can see the moon creeping down, down, down!"

She waved her wand, and the Baby was once more nestling down in the warm soft golden feathers of the Weathercock's back, once more kicking the stars out of the way with his bare feet, as they flew swiftly through the air. And just as the big yellow moon sank behind the hills on the opposite side of the world, and the sun began to look over the top of the hills near home, the Baby rolled off the Weathercock's back into his own cradle, and the pretty gold bird flew back to the top of the church spire.

The Weathercock's village gave a yawn and woke up.



THE snow fairies had painted the world white for Christmas Day, and the frost fairies had danced over it afterwards and sprinkled it with sparkles. The Weathercock felt immensely proud of his village, as he twirled round on his toes and surveyed it from the top of the church spire.

"I can see right over the edge of the world, and all round the moon, and all round the sun! I am a most important bird!" he crowed.

But no one answered him. There was no cradle on the schoolmaster's doorstep, and no Baby. The Weathercock felt extremely lonely. He had never once felt lonely since last spring, and a golden tear rose in each of his golden eyes.

The schoolmaster's door opened, and a little procession came out. First of all, the schoolmaster appeared, walking backwards and clapping his hands as he came, in a most foolish manner. The Weathercock had never seen the schoolmaster look so undignified before; no one would have taken him for a man who could talk about equinoctial gales in five languages. After the schoolmaster staggered the Baby, holding on to his mother's thumb with one hand and waving the other one about wildly in the effort to keep his balance. It was not easy to keep his balance, because his legs insisted on walking in opposite directions, and both his knees wobbled. Still, it was undoubtedly a great help to have the schoolmaster just in front of him, clapping his hands; and so, in time, the whole procession arrived on the doorstep and sat down on it, panting for breath. Baby's first walk had been a most exhausting proceeding.

"Dad-dad-dad-*daddy*!" said the Baby, who was the first to recover.

"Pitty ickle boy-boy!" answered the schoolmaster in a delighted tone.

"Mum-mum-mum-*mummy*!" was the Baby's next remark.

"My precious!" cried the schoolmaster's wife, and she caught him up in her arms and hugged him. As she did this, the Baby seemed to remember someone who had hugged him like that before, someone who sat on a hard pink sofa and was dressed in sunshine and roses. But he could not remember much about it; and he soon returned to the more exciting occupation of trying to speak the grown-up language.

"Boy-boy!" he said at the top of his voice. "Boy-boy!"

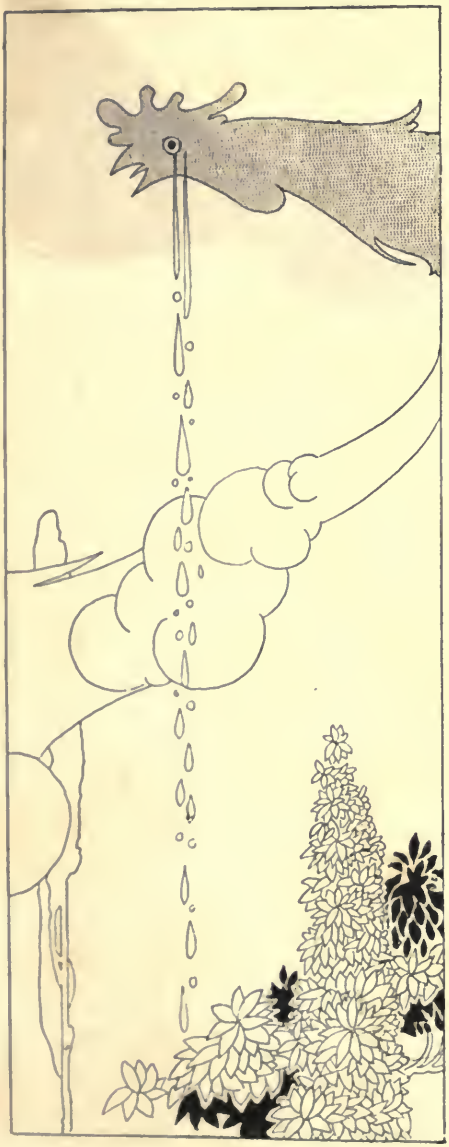
"That's it!" said his proud father. "We shall soon be as grown-up as daddy, eh, my son?"

"The schoolmaster's Baby is growing up very fast indeed," said Elspeth to the Idle Boy. "Do you remember how backward he was until four days ago?"

The Idle Boy paid no attention to this remark. He was gazing up at the golden bird in the blue sky. "I had such a queer dream the other night!" he said. "I dreamed we were all in Fairyland, with that chap up there; and the Fairy Queen had a face exactly like my mother's."

"I had that dream too," said Elspeth; "but the Fairy Queen's face in my dream was like the picture of my mother that hangs on the wall at home."

"It wasn't a dream; it really happened; I arranged it,



I arranged it!" cried the Weathercock from the top of the church spire.

"Silly-illy birdie-bird!" said the learned schoolmaster.

"Silly-illy bird!" echoed the Baby.

The Weathercock turned his back on the schoolmaster's house, and golden tears streamed down his cheeks. "I cannot bear it!" he sobbed, "I cannot bear it! The Fairy Queen has forgotten her promise, and I am all alone in my own village!"

When he turned round again, the village street was quite empty; but there were several people straggling along the road that led over the bridge. The Baby was there, pretending to walk, though his father held one of his arms and his mother held the other, so that they really

"THE VILLAGE STREET WAS QUITE EMPTY"