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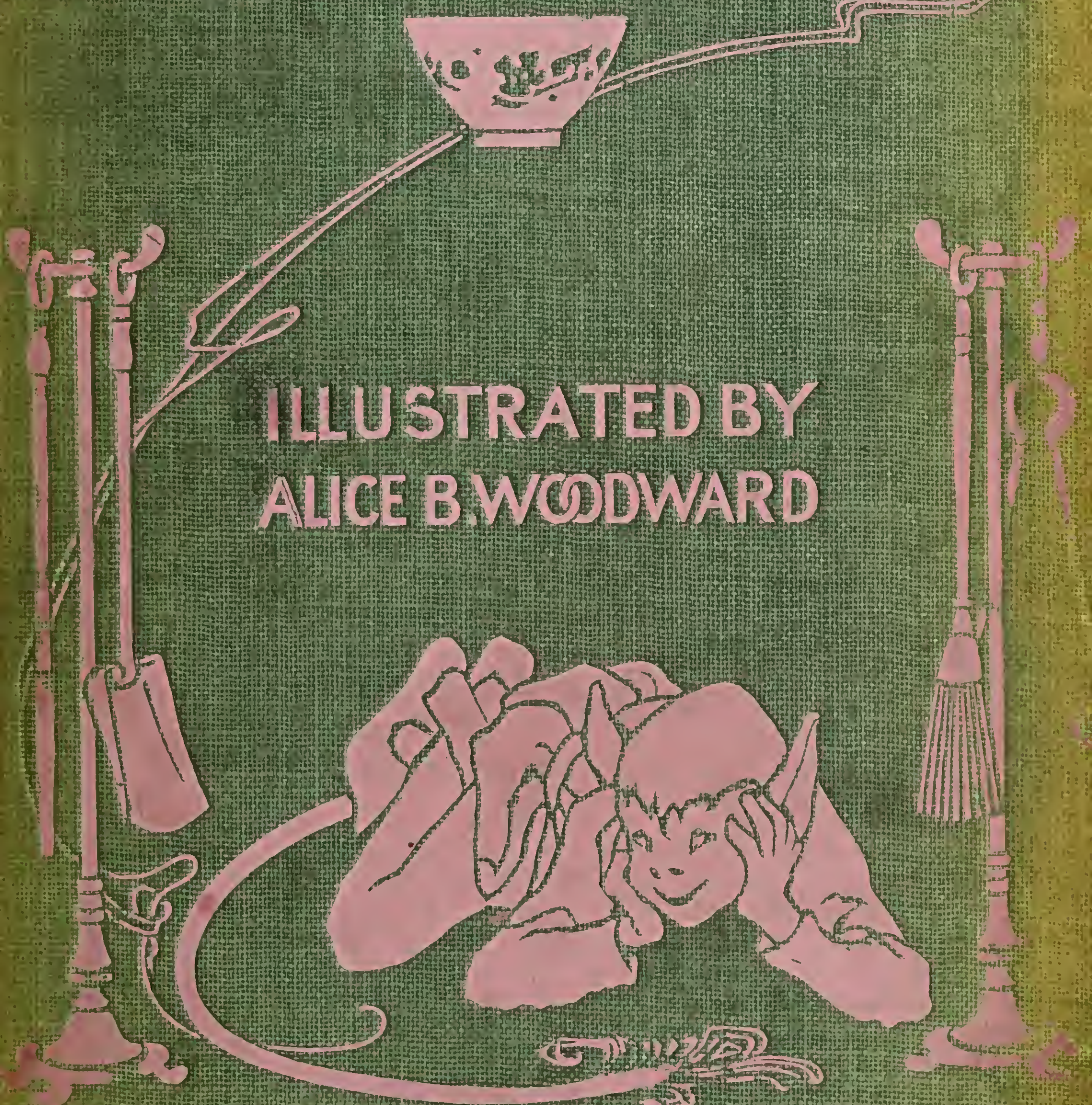

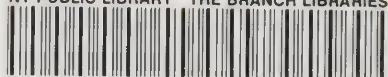

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Lob lie-by-the-fire (see p. 70).

LOB LIE-BY-THE-FIRE
OR
THE LUCK OF LINGBOROUGH
AND OTHER TALES

BY
JULIANA HORATIA EWING

ILLUSTRATED
BY ALICE B
WOODWARD

GEORGE BELL & SONS
1909

To

JAMES BOYN M'COMBIE, Esq.
OF ABERDEEN

THIS LITTLE BOOK IS VERY AFFECTIONATELY DEDICATED

J. H. E.

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LOB LIE-BY-THE-FIRE

OR THE

LUCK OF LINGBOROUGH

LOB LIE-BY-THE-FIRE

INTRODUCTORY

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

"—— to earn his cream-bowl duly set."

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

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

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

It was long before Miss Kitty's time that Lob Lie-by-the-fire first came to Lingborough. Why and whence he came is not recorded, nor when and wherefore he withdrew his valuable help, which, as

wages rose, and prices rose also, would have been more welcome than ever.

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

Whether (as Fletcher says) he were the son of a witch, if curds and cream won his heart, and new clothes put an end to his labours, it does not pretend to tell. His history is less known than that of any other sprite. It may be embodied in some oral tradition that shall one day be found; but as yet the mists of forgetfulness hide it from the story-teller of to-day as deeply as the sea fogs are wont to lie between Lingborough and the adjacent coast.

The little Old Ladies.—Alms done in Secret.

The little old ladies of Lingborough were heiresses.

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

"And how should she know how to walk?" said Miss Betty. "Her mother can't have taught her, poor body! that ran through the streets of Leith, with a creel on her back, as a lassie; and got out of her coach (lined with satin, you mind, sister Kitty?) to her dying day, with a bounce, all in a heap, her dress caught, and her stockings exposed (among

ourselves, ladies!) like some good wife that's afraid to be late for the market. Aye, aye! Malcolm Midden—good man!—made a fine pocket of silver in a dirty trade, but his women 'll jerk, and toss, and bounce, and fuss, and fluster for a generation or two yet, for all the silks and satins he can buy 'em."

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

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

As to the incomings of Lingborough, "It was nobody's business but their own," as Miss Betty said to the lawyer who was their man of business, and whom they consulted on little matters of rent and repairs at as much length, and with as much formal solemnity, as would have gone elsewhere to the changing hands of half a million of money. Without violating their confidence, however, we may say that the estate paid its way, kept them in silk stockings, and gave them new tabbinet dresses once in three years. It supplied their wants the

better that they had inherited house plenishing from their parents, "which they thanked their stars was not made of tag-rag, and would last their time," and that they were quite content with an old home and old neighbours, and never desired to change the grand air that blew about their native hills for worse, in order to be poisoned with bad butter, and make the fortunes of extortionate lodging-house keepers.

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

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

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

Thus it came about that the little ladies' charities were not known even to each other—that Miss Betty turned her morning camlet twice instead of once, and Miss Kitty denied herself in sugar, to carry out benevolent little projects which were accomplished

in secret, and of which no record appears in the Lingborough ledger.

At Tea with Mrs. Dunmaw.

The little ladies of Lingborough were very sociable, and there was, as they said, "as much gaiety as was good for anyone" within their reach. There were at least six houses at which they drank tea from time to time, all within a walk. As hosts or guests, you always met the same people, which was a friendly arrangement, and the programmes of the entertainments were so uniform, that no one could possibly feel awkward. The best of manners and home-made wines distinguished these tea parties, where the company was strictly genteel, if a little faded. Supper was served at nine, and the parson and the lawyer played whist for love with different partners on different evenings with strict impartiality.

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

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

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

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

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

She rubbed nervously at the diamond brooch with her thin little mittened hands. She talked very fast; and if the lawyer were guilty of feeling any ungallant indifference to her observations, she did not so much as hear his, and her cheeks became so flushed that Mrs. Dunmaw crossed the room in her China crape shawl and said, "My dear Miss Kitty,

She rubbed nervously at the diamond brooch with her thin little mittened hands (p. 8).

I'm sure you feel the heat very much. Do take my fan, which is larger than yours."

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

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

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

Midsummer Eve.—A Lost Diamond.

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

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

"A grand prospect for the crops, sir," said Miss

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

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

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

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

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

"Oh dear no, sister Betty," sobbed Miss Kitty; "but it's all my fault. I know I was fidgeting with

it whilst I was talking; and it's a punishment on my fidgety ways, and for ever presuming to wear it at all, when you're the head of the family, and solely entitled to it. And I shall never forgive myself if it's lost, and if it's found I'll never, never wear it any more." And as she deluged her best company pocket-handkerchief (for the useful one was in a big pocket under her dress, and could not be got at, the parson being present), Church, State, the Royal Family, the family Bible, her highest principles, her dearest affections, and the diamond brooch, all seemed to swim before her disturbed mind in one sea of desolation.

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

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

But another story of found jewels was to be added to the parson's stock. He had bent his long back

for about the eighteenth time, when such a shimmer as no glass or silica can give flashed into his eyes, and he caught up the diamond out of the dust, and it fitted exactly into the little black hole.

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

"A most miraculous discovery!" gasped Miss Betty.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Miss Betty bridled and bit her lip.

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

"Why { I've got it in my hand, ma'am!"
He's got it in his hand, sister!"
cried the parson and Miss Kitty in one breath. Miss Betty was too much puzzled to be polite.

"What are you talking about?" she asked.

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

"*The Baby,*" said Miss Betty.

What Miss Betty Found.

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

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

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

When Miss Betty screamed the baby awoke, and his long black lashes tickled his cheeks and made him wink and cry. But by the time she returned with her sister and the parson, he was quite happy again, gazing up with dark eyes full of delight into

the glowing broom-bush, and fighting the evening breeze with his feet, which were entangled in the folds of the yellow cloth, and with the battered toadstool which was still in his hand.

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

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

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

The Baby, the Lawyer, and the Parson.

There were no railways near Lingborough at this time. The coach ran three times a week, and a walking postman brought the letters from the town to the small hamlets. Telegraph wires were unknown, and yet news travelled quite as fast then as it does now, and in the course of the following morning all the neighbourhood knew that Miss

Betty had found a baby under a broom bush, and the lawyer called in the afternoon to inquire how the ladies found themselves after the tea party at Mrs. General Dunmaw's.

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

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

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

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

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

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

That they would never be found.

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

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

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

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

That Thomasina had taken to him.

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

That tramps have souls.

That he would be taught to say his prayers.

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

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

The fear was needless. Miss Kitty was romantic and imaginative. She had carried the baby through

his boyhood about the Lingborough fields whilst she was dressing; and he was attending her own funeral in the capacity of an attached and faithful servant, in black livery with worsted frogs, as she sprinkled salt on her buttered toast at breakfast, when she was startled from this affecting daydream by Miss Betty's voice.

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

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

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

"I hope we know what is due to ourselves, and to the estate—small as it is—sir," said Miss Betty, "as well as to Providence, too well to attempt to raise any child, however handsome, from that station of life in which he was born."

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

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

"My dear ladies," said the lawyer anxiously, "let me implore you not to be rash. To adopt a child in the most favourable circumstances is the greatest

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

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

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

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

"My experience of babies is so limited, Miss Betty," said the lawyer, "that really—if you'll excuse me—but I can quite imagine him. I have before now been tempted myself to adopt stray—puppies, when I have seen them in the round, soft, innocent, bright-eyed stage. And when they have grown up in the hands of more credulous friends

into lanky, ill-conditioned, misconducted curs, I have congratulated myself that I was not misled by the graces of an age at which ill-breeding is less apparent than later in life."

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

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

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

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

"If you ask me, dear ladies, whether it is your duty to provide for this child because you found him, I say that there is no such obligation. If you

ask if I think it wise in your own interests, and hopeful as to the boy's career, I am obliged to agree with your legal adviser. Vagabond ways are seldom cured in one generation, and I think it is quite probable that, after much trouble and anxiety spent upon him, he may go back to a wandering life. But, Miss Betty," continued the parson in deepening tones, as he pounded his left palm with his right fist for want of a pulpit, "If you ask me whether I believe any child of any race is born incapable of improvement, and beyond benefit from the charities we owe to each other, I should deny my faith if I could say yes. I shall not, madam, confuse the end of your connection with him with the end of your training in him, even if he runs away, or fancy that I see the one because I see the other. I do not pretend to know how much evil he inherits from his forefathers as accurately as our graphic friend; but I do know that he has a Father Whose image is also to be found in His children—not quite effaced in any of them—and Whose care of this one will last when yours, madam, may seem to have been in vain."

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

"I fear I am encouraging you in grave indiscretion," said he. "But, indeed, my dear ladies, I am quite against your project, for you do not realise the anxieties and disappointments that are before you, I am sure. The child will give you infinite trouble. I think he will run away. And yet I cannot in good conscience say that I believe love's labour must be lost. He may return to the woods and wilds; but I hope he will carry something with him."

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

Babyhood.—Pretty Flowers.—The Rose-coloured Tulips.

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

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

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

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

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

He was named John.

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

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

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

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

So Miss Betty bought a Bible, and on the fly-leaf of it she wrote in her fine, round, gentlewoman's writing—"*John Broom. With good wishes for his welfare, temporal and eternal. From a sincere friend.*" And when the inscription was dry the

Bible was wrapped in brown paper, and put by in Thomasina's trunk till John Broom should come to years of discretion.

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

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

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

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

single plate was a serious matter, and, if beyond riveting, a misfortune.

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

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

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

Meanwhile, when Thomasina came to look for

"Pick the pretty f'owers, love" (p. 24).

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Education.—Fireside Tales.

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

The parson had said, "Treat the child fairly.

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

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

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

As to his fitness to be an errand boy, he could not carry a message from the kitchen to the cowhouse without stopping by the way to play with the yard-dog, and a hedgehog in the path would probably

have led him astray, if Thomasina had had a fit and he had been despatched for the doctor.

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

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

Indeed, since he could no longer be shut up in the drying-ground, Thomasina had found that he was never so happy and so safe as when he was listening to tales, and many a long winter evening he lay idle on the kitchen hearth, with his head on the sheep dog, whilst the more industrious Thomasina plied her knitting-needles, as she sat in the ingle-nook, with the flickering firelight playing among the plaits of her large cap, and told tales of the country side.

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

He had a sleeping-room above the barn, and took

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

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

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

He would help her out sometimes with names and dates in a local biography. By his own account he knew the man who was murdered at the inn in the Black Valley so intimately that it turned Annie the lass as white as a dish-cloth to sit beside him. If Thomasina said that folk were yet alive who had seen the little green men dance in Dawborough Croft, the cowherd would smack his knees and cry, "Scores on 'em!" And when she whispered of the white figure which stood at the cross roads after

midnight, he testified to having seen it himself—tall beyond mortal height, and pointing four ways at once. He had a legend of his own too, which Thomasina sometimes gave him the chance of telling, of how he was followed home one moonlight night by a black Something as big as a young calf, which "wimmled and wammled" around him till he fell senseless into the ditch, and being found there by the farm-bailiff on his return from market, was unjustly accused of the vice of intoxication.

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

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

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

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

Why and where he had gone, Thomasina could

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

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

The Farm-Bailiff.—Pretty Cocky.—In the Willow Tree.

Miss Betty and Miss Kitty did really deny themselves the indulgence of being indulgent, and treated John Broom on principles, and for his good. But they did so in their own tremulous and spasmodic way, and got little credit for it. Thomasina, on the other hand, spoiled him with such a masterful managing air, and so much sensible talk, that no one would have thought that the only system she followed was to conceal his misdemeanours, and to stand between him and the just wrath of the farm-bailiff.

The farm-bailiff, or grieve, as he liked to call himself, was a Scotchman, with a hard-featured face (which he washed on the Sabbath), a harsh voice, a good heart rather deeper down in his body than is usual, and a shrewd, money-getting head, with a speckled straw hat on the top of it. No one could

venture to imagine when that hat was new, or how long ago it was that the farm-bailiff went to the expense of purchasing those work-day clothes. But the dirt on his face and neck was an orderly accumulation, such as gathers on walls, oil-paintings, and other places to which soap is not habitually applied; it was not a matter of spills and splashes, like the dirt John Broom disgraced himself with. And his clothes, if old, fitted neatly about him; they never suggested raggedness, which was the normal condition of the tramp-boy's jackets. They only looked as if he had been born (and occasionally buried) in them. It is needful to make this distinction, that the good man may not be accused of inconsistency in the peculiar vexation which John Broom's disorderly appearance caused him.

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

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

When the eleventh anniversary of John Broom's discovery was passed, and his character at school gave no hopes of his ever qualifying himself to serve the lawyer, it was resolved that—"idleness being the mother of mischief," he should be put under the care of the farm-bailiff, to do such odd jobs about the place as might be suited to his capacity and love of out-door life. And now John Broom's troubles

began. By fair means or foul, with here an hour's weeding and there a day's bird scaring, and with errands perpetual, the farm-bailiff contrived to "get some work out of" the idle little urchin. His speckled hat and grim face seemed to be everywhere, and always to pop up when John Broom began to play.

They lived "at daggers drawn." I am sorry to say that John Broom's fitful industry was still kept for his own fancies. To climb trees, to run races with the sheep dog, to cut grotesque sticks, gather hedge fruits, explore a bog, or make new friends among beasts and birds—at such matters he would labour with feverish zeal. But so far from trying to cure himself of his indolence about daily drudgery, he found a new and pleasant excitement in thwarting the farm-bailiff at every turn.

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

He had never approved of the tramp-child, who had the overwhelming drawbacks of having no pedigree and of being a bad bargain as to expense. This was not altogether John Broom's fault, but with his personal failings the farm-bailiff had even less sympathy. It has been hinted that he was born in the speckled hat, and whether this were so or not, he certainly had worn an old head whilst his

shoulders were still young, and could not remember the time when he wished to waste his energies on anything that did not earn or at least save something.

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

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

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

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

Miss Betty and Miss Kitty were delighted both with the cockatoo and the perch, but they were a good deal troubled as to how to fasten the two together. There was a neat little ring on the perch, and the cockatoo's chain was quite complete, and he evidently wanted to get out, for he shook the walls of his cage in his gambols. But he put up his crest and snapped when any one approached, in a manner so alarming that Annie the lass shut herself up in the dairy, and the farm-bailiff turned his speckled hat in his hands, and gave cautious counsel from a safe distance.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

They saw John Broom approach the cage, on which the cockatoo put up his crest, opened his beak

slowly, and snarled, and Miss Betty tapped on the window and shook her black satin workbag.

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

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

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

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

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

And just when Miss Betty had run round, and as she shouted through the keyhole, "Open the door, John Broom. We've changed our minds. We've decided to keep it in its cage," the cockatoo strode solemnly forth on his eight long toes.

"Pretty Cocky!" said he.

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

"It'll break your leg—you'll tear its eyes out!" cried Miss Kitty.

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

But Cocky was now waddling solemnly round the

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

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

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

And just as the little ladies ran into the garden, and Miss Kitty was saying, "One comfort is, sister Betty, that it's quite safe in the room, till we can think what to do next," he bowed his yellow crest, spread his noble wings, and sailed out into the æther.

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

The cockatoo was on the top of a fir-tree, and a fragment of the chain was with him, for he had broken it, and below on the lawn stood the little

ladies, who, with the unfailing courage of women in a hopeless cause, were trying to dislodge him by waving their pocket-handkerchiefs and crying "sh!"

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Dinna call on him, leddies," he said, speaking

"You've got a rare perch this time," said he (p. 39).

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Ye look weel standing gawping here, before the leddies," said he, "wasting the precious hours, and bringing your father's grey hairs wi' sorrow to the grave; and John Broom yonder shaming ye, and

you not so much as thinking to fetch the perch for him, ye lazy loon. Away wi' ye and get it, before I lay a stick about your shoulders."

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

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

Into the Mist.

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

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

John Broom had his own grievances too, and he brooded over them. He thought the little ladies had given him over to the farm-bailiff, because they had ceased to care for him, and that the farm-bailiff was prejudiced against him beyond any hope of propitiation. The village folk taunted him, too, with being an outcast, and called him Gipsy John, and this maddened him. Then he would creep into the cow-house and lie in the straw against the white

cow's warm back, and for a few of Miss Betty's coppers, to spend in beer or tobacco, the cowherd would hide him from the farm-bailiff and tell him countryside tales. To Thomasina's stories of ghosts and gossip, he would add strange tales of smugglers on the near-lying coast, and as John Broom listened, his restless blood rebelled more and more against the sour sneers and dry drudgery that he got from the farm-bailiff.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The Sea.—The One-eyed Sailor.—The Other Side of the World.

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

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

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

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

When he got down by the water he saw the vessels lying alongside, and they were dirtier than he had supposed. But he did not lose heart, and

remembering, from the cowherd's tales, that people who cannot pay for their passage must either work it out or hide themselves on board ship, he took the easier alternative, and got on to the first vessel which had a plank to the quay, and hid himself under some tarpaulin on the deck.

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

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

* * * * * * * * *

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

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

He did everything he was told now as fast as he could do it, in fear for his life. The one-eyed sailor had told him that the captain always took orphans

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

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

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

It was Christmas Day, and so hot that he could not run far, for it was at the other side of the world,

where things are upside down, and he sat down by the roadside on the outskirts of the city; and as he sat, with his thin, brown face resting on his hands, a familiar voice beside him said, "Pretty Cocky!" and looking up he saw a man with several cages of birds. The speaker was a cockatoo of the most exquisite shades of cream-colour, salmon, and rose, and he had a rose-coloured crest. But lovely as he was, John Broom's eyes were on another cage, where, silent, solemn, and sulky, sat a big white one with sulphur-coloured trimmings and fierce black eyes; and he was so like Miss Betty's pet, that the poor child's heart bounded as if a hand had been held out to him from home.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Every day and every night, through the long months of the voyage, he had dreamed of begging his way barefoot to Miss Betty's door. But now he did not go. His life was hard, but it was not cruel. He was very idle, and there was plenty to see. He wandered about the country as of old. The ships and shipping too had a fascination for him now that the past was past, and here he could watch them

from the shore; and, partly for shame and partly for pride, he could not face the idea of going back. If he had been taunted with being a vagrant boy before, what would be said now if he presented himself, a true tramp, to the farm-bailiff? Besides, Miss Betty and Miss Kitty could not forgive him. It was impossible!

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

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

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

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

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

But at this moment he erected himself, his turquoise eyes looked straight before them, and he put his hand to his head and moved it slowly away again, as a young man with more swinging grandeur of colours and fur and plumes, and with greater glittering of gems and silver, passed by, a sword clattering after him.

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

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

"It's here, sir."

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

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

He was knocked about, but never cruelly, and he got plenty of coppers and broken victuals, and now and then an old cap or pair of boots, a world too

large for him. His principal errands were to fetch liquor for the soldiers. In arms and pockets he would sometimes carry a dozen bottles at once, and fly back from the canteen or public-house without breaking one.

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

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

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

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

John Broom had several remembrances of the clearest kind to that effect, so he put up his arms

to shield his head from the probable blow, and said, "Yes, M'Alister."

"How often?" asked the Scotchman.

"I never counted," said John Broom; "pretty often."

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

"Three, M'Alister."

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

"That there's not," said John Broom, warmly.

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

"Nothing like so good," said John Broom, sincerely.

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

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

"Why don't ye give it up, M'Alister?"

The man rose to his full height, and laid his hand heavily on the boy's shoulder, and his eyes seemed

to fade with that pitiful, weary look, which only such blue eyes show so well. "Because I *canna*," said he; "because, for as big as I am, I canna. But for as little as you are, laddie, ye can, and, Heaven help me, ye shall."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Outpost Duty.—The Sergeant's Story.—Grand Rounds.

It was a bitterly cold winter. The soldiers drank a great deal, and John Broom was constantly trot-

ting up and down, and the box grew very heavy. Bottles were filled and refilled, in spite of greatly increased strictness in the discipline of the garrison, for there were rumours of invasion, and penalties were heavy, and sentry posts were increased, and the regiments were kept in readiness for action.

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

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

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

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

"It's not the miles, M'Alister," said John Broom, "but you're on outpost duty, and——"

"And you're misdoubting what may be done to ye for bringing liquor to a sentry on duty? Aye,

aye, lad, ye do weel to be cautious," said the Highlander, and he turned away.

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

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

"Wha goes there?" said he.

"It's I, M'Alister," whispered John Broom.

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

"Not a soul; I crept by the hedges. Here's your whisky, M'Alister; but, oh, be careful!" said the lad.

The Scotchman's eyes glittered greedily at the bottle.

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

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

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

It was of a friend of the sergeant's, who had been a boy with him in the same village at home, who had seen active service with him abroad, and who had slept at his post on such a night as this, from the joint effects of cold and drink. It was war time,

and he had been tried by court-martial, and shot for the offence. The sergeant had been one of the firing party to execute his friend, and they had taken leave of each other as brothers, before the final parting face to face in this last awful scene.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

And he reached the three roads, and M'Alister was asleep in the ditch.

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

Hospital.—" Hame."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"The Lord being merciful to me," said the Highlander. "But *this* world's nearly past, laddie, and I was fain to see ye again. Dinna greet, man, for I've important business wi' ye, and I should wish your attention. Firstly, I'm aboot to hand ower to

ye the key of your box. Tak it, and put it in a pocket that's no got a hole in it, if you're worth one. Secondly, there's a bit bag I made mysel, and it's got a trifle o' money in it that I'm giving and bequeathing to ye, under certain conditions, namely, that ye shall spend the contents of the box according to my last wishes and instructions, with the ultimate end of your ain benefit, ye'll understand."

A fit of coughing here broke M'Alister's discourse; but, after drinking from a cup beside him, he put aside John Broom's remonstrances with a dignified movement of his hand, and continued,—

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

"Never, M'Alister."

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

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

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

"Never, M'Alister."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"I can't read big words, M'Alister."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

There was a pause after the first verse, and he grew restless, and turning doubtfully to where John

Broom sat, as if his sight were failing, he said, "Ye'll mind your promise, ye'll gang hame?" And after awhile he repeated the last word,

"*Hame!*"

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

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

Luck goes.—And comes again.

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

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

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

As to Pretty Cocky, he lived, but Miss Kitty

fancied that he grew less pretty and drooped upon his polished perch.

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

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

The farm-bailiff had his own trouble, but he kept it to himself. No one knew how severely he had beaten John Broom the day before he ran away, but he remembered it himself with painful clearness. Harsh men are apt to have consciences, and his was far from easy about the lad who had been entrusted to his care. He could not help thinking of it when the day's work was over, and he had to keep filling up his evening whisky-glass again and again to drown disagreeable thoughts.

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

The cowherd was completely upset by John Broom's mysterious disappearance, and he comforted himself as the farm-bailiff did, but to a larger extent. And Thomasina winked at many irregularities in consideration of the groans of sympathy

with which he responded to her tears as they sat round the hearth where John Broom no longer lay.

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

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

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

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

By his own account many remarkable things had befallen him in the course of his life, including that meeting with a Black Something to which allusion has been made, but nothing so strange as what happened to him that night.

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

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

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

Lob Lie-by-the-fire.

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

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

"There'd been little enough luck at Lingborough lately, that they should wish to scare it away when it came."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

There was an aged pauper who lived on the charity

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

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

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

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

The ducklings were not eaten by rats.

No fowls were stolen.

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

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

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

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

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

The neighbours knew even more than those on the

spot. They said—That since Lob came back to Lingborough the hens laid eggs as large as turkeys' eggs, and the turkeys' eggs were—oh, you wouldn't believe the size!

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

That her cheeses were as rich as butter.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Miss Betty is Surprised.

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

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

It was while this young lady was getting more noise out of Mrs. Dunmaw's red silk and rosewood piano than had been shaken out of it during the last thirty years, that the lawyer brought his cup of coffee to Miss Betty's side, and said, suavely, " I hear wonderful accounts of Lingborough, dear Miss Betty."

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

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

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

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

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

"The turnips—" began Miss Betty.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The Parson and the Lubber-fiend.

"Do you think there'd be any harm in leaving It alone, sister Betty?" asked Miss Kitty, tremulously.

They had reached Lingborough, and the parson

had come in with them, by Miss Betty's request, and Thomasina had been duly examined.

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

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

"You're quite right, sister Betty," said Miss Kitty. "You always are; but oh dear, oh dear!"—

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

"Is this the door?" said the parson, cheerfully, after knocking his head against black beams and just saving his legs down shallow and unexpected steps on his way to the kitchen—beams so unfelt and

steps so familiar to the women that it had never struck them that the long passage was not the most straightforward walk a man could take—"I think you said It generally lies on the hearth?"

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

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

But Thomasina spoke in vain, for the parson opened the door, and as they pressed in, the moonlight streaming through the latticed window showed Lob lying by the fire.

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

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

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

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

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

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

THE END.

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

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

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

He did do well. He became "a good scholar," as farmers were then. He spent as much of his passionate energies on the farm as the farm would absorb, and he restrained the rest. It is not cockatoos only who have sometimes to live and be happy in this unfinished life with one wing clipped.

In fine weather, when the perch was put into the garden, Miss Betty was sometimes startled by stumbling on John Broom in the dusk, sitting on his heels, the unfastened chain in his hand, with his

black head lovingly laid against Cocky's white and yellow poll, talking in a low voice, and apparently with the sympathy of his companion; and, as Miss Betty justly feared, of that "other side of the world," which they both knew, and which both at times had cravings to revisit.

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

"The sock'll bring him home," said Mrs. Broom, and home he came, and never could say what he had been doing. Nor was the account given by Thomasina's cousin, who was a tide-waiter down yonder, particularly satisfying to the women's curiosity. He said that John Broom was always about; that he went aboard of all the craft in the bay, and asked whence they came and whither they were bound. That, being once taunted to it, he went up the rigging of a big vessel like a cat, and came down it looking like a fool. That, as a rule, he gossiped

and shared his tobacco with sailors and fishermen, and brought out the sock much oftener than was prudent for the benefit of the ragged boys who haunt the quay.

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

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

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

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

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

"Aweel, lad, sae ye've cam hame?"

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

TIMOTHY'S SHOES

NOTE TO 'TIMOTHY'S SHOES.'

SOME time after the appearance of 'Timothy's Shoes' in *Aunt Judy's Magazine*, I was told by a friend that a tale about a very similar pair of shoes had appeared in an American publication. My friend had forgotten the title, and I have not yet seen the story, but it is perhaps due to the writer of it to apologise for any unintentional similarity, and to myself to say that *my* little shoes were cobbled in my own brain, and not on a borrowed last

J. H. E.

TIMOTHY'S SHOES

The Fairy Godmother.

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

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

"It's too late to talk about that now, my dear," said her godmother (a fairy godmother, too!); "the baby is a very fine boy, and if you will let me know when the christening-day is fixed, I will come and give him a present. I can't be godmother, though;

I'm too old, and you've talked about responsibilities till I'm quite alarmed." With which the old lady kissed her goddaughter, and nearly put out the baby's eye with the point of her peaked hat, after which she mounted her broomstick and rode away.

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Doubtless 'tis of the more precious metal," said Dr. Dixon Airey, the schoolmaster (and this was his way of saying that it was a gold mug), "and not

improbably studded with the glittering diamond. Let us not be precipitate in our conclusions."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Kingcups.

As years went by, and her family increased, the mother learned the full value of the little shoes. Her nine boys wore them in turn, but they never wore them out. So long as the fairy shoes were on their feet they were pretty sure to go where they were

sent and to come back when they were wanted, which, as all parents know, is no light matter. Moreover, during the time that each boy wore them, he got into such good habits that he was thenceforward comparatively tractable. At last they descended to the ninth and youngest boy, and became —Timothy's shoes.

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

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

Tim's mother held him by his right arm, and Tim's left arm and both his legs were already as far away as he could stretch them, and Tim's face looked just as incredulous as yours would look if you were told that there was a bogy in the store-closet who would avenge any attack upon the jam-pots with untold terrors. At last the good woman let go her hold, and Tim went off like an arrow from a bow,

and he gave not one more thought to what his mother had said.

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

Once or twice Tim loitered to pick milkmaids and white starflowers and speedwell; but the shoes pinched him, and he ran on all the more willingly that a newly-fledged butterfly went before him. But when the path ran on above the marsh, and he looked down and saw the kingcups, he dismissed all thoughts of school. True, the bank was long and steep, but that only added to the fun. Kingcups he must have. The other flowers he flung away. Milkmaids are wan-looking at the best; starflowers and speedwell are ragged; but those shining things that he had not seen for twelve long months, with cups of gold and leaves like water-lilies—Tim flung his satchel on to the grass, and began to scramble down the bank. But though he turned his feet towards the kingcups, the shoes seemed resolved to go to school; and as he persisted in going towards the marsh, he suffered such twitches and twinges that he thought his feet must have been wrenched off. But

Tim was a very resolute little fellow, and though his ankles bid fair to be dislocated at every step, he dragged himself, shoes and all, down to the marsh. And now, provokingly enough, he could not find a kingcup within reach; in very perversity, as it seemed, not one would grow on the safe edge, but, like so many Will-o'-the-wisps, they shone out of the depths of the treacherous bog. And as Tim wandered round the marsh, jerk; wrench—oh, dear! every step was like a galvanic shock. At last, desperate with pain and disappointment, he fairly jumped into a brilliant clump that looked tolerably near, and was at once ankle-deep in water. Then, to his delight, the wet mud sucked the shoes off his feet, and he waded about among the rushes, reeds, and kingcups, sublimely happy.

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

Now, with all his faults, Tim was no coward and no liar, so with a quaking heart and a stubborn face

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

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

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

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

The Shoes at School.

When Timothy's mother heard how he had been in the marsh, she decided to send him at once to a real boys' school, as he was quite beyond dame's management. So he was sent to live with Dr. Dixon Airey, who kept a school on the moors, assisted by one usher, a gentleman who had very long legs and used very long words, and who wore common spectacles of very high power on work days, and green ones on Sundays and holidays.

And Timothy's shoes went with him.

On the whole he liked being at school. He liked the boys, he did not hate Dr. Airey much, and he would have felt kindly towards the Usher but for certain exasperating circumstances. The Usher was accustomed to illustrate his lessons by examples from familiar objects, and as he naturally had not much imagination left after years of grinding at the

"You've been in the marsh, Timothy," said the dame.
"Put on your shoes" (p. 84).

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rudiments of everything with a succession of lazy little boys, he took the first familiar objects that came to hand, and his examples were apt to be tame. Now though Timothy's shoes were well-known in his native village, they created quite a sensation in Dr. Dixon Airey's establishment, and the Usher brought them into his familiar examples till Timothy was nearly frantic. Thus: "If Timothy's shoes cost 8*s*. 7*d*. without the copper tips, etc.;" or, illustrating the genitive case, "Timothy's shoes, or the shoes of Timothy," or again: "The shoes. Of the shoes. To or for the shoes. The shoes. O shoes! By, with, or from the shoes."

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

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

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

"A *very* big pie!" cried Tim on one of these occasions. He had been sitting half asleep in the sunshine, his mind running on the coming enjoyments of the fruit season, cooked and uncooked; the Usher had appealed to him unexpectedly, and the answer was out of his lips before he could recollect himself. Of course he was sent to the bottom of

the class; and the worst of going down in class for Timothy was that his shoes were never content to rest there. They pinched his poor feet till he shuffled them off in despair, and then they pattered back to his proper place, where they stayed till, for very shame, Tim was obliged to work back to them: and if he kept down in class for two or three days, for so long he had to sit in his socks, for the shoes always took the place that Tim ought to have filled.

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

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

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

Altogether Timothy would have been happy but for the shoes. They did him good service in many ways, it is true. When Timothy first came, the little boys groaned under the tyranny of a certain big bully of whom all were afraid. One day when

he was maltreating Bramble minor in a shameful and most unjust fashion, Timothy rushed at him and with the copper tips of his unerring shoes he kicked him so severely that the big bully did not get over it for a week, and no one feared him any more. Then in races, and all games of swift and skilful chase, Timothy's shoes won him high renown. But they made him uncomfortable whenever he went wrong, and left him no peace till he went right, and he grumbled loudly against them.

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

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

The Shoes at Church.

On Sunday, Dr. Dixon Airey's school went to the old church in the valley. It was a venerable building with a stone floor, and when Dr. Dixon Airey's young gentlemen came in they made such a clattering with their feet that everybody looked round. So the Usher very properly made a point of being punctual that they might not disturb the congregation.

The Usher always went to church with the boys, and he always wore his green spectacles. It has been hinted that on Sundays and holidays he was slow to see anything amiss. Indeed if he were

directly told of misconduct he would only shake his head and say:

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

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

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

Oh, how the shoes pinched Tim's feet as he ran away over the heather, and how Tim vowed in his heart never to rest till he got rid of them! At last the wrenching became so intolerable that Tim tore them off his feet, and kicked them for very spite. Fortunately for Tim's shins the shoes did not kick back again, but they were just setting off after the Usher, when Tim snatched them up and put them in his pocket. At last he found among the grey rocks that peeped out of the heather and bracken,

one that he could just move, and when he had pushed it back, he popped the shoes under it, and then rolled the heavy boulder back on them to keep them fast. After which he ate bilberries till his teeth were blue, and tried to forget the shoes and to enjoy himself. But he could not do either.

As to the Usher, when he found that Timothy was missing, he was very much vexed; and when the Psalms were ended and still he had not come, the Usher took off his green spectacles and put them into his pocket. And Bramble minor, who came next to Timothy, kept his Prayer-Book open at the Church Catechism and read his Duty to his Neighbour instead of attending to the service. At last the time came, and all the boys filed down the nave. First the parish schools and then Dr. Dixon Airey's young gentlemen; and just as they took their places, between Bramble minor and the next boy—in the spot where Timothy should have been—stood Timothy's shoes.

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

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

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

"Bramble minor, sir."

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

"Perfectly, sir."

"Mrs. Airey and I," said the Doctor, "shall have much pleasure in seeing Bramble minor at tea this evening. I believe there are greengage turnovers. We hope also for the honour of *your* company, sir," added the Doctor. "And when Timothy retraces

his erring steps, *tell him to come and fetch his shoes.*"

The Poor Person.

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

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

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

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

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

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

He did not go towards the village (it was too

public he thought); he went over the moors, and when he had walked about half a mile, down by a sandy lane just below him, he saw a poor person's cottage. The cottage was so tumble-down, and so old and inconvenient, there could be no doubt but that it belonged to a poor person, and to a very poor person indeed!

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Whatever did he go there for?" cried Tim, im-

patiently, for he saw no prospect of getting rid of his tormentors.

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

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

And so they were still Timothy's shoes.

The Dirty Boy.

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

Timothy and the Usher had so much moor breeze and heather scents every day, that they quite enjoyed the heavier air of the valley and the smell and smoke of town life. Just as they entered the first street a dirty little boy, in rags and with bare feet, ran beside them, and as he ran he talked. And it was all about his own trouble and poverty, and hunger and bare feet, and he spoke very fast, with a kind of whine.

"I feel quite ashamed, Timothy," said the Usher (who worked hard for twelve hours a day, and supported a blind mother and two sisters),—"I feel quite ashamed to be out holidaying when a fellow-creature is barefooted and in want." And as he spoke the Usher gave sixpence to the dirty little boy (who never worked at all, and was supported by

kind people out walking). And when the dirty little boy had got the sixpence, he bit it with his teeth and rang it on the stones, and then danced catherine-wheels on the pavement till somebody else came by. But the Usher did not see this through his green spectacles.

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

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

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

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

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

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

"I will give you these shoes, boy," said he, "on

one condition. You must promise not to lose them, nor to give them away."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Then they went out into the street, where there was an interesting smell of smoke, and humanity, and meat, and groceries, and drapery, and drugs, quite different to the moor air, and the rattling and bustling were most stimulating. And Tim and the Usher looked in at all the shop-windows gratis, and chose the things they would have bought if they

had had the money. At last the Usher went into a shop and bought for Tim a kite which he had admired; and Tim would have given everything he possessed to have been able to buy some small keepsake for the Usher, but he could not, for he had spent all his pocket-money on the new boots.

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

moment the Usher forgot what he was saying about our national liberties, and recalled (as with a lightning flash) the connection between crowds and our national pickpockets. And when he clapped his hand to his waistcoat—his watch was gone!

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

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

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

before yesterday, the dirty boy gave one wriggle, dived, and leaving his jacket in the policeman's hand, fled away like the wind on his bare feet.

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

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

And the shoes took him very comfortably home.

The Children's Party.

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

"I can come home in proper time without those clod-hopping shoes," said Timothy to himself. "It

is really too bad to expect one to go to a party in leather shoes with copper tips and heels!"

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

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

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

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

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

and they were just about to dance Sir Roger de Coverley, when the clock struck ten.

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

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

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

The Snow Storm.

When Timothy went back to school in the beginning of the year, the snow lay deep upon the moors. The boys made colossal snow men, and buried things deep under drifts, for the dog Bernardus to

fetch out. On the ice Timothy's shoes were invaluable. He was the best skater and slider in the school, and when he was going triumphantly down a long slide with his arms folded and his friends cheering, Tim was very glad he had not given away his shoes.

One Saturday the Usher took him and Bramble minor for a long walk over the hills. They had tea with a friendly farmer, whose hospitality would hardly let them go. So they were later than they had intended, and about the time that they set out to return a little snow began to fall. It was small snow, and fell very quietly. But though it fell so quietly, it was wonderful how soon the walls and gates got covered; and though the flakes were small they were so dense that in a short time no one could see more than a few yards in front of him. The Usher thought it was desirable to get home as quickly as possible, and he proposed to take a short cut across the moors, instead of following the high road all the way. So they climbed a wall, and ploughed their way through the untrodden snow, and their hands and feet grew bitterly painful and then numb, and the soft snow lodged in their necks and drifted on to their eyelashes and into their ears, and at last Timothy fairly cried. For he said, that besides the biting of the frost his shoes pinched and pulled at his feet.

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

But Tim found it so hard to bear, that the Usher took him on to his back and took his feet into his hands, and Bramble minor carried the shoes. And

five minutes passed, but they did not strike the road, and five more minutes passed, and though Tim lay heavy upon the Usher's shoulder (for he was asleep) the Usher's heart was heavier still. And five minutes more passed, and Bramble minor was crying, and the Usher said, "Boys, we've lost our way. I see nothing for it but to put Timothy's shoes down and follow them."

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

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

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

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

But Timothy gave no answer.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Bernardus on Duty.

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

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

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

But when Dr. Dixon Airey opened the door for

the seventh time, Timothy's shoes ran in, and they were filled with snow. And when the Doctor saw them he covered his face with his hands.

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

And there lay Bernardus with his big nose at the door of his kennel smelling the storm. And when he saw the light and heard footsteps, his great, melancholy, human eyes brightened, and he moaned with joy. And when the men came up from the village and moved about with shovels and lanterns, he was nearly frantic, for he thought, "This looks like business;" and he dragged at his kennel, as much as to say, "If you don't let me off the chain now, of all moments, I'll come on my own responsibility and bring the kennel with me."

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

"It's a rare good thing there's some dumb animals cleverer than we are ourselves," observed one of the labourers as they struggled blindly through the snow, the lanterns casting feeble and erratic patches of light for a yard or two before their feet. To Bernardus his own wonderful gift was light, and

sight, and guide, its own sufficient stimulus, and its own reward.

"There's some'at amiss," said another man presently; "t'dog's whining; he's stuck fast."

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

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

* * * * * * * * *

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

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

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

The Shoes go Home.

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

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

He was at home when the day came on which the old leather shoes into which he could no longer squeeze his feet were polished for the last time, and

put away in a cupboard in his mother's room: Timothy blacked them with his own hands, and the tears were in his eyes as he put them on the shelf.

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

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

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

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

had had reason to exclaim about one or other of her nine sons any day for the last twenty years.

But as she spoke the cupboard door swung slowly open, and Timothy's shoes came out and ran across the floor. They paused for an instant by his mother's bed, as if to say farewell, and then the bedroom door opened also and let them pass. Down the stairs they went, and they ran with that music of a childish patter that no foot in the house could make now; and the mother sobbed to hear it for the last time. Then she thought, "The house door's locked, they can't go right away yet."

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

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

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

* * * * * * * * *

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

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

OLD FATHER CHRISTMAS

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CHAPTER I.

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

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

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

"Now, as I say, my relations and friends thought twice before they pulled out five shillings in a toy shop, but they didn't forget me, all the same. On my eighth birthday my mother gave me a bright blue comforter of her own knitting. My little sister gave me a ball. My mother had cut out the divisions from various bits in the rag bag, and my sister had done some of the seaming. It was stuffed with bran, and had a cork inside which had broken from old age, and would no longer fit the pickle jar it belonged to. This made the ball bound when we played 'prisoner's base.' My father gave me the riding-whip that had lost the lash and the top of the handle, and an old pair of his gloves, to play coachman with; these I had long wished for. Kitty the servant gave me a shell that she had had by her for years. How I had coveted that shell! It had this remarkable property: when you put it to your ear you could hear the roaring of the sea. I had never seen the sea, but Kitty was born in a fisherman's cottage, and many an hour have I sat by the kitchen fire whilst she told me strange stories of the mighty ocean, and ever and anon she would snatch the shell from the mantelpiece and clap it to my ear, crying, 'There child, you couldn't hear it plainer than that. It's the very moral!'

"When Kitty gave me that shell for my very own I felt that life had little more to offer. I held it to every ear in the house, including the cat's; and, seeing Dick the sexton's son go by with an armful of straw to stuff Guy Fawkes, I ran out, and in my anxiety to make him share the treat, and learn what the sea is like, I clapped the shell to his ear so smartly and unexpectedly, that he, thinking me to have struck him, knocked me down then and there with his bundle of straw. When he understood the

rights of the case, he begged my pardon handsomely, and gave me two whole treacle sticks and part of a third out of his breeches' pocket, in return for which I forgave him freely, and promised to let him hear the sea roar on every Saturday half-holiday till farther notice.

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

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

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

"My godmother was very ingenious. She had

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

No. 1. GUY FAWKES.—Outlined from a figure of a warehouseman rolling a sherry cask into Mr. Rudd's wine vaults. I added the hat, cloak, and boots in the finished drawing.

No. 2. PUNCH.—I sketched him from the life.

No. 3. HIS MOST GRACIOUS MAJESTY THE KING.—On a quart jug bought in Cheapside.

No. 4. BOGY, *with bad boys in the bag on his back.*—Outlined from Christian bending under his burden, in my mother's old copy of the 'Pilgrim's Progress.' The face from Giant Despair.

No. 5 and No. 6. THE MAN IN THE MOON and THE CLERK OF THE WEATHER OFFICE.—From a book of caricatures belonging to Dr. James.

No. 7. A DUNCE.—From a steel engraving framed in rosewood that hangs in my Uncle Wilkinson's parlour.

No. 8. OLD FATHER CHRISTMAS.—From a German book at Lady Littleham's.

CHAPTER II.

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

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

"Patty and I had our favourites amongst the pictures. Bogy, now, was a character one did not care to think about too near bed-time. I was tired of Guy Fawkes, and thought he looked more natural made of straw, as Dick did him. The Dunce was a little too personal; but Old Father Christmas took our hearts by storm; we had never seen anything like him, though now-a-days you may get a plaster figure of him in any toy-shop at Christmas-time, with hair and beard like cotton wool, and a Christmas-tree in his hand.

"The custom of Christmas-trees came from Germany. I can remember when they were first introduced into England, and what wonderful things we thought them. Now, every village school has its tree, and the scholars openly discuss whether the

presents have been 'good,' or 'mean' as compared with other trees in former years. The first one that I ever saw I believed to have come from good Father Christmas himself; but little boys have grown too wise now to be taken in for their own amusement. They are not excited by secret and mysterious preparations in the back drawing-room; they hardly confess to the thrill—which I feel to this day—when the folding-doors are thrown open, and amid the blaze of tapers, mamma, like a Fate, advances with her scissors to give every one what falls to his lot.

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

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

"'Candles,' said my father.

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

"'These are toys, my son.'

"'Are they ever taken off?'

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

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

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

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

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

"And I, who was, for my age, what Kitty called 'Bible-learned,' said thoughtfully, and with some

puzzledness of mind, 'Then he's older than Methusaleh.'

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

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

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

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

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

"Patty and I were hardy children, and accustomed to 'run out' in all weathers, without much extra wrapping up. We put Kitty's shawl over our two heads, and went outside. I rather hoped to see something of Dick, for it was holiday time; but no Dick passed. He was busy helping his father to

bore holes in the carved seats of the church, which were to hold sprigs of holly for the morrow—that was the idea of church decoration in my young days. You have improved on your elders there, young people, and I am candid enough to allow it. Still, the sprigs of red and green were better than nothing, and, like your lovely wreaths and pious devices, they made one feel as if the old black wood were bursting into life and leaf again for very Christmas joy; and, if one only knelt carefully, they did not scratch his nose.

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

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

"'Look!'

CHAPTER III.

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

"The same conviction seized upon us both. With one breath we exclaimed, '*It's Old Father Christmas!*'

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

"As he passed us and met our earnest gaze, he smiled and nodded so affably, that I was bold enough to cry, 'Good-evening, Father Christmas!'

"'Same to you!' said he, in a high-pitched voice.

"'Then you *are* Father Christmas,' said Patty.

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

"'So I be, miss, so I be,' said Father Christmas, nodding.

"'Father says you're eighteen hundred and thirty years old,' I muttered.

" 'Aye, aye, to be sure,' said Father Christmas, 'I'm a long age.'

"A *very* long age, thought I, and I added, 'You're nearly twice as old as Methuselah, you know,' thinking that this might not have struck him.

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

" 'A Christmas tree,' said Patty.

"And the old man smiled and nodded.

"I leant over the wall, and shouted, 'But there are no candles.'

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

" 'Toys too, there'll be, won't there?' said Patty.

"Father Christmas nodded his head. 'And sweeties,' he added, expressively.

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

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

" 'I'm coming back by-and-by,' said he.

" 'How soon?' cried Patty.

" 'About four o'clock,' said the old man, smiling, 'I'm only going up yonder.'

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

" 'Up yonder.' This puzzled us. Father Christmas had pointed, but so indefinitely, that he might

Old Father Christmas (p. 120).

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

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

"'Perhaps it's a new dog that he's got to take care of his cave,' said Patty.

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

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

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

"We hovered on the outskirts of the rooms till four o'clock came. We sat on the stairs and watched the big clock, which I was just learning to read; and Patty made herself giddy with constantly looking up and counting the four strokes, towards which the hour hand slowly moved. We put our

noses into the kitchen now and then, to smell the cakes and get warm, and anon we hung about the parlour door, and were most unjustly accused of trying to peep. What did we care what our mother was doing in the parlour?—we, who had seen Old Father Christmas himself, and were expecting him back again every moment!

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

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

"It really was the dirty little brown and white spaniel; and he persisted in licking me, and jumping on me, and making curious little noises, that must have meant something if one had known his language. I was rather harassed at the moment. My legs were sore, I was a little afraid of the dog,

and Patty was very much afraid of sitting on the wall without me.

"'You won't fall,' I said to her. 'Get down, will you?' I said to the dog.

"'Humpty Dumpty fell off a wall,' said Patty.

"'Bow! wow!' said the dog.

"I pulled Patty down, and the dog tried to pull me down; but when my little sister was on her feet, to my relief, he transferred his attentions to her. When he had jumped at her, and licked her several times, he turned round and ran away.

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

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

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

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

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

CHAPTER IV.

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

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

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

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

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

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

" Well, there we sat, helping Old Father Christ-

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

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

"But, bless me! now-a-days, it's 'Come and tell Mr. Smith what a fine boy you are, and how many houses you can build with your bricks,' or, 'The dear child wants everything he sees,' or, 'Little pet never lets mamma alone for a minute; does she, love?' But in my young days it was, 'Self-praise is no recommendation' (as Kitty used to tell me), or, 'You're knocking too hard at No. One' (as my

father said when we talked about ourselves), or, 'Little boys should be seen but not heard' (as a rule of conduct 'in company'), or, 'Don't ask for what you want, but take what's given you, and be thankful.'

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

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

"'I suppose the candles are on the tree now?'

"'Just about putting of 'em on,' said Father Christmas.

"'And the presents, too?' said Patty.

"'Aye, aye, *to* be sure,' said Father Christmas, and he smiled delightfully.

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

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

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

"At last he was satisfied. I said grace, during which he stood, and indeed he stood for some time afterwards with his eyes shut—I fancy under the impression that I was still speaking. He had just

said a fervent 'Amen,' and reseated himself, when my father put his head into the kitchen, and made this remarkable statement,—

"'Old Father Christmas has sent a tree to the young people.'

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

"'Come along,' said my father, 'Come children. Come Reuben. Come Kitty.'

"And he went into the parlour, and we all followed him.

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

"We were all very happy; even Kitty, I think, though she kept her sleeves rolled up, and seemed rather to grudge enjoying herself (a weak point in

some energetic characters). She went back to her oven before the lights were out and the angel on the top of the tree taken down. She locked up her present (a little work-box) at once. She often showed it off afterwards, but it was kept in the same bit of tissue paper till she died. Our presents certainly did not last so long!

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

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

BENJY IN BEASTLAND

BENJY IN BEASTLAND

A Bad Boy.

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

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

Then boys' wholesale powers of accumulation and destruction render their dens convenient storehouses of generally useless and particularly useful lumber. If you want string or wire, or bottles or flowerpots, or a bird-cage, or an odd glove or shoe, or anything of any kind to patch up something of a similar kind, or missing property of your own or another's—go to

a boy's room! There one finds abundance of everything, from cobbler's wax to the carmine from one's own water-colour box.

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

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

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

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

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

scrubbed with hot water and soft soap both inside and out.

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

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

But he was proud of being patronised by Tom, the coachman's scapegrace son—a coarse, cruel, and uneducated lad, whose ideas of "fun" Benjy unfortunately made his own. With him he went to see pigs killed, helped to drown supernumerary pups and kittens, and became learned in dog-fights, cock-fights, rat-hunting, cat-hunting, and so forth.

Benjy's father was an invalid, and he had no brothers, so that he was without due control and

companionship. His own lack of nice pursuits made the excitement of cruelty an acceptable amusement for his idleness, and he would have thought it unmanly to be more scrupulous and tender-hearted than the coachman's son.

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

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

Nox,

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

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

Nox rose early, delighted in cold water, and had

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

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

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

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

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

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

Benjy destroyed lives with much wanton cruelty.

Nox had saved lives at the risk of his own.

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

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

sorts also got flung in here, for at this point the rivei skirted the back part of the town.

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

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

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

There the mother whose child had fallen into the

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

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

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

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

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

Mister Rough

was another dog belonging to Benjy's father, and commonly regarded as the property of Benjy himself. He was a wiry-haired terrier, with clipped ears

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

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

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

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

More Mischief.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

From the Morgue to the Moon.

Benjy went to bed, but he could not sleep. He wished he had not put that dog in the river—it would get him into a scrape. He had been flogged for Mr. Goodman's spaniel, and though Mister Rough had been flogged for Lady Dumble's cat, Benjy knew on whose shoulders the flogging should by rights have descended. Then Nox seemed all right, in spite of the needle, and would no doubt pursue his officious charities with sunrise. Benjy could not trust himself to get up early in the morning, but he could go out that night, and he would—with a hayfork—and get the body out of the water, and hide or bury it.

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

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

The book had a frontispiece representing the dogs sitting in the moon and relating their former experiences.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

As Cerberus guarded the entrance to Pluto's domains, so there sat at the going in to Beastland a black dog—the very black dog who gets on to sulky children's backs. And on the back of the black dog sat a crow—the crow that people pluck when they quarrel; and though it has been plucked so often it

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

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

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

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

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

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

"It's very odd," thought Benjy; "but I'll go on."

The black dog growled, but let him pass; the bee buzzed about, and the cat in the cradle swung and slept serenely through it all.

"I should get on quicker if I rode instead of walking," thought Benjy; so he went up to the nightmare and asked if she would carry him a few miles.

"You must be the victim of a very singular delusion," said the nightmare, coolly. "It is for me to be carried by you, not for you to ride on me." And as Benjy looked, her nose grew longer and longer, and her eyes were so hideous, they took Benjy's breath away; and he fled as fast as his legs would carry him. And so he got deep, deep into Beastland.

Oh! it was a beautiful place. There were many more beasts than there are in the Zoological Gardens; and they were all free. They did not devour each other, for a peculiar kind of short grass grew all over Beastland, which was eaten by all alike.

If by chance there were any quarrelling, or symptoms of misbehaviour, the man in the moon would cry "Manners!" and all was quiet at once.

Talking of manners, the civility of the beasts in Beastland was most conspicuous. They came in crowds and welcomed Benjy, each after his own fashion. The cats rubbed their heads against his legs and held their tails erect, as if they were presenting arms. The dogs wagged theirs, and barked and capered round him; except one French poodle, who "sat up" during the whole visit, as an act of politeness. The little birds sang and chirruped. The pigeons sat on his shoulders and cooed; two little swallows clung to the eaves of his hat, and twitched their tails, and said "Kiwit! kiwit!" A peacock with a spread tail went before him; and a flock of rose-coloured cockatoos brought up the rear. Presently a wise and solemn old elephant came and knelt before Benjy; and Benjy got on to his back and rode in triumph, the other beasts following.

Benjy and the nightmare (p. 144).

"Let us show him the lions!" cried all the beasts; and on they went.

But when Benjy found that they meant real lions —like the lions in a menagerie, but not in cages— he was frightened, and would not go on. And he explained that by the "lions" of a place *he* meant the "sights" that are exhibited to strangers, whether natural curiosities or local manufactures. When the beasts understood this, they were most anxious to show him "lions" of his own kind.

So the wise-eyed beavers, whose black faces were as glossy as that of Nox, took him to their lodges, and showed him how they fell or collect wood "up stream" with their sharp teeth, and so float it down to the spot where they have decided to build, as the "logs" from American forests float down the rivers in spring. And as they displayed the wondrous forethought and ingenuity of their common dwellings, a little caddis worm, in the water hard by, begged Benjy to observe that, on a smaller scale, his own house bore witness to similar patience and skill, with its rubble walls of motley variety.

In another stream a doughty little stickleback sailing round and round the barrel-shaped nest, over which he was keeping watch, displayed its construction with pardonable pride.

Then Benjy saw, with an interest it was impossible not to feel, the wonderful galleries in the earth cities of the ants; the nests of the large hornet, the wasp, and the earwig, where hive as well as comb is the work of the industrious proprietors; and whilst he was looking at these, a message came from three patches of lepraliæ on the back of an old oyster-shell by the sea, to beg that Benjy would come and see their dwellings, where the cells were not of one uniform pattern, but in all varieties of exquisite shapes,

each tribe or family having its own proper style of architecture. And it must not be supposed that, because lepralia cells can only be seen under a microscope with us, that it was so in Beastland; for there all the labours and exquisite performances of every animal were equally manifest to sight.

But invitations came in fast. The "social grosbeaks" requested him to visit their city of nests in a distant wood; the "prairie dogs" wished to welcome him to their village of mounds, where each dog, sitting on his own little hut, eagerly awaited the honour of his visit. The rooks bade him to a solemn conference; and a sentinel was posted on every alternate tree, up to the place of meeting, to give notice of his approach. A spider (looking very like some little, old, hard-headed, wizen-faced, mechanical genius!) was really anxious to teach Benjy to make webs.

"Look here," said he; "we will suppose that you are ready and about to begin. Well. You look—anywhere, in fact—down into space, and decide to what point you wish to affix your first line. Then—you have a ball of thread in your inside, of course?"

"I can't say that I have," said Benjy; "but I have a good deal of string in my pocket."

"That's all right," said the spider; "I call it thread; you call it string. Pocket or stomach, it's all the same, I suppose. Well——"

But just as the spider was at the crisis of his lesson, and all was going on most pleasantly—whizz!—the tell-tale-tit made its appearance, and soon whispered, first to one animal and then to another, who and what Benjy was. The effect was magical. "Scandalous!" cried all the beasts; "the monster!" An old tabby cat puffed out her tail, and ran up a tree. "Boy!" she exclaimed, in a tone of the deepest disgust; for in Beastland they

say "boy" as a term of reproach where we should say "beast."

The confusion was great, and the tell-tale-tit revelled in it, hopping and flitting about, and adding a word here or there if the excitement seemed to flag.

"To think what he might do to us, if we were down yonder!" cried an old pug. (She was a great-grandmother, and so fat that she could hardly waddle.)

"He is in *your* power up here, you know," said the tell-tale-tit, suggestively.

"So he is!" cried the beasts; and with one voice they shouted—"Punishment! Punishment! Bring him to the lion!" And to the lion he was brought, the beasts still crying, "Punishment! Punishment!"

"I'll punish him!" cried a donkey, who trotted up on hearing of the matter. "Let me get a lump of cold iron between his teeth, and tug and jerk it against the corners of his mouth. Let me pull in and flog at the same moment. Let me knock him over the head, and kick him in the ribs, and thwack his back, and prod his side; and I'll soon make him run, and take his nasty temper out of him, and teach him to carry any weight, and go gaily in harness."

"Gently, gently, my friend," said the lion. "You speak under a very natural feeling of irritation; but if I am to be judge of this case, the prisoner must have fair play."

Accordingly the beasts placed themselves in a sort of circle, Benjy being put in the middle; and a bull-frog who lived in a ditch hard by was appointed to watch the case on his behalf. The bull-frog had big, watchful eyes, and was cool and cautious. As the case proceeded he occasionally said, "Omph!"

which sounded thoughtful, and committed him to nothing.

"What is the prisoner accused of?" asked the lion.

At this question everybody looked round for the tell-tale-tit; but, like most mischief-makers, the good gossip liked nothing less than being brought to book, and had taken advantage of the confusion to fly away. So the other animals had to recall what they had heard as best they might.

"He ill-uses and drowns dogs, hunts and kills cats——"

"Rough kills the cats," interrupted Benjy, for he was becoming alarmed.

"Omph!" said the bull-frog.

"Send for Mr. Rough," said the lion; and a messenger was despatched. (It is not always needful to disturb yourself, dear reader, when your pet dog is absent without leave: he may have gone on business to Beastland.)

"Cock-a-doodle-do! Flap, flap! send for more whilst you are about it," cried a handsome game-cock, strutting into the midst. "Cock-a-doodle-do! when I crow, let no other cock open his beak. There's a nice, cock-fighting, good-for-nothing young scapegrace! I know a pullet of the same breed down yonder: his name is Tom. Let him be fetched up, and we will fasten spurs on to their heels, and set them to kick each other, and tear each other's eyes out. It will be rare sport, and sport is a noble taste, and should be encouraged. Flap, flap! cock-a-doodle-do!"

The cock was just stretched on his tiptoes, in the act of crowing, when a pattering of feet and the jingling of a chain collar were heard, and Mister Rough trotted brusquely into the circle, with his clipped ears and his stumpy tail erect.

"Mister Rough," said the lion; "the prisoner says it is you and not he who torment the cats."

"Bowf, bowf, bowf!" replied the terrier, jumping wildly about in his stocking feet. "Whose fault is it? Wowf, wowf, wowf, who taught me to do it? Bowf, wowf! that bad boy there. Rowf, rowf! let me get hold of him by the small of the back, and I'll shake him as I would shake a rat. Rowf, wowf, bowf!"

"*Manners*!" cried the man in the moon, and there was silence at once.

"Then he has not gone to Norwich, after all!" said Benjy to himself.

After a short pause the examination was resumed. Mister Rough deposed that he hunted cats by the teaching and imperative orders of Benjy and other human beings. That he could not now see a cat without a feeling which he could only describe as madness seizing him, which obliged him to chase and despatch puss without any delay. He never felt this sensation towards the cat of his own house, in her own kitchen. They were quite friendly, and ate from the same dish. In cross-examination he admitted that he had a natural taste for tearing things, and preferred fur to any other material. But he affirmed that an occasional slipper or other article would have served the purpose, but for his unfortunate education, especially if the slipper or other article were hairy or trimmed with fur.

"But all that is as nothing," cried the old tabby, indignantly; "he has been guilty of the most horrible cruelties, and they ought to be paid back to him in kind. Sss, spt, he's a boy, I say, a regular boy!"

"Omph!" said the bull-frog, and went below to consider the case.

"Gentlebeasts," said the lion, "I consider it unnecessary to hear more evidence against the prisoner, especially as no attempt is made to deny his cruelties, though in the matter of cat-hunting he implicates Mister Rough. There are not two opinions as to his guilt; the only open question is that of punishment. As you have placed the matter in my hands, I will beg you to wait until I have taken three turns and given the subject my serious consideration."

But instead of three turns the lion took seven, pacing majestically round and round, and now and then lashing his tail. At last he resumed his seat; the bull-frog put his green head up again, and the lion gave judgment.

"Gentlebeasts, birds, and fishes, I have given this subject my most serious consideration, and I trust that my decision will not give offence. Our friend, Madame Tabby, declares that the prisoner should be punished with a like cruelty to that which he has inflicted. Friend Donkey is ready to ride or drive him with all the kicking, beating, and pulling which soured his own temper, and stunted his faculties in their early development. I must frankly roar that I am not in favour of this. My friends, let us not degrade ourselves to the level of men. We know what they are. Too often stupid in their kindness, vindictive in their anger, and not seldom wantonly cruel. Is this our character as a class? Do we even commonly retaliate? Ask friend Donkey himself. Does the treatment (even more irrational than unkind) which blunts the intelligence, and twists the temper of so many of his race, prevent their rendering on the whole the largest labour for the roughest usage of any servant of man? Need I speak of dogs? Do they bear malice towards a harsh mas-

ter? Are they unfaithful because he is unkind? Would Mister Rough himself permit any one to touch an article of his master's property, or grudge his own life in his defence? No, my friends, we are beasts, remember—not boys. We have our own ideas of chase and sport, like men; but cruelty is not one of our vices. I believe, gentlebeasts, that it is a principle with the human race to return good for evil; but according to my experience the practice is more common amongst ourselves. Gentlebeasts, we *cannot* treat this boy as he has treated us: but he is unworthy of our society, and I condemn him to be expelled. Some of our dog-friends have taken refuge here with tin-kettles at their tails. Let one of these be fastened to Benjy, and let him be chased from Beastland."

This was no sooner said than done. And with an old tin pan cutting his heels at every step, Benjy was hunted from the moon. The lion gave one terrific roar as the signal for starting, and all the beasts, with Mister Rough at their head, gave chase.

Dear readers, did you ever wonder—as I used to wonder—if one could get to the end of the world *and jump off*? One is bound to confess that, as regards our old earth, it is not feasible; but permit me (in a story) to state that Benjy ran and ran till he got to the end of the moon and jumped off, Mister Rough jumping after him. Down, down they went through space; past the Great Bear (where were all the ghosts of the big wild beasts); past the Little Bear (where were the ghosts of all the small wild beasts); close by the Dog Star, where good dogs go to when they die, and where "the dog in the manger" sat outside and must never go in till all the dogs are assembled. This they passed so close

that they could see the dog of Montargis and the hound Gelert affably licking each other's noses, and telling stories of old times to the latest comer. This was a white poodle, whose days on earth had been prolonged by tender care till he outlived almost every faculty and sense but the power to eat, and a strange intuitive knowledge of his master's presence, surviving every other instinct. There he sat now, no longer the blind, deaf, feeble, shrunken heap of bones and matted wool, that died of sheer old age, and was buried on the garden side of the churchyard wall, as near as permissible to the family vault; but the snowy, fluffy, elegant poodle of his youth, with graceful ears raised in respectful attention to the hero of Montargis.

Down, down they went, on, on! How far and long it seemed! And now it was no longer night but morning, and the sun shone, and still they went on, on, down, down: Benjy crying, "Oh! oh!" and Rough and his chain collar going "Bowf, wowf, jingle, jingle," till they came close above the river, and before Benjy could give an extra shriek the two were floundering in the water. Rough soon swam ashore, but Benjy could not swim, and the water sucked him down as it had sucked down many a dog in that very spot. Then Benjy choked, and gasped, and struggled, as his victims had so often choked, and gasped, and struggled under his eyes. And he fought with the intolerable suffocation till it seemed as if his head must burst, yet he could not cry out, for the cold water gagged him. Then he grasped at something that floated by, but it gave him no help, for it was a dead dog—the one he had thrown into the river the evening before. And horror chilled him more than the cold water had done, as he thought that now he himself must be drowned,

and rot among these ghastly relics of his cruelty. And a rook on a tree hard by cried, "Serve him right! serve him right!" whilst the frogs on the river's brink sat staring at the crushed bodies of their relatives, and croaked, "Stone him! stone him!"

A pike hovering near could owe him no grudge, for the creatures he had drowned had afforded it many a meal. But, like most accomplices, the pike was selfish, and only waited for the time when it could eat Benjy too.

Meanwhile, some one on the bank was giving short barks, like minute guns of distress, that had quite a different meaning.

And then Benjy sank; and as he went down the remembrance of all his cruelties rushed over his mind, as the water rushed over his body. All, from the first bumble-bee he had tortured, to the needle in Nox's lip, came together in one hideous crowd to his remembrance, till even the callous soul of Benjy sickened, and he loathed himself.

And now he rose again for a moment to the surface, and caught a breath of air, and saw the blue sky, and heard a corn-crake in the field where his sisters had wanted him to go cowslip-gathering; and he fancied that he saw the beautiful black head of Nox also in the water, and found himself saying in his heart, "No, no! thank God, I didn't kill *him*."

And then he sank again. And he thought of his home, and his father and mother, and the little sisters whom he had teased; and how he had got them into scrapes, and killed their pets, and laughed at their tears. And he remembered how they had come to meet him last midsummer holidays, with flowers in their hats and flowers round the donkey's ears; and how he had prodded poor Neddy with a

stick having a sliding spike which he had brought with him. And what fun he had found in the starts of the donkey and the terror and astonishment of the children. Oh! how often had he not skulked from the society of these good and dear ones, to be proud of being noticed and instructed in evil by some untaught village blackguard! And then he thought of the cosy bed and his mother's nightly blessing, never more to be his, who must now lie amongst dead dogs as if he himself were such another!

And then he rose again, and there was the noble head of old Nox not three feet from him. He could see the clear brown eyes fixed eagerly upon him, and he thought, "He is coming to revenge himself on me." But he did not mind, for he was almost past feeling any new pain. Only he gave one longing, wistful look towards the home that had been his. And as he looked a lark rose and went up into the summer sky. And as the lark went up, up, Benjy went down, down.

Now as he sank there came into his mind a memory of something he had once read, comparing the return of a Christian soul to GOD to the soaring of a lark into the heavens. And no animal that he had seized in his pitiless grasp ever felt such despair and helplessness as Benjy felt when the strong, pitiless thought seized his soul, that though his body might decay among dead dogs, he could not die as the dogs had died—irresponsible for the use of life. And many a sin, besides sins of cruelty, came back to poor Benjy's mind—known sins, for which he had been punished, but not penitent; sins that were known to no human being but himself, and sins that he had forgotten until now. And he remembered one day at school, when the head master had given

some serious warnings and advice to himself and a few other boys in private. And how he had sat mum and meek, with his smudgy and secretive face, till the old doctor had departed, and how he had then delivered a not very clever mimic address in the doctor's style, to the effectual dissipation of all serious thought. And now—opportunities, advice, and time of amendment were all but gone, and what had he to look forward to? From the depths of his breaking heart Benjy prayed he might somehow or other be spared to do better. And for the third and last time he rose to the surface.

The lark was almost out of sight; but close to Benjy's pallid face was a soft black nose, and large brown eyes met his with an expression neither revengeful nor affectionate. It was business-like, earnest, and somewhat eager and proud. And then the soft, sensitive mouth he had wounded seized Benjy with a hold as firm and as gentle as if he had been a rare water-fowl, and Nox paddled himself round with his broad, brown paws, and made gallantly for shore. Benjy was much heavier than a dead cat, and the big brave beast had hard work of it; so that by the time he had dragged the body to land, Nox was too far spent to toss his head and carry his prize about as usual. He dropped Benjy, and lay down by him, with one paw on the body, as much as to say, "Let no unauthorised person meddle in this matter."

But when he had rested, he took up Benjy in his mouth, and—not deigning so much as a glance in the direction of some men who were shouting and running towards him—he trotted with his burden to the Morgue under the willow tree, where he laid Benjy down side by side with two dead dogs, a kitten, and an old hat.

After which he shook himself, and went home to breakfast.

* * * * * * * * *

What Became of Benjy.

Benjy was duly found under the willow tree, and taken home. For a long time he was very ill, though at last he recovered; and I am bound to state that some of his relatives consider his visit to Beastland to be entirely mythical. They believe that he fell from the willow tree into the water, and that his visit to the moon is a fanciful conceit woven during illness by his fevered brain.

However that may be, Benjy and beasts were thenceforward on very different terms. Some other causes may have helped towards this. Perhaps when the boys of a family are naturally disagreeable, the fact is apt to be too readily acquiesced in. They have a licence which no one would dream of according to "the girls," but it may sometimes be too readily decided that "boys will be boys," in the most obnoxious sense of the phrase, and a "bad name" is unfavourable to them as well as to dogs.

Now during long weeks of convalescence, Benjy's only companions were his parents and the little sisters whose sympathy with beastkind had always been in such manifest contrast with his own tastes. And as the little maids could only amuse him with their own amusements, and as, moreover, there is no occupation so soothing, healing, and renovating to mind and body, so full of interest without hurtful excitement, as the study of Nature, it came about that Benjy's sick-room was so decorated with plants, aquariums, and so forth, that it became a sort of miniature Beastland. From watching his sisters,

Benjy took to feeding the fresh-water beasts himself; and at last became so tenderly interested in their fate, that he privately "tipped" the housemaid with his last half-crown, to induce her to come up the stairs in the morning with great circumspection. For the cray-fish was given to escaping from his tank for an early stroll, and had once been all but trodden on at the bottom of the first flight of stairs.

But it was a very sad event which finally and fully softened Benjy's heart.

As Benjy was being carried into the house after his accident, Mister Rough caught sight of his master in this doleful position, and was anxious to follow and see what became of him. But as he was in the way, a servant was ordered to fasten him up in his own out-house; and to this man's care he was confided through Benjy's illness. The little girls often asked after him, and received satisfactory reports of his health, but as the terrier's temper was supposed to be less trustworthy than that of Nox, they were not allowed to play with him, or take him out with them. Hence it came about that he was a good deal neglected at this time, Benjy's parents being so absorbed by the anxiety of his illness, and the sisters not being allowed to make the dog their companion. Once or twice the servant took him out for a run; but Mister Rough would not take a proper "constitutional." The instant he was free, he fled to the house to see what had become of Benjy. As he did this every time, and it was inconvenient, the servant finally left him alone, and did not take him out at all. Food was put within his reach, but Mister Rough's appetite failed daily. A cat crept in under the roof and looked at her old enemy with impunity. A rat stole his crusts; and Mister Rough never moved his eyes nor his nose

from the opening under the barn-door. Oh, for one sniff of Benjy passing by! Oh, to be swung round a dozen times by the teeth or tail! Oh, for a kicking, a thrashing—for *anything* from Benjy! So the gentle heart within that rough little body pined day by day in its loving anxiety for a harsh master.

But the first time that Benjy came downstairs, he begged that Mister Rough might be brought into the drawing-room; for, as I have said, if he had a regard for any animal it was for the wiry terrier. So the servant opened the barn-door; and Mister Rough thought of Benjy, and darted into the house. And when he got into the front hall, he smelt Benjy, and ran into the drawing-room; and when he got into the drawing-room, he saw Benjy, who had heard the jingle of his collar, and stood up to receive him with outstretched arms. Then with one wild sound, that was neither a bark nor a whine, Mister Rough sprang to Benjy's arms, and fell at his feet.

Dead? Yes, dead; with one spasm of unspeakable joy!

Benjy's grief for his faithful friend was not favourable to his bodily health just then, but it was good for him in other ways. And as the bitter tears poured over his cheeks and dropped on to the scarred, grizzled little face that could feel cruelty or kindness no more, the smudginess seemed to be washed away from him body and soul.

Yes, in spite of all past sins, Benjy lived to amend, and to become, eventually, a first-rate naturalist and a good friend to beasts. For there is no doubt that some most objectionable boys do get scrubbed, and softened, and ennobled into superior men. And Benjy was one of these.

By the time he was thoroughly strong again, he

and his little sisters had a common interest in the animals under their care—their own private Beastland. He tried to pet another terrier, but in vain. So the new "Rough" was given to the sisters, and Benjy adopted Nox. For he said, "I should like a dog who knew Mister Rough;" and, "If Nox likes me in spite of old times, I shall believe I am fit to keep a pet." And no one who knows dogs needs to be told that not the ghost of a bit of malice lessened the love which the benevolent retriever bore to his new master.

The savings of Benjy's pocket-money for some time were expended on a tombstone for the terrier's grave, with this inscription—

TO A FAITHFUL FRIEND,
ROUGH WITHOUT AND GENTLE WITHIN,
WHO DIED OF JOY,
APRIL 3, 18—
ON HIS MASTER'S RECOVERY FROM SICKNESS.

* * * * * * * * *

And that true and tender beast, who bore so much hard usage for so long, but died of his one great happiness——

Dear reader, do you not think he is in the Dog Star?

THE PEACE-EGG

THE PEACE-EGG

A CHRISTMAS TALE

EVERY one ought to be happy at Christmas. But there are many things which ought to be, and yet are not; and people are sometimes sad even in the Christmas holidays.

The Captain and his wife were sad, though it was Christmas Eve. Sad, though they were in the prime of life, blessed with good health, devoted to each other and to their children, with competent means, a comfortable house on a little freehold property of their own, and, one might say, everything that heart could desire. Sad, though they were good people, whose peace of mind had a firmer foundation than their earthly goods alone; contented people, too, with plenty of occupation for mind and body. Sad—and in the nursery this was held to be past all reason—though the children were performing that ancient and most entertaining play or Christmas mystery of Good St. George of England, known as *The Peace-Egg*, for their benefit and behoof alone.

The play was none the worse that most of the actors were too young to learn parts, so that there was very little of the rather tedious dialogue, only plenty of dress and ribbons, and of fighting with the wooden swords. But though St. George looked

bonny enough to warm any father's heart, as he marched up and down with an air learned by watching many a parade in barrack-square and drill-ground, and though the Valiant Slasher did not cry in spite of falling hard and the Doctor treading accidentally on his little finger in picking him up, still the Captain and his wife sighed nearly as often as they smiled, and the mother dropped tears as well as pennies into the cap which the King of Egypt brought round after the performance.

The Captain's Wife.

Many many years back the Captain's wife had been a child herself, and had laughed to see the village mummers act the Peace-Egg, and had been quite happy on Christmas Eve. Happy, though she had no mother. Happy, though her father was a stern man, very fond of his only child, but with an obstinate will that not even she dared thwart. She had lived to thwart it, and he had never forgiven her. It was when she married the Captain. The old man had a prejudice against soldiers, which was quite reason enough, in his opinion, for his daughter to sacrifice the happiness of her future life by giving up the soldier she loved. At last he gave her her choice between the Captain and his own favour and money. She chose the Captain, and was disowned and disinherited.

The Captain bore a high character, and was a good and clever officer, but that went for nothing against the old man's whim. He made a very good husband too; but even this did not move his father-in-law, who had never held any intercourse with him or his wife since the day of their marriage, and who had never seen his own grandchildren. Though

not so bitterly prejudiced as the old father, the Captain's wife's friends had their doubts about the marriage. The place was not a military station, and they were quiet country folk who knew very little about soldiers, whilst what they imagined was not altogether favourable to "red-coats," as they called them. Soldiers are well-looking generally, it is true (and the Captain was more than well-looking—he was handsome); brave, of course, it is their business (and the Captain had V.C. after his name and several bits of ribbon on his patrol jacket). But then, thought the good people, they are here to-day and gone to-morrow, you "never know where you have them;" they are probably in debt, possibly married to several women in several foreign countries, and, though they are very courteous in society, who knows how they treat their wives when they drag them off from their natural friends and protectors to distant lands where no one can call them to account?

"Ah, poor thing!" said Mrs. John Bull, junior, as she took off her husband's coat on his return from business a week after the Captain's wedding, "I wonder how she feels? There's no doubt the old man behaved disgracefully; but it's a great risk marrying a soldier. It stands to reason, military men aren't domestic; and I wish—Lucy Jane, fetch your papa's slippers, quick!—she'd had the sense to settle down comfortably amongst her friends with a man who would have taken care of her."

"Officers are a wild set, I expect," said Mr. Bull, complacently, as he stretched his limbs in his own particular armchair, into which no member of his family ever intruded. "But the red-coats carry the day with plenty of girls who ought to know better. You women are always caught by a bit of finery.

However, there's no use our bothering *our* heads about it. As she has brewed she must bake."

The Captain's wife's baking was lighter and more palatable than her friends believed. The Captain (who took off his own coat when he came home, and never wore slippers but in his dressing-room) was domestic enough. A selfish companion must, doubtless, be a great trial amid the hardships of military life, but when a soldier is kind-hearted he is often a much more helpful and thoughtful and handy husband than an equally well-meaning civilian. Amid the ups and downs of their wanderings, the discomforts of shipboard and of stations in the colonies, bad servants, and unwonted sicknesses, the Captain's tenderness never failed. If the life was rough the Captain was ready. He had been, by turns, in one strait or another, sick-nurse, doctor, carpenter, nursemaid, and cook to his family, and had, moreover, an idea that nobody filled these offices quite so well as himself. Withal, his very profession kept him neat, well-dressed, and active. In the roughest of their ever-changing quarters he was a smarter man, more like the lover of his wife's young days, than Mr. Bull amid his stationary comforts. Then if the Captain's wife was—as her friends said—"never settled," she was also for ever entertained by new scenes; and domestic mischances do not weigh very heavily on people whose possessions are few and their intellectual interests many. It is true that there were ladies in the Captain's regiment who passed by sea and land from one quarter of the globe to another, amid strange climates and customs, strange trees and flowers, beasts and birds; from the glittering snows of North America to the orchids of the Cape, from beautiful Pera to the lily-covered hills of Japan, and

who in no place rose above the fret of domestic worries, and had little to tell on their return but of the universal misconduct of servants, from Irish "helps" in the colonies, to *compradors* and China-boys at Shanghai. But it was not so with the Captain's wife. Moreover, one becomes accustomed to one's fate, and she moved her whole establishment from the Curragh to Corfu with less anxiety than that felt by Mrs. Bull over a port-wine stain on the best table-cloth.

And yet, as years went and children came, the Captain and his wife grew tired of travelling. New scenes were small comfort when they heard of the death of old friends. One foot of murky English sky was dearer, after all, than miles of the unclouded heavens of the South. The grey hills and over-grown lanes of her old home haunted the Captain's wife by night and day, and home-sickness (that weariest of all sicknesses) began to take the light out of her eyes before their time. It preyed upon the Captain too. Now and then he would say, fretfully, "I *should* like an English resting-place, however small, before *every*body is dead! But the children's prospects have to be considered." The continued estrangement from the old man was an abiding sorrow also, and they had hopes that, if only they could get to England, he might be persuaded to peace and charity this time.

At last they were sent home. But the hard old father still would not relent. He returned their letters unopened. This bitter disappointment made the Captain's wife so ill that she almost died, and in one month the Captain's hair became iron grey. He reproached himself for having ever taken the daughter from her father, "to kill her at last," as he said. And (thinking of his own children) he even

reproached himself for having robbed the old widower of his only child. After two years at home his regiment was ordered to India. He failed to effect an exchange, and they prepared to move once more—from Chatham to Calcutta. Never before had the packing to which she was so well accustomed been so bitter a task to the Captain's wife.

It was at the darkest hour of this gloomy time that the Captain came in, waving above his head a letter which changed all their plans.

Now close by the old home of the Captain's wife there had lived a man, much older than herself, who yet had loved her with a devotion as great as that of the young Captain. She never knew it, for when he saw that she had given her heart to his younger rival, he kept silence, and he never asked for what he knew he might have had—the old man's authority in his favour. So generous was the affection which he could never conquer, that he constantly tried to reconcile the father to his children whilst he lived, and, when he died, he bequeathed his house and small estate to the woman he had loved.

"It will be a legacy of peace," he thought, on his deathbed. "The old man cannot hold out when she and her children are constantly in sight. And it may please GOD that I shall know of the reunion I have not been permitted to see with my eyes."

And thus it came about that the Captain's regiment went to India without him, and that the Captain's wife and her father lived on opposite sides of the same road.

MASTER ROBERT.

The eldest of the Captain's children was a boy. He was named Robert, after his grandfather, and

seemed to have inherited a good deal of the old gentleman's character, mixed with gentler traits. He was a fair, fine boy, tall and stout for his age, with the Captain's regular features, and (he flattered himself) the Captain's firm step and martial bearing. He was apt—like his grandfather—to hold his own will to be other people's law, and (happily for the peace of the nursery) this opinion was devoutly shared by his brother Nicholas. Though the Captain had sold his commission, Robin continued to command an irregular force of volunteers in the nursery, and never was colonel more despotic. His brothers and sister were by turns infantry, cavalry, engineers, and artillery, according to his whim, and when his affections finally settled upon the Highlanders of "The Black Watch," no female power could compel him to keep his stockings above his knees or his knickerbockers below them.

The Captain alone was a match for his strong-willed son.

"If you please, sir," said Sarah, one morning, flouncing in upon the Captain, just as he was about to start for the neighbouring town,—"If you please, sir, I wish you'd speak to Master Robert. He's past my powers."

"I've no doubt of it," thought the Captain, but he only said, "Well, what's the matter?"

"Night after night do I put him to bed," said Sarah, "and night after night does he get up as soon as I'm out of the room, and says he's orderly officer for the evening, and goes about in his night-shirt and his feet as bare as boards."

The Captain fingered his heavy moustache to hide a smile, but he listened patiently to Sarah's complaints.

"It ain't so much *him* I should mind, sir," she

continued, "but he goes round the beds and wakes up the other young gentlemen and Miss Dora, one after another, and when I speak to him, he gives me all the sauce he can lay his tongue to, and says he's going round the guards. The other night I tried to put him back into his bed, but he got away and ran all over the house, me hunting him everywhere, and not a sign of him, till he jumps out on me from the garret-stairs and nearly knocks me down. 'I've visited the outposts, Sarah,' says he; 'all's well.' And off he goes to bed as bold as brass."

"Have you spoken to your mistress?" asked the Captain.

"Yes, sir," said Sarah. "And missis spoke to him, and he promised not to go round the guards again."

"Has he broken his promise?" asked the Captain, with a look of anger, and also of surprise.

"When I opened the door last night, sir," continued Sarah, in her shrill treble, "what should I see in the dark but Master Robert a-walking up and down with the carpet-brush stuck in his arm. 'Who goes there?' says he. 'You owdacious boy!' says I, 'Didn't you promise your ma you'd leave off them tricks?' 'I'm not going round the guards,' says he; 'I promised not. But I'm for sentry duty to-night.' And say what I would to him, all he had for me was, 'You mustn't speak to a sentry on duty.' So I says, 'As sure as I live till morning, I'll go to your pa,' for he pays no more attention to his ma than to me, nor to any one else."

"Please to see that the chair-bed in my dressing-room is moved into your mistress's bedroom," said the Captain. "I will attend to Master Robert."

With this Sarah had to content herself, and she went back to the nursery. Robert was nowhere to

be seen, and made no reply to her summons. On this the unwary nursemaid flounced into the bedroom to look for him, when Robert, who was hidden beneath a table, darted forth, and promptly locked her in.

"You're under arrest," he shouted, through the keyhole.

"Let me out!" shrieked Sarah.

"I'll send a file of the guard to fetch you to the orderly-room, by-and-by," said Robert, "for 'preferring frivolous complaints.'" And he departed to the farm-yard to look at the ducks.

That night, when Robert went up to bed, the Captain quietly locked him into his dressing-room, from which the bed had been removed.

"You're for sentry duty, to-night," said the Captain. "The carpet-brush is in the corner. Good-evening."

As his father anticipated, Robert was soon tired of the sentry game in these new circumstances, and long before the night had half worn away he wished himself safely undressed and in his own comfortable bed. At half-past twelve o'clock he felt as if he could bear it no longer, and knocked at the Captain's door.

"Who goes there?" said the Captain.

"Mayn't I go to bed, please?" whined poor Robert.

"Certainly not," said the Captain. "You're on duty."

And on duty poor Robert had to remain, for the Captain had a will as well as his son. So he rolled himself up in his father's railway rug, and slept on the floor.

The next night he was very glad to go quietly to bed, and remain there.

In the Nursery.

The Captain's children sat at breakfast in a large, bright nursery. It was the room where the old bachelor had died, and now *her* children made it merry. This was just what he would have wished.

They all sat round the table, for it was breakfast-time. There were five of them, and five bowls of boiled bread-and-milk smoked before them. Sarah (a foolish, gossipping girl, who acted as nurse till better could be found) was waiting on them, and by the table sat Darkie, the black retriever, his long, curly back swaying slightly from the difficulty of holding himself up, and his solemn hazel eyes fixed very intently on each and all of the breakfast bowls. He was as silent and sagacious as Sarah was talkative and empty-headed. The expression of his face was that of King Charles I. as painted by Vandyke. Though large, he was unassuming. Pax, the pug, on the contrary, who came up to the first joint of Darkie's leg, stood defiantly on his dignity (and his short stumps). He always placed himself in front of the bigger dog, and made a point of hustling him in doorways and of going first downstairs. He strutted like a beadle, and carried his tail more tightly curled than a bishop's crook. He looked as one may imagine the frog in the fable would have looked had he been able to swell himself rather nearer to the size of the ox. This was partly due to his very prominent eyes, and partly to an obesity favoured by habits of lying inside the fender and of eating meals proportioned more to his consequence than to his hunger. They were both favourites of two years' standing, and had very nearly been given away, when the good news came of an English home for the family, dogs and all.

Robert's tongue was seldom idle, even at meals. "Are you a Yorkshirewoman, Sarah?" he asked, pausing, with his spoon full in his hand.

"No, Master Robert," said Sarah.

"But you understand Yorkshire, don't you? I can't, very often; but mamma can, and can speak it, too. Papa says mamma always talks Yorkshire to servants and poor people. She used to talk Yorkshire to Themistocles, Papa said, and he said it was no good; for though Themistocles knew a lot of languages, he didn't know that. And mamma laughed, and said she didn't know she did.—Themistocles was our man-servant in Corfu," Robin added, in explanation. "He stole lots of things, Themistocles did; but papa found him out."

Robin now made a rapid attack on his bread-and-milk, after which he broke out again.

"Sarah, who is that tall old gentleman at church, in the seat near the pulpit? He wears a cloak like what the Blues wear, only all blue, and is tall enough for a Life-guardsman. He stood when we were kneeling down, and said, *Almighty and most merciful Father* louder than anybody."

Sarah knew who the old gentleman was, and knew also that the children did not know, and that their parents did not see fit to tell them as yet. But she had a passion for telling and hearing news, and would rather gossip with a child than not gossip at all. "Never you mind, Master Robin," she said, nodding sagaciously. "Little boys aren't to know everything."

"Ah, then, I know you don't know," replied Robert; "if you did, you'd tell. Nicholas, give some of your bread to Darkie and Pax. I've done mine. *For what we have received the Lord make us truly thankful.* Say your grace and put your

chair away, and come along. I want to hold a court-martial." And seizing his own chair by the seat, Robin carried it swiftly to its corner. As he passed Sarah he observed tauntingly, "You pretend to know, but you don't."

"I do," said Sarah.

"You don't," said Robin.

"Your ma's forbid you to contradict, Master Robin," said Sarah; "and if you do, I shall tell her. I know well enough who the old gentleman is, and perhaps I might tell you, only you'd go straight off and tell again."

"No, no, I wouldn't!" shouted Robin. "I can keep a secret, indeed I can! Pinch my little finger, and try. Do, do tell me, Sarah, there's a dear Sarah, and then I shall know you know." And he danced round her, catching at her skirts.

To keep a secret was beyond Sarah's powers.

"Do let my dress be, Master Robin," she said, "you're ripping out all the gathers, and listen while I whisper. As sure as you're a living boy, that gentleman's your own grandpapa."

Robin lost his hold on Sarah's dress; his arms fell by his side, and he stood with his brows knit for some minutes, thinking. Then he said, emphatically, "What lies you do tell, Sarah!"

"Oh, Robin!" cried Nicholas, who had drawn near, his thick curls standing stark with curiosity, "mamma said 'lies' wasn't a proper word, and you promised not to say it again."

"I forgot," said Robin. "I didn't mean to break my promise. But she does tell—ahem!—*you know what.*"

"You wicked boy!" cried the enraged Sarah; "how dare you to say such a thing, and everybody in the place knows he's your ma's own pa."

"I'll go and ask her," said Robin, and he was at the door in a moment; but Sarah, alarmed by the thought of getting into a scrape herself, caught him by the arm.

"Don't you go, love; it'll only make your ma angry. There; it was all my nonsense."

"Then it's not true?" said Robin, indignantly. "What did you tell me so for?"

"It was all my jokes and nonsense," said the unscrupulous Sarah. "But your ma wouldn't like to know I've said such a thing. And Master Robert wouldn't be so mean as to tell tales, would he, love?"

"I'm not mean," said Robin, stoutly; "and I don't tell tales; but you do, and you tell *you know what,* besides. However, I won't go this time; but I'll tell you what—if you tell tales of me to papa any more, I'll tell him what you said about the old gentleman in the blue cloak." With which parting threat Robin strode off to join his brothers and sisters.

Sarah's tale had put the court-martial out of his head, and he leaned against the tall fender, gazing at his little sister, who was tenderly nursing a well-worn doll. Robin sighed.

"What a long time that doll takes to wear out, Dora!" said he. "When will it be done?"

"Oh, not yet, not yet!" cried Dora, clasping the doll to her, and turning away. "She's quite good, yet."

"How miserly you are," said her brother; "and selfish, too; for you know I can't have a military funeral till you'll let me bury that old thing."

Dora began to cry.

"There you go, crying!" said Robin, impatiently. "Look here: I won't take it till you get the new

one on your birthday. You can't be so mean as not to let me have it then?"

But Dora's tears still fell. "I love this one so much," she sobbed. "I love her better than the new one."

"You want both; that's it," said Robin, angrily. "Dora, you're the meanest girl I ever knew!"

At which unjust and painful accusation Dora threw herself and the doll upon their faces, and wept bitterly. The eyes of the soft-hearted Nicholas began to fill with tears, and he squatted down before her, looking most dismal. He had a fellow-feeling for her attachment to an old toy, and yet Robin's will was law to him.

"Couldn't we make a coffin, and pretend the body was inside?" he suggested.

"No, we couldn't," said Robin. "I wouldn't play the Dead March after an empty candle-box. It's a great shame—and I promised she should be chaplain in one of my night-gowns, too."

"Perhaps you'll get just as fond of the new one," said Nicholas, turning to Dora.

But Dora only cried, "No, no! He shall have the new one to bury, and I'll keep my poor, dear, darling Betsy." And she clasped Betsy tighter than before.

"That's the meanest thing you've said yet," retorted Robin; "for you know mamma wouldn't let me bury the new one." And, with an air of great disgust, he quitted the nursery.

"A Mumming We will Go."

Nicholas had sore work to console his little sister, and Betsy's prospects were in a very unfavourable state, when a diversion was caused in her favour by

a new whim which put the military funeral out of Robin's head.

After he left the nursery he strolled out of doors, and, peeping through the gate at the end of the drive, he saw a party of boys going through what looked like a military exercise with sticks and a good deal of stamping; but, instead of mere words of command, they all spoke by turns, as in a play. In spite of their strong Yorkshire accent, Robin overheard a good deal, and it sounded very fine. Not being at all shy, he joined them, and asked so many questions that he soon got to know all about it. They were practising a Christmas mumming-play, called "The Peace-Egg." Why it was called thus they could not tell him, as there was nothing whatever about eggs in it, and so far from being a play of peace, it was made up of a series of battles between certain valiant knights and princes, of whom St. George of England was the chief and conqueror. The rehearsal being over, Robin went with the boys to the sexton's house (he was father to the "King of Egypt"), where they showed him the dresses they were to wear. These were made of gay-coloured materials, and covered with ribbons, except that of the "Black Prince of Paradine," which was black, as became his title. The boys also showed him the book from which they learned their parts, and which was to be bought for one penny at the post-office shop.

"Then are you the mummers who come round at Christmas, and act in people's kitchens, and people give them money, that mamma used to tell us about?" said Robin.

St. George of England looked at his companions as if for counsel as to how far they might commit themselves, and then replied, with Yorkshire caution, "Well, I suppose we are."

"And do you go out in the snow from one house to another at night; and oh, don't you enjoy it?" cried Robin.

"We like it well enough," St. George admitted.

Robin bought a copy of "The Peace-Egg." He was resolved to have a nursery performance, and to act the part of St. George himself. The others were willing for what he wished, but there were difficulties. In the first place, there are eight characters in the play, and there were only five children. They decided among themselves to leave out "the Fool," and mamma said that another character was not to be acted by any of them, or indeed mentioned; "the little one who comes in at the end," Robin explained. Mamma had her reasons, and these were always good. She had not been altogether pleased that Robin had bought the play. It was a very old thing, she said, and very queer; not adapted for a child's play. If mamma thought the parts not quite fit for the children to learn, they found them much too long; so in the end she picked out some bits for each, which they learned easily, and which, with a good deal of fighting, made quite as good a story of it as if they had done the whole. What may have been wanting otherwise was made up for by the dresses, which were charming.

Robin was St. George, Nicholas the Valiant Slasher, Dora the Doctor, and the other two Hector and the King of Egypt. "And now we've no Black Prince!" cried Robin in dismay.

"Let Darkie be the Black Prince," said Nicholas. "When you wave your stick he'll jump for it, and then you can pretend to fight with him."

"It's not a stick, it's a sword," said Robin. "However, Darkie may be the Black Prince."

"And what's Pax to be?" asked Dora; "for you

know he will come if Darkie does, and he'll run in before everybody else too."

"Then he must be the Fool," said Robin, "and it will do very well, for the Fool comes in before the rest, and Pax can have his red coat on, and the collar with the little bells."

Christmas Eve.

Robin thought that Christmas would never come. To the Captain and his wife it seemed to come too fast. They had hoped it might bring reconciliation with the old man, but it seemed they had hoped in vain.

There were times now when the Captain almost regretted the old bachelor's bequest. The familiar scenes of her old home sharpened his wife's grief. To see her father every Sunday in church, with marks of age and infirmity upon him, but with not a look of tenderness for his only child, this tried her sorely.

"She felt it less abroad," thought the Captain. "An English home in which she frets herself to death is, after all, no great boon."

Christmas Eve came.

"I'm sure it's quite Christmas enough now," said Robin. "We'll have 'The Peace-Egg' to-night."

So as the Captain and his wife sat sadly over their fire, the door opened, and Pax ran in shaking his bells, and followed by the nursery mummers. The performance was most successful. It was by no means pathetic, and yet, as has been said, the Captain's wife shed tears.

"What is the matter, mamma?" said St. George, abruptly dropping his sword and running up to her.

"Don't tease mamma with questions," said the

Captain; "she is not very well, and rather sad. We must all be very kind and good to poor dear mamma;" and the Captain raised his wife's hand to his lips as he spoke. Robin seized the other hand and kissed it tenderly. He was very fond of his mother. At this moment Pax took a little run, and jumped on to mamma's lap, where, sitting facing the company, he opened his black mouth and yawned, with a ludicrous inappropriateness worthy of any clown. It made everybody laugh.

"And now we'll go and act in the kitchen," said Nicholas.

"Supper at nine o'clock, remember," shouted the Captain. "And we are going to have real frumenty and Yule cakes, such as mamma used to tell us of when we were abroad."

"Hurray!" shouted the mummers, and they ran off, Pax leaping from his seat just in time to hustle the Black Prince in the doorway. When the dining-room door was shut, St. George raised his hand, and said "Hush!"

The mummers pricked their ears, but there was only a distant harsh and scraping sound, as of stones rubbed together.

"They're cleaning the passages," St. George went on, "and Sarah told me they meant to finish the mistletoe, and have everything cleaned up by supper-time. They don't want us, I know. Look here, we'll go *real mumming* instead. That *will* be fun!"

The Valiant Slasher grinned with delight.

"But will mamma let us?" he inquired.

"Oh, it will be all right if we're back by supper-time," said St. George, hastily. "Only of course we must take care not to catch cold. Come and help me to get some wraps."

The old oak chest in which spare shawls, rugs,

and coats were kept was soon ransacked, and the mummers' gay dresses hidden by motley wrappers. But no sooner did Darkie and Pax behold the coats, etc., than they at once began to leap and bark, as it was their custom to do when they saw any one dressing to go out. Robin was sorely afraid that this would betray them; but though the Captain and his wife heard the barking they did not guess the cause.

So the front door being very gently opened and closed, the nursery mummers stole away.

The Nursery Mummers and the Old Man.

It was a very fine night. The snow was well-trodden on the drive, so that it did not wet their feet, but on the trees and shrubs it hung soft and white.

"It's much jollier being out at night than in the daytime," said Robin.

"Much," responded Nicholas, with intense feeling.

"We'll go a wassailing next week," said Robin. "I know all about it, and perhaps we shall get a good lot of money, and then we'll buy tin swords with scabbards for next year. I don't like these sticks. Oh, dear, I wish it wasn't so long between one Christmas and another."

"Where shall we go first?" asked Nicholas, as they turned into the high road. But before Robin could reply, Dora clung to Nicholas, crying, "Oh, look at those men!"

The boys looked up the road, down which three men were coming in a very unsteady fashion, and shouting as they rolled from side to side.

"They're drunk," said Nicholas; "and they're shouting at us."

"Oh, run, run!" cried Dora; and down the road they ran, the men shouting and following them.

They had not run far, when Hector caught his foot in the Captain's great-coat, which he was wearing, and came down headlong in the road. They were close by a gate, and when Nicholas had set Hector upon his legs, St. George hastily opened it.

"This is the first house," he said. "We'll act here;" and all, even the Valiant Slasher, pressed in as quickly as possible. Once safe within the grounds, they shouldered their sticks, and resumed their composure.

"You're going to the front door," said Nicholas. "Mummers ought to go to the back."

"We don't know where it is," said Robin, and he rang the front-door bell. There was a pause. Then lights shone, steps were heard, and at last a sound of much unbarring, unbolting, and unlocking. It might have been a prison. Then the door was opened by an elderly, timid-looking woman, who held a tallow candle above her head.

"Who's there?" she said, "at this time of night."

"We're Christmas mummers," said Robin, stoutly; "we didn't know the way to the back door, but——"

"And don't you know better than to come here?" said the woman. "Be off with you, as fast as you can."

"You're only the servant," said Robin. "Go and ask your master and mistress if they wouldn't like to see us act. We do it very well."

"You impudent boy, be off with you!" repeated the woman. "Master'd no more let you nor any other such rubbish set foot in this house——"

"Woman!" shouted a voice close behind her, which made her start as if she had been shot, "who authorises you to say what your master will or will not do, before you've asked him? The boy is right.

You *are* the servant, and it is not your business to choose for me whom I shall or shall not see."

"I meant no harm, sir, I'm sure," said the housekeeper; "but I thought you'd never——"

"My good woman," said her master, "if I had wanted somebody to think for me, you're the last person I should have employed. I hire you to obey orders, not to think."

"I'm sure, sir," said the housekeeper, whose only form of argument was reiteration, "I never thought you would have seen them——"

"Then you were wrong," shouted her master. "I will see them. Bring them in."

He was a tall, gaunt old man, and Robin stared at him for some minutes, wondering where he could have seen somebody very like him. At last he remembered. It was the old gentleman of the blue cloak.

The children threw off their wraps, the housekeeper helping them, and chattering ceaselessly, from sheer nervousness.

"Well, to be sure," said she, "their dresses are pretty, too. And they seem quite a better sort of children, they talk quite genteel. I might ha' knowed they weren't like common mummers, but I was so flusterated hearing the bell go so late, and——"

"Are they ready?" said the old man, who had stood like a ghost in the dim light of the flaring tallow candle, grimly watching the proceedings.

"Yes, sir. Shall I take them to the kitchen, sir?"

"——for you and the other idle hussies to gape and grin at? No. Bring them to the library," he snapped, and then stalked off, leading the way.

The housekeeper accordingly led them to the

library, and then withdrew, nearly falling on her face as she left the room by stumbling over Darkie, who slipped in last like a black shadow.

The old man was seated in a carved oak chair by the fire.

"I never said the dogs were to come in," he said.

"But we can't do without them, please," said Robin, boldly. "You see there are eight people in 'The Peace-Egg,' and there are only five of us; and so Darkie has to be the Black Prince, and Pax has to be the Fool, and so we have to have them."

"Five and two make seven," said the old man, with a grim smile; "what do you do for the eighth?"

"Oh, that's the little one at the end," said Robin, confidentially. "Mamma said we weren't to mention him, but I think that's because we're children." —"You're grown up, you know, so I'll show you the book, and you can see for yourself," he went on, drawing 'The Peace-Egg' from his pocket; "there, that's the picture of him, on the last page; black, with horns and a tail."

The old man's stern face relaxed into a broad smile as he examined the grotesque woodcut; but when he turned to the first page the smile vanished in a deep frown, and his eyes shone like hot coals with anger. He had seen Robin's name.

"Who sent you here?" he asked, in a hoarse voice. "Speak, and speak the truth! Did your mother send you here?"

Robin thought the old man was angry with them for playing truant. He said, slowly, "N—no. She didn't exactly send us; but I don't think she'll mind our having come if we get back in time for supper. Mamma never *forbid* our going mumming, you know."

"I don't suppose she ever thought of it," Nicholas

The old man and the Mummers (p. 185).

said, candidly, wagging his curly head from side to side.

"She knows we're mummers," said Robin, "for she helped us. When we were abroad, you know, she used to tell us about the mummers acting at Christmas, when she was a little girl; and so we thought we'd be mummers, and so we acted to papa and mamma, and so we thought we'd act to the maids, but they were cleaning the passages, and so we thought we'd really go mumming; and we've got several other houses to go to before supper-time; we'd better begin, I think," said Robin; and without more ado he began to march round and round, raising his sword and shouting,—

> "I am St. George, who from Old England sprung,
> My famous name throughout the world hath rung."

And the performance went off quite as creditably as before.

As the children acted the old man's anger wore off. He watched them with an interest he could not repress. When Nicholas took some hard thwacks from St. George without flinching, the old man clapped his hands; and, after the encounter between St. George and the Black Prince, he said he would not have had the dogs excluded on any consideration. It was just at the end, when they were all marching round and round, holding on by each other's swords "over the shoulder," and singing "A mumming we will go, etc.," that Nicholas suddenly brought the circle to a standstill by stopping dead short, and staring up at the wall before him.

"What *are* you stopping for?" said St. George, turning indignantly round.

"Look there!" cried Nicholas, pointing to a little painting which hung above the old man's head.

Robin looked, and said, abruptly, "It's Dora."

"Which is Dora?" asked the old man, in a strange, sharp tone.

"Here she is," said Robin and Nicholas in one breath, as they dragged her forward.

"She's the Doctor," said Robin; "and you can't see her face for her things. Dor, take off your cap and pull back that hood. There! Oh, it *is* like her!"

It was a portrait of her mother as a child; but of this the nursery mummers knew nothing. The old man looked as the peaked cap and hood fell away from Dora's face and fair curls, and then he uttered a sharp cry, and buried his head upon his hands. The boys stood stupefied, but Dora ran up to him, and, putting her little hands on his arms, said, in childish pitying tones, "Oh, I am so sorry! Have you got a headache? May Robin put the shovel in the fire for you? Mamma has hot shovels for her headaches." And, though the old man did not speak or move, she went on coaxing him, and stroking his head, on which the hair was white. At this moment Pax took one of his unexpected runs, and jumped on to the old man's knee, in his own particular fashion, and then yawned at the company. The old man was startled, and lifted his face suddenly. It was wet with tears.

"Why, you're crying!" exclaimed the children with one breath.

"It's very odd," said Robin, fretfully. "I can't think what's the matter to-night. Mamma was crying too when we were acting, and papa said we weren't to tease her with questions, and he kissed her hand, and I kissed her hand too. And papa said we must all be very good and kind to poor dear mamma, and so I mean to be, she's so good. And

I think we'd better go home, or perhaps she'll be frightened," Robin added.

"She's so good, is she?" asked the old man. He had put Pax off his knee, and taken Dora on to it.

"Oh, isn't she!" said Nicholas, swaying his curly head from side to side as usual.

"She's always good," said Robin, emphatically; "and so's papa. But I'm always doing something I oughtn't to," he added, slowly. "But then, you know, I don't pretend to obey Sarah. I don't care a fig for Sarah; and I won't obey any woman but mamma."

"Who's Sarah?" asked the grandfather.

"She's our nurse," said Robin, "and she tells—I mustn't say what she tells—but it's not the truth. She told one about *you* the other day," he added.

"About me?" said the old man.

"She said you were our grandpapa. So then I knew she was telling *you know what*."

"How did you know it wasn't true?" the old man asked.

"Why, of course," said Robin, "if you were our mamma's father, you'd know her, and be very fond of her, and come and see her. And then you'd be our grandfather, too, and you'd have us to see you, and perhaps give us Christmas-boxes. I wish you were," Robin added with a sigh. "It would be very nice."

"Would *you* like it?" asked the old man of Dora.

And Dora, who was half asleep and very comfortable, put her little arms about his neck as she was wont to put them round the Captain's, and said, "Very much."

He put her down at last, very tenderly, almost unwillingly, and left the children alone. By-and-by

he returned, dressed in the blue cloak, and took Dora up again.

"I will see you home," he said.

The children had not been missed. The clock had only just struck nine when there came a knock on the door of the dining-room, where the Captain and his wife still sat by the Yule log. She said "Come in," wearily, thinking it was the frumenty and the Christmas cakes.

But it was her father, with her child in his arms!

Peace and Goodwill.

Lucy Jane Bull and her sisters were quite old enough to understand a good deal of grown-up conversation when they overheard it. Thus, when a friend of Mrs. Bull's observed during an afternoon call that she believed that "officers' wives were very dressy," the young ladies were at once resolved to keep a sharp look-out for the Captain's wife's bonnet in church on Christmas Day.

The Bulls had just taken their seats when the Captain's wife came in. They really would have hid their faces, and looked at the bonnet afterwards, but for the startling sight that met the gaze of the congregation. The old grandfather walked into church abreast of the Captain.

"They've met in the porch," whispered Mr. Bull under the shelter of his hat.

"They can't quarrel publicly in a place of worship," said Mrs. Bull, turning pale.

"She's gone into his seat," cried Lucy Jane in a shrill whisper.

"And the children after her," added the other sister, incautiously aloud.

There was now no doubt about the matter. The

old man in his blue cloak stood for a few moments politely disputing the question of precedence with his handsome son-in-law. Then the Captain bowed and passed in, and the old man followed him.

By the time that the service was ended everybody knew of the happy peacemaking, and was glad. One old friend after another came up with blessings and good wishes. This was a proper Christmas, indeed, they said. There was a general rejoicing.

But only the grandfather and his children knew that it was hatched from "The Peace-Egg."

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