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*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK MISS ELLIOT'S GIRLS: STORIES OF
BEASTS, BIRDS, AND BUTTERFLIES ***





"What's the matter?" said Charlie. "A great, horrid green worm," said I.

MISS ELLIOT'S GIRLS
STORIES OF
BEASTS, BIRDS, AND BUTTERFLIES
By **MRS. MARY SPRING CORNING**



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MISS ELLIOT'S GIRLS

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CHAPTER I.

GREENY, BLACKY, AND SLY-BOOTS.

Sammy Ray was running by the parsonage one day when Miss Ruth called to him. She was sitting in the vine-shaded porch, and there was a crutch leaning against her chair.

"Sammy," she said, "isn't there a field of tobacco near where you live?"

"Yes'm; two of 'em."

"To-morrow morning look among the tobacco plants and find me a large green worm. Have you ever seen a tobacco worm?"

Sammy grinned.

"I've killed more'n a hundred of 'em this summer," he said. "Pat Heeley hires me to smash all I can find, 'cause they eat the tobacco."

"Well, bring one carefully to me on the leaf where he is feeding; the largest one you can find."

Before breakfast the next morning Ruth Elliot had her first sight of a tobacco worm.

"Take care!" said Sammy, "or he'll spit tobacco juice on you. See that horn on his tail? When you want to kill him, you jest catch hold this way, and"—

"But I don't want to kill him," she said. "I want to keep him in this nice little house I have got ready for him, and give him all the tobacco he can eat. Will you bring me a fresh leaf every morning?"

While she was speaking she had put the worm in a box with a cover of pink netting. On his way home Sammy met Roy Tyler, and told him (as a secret) that the lame lady at the minister's house kept worms, and would pay two cents a head for tobacco worms. "Anyway," said Sammy, "that's what she paid me."

If there was money to be got in the tobacco-worm business, Roy wanted a share in it; and before night he brought to Miss Ruth, in an old tin basin, eight worms of various sizes, from a tiny baby worm just hatched, to a great, ugly creature, jet black, and spotted and barred with yellow. The black worm Miss Ruth consented to keep, and Roy, lifting him by his horn, dropped him on the green worm's back.

"Now you have a Blacky and a Greeny," the boy said; and by these names they were called.

Roy and Sammy came together the next morning, and watched the worms at their breakfast.

"How they eat!" said Sammy; "they make their great jaws go like a couple of old tobacco-chewers."

"Yes; and if they lived on bread and butter 't would cost a lot to feed 'em, wouldn't it?" said Roy.

"Look at my woodbine worm, boys," Miss Ruth said, as she lifted the cover of another box. "Isn't he a beauty? See the delicate green, shaded to white, on his back, and that row of spots down his sides looking like buttons! I call him Sly-boots, because he has a trick of hiding under the leaves. He used to have a horn on his tail like the tobacco worms."

"Where that spot is, that looks like an eye?"

"Yes; and one day he ate nothing and hid himself away, and looked so strangely that I thought he was going to die; but the next morning he appeared in this beautiful new coat."

"How funny! Say, what is he going to turn into?"

But Miss Ruth was busy house-cleaning. First she turned out her tenants. They were at breakfast; but they took their food with them, and did not mind. Then she tipped their house upside down, and brushed out every stick and stem and bit of leaf, spread thick brown paper on the floor, and put back Greeny and Blacky snug and comfortable.

The next time Sammy and Roy met at the parsonage, three flower-pots of moist sand stood in a row under the bench.

"Winter quarters," Miss Ruth explained when she saw the boys looking at them; "and it's about time for my tenants to move in. Greeny and Blacky have stopped eating, and Sly-boots is turning pale."

"A worm turn pale!"

"Yes, indeed; look at him."

It was quite true; the green on his back had changed to gray-white, and his pretty spots were fading.

"He looks awfully; is he going to die?"

"Yes—and no. Come this afternoon and see what will happen."

But when they came, Blacky and Sly-boots were not to be seen. Their summer residence, empty and uncovered, stood out in the sun, and two of the flower-pots were covered with netting.

"I couldn't keep them, boys," Miss Ruth said; "they were in such haste to be gone. Only Greeny is above ground."

Greeny was in his flower-pot. He was creeping slowly round and round, now and then stretching his long neck over the edge, but not trying to get out. Soon he began to burrow. Straight down, head first, he went into the ground. Now he was half under, now three quarters, now only the end of his tail and the tip of his horn could be seen. When he was quite gone, Sammy drew a long breath and Roy said, "I swanny!"

"How long will he have to stay down there?"

"All winter, Roy."

"Poor fellow!"

"Happy fellow! *I* say. Why, he has done being a worm. His creeping days are over. He has only to lie snug and quiet under the ground a while; then wake and come up to the sunshine some bright morning with a new body and a pair of lovely wings to spread and fly away with."

"Why, it's like—it's like"—

"What is it like, Sammy?"

"Ain't it like *folks*, Miss Ruth?" Grandma sings:—

'I'll take my wings and fly away
In the morning,'

"Yes," she said; "it *is* like folks." Then glancing at her crutch, repeated, smiling: "In the morning."

When the woodbine in the porch had turned red, and the maples in the door-yard yellow, the flower-pots were removed to the warm cellar, and one winter evening Sammy Ray wrote Greeny's epitaph:—

"A poor green worm, here I lie;
But by-and-by
I shall fly,
Ever so high,
Into the sky."

He came often in the spring to ask if any thing had happened, and one day Miss Ruth took from a box and laid in his hand a shining brown chrysalis, with a curved handle.

"What a funny little brown jug!" said Sammy.

"Greeny is inside; close your hand gently and see if you feel him."

"How cold!" said the boy; and then: "Oh! oh! he *is* alive, for he kicks!"

In June Greeny and Blacky came out of their shells, but no one saw them do it, for it was in the night; but Sly-boots was more obliging. One morning Miss Ruth heard a rustling, and lo! what looked like a great bug, with long, slender legs, was climbing to the top of the box. Soon he hung by his feet to the netting, rested motionless a while, and then slowly, slowly unfolded his wings to the sun. They were brown and white and pink, beautifully shaded, and his body was covered with rings of brown satin. Blacky and Greeny were not so handsome. They had orange-spotted bodies, great wings of sober gray, and carried long flexible tubes curled like a watch-spring, that could be stretched out to suck honey from the flowers.

At sunset Miss Ruth sent for the boys. She placed the uncovered box where the moths waited with folded wings, in the open window. Up from the garden came a soft breeze sweet with the breath of the roses and petunias. There was a stir, a rustle, a waving of dusky wings, and the box was empty.

So Greeny and Blacky and Sly-boots "took their wings and flew away," and the boys saw them no more.

CHAPTER II.

THE PATCHWORK QUILT SOCIETY.

The minister's wife came home from a meeting of the sewing society one afternoon quite discouraged.

"Only nine ladies present!" she said, "and very little accomplished; and the barrel promised to that poor missionary out West, before cold weather—I really don't see how it is to be done."

"What work have you on hand?" Miss Ruth inquired.

"We have just made a beginning," Mrs. Elliot answered with a sigh. "There's half a dozen fine shirts to make, and a pile of sheets and pillowcases, dresses and aprons for four little girls, table-cloths and towels to hem, and I know not what else. We always have sent a bed-quilt, but this barrel must go without it. It's a pity, too, for they need bedding."

"Why, so it is," said Miss Ruth. "Susie,"—to a little girl sitting close beside her,—“why can't some of you girls get together one afternoon in the week and make a patchwork quilt to send in the barrel?"

Susie put her head on one side and considered.

"Where could we meet, Aunt Ruth?"

"Here in my room, Susie, if mamma has no objection."

"Certainly not," Mrs. Elliot said; "but are you well enough to undertake it, Ruth?"

"Yes, indeed, Mary; I shall really enjoy it."

"And would you cut out the blocks for us, and show us how to keep them from getting all *skewonical*, like the cradle-quilt I made for Amelia Adeline?"

Amelia Adeline was Susie's doll.

"Yes; and I could tell you stories while you were working. How would that do?"

"Why, it would be splendid!" said the little girl. "There comes Mollie, I guess, by the noise. Won't she be glad? Say, Mollie!—why, what a looking object!"

This exclamation was called forth by the appearance of the little girl, who had been heard running at full speed the length of the piazza, and now presented herself at the door of Miss Ruth's room, her face flushed, her hair in the wildest confusion, and the skirt of her calico frock quite detached from the waist, hanging over her arm.

"Wasn't it lucky that the gathers ripped?" she cried, holding up the unlucky fragment. "If they hadn't, mamma, I should be hanging, head down, from the five-barred gate in the lower pasture, and no body to help me but the cows. You see, I set out to jump, and my skirt got caught in a nail on the post."

"O Mollie!" said her mother, "what made you climb the five-barred gate?"

"'Cause she's a big tom-boy," said Lovina Tibbs, who had come from the kitchen to call the family to supper. "Ain't yer 'shamed of yerself, Mary Elliot?—a great girl like you, most ten years old, walkin' top o' rail fences and climbin' apple-trees in the low pastur'!"

"No, I'm not!" said Mollie, promptly.

"Hush, Mollie," said Mrs. Elliot. "Lovina, that will do. Wash your face and hands, Mollie, and make yourself decent to come to supper."

An hour later, seated in the hammock, the girls discussed their aunt's plan.

"We'll have the Jones girls," said Susie, "and Grace Tyler, and Nellie Dimock, she's such a dear little thing; and I suppose we must ask Fan Eldridge, because she lives next door, though I dread to have her come, she gets mad so easy; but mamma wouldn't like to have us leave her out; and then, let's see—oh! we'll ask Florence Austin, the new girl, you know."

"Would you?" said Mollie, doubtfully. "We don't know her very well, and she dresses so fine and is kind of *citified*, you know. Ar'n't you afraid she'll spoil the fun?"

"No," said Susie, decidedly. "Mamma said we were to be good to her because she's a stranger; and I think she's nice, too—not a bit proud, though her father is so rich."

"Well," Mollie assented, who, though thirteen months older than her sister, generally yielded to Susie's better judgment; "let her come, then. That makes six besides us, and Aunt Ruth said half a dozen would be plenty. Sue, I think it's going to be real jolly, don't you?"

CHAPTER III.

THE STORY OF DINAH DIAMOND.

Miss Ruth Elliot was the minister's sister. And two years before, when she came to live in the parsonage, an addition of two rooms was built for her on the ground floor because she was an invalid, and lame, and could not climb the stairs.

They were pretty rooms, with soft carpets, pictures on the walls, and in the winter time the sun shining in all day at the south window and the glass door. In summer with this door wide open and the piazza cool and shady with woodbine and clematis, you would have agreed with the little girls who made up Ruth Elliot's sewing circle, that first Wednesday afternoon, that they were "just lovely!"

All were there—the Jones' twins, Ann Eliza and Eliza Ann, tall girls as like each other as two peas and growing so fast one could always see where their gowns were let down; Grace Tyler with curly black hair and rosy cheeks; Nellie Dimock, a little dumpling of a girl with big blue eyes and a funny turned up nose; Fannie Eldridge, looking so sweet and smiling, you would not suspect she could be guilty of the fault Susie had charged her with; and Florence Austin, whose father had lately purchased a house in Green Meadow, and with his family had come to live in the country. Last of all, the minister's two little daughters, whom you have already met.

Ruth Elliot was sitting at a table covered with piles of bright calico pieces cut and basted for sewing, and when each girl had received a block with all necessary directions for making it, needles were threaded, thimbles adjusted, and the Patchwork Quilt Society was in full session.

"Now, Aunt Ruth," said Susie, "you promised to tell us a story, you know."

"Yes; tell us about Dinah Diamond, please," said Mollie.

"You and Susie have heard that story before, Mollie."

"That does not make a bit of difference, Auntie. The stories we like best we have heard over and over again. Besides, the other girls haven't heard it. Come, Aunt Ruth, please begin."

And so, while all sat industriously at work, Ruth Elliot related to the little girls

THE TRUE STORY OF DINAH DIAMOND.

"When I was a little girl," she began, "I had a present from a neighbor of a black kitten. I carried her home in my apron, a little ball of black fur, with bright blue eyes that turned yellow as she got bigger, and a white spot on her breast shaped like a diamond. I remember she spit and clawed at me all the way home, and made frantic efforts to escape, and for a day or two was quite homesick and miserable; but she soon grew accustomed to her surroundings, and was so sprightly and playful that she became the pet of the house.

"The first remarkable thing she did, was to set herself on fire with a kerosene lamp. We were sitting at supper one evening, when we heard a crash in the sitting-room, and rushing in, found the cloth that had covered the center table and a blazing lamp on the floor. It was the work of an instant for my father to raise a window, wrap the lamp in the table-cloth, and throw both into the street. This left the room in darkness, and I don't think the cause of the accident occurred to any of us, till there rushed from under the sofa a little ball of fire that flew round and round the room at a most astonishing pace.

"'Oh, my kitten! my kitten!' I screamed. 'She's burning to death! Catch her! Catch her! Put her out! Throw cold water on her! Oh, my poor, poor Dinah!' and I began a wild chase in the darkness, weeping and wailing as I ran. The entire family joined in the pursuit. We tumbled over chairs and footstools. We ran into each other, and I remember my brother Charlie and I bumped our heads together with a dreadful crash, but I think neither of us felt any pain. They called out to each other in the most excited tones: 'Head her off there! Corner her! You've got her! No, you haven't! There she goes! Catch her! Catch her!' while I kept up a wailing accompaniment, 'Oh, my poor, precious Dinah! my burned up Dinah Diamond,' etc.

"Well, my mother caught her at last in her apron and rolled her in the hearth rug till every vestige of fire was extinguished and then laid her in my lap.

"Don't laugh, Mollie," said tenderhearted Nellie Dimock—"please don't laugh. I think it was dreadful. O Miss Ruth, was the poor little thing dead?"

"No, indeed, Nellie; and, wonderful to relate, she was very little hurt. We supposed her fine thick coat kept the fire from reaching her body, for we could discover no burns. Her tongue was blistered where she had lapped the flame, and in her wild flight she had lamed one of her paws. Of course her beauty was gone, and for a few weeks she was that deplorable looking object—a singed cat. But oh, what tears of joy I shed over her, and how I dosed her with catnip tea, and bathed her paw with arnica, and nursed and petted her till she was quite well again! My little brother Walter ("That was my papa, you know," Mollie whispered to her neighbor), who was only three years old, would stand by me while I was tending her, his chubby face twisted into a comical expression of sympathy, and say in pitying tones: 'There! there! poo-ittle Dinah! I know all about it. How oo must huffer' (suffer). The dear little fellow had burned his finger not long

before and remembered the smart.

"I am sorry to say that the invalid received his expressions of sympathy in a very ungracious manner, spitting at him notwithstanding her sore tongue, and showing her claws in a threatening way if he tried to touch her. As fond as I was of Dinah, I was soon obliged to admit that she had an unamiable disposition."

"Why, Miss Ruth, how funny!" said Ann Eliza Jones. "I didn't know there was any difference in cats' dispositions."

"Indeed there is," Miss Ruth answered: "quite as much as in the dispositions of children, as any one will tell you who has raised a family of kittens. Well, Dinah made a quick recovery, and when her new coat was grown it was blacker and more silky than the old one. She was a handsome cat, not large, but beautifully formed, with a bright, intelligent face and great yellow eyes that changed color in different lights. She was devoted to me, and would let no one else touch her if she could help it, but allowed me to handle her as I pleased. I have tucked her in my pocket many a time when I went of an errand, and once I carried her to the prayer-meeting in my mother's muff. But she made a serious disturbance in the midst of the service by giving chase to a mouse, and I never repeated the experiment.

"Dinah was a famous hunter, and kept our own and the neighbors' premises clear of rats and mice, but never to my knowledge caught a chicken or a bird. She had a curious fancy for catching snakes, which she would kill with one bite in the back of the neck and then drag in triumph to the piazza or the kitchen, where she would keep guard over her prey and call for me till I appeared. I could never quite make her understand why she was not as deserving of praise as when she brought in a mole or a mouse; and as long as she lived she hunted for snakes, though after a while she stopped bringing them to the house. She made herself useful by chasing the neighbors' hens from the garden, and grew to be such a tyrant that she would not allow a dog or a cat to come about the place, but rushed out and attacked them in such a savage fashion that after one or two encounters they were glad to keep out of her way.

"Once I saw her put a flock of turkeys to flight. The leader at first resolved to stand his ground. He swelled and strutted and gobbled furiously, exactly as if he were saying, 'Come on, you miserable little black object, you! I'll teach you to fight a fellow of my size. Come on! Come on!' Dinah crouched low, and eyed her antagonist for a moment, then she made a spring, and when he saw the 'black object' flying toward him, every hair bristling, all eyes, and teeth, and claws, the old gobbler was scared half out of his senses, and made off as fast as his long legs would carry him, followed by his troop in the most admired disorder.

"I was very proud of one feat of bravery Dinah accomplished. One of our neighbors owned a large hunting dog and had frequently warned me that if my cat ever had the presumption to attack his dog, Bruno would shake the breath out of her as easy as he could kill a rat. I was inwardly much alarmed at this threat, but I put on a bold front, and assured Mr. Dixon that Dinah Diamond always had come off best in a fight and I believed she always would, and the result justified my boast.

"It happened that Dinah had three little kittens hidden away in the wood-shed chamber, and you can imagine under these circumstances, when even the most timid animals are bold, how fierce such a cat as Dinah would be. Unfortunately for Bruno he chose this time to rummage in the wood-shed for bones. We did not know how the attack began, but suppose Dinah spied him from above, and made a flying leap, lighting most unexpectedly to him upon his back, for we heard one unearthly yell, and out rushed Bruno with his unwelcome burden, her tail erect, her eyes two balls of fire, and every cruel claw, each one as sharp as a needle, buried deep in the poor dog's flesh. How he did yelp!—ki! ki! ki! ki! and how he ran, through the yard and the garden, clearing the fence at a bound, and taking a bee-line for home! Half-way across the street, when Dinah released her hold and slipped to the ground, he showed no disposition to revenge his wrongs, but with drooping ears and tail between his legs kept on his homeward way yelping as he ran. Nor did he ever give my brave cat the opportunity to repeat the attack, for if he chanced to come to the house in his master's company, he always waited at a respectful distance outside the gate.

"It would take too long to tell you all the wonderful things Dinah did, but I am sure you all agree with me that she was a remarkable cat. She came out in a new character when I was ill with an attack of fever. She would not be kept from me. Again and again she was driven from the room where I lay, but she would patiently watch her opportunity and steal in, and when my mother found that she was perfectly quiet and that it distressed me to have her shut out, she was allowed to remain. She would lie for hours at the foot of my bed watching me, hardly taking time to eat her meals, and giving up her dearly loved rambles out of doors to stay in my darkened room. I have thought some times if I had died then Dinah would have died too of grief at my loss. But I didn't die; and when I was getting well we had the best of times, for I shared with her all the dainty dishes prepared for me, and every day gave her my undivided attention for hours. It was about this time that I composed some verses in her praise, half-printing and half-writing them on a sheet of foolscap paper. They ran thus:—

'Who is it that I love so well?
I love her more than words can tell.
And who of all cats is the belle?

My Dinah.

Whose silky fur is dark as night?
Whose diamond is so snowy white?
Whose yellow eyes are big and bright?

Black Dinah.

Who broke the lamp, and in the gloom
A ball of fire flew round the room,
And just escaped an awful doom?

Poor Dinah.

Who, to defend her kittens twain,
Flew at big dogs with might and main,
And scratched them till they howled with pain?

Brave Dinah.

Who at the table takes her seat
With all the family to eat,
And picks up every scrap of meat?

My Dinah.

Who watched beside me every day,
As on my feverish couch I lay,
And whiled the tedious hours away?

Dear Dinah.

And when thou art no longer here,
Over thy grave I'll shed a tear,
For thou to me wast very dear,

Black Dinah.'

"Did you really used to set a chair for her at the table and let her eat with the folks?" Fanny Eldridge asked.

"Well, Fannie, that statement must be taken with some allowance. Occasionally when there was plenty of room she was allowed to sit by me, and I assure you she behaved with perfect propriety. I kept a fork on purpose for her, and when I held it out with a bit of meat on it she would guide it to her mouth with one paw and eat it as daintily as possible. I never knew her to drop a crumb on the carpet. Indeed, I know several boys and girls whose table manners are not as good as Dinah Diamond's."

"I suppose you mean me, Auntie," said Mollie. "Mamma is always telling me I eat too fast, and I know I scatter the bread about sometimes when I'm in a hurry."

"Well, Mollie," said Miss Ruth, laughing, "I was *not* thinking of you, but if the coat fits, you may put it on."

"What became of Dinah at last, Miss Ruth?"

"She made a sad end, Fannie, for as she grew older her disposition got worse instead of better, until she became so cross and disagreeable that she hadn't a friend left but me. She would scratch and bite little children if they attempted to touch her, and was so cruel to one of her own kittens that we were raising to take her place—for she was too old and infirm to be a good mouser—that we were afraid she would kill the poor thing outright. One morning, after she had made an unusually savage attack on her son Solomon, my mother said: 'We must have that cat killed, and the sooner the better. It isn't safe to keep such an ugly creature a day longer.' Dinah was apparently fast asleep on her cushion in the corner of the kitchen lounge when these words were spoken. In a few minutes she jumped down, walked slowly across the room and out at the kitchen door, and we never saw her again."

"Why, how queer! What became of her?"

"We never knew. We inquired in the neighborhood, and searched the barn and the wood-shed, and in every place we could think of where she would be likely to hide, but we could get no trace of her, and when weeks passed and she did not return we concluded that she was dead."

"You don't think—*do* you think, Miss Ruth, that she understood what was said and knew if she stayed she would have to be killed?"

"*I* do," said Mollie, positively. "I'm sure of it!—and so the poor thing went off and drowned herself, or, maybe, died of a broken heart."

"Oh!" said Nellie Dimock, "poor Dinah Diamond!"

"Nonsense, Mollie!" said Susie Elliot. "Cats don't die of broken hearts."

"She had been ailing for some days," Miss Ruth explained, "refusing her food and looking forlorn and miserable, and I am inclined to think instinct taught her that her end was near. You know wild animals creep away into some solitary place to die, and Dinah had a drop or two of wild-cat blood in her veins. I fancy she hid herself in some hole under the barn and died there. It was a curious coincidence, that she should have chosen that particular time, just after her doom was

pronounced, to take her departure. But what grieved me most was that, excepting myself, every member of the family rejoiced that she was dead.

"Poor Dinah Diamond! She was beautiful and clever, and constant and brave, but she lived unloved and died unlamented because of her bad temper."

CHAPTER IV.

A SWALLOW-TAILED BUTTERFLY.

"If I can't have the seat I want, I won't have any; and I think you are real mean, Mollie Elliot! I ain't coming here any more."

These were the words Miss Ruth heard spoken in loud angry tones as she opened the door connecting her bedroom with the parlor, where the little girls were assembled, and caught a glimpse of an energetic figure in pink gingham running across the lawn that separated the minister's house from his next door neighbor.

"Now, Auntie," said Mollie, in answer to Miss Ruth's look of inquiry, "I am not in the least to blame. I'll leave it to the girls if I am. Fan Eldridge is so touchy! She came in a minute ago and Nellie Tyler happened to be sitting by me, and Fan marched up to her and says, 'I'll take my seat if you please'; and I said, 'It's no more your seat than it is Nellie's.' We don't have any particular seats, you know we don't, Auntie, but sit just as it happens. Well, she declared it was her seat because she had had it the last two afternoons, and I told Nellie not to give up to her because she acted so hateful about it, and then she went off mad. I'm sure I don't care; if she chooses to stay away she can."

"You don't quite mean that, Mollie," her aunt said gravely. "The Patchwork Society can't afford to lose one of its members, certainly not for so small a difference as the choice of a seat. We must have Fanny back, if I give up my seat to her. But come into this room, girls. I have something pretty to show you. Softly! or you will frighten him away."

There was a honeysuckle vine trained close to the window, in full bloom, and darting in and out among the flowers, taking a sip now and then from a honey-cup, or resting on a leaf or twig, was a large butterfly with black-velvet wings and spots and bands of blue and red and yellow.

"O you beauty!" said Miss Ruth. "Do you know, girls, of all the moths and butterflies I have raised from the larvæ,—and I have had Painted Ladies, and Luna Moths, and one lovely Cecropia which was the admiration of all beholders,—my favorite has always been the Swallow-tailed? Perhaps it was because he was my first love. I was no older than you, Nellie, when, half curious and half disgusted, I held at arm's length on a bit of fennel-stalk, and dropped in an old ribbon-box Aunt Susan provided for the purpose, the great green worm that, after various stages of insect life, turned into just such a beautiful creature as you see flying about among the flowers. Since then I have raised dozens of them."

"I don't see how you could have any thing to do with worms," said Eliza Jones. "I hate them—the horrid, squirming things!"

"So did I, Eliza, till I studied into their ways and learned what wonderful things they can do; and now, I assure you, I have a high respect and admiration for them."

"Will you tell us about it?" Florence asked. "I've always wanted to know just how worms turned into butterflies,"

"And I should like nothing better than to tell you," she answered. "'Making butterflies,' as a dear little boy once defined my favorite occupation, and telling those who are interested in such things how they are made, is very delightful to me,"

"Come, then, girls, hurry!" said Nellie: "the sooner we get to work the sooner the story will begin. Good-by, Mr. Swallow-tail,—I wonder what they call you so for,—we are going to hear all about you,"

But when they returned to the other room they found Sammy Ray and Roy Tyler on the piazza, close to the open door. Roy beckoned to his sister, and they held a whispered conference during which the words, "You ask her," energetically spoken by Roy, could be plainly heard by those inside.

Nellie turned presently, half laughing, but a little embarrassed.

"The boys want to know if they can't come in," she said. "I tell them it's ridiculous for boys to attend a sewing society, but they won't go away till I've asked."

Here the boys stepped forward and took off their hats. Their faces shone with the scrubbing with soap and water they had given them, and both had on clean collars. Sammy dived in his trowsers pocket and brought out a couple of big brass thimbles and some needles stuck in a bit of flannel.

"We are willing to help sew," said the boy, and bravely stood his ground, though all the girls

laughed, and even Miss Ruth looked amused at the sight of these huge implements.

"If we let you in at all, boys," she said, "it must be as guests. What do you say, girls? Suppose we put it to vote. As many of you as are in favor of admitting Samuel Ray and Roy Tyler to the meeting of the Patchwork Quilt Society, now in session, will please to signify it by raising the right hand."

Every hand was lifted.

"It is a unanimous vote," she announced. "Walk in, boys. One more chair, Susie. Now, then, are we ready?"

But this was fated to be a day of interruptions, for while she was speaking the door opened and in walked Lavina Tibbs, bearing a plate piled high with something covered with a napkin.

"Miss Elliot's compliments," she said, "and would the Bed-quilt Society accept some gingerbread for luncheon?" She set the plate on the table, removed the napkin with a flourish, and added on her own account:—

"It's jest out of the oven, an' if it ain't good I don't know how to make soft gingerbread, that's all!"

Good? If you had inhaled its delicious odor, and seen its lovely brown crust and golden interior, you would have longed (as did every boy and girl in the room) to taste it directly; and, having tasted, you would have eaten your share to the last crumb. Miss Ruth gave Susie a whispered direction, and the little girl brought from a corner cupboard a pile of pink-and-white china plates, and napkins with pink borders to correspond. The plates had belonged to Miss Ruth's grandmother, and were very valuable; but Ruth Elliot believed that nothing was too good to be used, and that the feast would be more enjoyable for being daintily served. But when all were helped, she still appeared to think some thing was wanting, and, after looking round the circle, her glance rested upon Mollie. The little girl had been unusually quiet ever since her dispute with Fannie, for she knew very well, though not a word of reproof had been spoken, that her aunt was not pleased with her. She dropped her eyes before Miss Ruth's gaze, and grew red in the face; then suddenly jumping up, she said:—

"I'll go and ask Fan Eldridge to come back, shall I, Auntie? and she may have any seat she likes; I'm sure I don't care."

"Yes, dear," Miss Ruth said, in the tone Mollie loved best to hear, "and be quick, do! or the gingerbread will be cold."

Fannie was standing idly at the window looking toward the parsonage, already repenting of her hasty departure, when Mollie rushed in.

"Come back, Fan, do! we all want you to," she said. "Mamma has sent in some hot gingerbread, and Sam Ray and Roy Tyler are there, and auntie is going to tell us about swallow-tailed butterflies, and she doesn't like to begin without you. Come, now, do! and you may have my seat."

The little girl needed no urging, but her mother interposed.

"Fannie was greatly to blame," Mrs. Eldridge said. "She has told me all about it, and I think she deserves to be punished by staying at home."

"Oh, but please, Mrs. Eldridge," said Mollie, "let her off this time! It was my fault as well as hers, for you see I provoked her by answering back."

"Say you are sorry, Fannie."

"Yes, truly, mamma, I am," said Fannie, with tears in her eyes; "and I'll take any seat, or I'll stand up all the afternoon, if you'll only let me go, and I *will* try to break myself of getting angry so easy; see if I don't!"

On the strength of these promises Mrs. Eldridge gave her consent, and the little girls crossed the lawn hand-in-hand, in loving companionship. So harmony was restored in the Society, and all ate their gingerbread with a relish. Sammy and Roy would have liked better to have munched their share on the piazza-steps, without plate or napkin. Under the circumstances, however, they behaved very well; for, though Roy took rather large mouthfuls, and Sammy licked his fingers when he thought no one was looking, these were small delinquencies, and you will be glad to know that the girls were too well-bred to appear to notice. Mollie, now fully restored to favor, was allowed to pass the finger-bowl, while Susie collected the plates, distributed the work, and made every thing snug and tidy in the room. Then Miss Ruth commenced the story of

THE SWALLOW-TAILED BUTTERFLY.

"When I was ten years old, my brother Charlie and I spent a summer with Aunt Susan, who lived in the old homestead some miles out of town.

"One night after tea she sent us into the garden to gather some sprigs of fennel for her to take to prayer-meeting—all the old ladies in Vernon took dill or fennel to evening meeting. I had just put my hand to the fennel-bush when I drew it back with a scream.

"'What's the matter?' said Charlie.

"'A great, horrid green worm,' said I. 'I almost touched it!'

"Here, let me smash him!" said Charlie; 'where is he?'

"Oh, don't touch him!" I cried; 'he might bite you. Oh, dear, I hate worms! I wonder what they were made for!'

"That kind was made to turn into butterflies,' said Tim Rhodes.

"Tim was working Aunt Susan's garden on shares that summer, and had heard all we said, for he was weeding the onion-bed close by.

"What, that fellow!' said Charlie; 'will he turn into a butterfly?' and we both of us looked at the caterpillar. He was about as long and as thick as my little finger, of a bright leafy green, with black-velvet rings dotted with orange at even distances along his body. He lay at full length on a fennel-stalk, and seemed to be asleep; but when Charlie touched him with a little stick, instantly there shot out of his head a pair of orange-colored horns, and the air was full of the pungent odor of fennel.

"It smells like prayer-meeting,' said Charlie, and ran off to play; but I wanted further information.

"Mr. Rhodes,' said I, 'how do you know this kind of worm makes butterflies?'

"Because I've seen 'em do it, child. If you should put that fellow now in a box with some holes in the top, so as he could breathe, and give him plenty of fresh fennel to eat, in a week (or less time if he's full grown) he'll wind himself up, and after a spell he'll hatch out a butterfly—a pretty one, too, I tell you,'

"I mean to try it,' I said; and I ran to the house and Aunt Susan gave me an old ribbon-box, and Mr. Rhodes punched a few holes in the cover with his pocket-knife; and after a little hesitation I picked the fennel-stalk with the worm on it, and laid it carefully in the box, making sure that the cover was tight. The box was then taken to the house and deposited on a bench in the porch, for Aunt Susan objected to entertaining this new boarder indoors.

"I gave my worm his breakfast the next morning before I had my own, and, forgetting my aversion, sat by the open box and watched him eat, as his strong jaws made clean work with leaf and stem.

"He isn't so ugly, after all, Charlie,' I said; 'he is almost handsome for a worm, with all those bright colors on him,'

"Then Charlie caught a little of my enthusiasm, and said *he* meant to keep a worm too. So he searched the fennel-bush and found three, and tumbled them unceremoniously into the box.

"Now they'll have good times together,' said he; 'that fellow was awful lonesome shut up by himself,'

"At Aunt Susan's suggestion I improved my worm-house by removing the top of the box and stretching mosquito-netting across, fastening it securely along the edges lest my prisoners should escape. And it was well I took this precaution; for, though for several days they made no attempt to get away, and seemed to do nothing but eat and sleep, one morning I found my largest and handsomest worm in a very disturbed and restless condition. He was making frantic efforts to escape. Up and down, round and round, over and under his companions, who were still quietly feeding, without a moment's pause, he was pushing his way. I watched him till I was tired; but when I left him he was still on his travels.

"In the afternoon, however, he had settled himself half-way up the side of his house. His head was moving slowly from side to side, and a fine white thread was coming out of his mouth. When I looked again he had fastened himself to the box by the tip of his tail and by a loop of fine silk passing round the upper part of his body. There he hung motionless two, three, almost four, days. The green and orange and black faded little by little, his body shrank to half its size, and he looked withered, unsightly, dead. I thought he *was* dead; but Tim Rhodes (who all along had shown a friendly interest in my pursuit) took a look at my poor dead worm,' and pronounced him all right.

"Keep a watch on him this afternoon,' said Tim,' and you'll see something queer,'

"So we did; and Aunt Susan was summoned to the porch by the news that 'the worm had split in the back and was coming out of his skin.' By the time she had got on her glasses and was ready to witness this wonderful sight, it was over. A heap of dried skin lay in the bottom of the box, and a pretty chrysalis of a delicate green color hung in place of the worm.

"O Auntie!' said Charlie, 'you ought to have seen him twist and squirm and make the split in his back bigger and bigger till it burst open and tumbled off, just as a boy wriggles out of a tight coat, you know!'

"After this came three weeks of waiting, during which the green chrysalis turned gray and hard and the other worms, one by one, went through the same changes, until four gray chrysalis were fastened to the sides of the box.

"Every day I looked, but nothing happened, until it seemed to me, tired of waiting, that nothing ever *would* happen. But one bright morning I forgot all my weariness when I found, clinging to the netting, a beautiful creature like the one we saw on the honeysuckle this afternoon, with a

slender black body and wings spotted with yellow and scarlet and lovely blue. When I opened the box he didn't try to fly. He was weak and trembling, and his wings were damp, but every moment they grew larger and his colors brighter in the sunshine.

"While Charlie and I stood watching him, we discussed, in our own way, a problem that has puzzled wiser heads than ours—how three distinct individuals (the worm, the chrysalis, and the butterfly) could be one and the same creature, and how from a low-born worm that groveled and crawled could be born this bright ethereal being—all light and beauty and color—that seemed fitted only for the sky.

"Aunt Susan listened to our talk a while and then repeated a text of Scripture:—

"Who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body?"

"While we talked the butterfly grew stronger and more beautiful, until at last, spreading his wings to their widest extent, he darted high into the air and we lost him. But from the day I took the green worm from the fennel-bush in Aunt Susan's garden I date my introduction to a delightful study which I have followed all my life as I have found opportunity. So you see it is no wonder I am fond of the swallow-tailed butterfly; and I have another reason, for once on a time I tamed one so that it sucked honey from my finger."

"Auntie, you are joking!"

"Indeed, no. It was a poor little waif which, mistaking chimney heat for warm spring weather, hatched himself out of season, and whose life I prolonged by providing him with food."

"The dear little thing! Tell us about it, please."

"Well, I had put away some chrysalids for the winter in a closet in my sleeping-room, and one day my nurse—I was ill at the time—heard a rustling in the box where they lay and brought it to me for investigation; and, behold! when I opened it there was a full-grown swallow-tail, who, waking too soon from his winter's nap, left the soft bed of cotton where his companions lay sleeping side by side and, wide awake and ready to fly, was impatiently waiting for some one to let him out into the sunshine.

"But the March sunshine was fitful and pale, and the cold wind would have chilled him to death before night; so we resolved to keep him indoors. We gave him the liberty of the room, and he fluttered about the plants in the window, now and then taking a flight to the ceiling, where, I am sorry to say, he bruised his delicate wings; but he seemed to learn wisdom by experience, for after a while he contented himself with a lower flight. Every day my bed was wheeled close to the window, and I amused myself for hours watching my pretty visitor. He would greedily suck a drop of honey, diluted with water, from the leaf of a plant or from the end of my finger, and by sight or smell, perhaps by both senses, soon learned where to go for his dinner.

"And so he lived and thrived for a fortnight, and I had hopes of keeping him till spring; but one cold night the furnace fire went out, and in the morning my pretty swallow-tail lay dead on the window-sill. Wasn't it a pity?"

"Oh," said Florence, "I like to hear about butterflies! Will you please tell us about some of the other kinds you have kept?"

"Tell us about that big fellow you said every body made a fuss over. Ce-ce—I can't remember what you called him."

"Cecropia!" said Susie, promptly. "Yes, do, Auntie! if you are not tired."

If Ruth Elliot had been ever so weary I think she would have forgotten it at sight of the interested faces of her audience; but in fact she was not in the least tired, but was as pleased to tell as they were to listen to the story of

THE CECROPIA MOTH.

"One day in November," she said, "a man who used to do odd jobs about the place for my father, and whom we always called Josh,—his name was Joshua Wheeler,—left his work to bring to the house and put into my hand a queer-looking pod-shaped package firmly fastened to a stout twig. It was of a rusty gray color and looked as much like a thick wad of dirty brown paper as any thing I can think of.

"I found this 'ere cur'us lookin' thing,' he said, 'under a walnut-tree on the hill yonder, where I was rakin' up leaves—an', thinks I, there's some kind of a crittur stored away inside, an' Miss Ruth she's crazy arter bugs an' worms an' sich like varmints, an' mebbe she'd like to see what comes out o' this 'ere; so I've fetched it along.'

"You may be sure I thanked him heartily and gave him a sixpence besides, which I am afraid went to buy tobacco. 'Law, Doctor, don't I know it?' Josh used to reply when my father urged him to break off a habit that was making a shaky old man of him at sixty; 'don't I know it's a dretful bad habit; but then you see a body must have somethin' to be a-chawin' on.'

"But what was in the brown package? That was the question I puzzled my brains over. I had never seen a cocoon in the least like it before, and I had no book on entomology to help me. With the point of a needle I carefully picked away the outer layer till I came to loose silken fibers that evidently were the covering of an inside case. Whatever was there was snugly tucked away in a

little inner chamber with the key inside, and I must wait with what patience I could command till he chose to open the door.

"I kept my precious cocoon all winter in a cold, dry place; but when warm spring weather came it lay in state on my work-table, in a box lined with cotton, where I could watch it all day long. Nothing happened till one bright day in June I heard a faint scratching inside the brown case. It grew louder and louder every moment. Evidently my tenant was bestirring himself and, with intervals of rest, was scraping and tearing away his silken wrappings. Presently an opening was made and out of this were poked two bushy legs with claws that held fast by the outside of his house, while the creature gradually pulled himself out.

"First a head with horns; then a part of the body and two more legs; then, with one tremendous effort, he was free!—an odd beast of no particular color, looking exceedingly damp and disagreeable, with his fat chunky body and short legs, like an exaggerated bumble-bee, only not at all pretty. He was shaky on his legs and half tumbled from his box to the window-sill, along which he walked trembling till he came to the tassel of the shade, just within his reach. This he grabbed with all four claws, his wings hanging down.

"'It's nothing but a homely old brown bug!' said my brother Charlie, whom I had called to see the sight.

"'No,' I said, "'it isn't a bug. I'm sure I don't know what it is,'

"I was ready to cry with disappointment and vexation, for I had expected great things from my brown chrysalis.

"The tassel was gently swaying with the weight of the clumsy creature, and in the warm sunshine which was gradually drying body and wings faint colors began to show—a dull red, a dash of white, a wavy band of gray, with patches of soft brown that began to look downy like feathers. Every moment these colors grew more distinct and took new shapes. None of them were bright, but they were beautifully blended and the whole body was of the texture of the finest velvet.

"But the wings! How can I describe to you how those thick, crumpled, unsightly appendages grew and grew, changing in color from a dingy black to a dark brown, with bands of gray and red? how the great white patches took distinct form, and some were dashed with red and bordered with black, and others eye-shaped with crescents of pale blue? It must have taken an hour for all this to come about—for the great wings to unfurl to their widest extent and the cecropia moth to show himself in all his beauty to our admiring gaze.

"The whole family had gathered to see the show. My father lingered, hat and riding-whip in hand, though he had a round of twenty miles to make among his patients before night; and Aunt Susan, who was on a visit, stood peering through her spectacles, too much absorbed to notice black Dinah taking a nap in her work-basket and the kitten making sad havoc with her knitting. Josh was called in from the wood-shed, and, with his hat on the back of his head and hands deep in his pockets, gazed in silence.

"'Wal,' he said at length, 'if that don't beat all natur!' Look at the size of that crittur, will you, and the hole he's jest crawled out of. Why, he's as big as a full-grown bat, measures full seven inches across from wing to wing. Wal, now, I'd gin consider'ble to know what's be'n goin' on for a spell back in that leetle house where he's passed his time; and I'll bet, Doctor, with all your larnin', *you* can't tell."

CHAPTER V.

FURRY-PURRY BECOMING GOLD ELSIE.

Miss Ruth found on her table the next Wednesday afternoon a note very neatly and carefully written, which read as follows:—

Miss RUTH,—Will you Please tell us Another Cat Story, becaus I like them best. So does Fannie Eldridge she said So after You told Worm stories.

Miss Ruth I Have Named my Black Kitty After your Dinah Diamond, her Last Name has to Be Spot Becaus her Spot is not a Diamond, this is from your Friend.

NELLIE DIMOCK.

"I hold in my hand," Miss Ruth said, when she had carefully perused this epistle, "a written request from two members of our Society for another cat story. Susie and Mollie, have I any more cat stories worth telling?"

"Yes, indeed, Auntie" said Mollie. "Don't you remember the pretty fairy story you used to tell us about the good little girl who saved a cat from being drowned by some bad boys, and carried her home? and she turned out to be a fairy cat and gave that girl every thing she wished for—cakes and candy, and a lovely pink silk frock packed in a nutshell for her to wear to the party?"

"O Mollie! that's too much of a baby story," said Susie. "Tell us about the musical cat who played the piano by walking over the keys, and all the people in the house thought it was a ghost."

"Yes, Auntie; and the funny story of the cat and the parrot—how the parrot got stuck up to her knees in a pan of dough, and in her fright said over every thing she had learned to say: 'Polly wants a cracker!' 'Oh, my goodness' sakes alive!' 'Get out, I say!' 'Here's a row!' 'Scat, you beast!' and so on;—and how the cat got her out."

"These are old stories, girls, and you have told them for me."

"Our old cat Jane," said Eliza Ann Jones, "is a regular cheat. You see, she *would* lie in grandma's chair. She used to jump in if grandma left it only for a minute; and grandma wouldn't know she was there, and two or three times sat right down on her. Why, it was just awful, and scared poor grandma half to death. Well, ma whipped the old cat every time she caught her in the chair, and we thought she was cured of the habit; but one day ma came into the room and there was nobody there but Jane, and she was stretched on the rug and seemed to be fast asleep; but grandma's chair was rocking away all by itself. Ma wondered what made the chair go, so she thought she'd watch. She left the door on a crack and peeped through, and as soon as the cat thought she was alone she jumped into the chair and settled herself for a nap; but when ma made a little noise, as if somebody were coming out, she hopped out and stretched herself on the rug and made believe she was fast asleep. 'Twas her jumping out so quick that set the chair rocking. Now, wasn't that cute?"

"I never knew till the other day," said Florence Austin, "that cats scatter crumbs to attract the birds, and then watch for them and spring out on the poor things when they are feeding."

"What a shame! I wouldn't keep a cat who played such a cruel trick," Mollie said.

"My Dinah Spot doesn't catch birds or chickens," said Nellie Dimock; "only mice."

Mrs. Elliot had come in with a message to her sister while this talk went on, and had lingered to hear Eliza's story of old Jane.

"Girls," she said, "with your President's permission, I will tell you a story about a cat. It is curious, because it proves that a cat remembers and reasons much as a man or woman would in similar circumstances. Susie and Mollie, I have told it to you before, but you will not mind hearing it again.

"When my brother Charles was a young man he kept a bachelor establishment in the country, and with other pets owned a beautiful gray cat he had; brought with him from Germany. She was very intelligent and docile, a great favorite with her master, and was allowed many privileges in the house. She came in and out through a small door cut in the side of the house which she opened and closed for herself. A chair was regularly placed for her at the table; she slept at the foot of my brother's bed, and perched herself on his shoulder when he took a stroll in the garden. She could distinguish the sound of his bell from any other in the house, and was greatly disturbed if the servant delayed in answering his call.

"One summer my sister Helen and her two boys were staying with Charles, and in the midst of the visit he was called away on business, and was absent for several weeks. Now, Carl and Teddy were dear little fellows, but full of mischief; and in their uncle's absence they so teased and tormented poor Miess, taking advantage of her amiable disposition, that she was forced at length to keep out of their way. About a week before Charles came home she had kittens, which she carefully hid behind a heavy book-case in the library.

"The morning of his return he had the cat in his lap petting and caressing her as usual, and then went out for an hour. As soon as he was gone, pussy brought her kittens one by one from their hiding-place and laid them on the rug in the corner of the room where she had nursed and tended all her young families before. Now she must have reasoned in this way: 'My good, kind master has come home, and those dreadful boys who have pinched my ears and tied things to my tail, and teased and frightened me almost to death, will be made to behave themselves. All danger to me and to my babies is over. Why must the pretty dears be hidden away in that musty place? Of course master wants to see them, and they are well worth looking at. The thing for me to do is to bring them out of that dark hole and put them where I always have put my kittens before.'"

"Wise old Miess!" said Mollie. "Mamma, please tell the girls how she saved uncle's pet canary from a strange cat."

"Yes, dear. Miess was so obedient and well trained that her master often trusted her in the room while he gave the bird his airing, and Bobby became so accustomed to the cat's presence that he hopped fearlessly about the floor close to pussy's rug, and more than once lighted on her back; but one day your uncle discovered Miess on the table with the bird in her mouth. For an instant he thought her cat nature had got the upper hand, and that Bobby's last moment had come; then he discovered a strange cat in the room and knew that his good cat had saved the canary's life. As soon as the intruder was driven out, Bobby fluttered away safe and sound."

"Wasn't that nice of Miess, Auntie?" said Susie. "I have thought of a story for you to tell us this afternoon—the story of the barn-cat that wanted so much to become a house-cat. Don't you remember that story you used to tell us long ago?"

"Oh, yes!" Mollie said; "her name was Furry-Purry, and she lived with Granny Barebones, and

there was Tom—Tom—some thing; what *was* his name? Tell us that, Aunt Ruth, do!"

"Isn't it open to the objection you made to Mollie's choice a while ago, Susie?" she asked. "I remember it went with 'The Three Bears' and 'Old Mother Pig' and 'The Little Red Hen.'"

"No, Auntie, I think not; it's different, somehow."

"Very well, then, if you are sure you haven't outgrown it."

"Is it a true story?" Nellie Dimock wanted to know.

"It is made out of a true story, Nellie. A young cat which was born and brought up in a barn became dissatisfied with her condition in life, and made up her mind to change it. She chose the house of a friend of mine for her future home, and presented herself every morning at the door, asking in a very earnest and humble way to be taken in. When driven away she went sadly and reluctantly, but in a few moments was back again waiting patiently, quietly, hour after hour, day after day. If noticed or spoken to, she gave a plaintive mew, looked cold and hungry, but showed no signs of discouragement. She didn't once try to steal into the house, as she might have done, but waited patiently for an invitation.

"And when one morning she brought a mouse and laid it on the door-step, and looking up, seemed to say: 'Kind lady, if you will take me for your cat, see what I will do for you,' my friend could no longer refuse. The door was opened, the long-wished-for invitation was given, and very soon the little barn-cat became the pet and plaything of the family. She proved a valuable family cat, and her descendants, to the fourth generation, are living in my friend's family to-day.

"Out of these materials I have dressed up the story of

HOW FURRY-PURRY BECAME GOLD ELSIE.

"The door of the great house stood open and Furry-Purry looked in.

"Furry-Purry was a small yellow cat striped down the back with a darker shade of the same color. Her paws, the lower part of her body, and the spot on her breast were white.

"This is what the little cat saw, looking through the open door into the great house:—

"A pleasant room hung with pictures, the floor covered with a soft carpet, where all kinds of bright-colored flowers seemed to be growing, and, in the sunniest corner, lying in an arm-chair piled with cushions, a large tabby cat.

"Just then a gust of wind closed the door, and Furry-Purry ran round the house to the barn and remained all day hidden in her hole under the boards.

"That night there was a storm, and several cats in the neighborhood crept into the barn for safety. There was old Mrs. Barebones, a cat with a bad cough, which was thought to be in a decline; Tom Skip-an'-jump, a sprightly young fellow with a tenor voice which he was fond of using on moonlight nights; and Robber Grim, a fierce, one-eyed creature—the pest of the neighborhood—with a great head and neck and flabby, hanging cheeks and bare spots on his tawny coat where the fur had been torn out in his fierce battles.

"The thunder roared overhead and the lightning, shining through the cracks, played on the barn floor and showed the cats sitting gravely in a circle. Only Tom Skip-an'-jump, who still kept his kittenish tricks, went frisking after his tail and turning somersaults in the hay. Presently he tumbled over Furry-Purry and bit her ear.

"'Come, play!' said he: 'it's a jolly time for puss-in-the-corner.'"

"'Tom,' said Furry-Purry, 'I never shall play again. I am very unhappy. I have seen Mrs. Tabitha Velvetpaw lying on a silk cushion, while I make my bed in the hay. She walks on a lovely soft carpet, and I have only this barn floor. O Tom, I want to be a house-cat.'"

"'A house-cat!' repeated Tom disdainfully. 'They sleep all day. They get their tails pulled and their ears pinched by horrid monsters with only two legs to walk on, and nights—beautiful moonlight nights when we barn-cats are roaming the alleys and singing on the roofs and having a good time generally—they are locked in cellars and garrets and made to watch rat-holes. Oh, no! not for Tom.'"

"He was off with a whisk of his tail to the highest beam in the barn, looking down on them with the greenest of green eyes, and singing,—

'Some love the home
Of a lazy drone,
And a bed on a cushioned knee;
But in wild free ways
I will spend my days,
And at night on the roofs I'll be.

Oh, 'tis my delight,
On a moonlight night!—

"'Don't listen to him, my dear,' said Mrs. Barebones, the consumptive cat; 'he's a wild,

thoughtless creature, quite inexperienced in the ways of the world. Heed the counsels of one whose sands of life are almost run and who, before she goes to the land of cats, would fain warn a youthful friend and, if possible, avert her from her own sad fate. This racking cough (ugh! ugh!) and this distressing *cat*-arrh, (snuff! snuff!) with which you see me afflicted were brought on by the hardships and exposure incident to the life of a barn-cat: midnight rambles, my dear (ugh!), in frost and snow; days when not so much as a mouse's tail has passed my hungry jaws, and winter nights when my coat was too thin to keep out the cold. And all these sufferings, past and present, are in consequence of my being a barn-cat.'

"Now, may the dogs get me, if I ever heard such a string of nonsense!' said Robber Grim. 'Don't believe a word she says. She's an old granny. She's got the fidgets. She wants a dose of catnip-tea. Don't believe Tom Skip-an'-jump, either. What does *he* know about war? He never was shot at. Look at me! I'm Robber Grim! I'm an old one, I am! I've got good blood in my veins. My great-grandfather was a catamount and his grandmother was a tiger-cat. I've been in a hundred battles. I've had one eye knocked out and an ear bit off. I left a piece of my tail in a trap. I've been scalded with hot water and peppered all over with shot. *I'll* teach you how to get a living without being a house-cat. I hate houses and the people who live in them, and I do them all the mischief I can. I eat up their chickens and I suck their eggs. I climb in at the pantry window and skim their milk. Once when the cook left the kitchen door open I snatched the beefsteak from the gridiron and made off with the family dinner. They hate me—they do. They've tried to kill me a dozen times; but I'm Robber Grim, ha! ha! and I've got nine lives!'

"At this instant there came a flash of lightning, followed by a peal of thunder that shook the barn to its foundations, and every cat fled in terror to its hole.

"The next morning Mrs. Tabitha Velvetpaw took a stroll round the garden and down the lane a little way, where the catnip grew. The ground was wet after the shower, and she was daintily picking her way along, very careful not to soil her beautiful feet, of which she was justly proud, when suddenly there glided from behind a tree and stood directly in her path a small yellow cat.

"Oh, my paws and whiskers!' exclaimed Mrs. Tabitha, surprised out of her usual dignity.

"If you please,' said Furry-Purry,—for it was she,—'I have made bold to come out and meet you to ask your advice. I am a poor little barn-cat, and I was contented with my lot till I saw you yesterday in your beautiful home; but now I feel that I was intended for a higher sphere. Tell me—oh, tell me, Mrs. Velvetpaw, how I may become a house-cat!'

"Well, did I ever!' said Mrs. Velvetpaw. 'The idea!' and she moved a step or two away from poor Furry-Purry, her manner, as well as her words, expressing astonishment and disdain.

"I know it seems presuming, Mrs. Velvetpaw, but—"

"Presuming! I should say so. What is this generation of cats coming to, when a low creature reared in a barn—a paw-paw (pauper) cat, as I may say—dare lift her eyes to those so far above her?'

"I have heard my mother say "a cat may look at a king,"' said Furry-Purry.

"Go away, you low-born creature! How dare you quote your mother to me? Go away, this instant! I am ashamed to be seen talking with you! What if my friend Mrs. Silvercoat or Major Mouser should happen to pass! Begone, I say! scat!'

"O Mrs. Tabitha,' said the poor little cat, 'don't send me away! I can't go back to that barn. Indeed, indeed, after spending this short time in your company, I can never endure to live with Tom Skip-an'-jump and Mrs. Barebones and that horrid Robber Grim. If you refuse to help me I will go straight to Growler's kennel. When he has worried me to death, won't you be sorry you drove me to such a fate? Dear, dear Mrs. Velvetpaw, your face is kinder than your words. Oh, pity the sorrows of a poor little cat!'

"Now, Mrs. Tabitha was not at heart an ill-natured puss; and when she saw Furry-Purry's imploring face, and listened to her eloquent appeal, she was moved with compassion.

"Rather than see you go to the dogs,' said she, 'I will lend a paw to help you. But what can I do, you silly thing?'

"Mrs. Velvetpaw, you have lived a long time in this neighborhood?'

"All my life, Yellow Cat.'

"And you know every body?'

"If you mean in the first rank of society—yes. Your Barebones, and Hop-an'-jumps, and creatures of that vulgar herd, are quite out of my *category*.'

"Perhaps you know of some house-cat dead or gone away?'

"And if I do?'

"You might put me in her place, you know.'

"Yellow Cat,' said Mrs. Tabitha, severely.

"If you please, my name is Furry-Purry.'

"Well, Furry-Purry, then. Your presumption can only be pardoned in consideration of your ignorance of the usages of society. House-cats, you must know, hold their position in families by hereditary descent. My place, for instance, was my mother's and my grandmother's before me. We are prepared by birth and education for the position we occupy. Have you considered how utterly unfitted you are for the life to which you aspire? I am sorry to disappoint you, but I fear your hopes are vain. There is, indeed, a vacancy in the brick house opposite. Cæsar—a venerable cat—died last week. He was much admired for his gentlemanly and dignified deportment. "Who shall come after the king?"

"I, Mrs. Tabitha, I—

"You, indeed!" she interrupted, scornfully.

"Oh, yes, if you will but condescend to give me instructions. I am quick to learn. The short time I have been so happy as to be in your company I have gained much knowledge. I am sure I can imitate the *mew*-sic of your voice. I know I can gently wave my tail, and touch my left whisker with my paw as you do. When I leave you I shall spend every moment till we meet again in practising your airs and graces, till I make them all my own. Dear friend,—if you will let me call you so,—help me to King Cæsar's place.'

"There was much that was flattering to Mrs. Velvetpaw in this speech.

"Well,' said she, 'I will see what can be done. There, go home now, and the first thing to be done is to make yourself perfectly clean. Wash yourself twelve times in the day, from the end of your nose to the tip of your tail. Take particular pains with your paws. A cat of refinement is known by the delicacy and cleanliness of her feet. Farewell! After three days, meet me here again.'

"You can imagine how faithfully Furry-Purry followed these directions—how with her sharp tongue she smoothed and stroked every hair of her pretty coat, and washed her face again and again with her wet paws.

"You are wretchedly thin!" Mrs. Tabitha said at their next meeting. 'That fault can only be remedied by a generous diet. You must look me full in the face when I talk to you. Really, you have no need to be ashamed of your eyes, for they are decidedly bright and handsome. When you walk, don't bend your legs till your body almost touches the ground. That gives you a wretchedly hang-cat appearance. Tread softly and daintily, but with dignity and grace of carriage. There must be other bad habits I have not mentioned.'

"I am afraid I spit sometimes.'

"Don't do that—it is considered vulgar. Don't bristle your tail. Don't show your claws except to mice. Keep such control over yourself as never to be surprised out of a dignified composure of manner.'

"Just here, without the slightest warning, there rushed from the thicket near them a large fierce-looking dog. Up went Mrs. Velvetpaw's back in an arch. Every hair of her body stood on end. Sharp-pointed claws protruded from each velvet foot, and, hissing and spitting, she tumbled over Furry-Purry in her haste, and scrambled to the topmost branch of the pear-tree. The little cat followed, imitating her guide in every particular. As for the dog, which was in pursuit of game, he did not even look at them; and when he was out of sight they came down from the tree, Mrs. Tabitha descending with the dignified composure she had just recommended to her young friend. She made no allusion to her hurried ascent.

"To-morrow night,' said she, 'as soon as it is dark, meet me in the backyard of the brick house.'

"Half glad and half frightened, Furry-Purry walked by her side the next evening, delighting in the soft green turf of the yard and the sweet-smelling shrubs against which she ventured to rub herself as they passed. Mrs. Tabitha led her round the house to a piazza draped with clustering vines.

"Come here to-morrow,' said she. 'Walk boldly up the steps and seat yourself in full view of that window. Look your prettiest—behave your best. Assume a pensive expression of countenance, with your eyes uplifted—so. If you are driven away, go directly, but return. Be strong, be brave, be persevering. Now, my dear, I have done all I can for you, and I wish you good luck,'

"The next morning a little girl living in the brick house, whose name was Winnie Gay, looked out of the dining-room window.

"Come quick, mamma!' she called; 'here's a cat on our piazza—a little yellow cat, and she's looking right up at me. May I open the door?'

"No, indeed!' said Mrs. Gay; 'we want no strange cats here.'

"But she looks hungry, mamma. She has just opened her mouth at me without making a bit of noise. Can't I give her a saucer of milk?'

"Come away from the window, Winnie, and don't notice her. You will only encourage her to come again. There, pussy, run away home; we can't have you here.'

"Now, mamma, you have frightened her. See how she keeps looking back. I'm afraid you've hurt her feelings. Dear little pussy! I wish I might call you back.'

"Furry-Purry was not discouraged at this her first unsuccessful attempt. The child's blue eyes beamed a welcome, and the lady's face was gentle and kind.

"'If I catch a mouse,' thought the cat, 'and bring it to them to show what I can do, perhaps I shall gain their favor.' Then she put away all the fine airs and graces Mrs. Velvetpaw had taught her, and became the sly, supple, watchful creature nature had made her. By a hole in the granary she crouched and waited with unwearied patience one, two, almost three, hours. Then she gave a sudden spring, there was one sharp little shriek from the victim, a snap of pussy's jaws, and her object was accomplished. She appeared again on the piazza, and, laying a dead mouse on the floor, crouched beside it in an attitude of perfect grace, and looked beseechingly in Mrs. Gay's face.

"'Well, you *are* a pretty creature!' that lady said, 'with your soft white paws and yellow coat,'

"'May I have her for my cat, mamma?' Winnie said. 'I thought I never should love another cat when dear old Cæsar died; but this little thing is such a beauty that I love her already. May I have her for mine?'

"But while Mrs. Gay hesitated, Furry-Purry, who could not hear what they said, and who, to tell the truth, was in a great hurry to eat her mouse, ran off with it to the barn. The next morning, however, she came again, and Mr. Gay, who was waiting for his breakfast, was called to the window.

"'My cat has come again, papa, with another mouse—a monstrous one, too.'

"'That isn't a mouse,' Mr. Gay said, looking at the plump, silver-gray creature Furry-Purry carefully deposited on the piazza-floor. 'Bless me! I believe it is that rascal of a mole that's gnawed my hyacinth and tulip bulbs. I offered the gardener's boy two dollars if he would catch the villain. To whom does that cat belong, Winnie? She's worth her weight in gold.'

"'I don't believe she belongs to anybody, papa; but I think she wants to belong to us, for she keeps coming and coming. *May* I have her for mine? I am sure mamma will say yes if you are willing.'

"'Why not?' said he. 'Run for a saucer of milk, and we will coax her in.'

"We who are acquainted with Furry-Purry's private history know how little coaxing was needed.

"As soon as the door was opened she walked in, and, laying the dead mole at Mr. Gay's feet, rubbed herself against his leg, purred gently, looked up into his face with her round bright eyes, and, in very expressive cat language, claimed him for her master. When he stooped to caress her, and praised and petted her for the good service she had rendered him, the happy creature rolled over and over on the soft carpet in an ecstasy of delight.

"Then Winnie clapped her hands for joy.

"'You are our own cat,' she said. 'You shall have sugar and cream to eat. You shall lie on Cæsar's silk cushion; and because you are yellow, and papa says you are worth your weight in gold, your name shall be Gold Elsie,'

"So Furry-Purry became a family cat.

"The first time she met Mrs. Velvetpaw after this change in her life, that excellent tabby looked at her with evident admiration.

"'How handsome you have grown!' said she; 'your eyes are topaz, your breast and paws are the softest velvet, your coat is spun gold. My dear, you are the belle of cats,'

"'Dear Mrs. Velvetpaw,' said Gold Elsie, 'my beauty and my prosperity I owe in large measure to you. But for your wise counsels I should still be a'—

"'Hush! don't speak the word. My dear, never again allude to your origin. It is a profound secret. You are received in the best society. Mrs. Silvercoat tells me it is reported that your master sought far and wide to find a worthy successor to King Cæsar, and that he esteems himself specially fortunate in that, after great labor and expense, he procured *you*. The ignorance you sometimes exhibit of the customs of genteel society is attributed to your foreign breeding.'

"'Mrs. Tabitha, I feel at times a strong desire to visit my old friends in the barn once more.'

"'Let me entreat you, my dear Miss Elsie, never again to think of it.'

"'But there is poor Mrs. Barebones almost gone with a consumption. I should like to show her some kindness.'

"'Her sufferings are ended. She has passed to the land of cats,'

"'Poor Mrs. Barebones! and Robber Grim? Do you happen to have heard any thing of him?'

"Silently Mrs. Tabitha beckoned her to follow, and, leading the way to the orchard, pointed to a sour-apple tree, where Gold Elsie beheld a ghastly sight. By a cord tied tightly about his neck, his jaws distended, his one eye starting from its socket, hung Robber Grim—stiff, motionless, dead.

"They hurried away, and presently Gold Elsie timidly inquired after her former playmate, Tom

Skip-an'-jump.

"Don't, my dear!" said Mrs. Velvetpaw; 'really, I can not submit to be farther *catechized*. If you are truly grateful to me, Elsie, for the service I have rendered you, and wish to do me credit in the high position to which I have raised you, you must, you certainly must, break every tie that binds you to your former life.'

"I will, Mrs. Tabitha, I will," said the little cat; and never again in Mrs. Velvetpaw's presence did she mention Tom Skip-an'-jump's name,"

"And didn't she ever see him again?" Nellie Dimock wanted to know. "I am sure there was no harm in Tom."

"Well, but you know she couldn't go with *that set* any more after she had got into good society," said Mollie Elliot.

"Mollie has caught Mrs. Velvetpaw's exact tone," said Florence Austin, at which all the girls laughed.

"Well, I don't care," Mollie answered; "she was a nice little cat, and deserved all her good fortune."

CHAPTER VI.

TOMMY TOMPKINS' YELLOW DOG.

"I have a letter to read to you this afternoon, girls," said Miss Ruth; "also the story of a yellow dog. The letter is from a friend of mine who spends her summers in a quiet village in Maine, in a fine old mansion overlooking green fields and a beautiful lake with hills sloping down to it on every side. Here is the letter she wrote me last June:—

"We have come back again to our summer home—to the old house, the broad piazza, the high-backed chairs, and the blue china. The clump of cinnamon roses across the way is one mass of spicy bloom, and soon its fragrance will be mingled with that of new-mown hay. There is nothing new about the place but Don Quixote, the great handsome English mastiff. Do you know the mastiff—his lion-like shape, his smooth, fawn-colored coat, his black nose, and kind, intelligent eyes, their light-hazel contrasting with the black markings around them? If you do, you must pardon this description.

"I am very fond of Don, and he of me. He belongs to our cousin, whose house is but one field removed from ours; but he is here much of the time. He evidently feels that both houses are under his protection, and passes his nights between the two. Often we hear his slow step as he paces the piazza round and round like a sentinel. He is only fifteen months old, and of course feels no older than a little dog, though he weighs one hundred and thirty pounds, and measures six feet from nose to tail.

"He can't understand why he isn't a lap-dog, and does climb our laps after his fashion, putting up one hind leg and resting his weight upon it with great satisfaction. We have good fun with him out of doors, where his puppyhood quite gets the better of his dignity, and he runs in circles and fetches mad bounds of pure glee.

"One day, lying in my hammock, with Don on the piazza at my feet, I put his charms and virtues together in verses, and I send them to you as the most succinct account I can give of my new pet. As I coned them over, repeating them half-aloud, at the frequent mention of his name Don raised his head with an intelligent and appreciative look. Here are the verses. I call them

DOG-GEREL.

Don! Don! beautiful Don!
Graceful and tall, with majestic mien,
Fawn-colored coat of the softest sheen,
The stateliest dog that the sun shines on,
Beautiful Don!

Don! Don! frolicsome Don!
Chasing your tail at a game of tag,
Dancing a jig with a kitchen rag,
Rearing and tearing, and all for fun,
Frolicsome Don!

Don! Don! affectionate Don!
Looking your love with soft kind eyes,
Climbing our laps, quite forgetting your size;
With kissing and coaxing you never are done,
Affectionate Don!

Don! Don! chivalrous Don!
Stalking all night piazza and yard,
Sleepless and watchful, our sentinel guard,
Squire of dames is the name you have won,
Chivalrous Don!

Don! Don! devotional Don!
When the Bible is opened you climb to your place,
And listen with solemn, immovable face,
Nor frolic nor coax till the chapter is done,
Devotional Don!

Don! Don! wonderful Don!
Devotional, faithful, affectionate one,
If owning these virtues when only a pup,
What will you be when you are grown up?
Wonderful Don!

"And now by way of contrast," said Miss Ruth as she folded the letter, "I have a story to tell you of a poor little forlorn, homely, insignificant dog, of low birth and no breeding, which was picked up on the street by a boy I know, and which made for himself friends and a good home by seizing the first opportunity that offered to do his duty and protect the property of those who had taken him in. I have no doubt that Don Quixote, intelligent, faithful, kind, with not a drop of plebeian blood in his noble body, will fulfill all the expectations of his friends, and we shall hear of many a brave and gallant deed of his performing; but when you have heard what Tommy Tompkins has to tell, I think you will say that not even Don Quixote could have done himself more credit under the circumstances than

TOMMY TOMPKINS' YELLOW DOG.

"Tommy shall tell the story as he told it to me:—

"Yes, marm, he's my dog. His name's Grip. My father paid five dollars for that dog. You look as if you thought he wasn't worth it; but I wouldn't take twice the money for him, not if you was to pay it over this minute. I know he ain't a handsome dog. I don't think yellow is a pretty color for a dog, do you? and I wish he had a little more of a tail. Liz says he's cur-tailed (Liz thinks it's smart to make puns), but he'll look a great deal better when his ear gets well and his hair grows out and covers the bare spots—don't you think so? But father says, "Handsome is that handsome does," and nobody can say but that our dog did the handsome thing when he saved over two hundred dollars in money and all mother's silver spoons and lots of other things from being stolen—hey, Grip? We call him Grip 'cause he hung on to that fellow so till the policeman got in to take him.

"What fellow? Why, the burglar, of course. Didn't you read about it in the newspaper? There was a long piece published about it the day after it happened, with headings in big letters: "The house No. 35 Wells Avenue, residence of Thomas Tompkins, the well-known dealer in hardware, cutlery, etc., was entered last night by burglars. Much valuable property saved through the courage and pluck of a small dog belonging to the family." They didn't get that part right, for he didn't belong to us then. You just wait, and I'll read the whole piece to you. I've got it somewhere in my pockets. You see, I cut it out of the paper to read to the boys at school.

"You'd rather I told you about it? Well. Lie down, Grip! Be quiet! can't you? He don't mean any thing by sniffing round your ankles in that way; anyhow, he won't catch hold unless I tell him to; but you see, ever since that night he wants to go for every strange man or woman that comes near the place. Liz says "he's got burglars on the brain."

"I guess I'll begin at the beginning and tell you how I came by him. One night after school I'd been down to the steamboat landing on an errand for father, and along on River Street there was a crowd of loafers round two dogs in a fight. This dog was one of 'em, and the other was a bulldog twice his size. The bulldog's master was looking on, without so much as trying to part 'em; but nobody was looking after the yellow dog: he didn't seem to have any master. Well, I want to see fair play in every thing. It makes me mad to see a fellow thrash a boy half his size, or a big dog chew up a little one. So I steps up and says to the bulldog's master, "Why don't you call off your dog?" but he only swore at me and told me to mind my own business.

"Well, I know a trick or two about dogs, and I ran into a grocer's shop close by and got two cents' worth of snuff, and I let that bulldog have it all right in his face and eyes. Of course he had to let go to sneeze; and I grabbed the yellow dog and ran. It was great fun. I could hear that dog sneezing and coughing, and his master yelling to me, but I never once held up or looked behind me till I was half-way up Brooks Street.

"Then I set the yellow dog down on the sidewalk and looked him over. My! he's a beauty now to what he was then, for he's clean and well-fed and respectable looking; but then he was nothing but skin and bone, and covered all over with mud and dirt, and one ear was torn and one eye swelled shut, and he limped when he walked, and—well, never mind, old Grip! you was all right inside, wasn't you?

"Well, I never dreaded any thing more in all my life than taking that dog home. Mother hates

dogs. She never would have one in the house, though I've always wanted a dog of my own. I knew Liz would call him a horrid little monster, and Fred would poke fun at me—and, oh, dear! I'd rather have gone to the dentist's or taken a Saturday-night scrub than go into that dining-room with Grip at my heels.

"But it had to be done. They were all at supper, and mother took it just as I was afraid she would. If she only would have waited and let me tell how I came by the dog, I thought maybe she would have felt sorry for the poor thing; but she was in such a hurry to get his muddy feet off the dining-room carpet that she wouldn't listen to a single word I said, but kept saying, "Turn him out! turn him out!" till I found it was no use, and I was just going to do as she said when father looked up from his supper, and says he: "Let the boy tell his story, mother. Where did you get the dog, Tommy?" "We were all surprised, for father hardly ever interfered with mother about us children—he's so taken up with business, you know, he hasn't any time left for the family. But I was glad enough to tell him how I came by the dog; and he laughed, and said he didn't see any objection to my keeping him over night. I might give him some supper and tie him up in the shed-chamber, and in the morning he'd have him taken round to Police-station C, where, if he wasn't claimed in four days, he'd be taken care of.

"I knew well enough how they'd take care of him at Station C. They'd shoot him—that's what they do to stray dogs without any friends. But anyhow, I could keep him over night, for mother would think it was all right, now father had said so. So I took him to the shed-chamber and gave him a good supper,—how he did eat!—and I found an old mat for him to lie on, and got a basin of warm water and some soap, and washed him as clean as I could and rubbed him dry, and made him warm and comfortable: and he licking my hands and face and wagging his stump of a tail and thanking me for it as plain as though he could talk.

"But oh, how he hated to be tied up! Fact is, he made such a fuss I stayed out there with him till past my bed-time; and when at last I had to go I left him howling and tugging at the string. Well, I went to sleep, and, after a while, I woke up, and that dog was at it still. I could hear him howl just as plain, though the shed-chamber was at the back of the house, ever so far from my room. I knew mother hadn't come upstairs, for the gas was burning in the halls, as she always turned it off the last thing; and I thought to myself: "If she hears the dog when she comes up, maybe she'll put him out, and I never shall see him again." And before I knew what I was about I was running through the hall and the trunk-room, and so out into the shed. It was pitch dark out there, but I found my way to Grip easy enough by the noise he made when he saw me; and it didn't take long to untie the string and catch him up and run back with him to my room. I knew he would be as still as a mouse in there with me. You were lonesome out there in the shed, weren't you, Grip?

"What would mother say? Well, you see, I meant to keep awake till she came upstairs and tell her all about it; but I was so tired I dropped asleep in a minute, and the first thing I knew I was dreaming that I was running up Brooks Street with Grip in my arms, and the bull-dog close after us, and just as he was going to spring mother screamed, and somebody kept saying, "'St, boy! 'st, boy! stick to him, good dog! stick to him!" And then I woke up, and mother really was screaming, and 'twas Fred who was saying, "Stick to him! stick to him!" And the gas was lit in the hall, and there was a great noise and hubbub out there, and I rushed out, and there was a man on the floor and the yellow dog had him by the throat. Father stood in the door-way with his pistol cocked, and he said in a quiet kind of way (just as father always speaks when he means business): "If you stir you are a dead man!" But I should like to know how he could stir with that grip on his throat!

"Then there came a banging and ringing at our front door, and Fred ran to open it, and in rushed our policeman—I mean the one that takes our street on his beat. He had heard the noise outside, you see, and, for a wonder, was on hand when he was wanted; and he just went for that fellow on the floor and clapped a pair of handcuffs on his wrists as quick as you could turn your hand over; and when he got a look at him he says: "Oh, it's you, Bill Long, is it? We've been wanting you for some time at the lodge (that was his name for the police-station). Well, get up and come along!"

"But I called the dog off.

"We didn't one of us go to bed again that night. Father and Fred looked through the house, and father said it was the neatest piece of work in the burglary line he ever saw done—real professionals, they were. There was two of 'em. They'd taken plenty of time. The forks and the spoons and the two hundred dollars in money was all done up in neat packages, and they'd been through father's desk and the secretary drawers; and they'd had a lunch of cold chicken and mince-pie, and left the marks of their greasy hands on the best damask napkins Bridget had ironed that day and left to air by the kitchen range. And then, you see, while one stayed below to keep watch, the other went up to finish the job; and he would have finished it, too, and both would have got away with all the things if it hadn't have been for that dog. Look at him! will you? I believe he understands every word I say as well as you do.

"Well, right at the door of father's room, Grip took him. How did he lay the fellow on his back? We suppose he was creeping into the room on his hands and knees,—they often do, father says,—and the dog made a rush at him in front and gripped him in the throat, and the weight of the dog threw him backward; and once down, Grip kept him there—see?

"Next morning at breakfast father said: "Tommy, how came the dog in the upper hall last night? I told you to tie him up in the shed-chamber." Then I had to own up, and tell how I went late in the evening and brought him to my room because he howled so. I said I was real sorry, and father said he would try to forgive me, seeing it all turned out well, and if Grip hadn't been there we

should have lost so much money. And says I: "Father, don't you mean to take him round to Station C this morning?" "No, I don't," says father. Then mother said she didn't know but she'd about as soon lose the silver as to keep such a dog as that in the house, and Fred said if I must have a dog, why didn't father get me a black-and-tan terrier—"or a lovely pug," says Liz; and between 'em they got me so stirred up I didn't know what to do. I said I didn't want a black-and-tan, and I'd throw a pug out of the window! And if nobody wanted to keep Grip, we'd go off together somewhere and earn our living, and I guessed the next time burglars got into the house and carried off all the money and things because we weren't there to stop 'em, they'd be sorry they 'd treated us so. Then I looked out of the window and winked hard to keep from crying. Wasn't I a silly?

"For they were only teasing me, and every one of them wanted to keep Grip. Well, that's all. No, it isn't quite all either; for one morning a man came to the house and wanted to see father—horrid man with a red face and a squint in one eye. I remembered him right away. He was one of the crowd looking on at the dog-fight down in River Street. He said he'd lost a dog, a very valuable dog, and he'd heard we'd got him. Father asked what kind of a dog, and he said yellow, and went on describing our Grip exactly, till I couldn't hold in another minute for fear father would let him have the dog. So I got round behind father's chair and whispered: "Buy him, father! buy him!"

"Fred called me a great goony, and said if I'd kept still father could have got the dog for half what he paid for him. Just because Fred is sixteen he thinks he knows every thing, and he's always lording it over me. He says I'll never make a business man—I ain't sharp enough. But I think five dollars is cheap enough for a dog that can tackle a burglar and scare off tramps and pedlars—don't you?"

CHAPTER VII.

ONE DAY IN A MODEL CITY.

"I will tell you, to-day," said Miss Ruth, after the members of her Society were quietly settled at their work, "about a race of little people who lived thousands and thousands of years ago. When the great trees were growing, out of which the coal we use was made, this race inhabited the earth as they do now in great numbers. We know this because their bodies are found perfectly preserved in pieces of coal and amber. Amber, you know, is a kind of gum that drops from certain trees and hardens, becoming very transparent and of a pretty yellow color. It is supposed that the little creatures found imbedded in it came to their death in running up the trunks of these trees, their feet sticking in the soft gum, and drop by drop trickling down on them till they were fast imprisoned in a beautiful transparent tomb.

"I remember seeing once at a museum a small black ant preserved in amber, and he looked so natural and lifelike, so like the ants we see running about to-day, that it was hard to realize that he came to his death so long, so very long ago; in fact, before this earth of ours was ready for the creation of man. What strange sights those little bead-eyes of his must have seen!

"When our ancestors were rude barbarians, living in caves and in holes they dug in the ground, the little people dwelt in cities built with wonderful skill and ingenuity; and while our forefathers were leading a rude, selfish life,—herding together, it is true, but with no organized government or fixed principles of industry and good order, living each one for himself, the strong oppressing the weak,—the little folks were ruled by a strict civil and military code. They lived together as brethren, having all things in common—were temperate, cleanly, industrious, civilized.

"Well, there are plenty of their descendants living all about us to-day, and I want you to become better acquainted with them, for they are very wise and cunning in their ways. Whenever you cross a meadow, or even when you are walking on the public road, unless you take heed to your steps, the chances are that you set your foot more than once on a little heap of loose sand that we call an ant-hill. The next time you discover the accident—I am sure you will not do it on purpose—wait a few moments and see what will happen. What you have done is to block up the main entrance to an underground city, sending a quantity of loose earth down the avenue, which the inhabitants must at great labor remove.

"Let us hope none of the little people were at that instant either leaving or entering the city by that gate, for if so, they were either killed outright or badly hurt. Soon you will see one and another citizen pushing his way through the *débris*, running wildly and excitedly about, as though greatly frightened and distressed at the state of things. Then more carefully surveying the ruins, apparently consulting together as to what is best to be done, until, a plan of action having been devised and settled upon, if you wait long enough, you will see a band of workers in an orderly, systematic manner begin to repair the damage. All this happens every time you tread on an ant-hill. If a passing animal breaks down the embankment,—a horse or a cow,—of course the injury done is much greater. In such a case every worker in the city is put to hard labor till the streets are cleared, the houses rebuilt, and all traces of the disaster removed.

"I am sure you will be interested to know what goes on from morning till night in one of these ant-cities, and I have written out on purpose to read to you this afternoon an account of one day's

proceedings. I call my paper

LIFE IN AN ANT-HILL; OR, ONE DAY IN A MODEL CITY.

"At sunrise the doors and gates were opened, and every body was awake and stirring, from the queen in her palace to the servants who brought in the meals and kept things tidy about the houses; and then, in accordance with a good old custom handed down from generation to generation, the first thing every body did on getting out of bed was to take a bath. Such a washing and scrubbing and sponging off and rubbing down as went on in every house, you can imagine. It made no difference what kind of work one was going about,—plastering, brick-laying, or digging of ditches,—like a sensible fellow, he went fresh and clean to it every day.

"Of course the queen-mother and the little princes and princesses, with a palace full of servants to wait on them, had all these offices of the toilet performed for them; but what do you think of common working folks going about from house to house to help each other wash up for the day? Fancy having a neighbor step in bright and early to wash your face and hands for you, or give you a sponge-bath, or a nice dry rub!

"After the wash came milking-time. Now, all the cows were pastured outside the city, and the servants who had the care of them hurried off as fast as they could, because the milk was needed for breakfast, especially for the babies. A beautiful road led to the milking-ground, broad and level, and so clean and well kept that not a stick or stone or rut or mud-hole was to be found in it from beginning to end. And this was true of all the streets and avenues, lanes and alleys, about the city.

"I don't know how they managed to keep them in such good condition—whether they appointed street commissioners or a committee on highways; but I wish those who have the care of the roads in Greenmeadow would take a lesson from them, so that two little girls I know needn't be kept from church so many Sundays in the spring because the mud is deep at the crossings.

"But I must tell you about the cows. There were a great many of them quietly feeding in their pleasant pasture, and they were of several different kinds. I don't know by what names their masters called them, but I do know these gentle creatures were to them just what the pretty Alderneys and Durhams are to us, and that they were treated with all the kindness and consideration the wise farmer gives to his domestic animals. There was one kind, a little white cow with queer crooked horns and quite blind. These they made pets of, not putting them out to pasture with the rest of the herd, but allowing them to walk the streets and go in and out of the houses at their pleasure, treating them much as we treat our cats and dogs.

"While the milking was going on, every cow was stroked and patted and gently caressed, and the good little creatures responded to this treatment by giving down their milk without a kick or a single toss of the horns. Such nice milk as it was—as sweet and as rich as honey! and the babies who fed on it got as fat as little pigs.

"By the time breakfast was over, the sun was well up, and all in the city went about the day's business. There was much building going on, for the place was densely populated and was growing rapidly. Great blocks were rising, story upon story, every part going on at the same time, with halls and galleries and closets and winding staircases, all connected and leading into each other, after a curious and wonderful fashion. Of course it took a great many workmen to construct these buildings—carpenters, masons, bricklayers, plasterers, besides architects and engineers; for the houses were all built on scientific principles, and there were under-ground passages to be built that required great skill and practical knowledge in their construction.

"The mortar and bricks were made outside the city gates, and all day gangs of workers journeyed back and forth to bring in supplies. They were hurrying, bustling, busy, but in good order and at perfect understanding with each other. If one stopped to exchange greetings with an acquaintance, to hear a bit of gossip perhaps, or to tell the latest news, he would pick up his load in a great hurry and start off at a round trot, as though he meant to make up for lost time. More than one overburdened worker was eased of a part of his load, some good-natured comrade adding it to his own. Thousands of bricks and as many loads of mortar were brought into the city by these industrious people every day, and their work was done quietly, thoroughly, and with wonderful quickness and precision.

"All this while there was plenty of indoor work going on; and the queen's body-guard, the babies' nurses, the attendants on the princes and princesses, the waiters and tenders, the sweepers and cleaners—all were as busy as you please. It was a pretty sight to see the nurses bring the babies out-of-doors for a sun-bath. The plump little things—some of them wrapped in mantles of white or yellow silk, others with only their skins to cover them—were laid down in soft spots on the grass, where they were watched with the tenderest care by their foster-mothers. If they were hungry, they had but to open their mouths and there was plenty of food ready for them. If so much as a breath of wind stirred the grass, or a little cloud obscured the sun, every nurse snatched a baby and scampered back with it to the nursery, lest it should take cold.

"At noon the queen, attended by her body-guard, made a royal progress through the city. She was of a portly presence, had pretty silky hair, and was dressed plainly in dark velvet. The little princesses wore ruffles and silk mantillas, of all the colors of the rainbow; but the queen-mother had far more important business to attend to than the adornment of her person, and in her self-devotion to her commonwealth had long ago, of her own free will, laid aside flounces and furbelows. What a good motherly body she was! and how devoted her subjects were to her!

Every-where she went she was followed by an admiring crowd. No home was too humble for her to enter, and under each roof she was received with the liveliest demonstrations of loyalty and delight. The happy people thronged about her. They skipped, they danced, they embraced each other in their joy. At times it was hard to restrain them within proper bounds of respect to the royal person; but the guard well understood their duties. They watched her every step, shielding and protecting her with respectful devotion. They formed a barrier about her when she rested, offered her refreshment at her first symptom of weariness, and presently conducted her in regal state back to the palace, hastening her progress at the last, that she might be spared the sight of a sad little cavalcade just then approaching the gate.

"There had been an accident to the workers employed in excavating an under-ground road. A portion of the earth-works had caved in, and two unfortunates had been buried in the ruins. Their companions, after hours of arduous and indefatigable labor, had succeeded in recovering the bodies, and were bringing them home for burial; while a third victim—still living, but grievously crushed and wounded—was borne tenderly along, with frequent stoppages by the way as his weakness required. A crowd of sympathizing neighbors and friends went out to meet the wonderful procession. Strong, willing arms relieved the weary bearers of their burden, and the sufferer was conveyed to his home, where his poor body was cleansed, and a healing ointment of wonderful efficacy and power applied to his wounds. Meanwhile the corpses were decently disposed outside the gates, awaiting burial; graves were prepared in the cemetery, and at sunset the funeral took place.

"But the day was not to end with this sad ceremony; for at twilight a sentinel ran in with the glad news that two well-beloved citizens, sent on an embassy to a distant country, and who had remained so long away that they had been given up for dead, were returning: in fact, were at that moment coming up the avenue to the gate. Then was there great rejoicing, the whole city turning out to welcome them; and the poor travelers, footsore and weary, and ready but now to lie down and die by the road-side, so spent were they by the perils and hardships they had undergone, suddenly found themselves within sight of home, surrounded by friends, companions, brothers, who embraced them rapturously, praising them for their fortitude and bravery, pitying their present weakness, caressing, cheering, comforting them. So they were brought in triumph back to their beloved city, where a banquet was prepared in honor of their return.

"So general and engrossing was the interest felt in this event, that a public calamity had well-nigh followed. The attendants on the princes and princesses (usually most vigilant and faithful), in the excitement of the occasion, forgot their charge, and the young folks instantly seized the opportunity to rush out of the city by a side gate; and when they were discovered were half-way across the meadow, and making for the wood beyond. In this wood (very dark and dreary) great danger, possibly death, would have overtaken them; but the silly things, impatient of the wholesome restraint in which, by order of the government, they were held till they should arrive at years of discretion, thought only of gaining their freedom, and were pushing on at a great pace, frisking and frolicking together as they went. They were, however, seen in time to avert the catastrophe, speedily brought back to duty, and given decidedly, though respectfully, to understand that, though scions of a royal race, they were still to consider themselves under tutors and governors.

"Then all was quiet. The gates were closed, the good little people laid themselves down to sleep, the sentinels began their watch, and night settled down upon the peaceful city. Presently the moon rose, lighting its single shapely dome, the deserted road lately trod-den by so many busy feet, and the dewy meadow where the cattle were resting.

"And now I wish we might say goodnight to the simple, kindly people whose occupations we have followed for a day, leaving them in the assurance that many such days were to follow, and that they were long to enjoy the peace and prosperity they so richly deserved. How pleasant to think of them building their houses, tending their flocks, taking care of the little ones, waiting upon their good queen, in the practice of all those virtues that make a community happy and prosperous! But, alas! this very day the chieftains of a neighboring tribe had met and planned an assault upon this quiet city that was to result in great loss of property and life, and of that which to them was far more precious than either.

"There was not the shadow of an excuse for the invasion. The hill people—a fierce, brave tribe, trained under a military government, and accustomed to fighting from their youth—had no quarrel with the citizens of the plain, who had no mind to fight with their neighbors or to interfere with any one's rights. But the hill people were slave-holders, and, whenever their establishments wanted replenishing, they sent out an army to attack some neighboring city; and if they gained the victory (as they were pretty sure to do, for they were a fierce, brave race), they would rush into every house in the city and carry off all the babies they could find, to be brought up as slaves.

"And this is what they had planned to do to the pretty city lying asleep in the moonlight on a July evening.

"They started about noon—a large body of infantry, making a fine show; for they wore polished armor as black as jet, that shone in the sun, and every one of them carried a murderous weapon. The advance guard was made up of the biggest and bravest, while the veterans, and the young soldiers who lacked experience, brought up the rear.

"They had a long wearisome march across a rocky plain and up a steep hill. Then there was a

river to cross, and on the other side a stretch of desert land, where the hot sun beat upon their heads, and where it must have been hard to keep up the rapid pace at which they marched. But they pressed on, and woe to him who stumbled and fell! for not a soldier was allowed to stop an instant to help his fallen comrade. The whole army swept on and over him, and there was no straggling from the close ranks or resting for one instant till the day's journey was accomplished.

"The last stage of the journey was through a dreary wood. Here they were exposed to many unseen dangers. Beasts of prey sprang out upon and devoured them. A big bird swooped down and carried aloft some poor wretch whose fate it was to fill the hungry maw of a baby bird. And many an unfortunate, getting entangled in a soft gray curtain of silk that hung across the path, struggled vainly to extricate himself, till the hairy monster which had woven the snare crept out of his den and cracked his bones and sucked the last drop of his blood.

"It was night when, weary and dusty, the army reached the borders of the wood. But they forgot both their fatigue and their losses by the way when they saw before them in the middle of a green meadow, its dome glittering in the light of the setting sun, the pretty, prosperous city they had braved all these dangers to rob.

"They rested that night, but were on the march soon after sunrise. A few rushed forward to surprise the sentinels on guard, while the main body of the army advanced more slowly, in solid phalanx, their brave coats-of-mail catching the early rays of the sun.

"Meanwhile the peaceful inhabitants, all unconscious of coming disaster, pursued their usual occupations—waiting on the queen-mother, milking the kine, building houses, cleaning the streets. Then came the alarm: 'The foe is at the gate!' and you should have seen of what brave stuff the little folks were made; how each one left his occupation or dropped his implement of labor, and from palace, hall, and hut, ran out to defend the beloved city. Only the queen's body-guard remained and a few of the nurses left in charge of the babies.

"And it was wonderful to mark how their courage gave them strength. Their assailants were of a taller, stronger race than they; but the little folks had the advantage in numbers, were quiet and light in their movements, and possessed a double portion of the bravery good patriots feel in the defence of the commonwealth.

"They threw themselves face to face and limb to limb upon their assailants. With their living bodies they raised a wall across the track of the army, and, as they came once and again, and yet again, they drove them back. Hundreds were slain at every onslaught, but hundreds instantly filled their places. There were plenty of single combats. One would throw himself upon his antagonist and cling there till he was cut in pieces and fell to the ground, and another and another would spring to take his place to meet the same fate. Dozens fought together—heads, legs, and bodies intertwining in an indistinguishable mass, each held in a savage grip that only loosened in death. A dozen devoted themselves to certain death for the chance of killing a single antagonist. Surely such desperate bravery, such generous heroism, deserved to gain a victory!

"But there was a sudden rush, a break in the ranks, and, lo! the little people were running back to the city,—back in all haste,—if, by any possibility, they might save from the victor's clutch the treasures they prized most. But what availed their efforts? The enemy was close behind them, forcing their way through the main entrance and the side gates, till the whole army was pouring into the devoted city.

"Can you imagine the scene that followed? The queen-mother and the young princes and princesses were left undisturbed in their apartments, but into every other house in the city, the rude soldiers rushed, searching for the poor babies. Many of them their nurses had hidden away, hoping that in the confusion their hiding-places would not be discovered; but the cunning fellows—old hands some of them at the business—seemed to know just where to look. Hundreds and hundreds of little ones were captured that day. The faithful attendants clasped and clung to them, suffering themselves to be torn in pieces before giving them up, but the sacrifice was in vain.

"The moon shone down that night upon a ghastly scene. The dead and dying strewed the ground, and the avenues leading to the city were choked with the slain. Hundreds of homes were made desolate, that only the night before were full of peaceful content.

"Meanwhile, the conquering army, laden with spoils, after another difficult and toilsome journey had reached their home. The captive babies were consigned to the care of slaves, procured long ago in a similar way, and who, apparently contented and happy, for they knew no other life, devoted all their energies to the service of their captors.

"Well, it is an old story. Ever since the world began the strong have oppressed the weak,—and ants or men, for greed or gold, will do their neighbors wrong."

"Well," said Mollie, as Miss Ruth laid down the last sheet of her manuscript, "if you hadn't told us beforehand that it was ants you were going to read about I should certainly have thought they were people. Don't they act for all the world just like folks? and who would ever think such little creatures could be so wise!"

"What I want to know," said Susie, "is, If the ant-cities are underground, how can any one see what goes on in them?"

"That is easily managed," Miss Ruth answered.

"A nest is taken up with a quantity of the earth that surrounds it, then it is cut down from the top—as you would halve a loaf of bread—and the divided parts are placed in glass cases made purposely to receive them. Of course, the little people are greatly disturbed for a time, and no wonder; but they soon grow accustomed to the new surroundings and go on with their every-day employments as if nothing had happened. The sides of the case make a fine firm wall for their city; they are furnished with plenty of food and building material, and soon they can be seen busy at work clearing their streets, building houses, feeding the babies, and quite contented and happy in their glass city. If, after months of separation, an ant from one half of the divided nest should be put into the other he would be recognized at once and welcomed with joy; but if a stranger were introduced he would be attacked and probably killed."

"We had a great time with the ants at our house last summer," said Eliza Jones: "little mites of red things, you know, and they *would* get into the cake-chest and the sugar-bucket, and bothered ma so she had to keep all the sweet things on a table with its legs in basins of water. They couldn't get over that, you see."

"Why not?" Mollie asked. "Can't they swim?"

"Ours couldn't; lots of them fell in the water and were drowned."

"Ants are usually quite helpless in the water," Miss Ruth said, "though a French writer who has made the little folks a study, tells a story of six soldier ants who rescued their companions from drowning. He put his sugar-basin in a vessel of water, and several adventurous ants climbed to the ceiling and dropped into it. Four missed their aim and fell outside the bowl in the water. Their companions tried in vain to rescue them, then went away and presently returned accompanied by six grenadiers, stout fellows, who immediately swam to their relief, seized them with their pincers and brought them to land. Three were apparently dead, but the faithful fellows licked and rubbed them quite dry, rolling them over and over, stretching themselves on them, and in a truly skillful and scientific manner sought to bring back life to their benumbed bodies. Under this treatment three came to life, while one only partly restored was carefully borne away. 'I have seen it' is Du Pont de Nervours's comment on what he thinks may be considered a marvelous story, though it seems no more wonderful to me than many well-attested facts in the lives of the little people."

"It's all wonderful," Susie said. "It seems as though they must think and reason and plan just as we do. Don't you think so, Auntie?"

"Indeed I do, Susie. One who has long studied their ways ranks them next to man in the scale of intelligence, and says the brain of an ant—no larger perhaps than a fine grain of sand—must be the most wonderful particle of matter in the world."

"But they can't talk, Auntie?"

"I am not so sure of that. Their voices may be too fine and high-pitched for our great ears to hear. I fancy there is a deal of conversation carried on in the grass and the bushes and the trees, that we know nothing about."

"How funny! What did you mean, Auntie, when you said the queen laid off all her flounces and furbelows."

"I was rather fancifully describing her wings, dear, which she takes off herself when she enters the nest, having no further use for them. There are three kinds of ants in every nest: perfect males and females, and the workers. There are many different races of ants, from the great white ant of Africa—a terror to the natives, though in some respects his good friend—down to the little red-and-yellow meadow ants so common among us. The ants I have told you about, the Rufians and the Fuscans, are natives of America, and are found in New England. The big black ant so common here, sometimes called the jet ant, is a carpenter and a wood-carver. His great jaws bore through the hardest wood, and his pretty galleries and winding staircases penetrate through the beams and rafters of many an old mansion. Not long ago I accidentally killed a carpenter ant, and in a few minutes a comrade appeared who slowly, and apparently with great labor and fatigue, bore away the body. I felt as though I were looking on at a funeral."

"I wish I had time to tell you about the agricultural ant of Texas, and the umbrella ants of Florida, who cut bits of leaf from the orange-trees and march home with them in procession, holding each leaf in an upright position. Fancy how odd they must look! But we have talked long enough for this time about the little people, and I am sure you all agree with King Solomon that they are 'exceeding wise.'"

"I never will step on an ant-hill again if I can possibly help it," said Susie. "It's too bad to make those hard-working folks so much trouble."

"And I mean to put my ear close down to the ground," said Nellie Dimock, "and listen and listen, so as to hear the ants talk to each other."

CHAPTER VIII.

THE STORY OF OLD STAR.

"Say, Sam!" said Roy Tyler, as the two boys were driving old Brindle home from pasture the next evening, "don't you wish she'd tell us some stories about horses? I'm tired of hearing about cats and ants."

"Well, I don't know," Sammy answered; "'twas funny about old Robber Grim. There's just such an old cat round our barn, catchin' chickens and suckin' eggs. I've fired more rocks at that feller—hit him once in the hind leg an' he went off limpin'."

"Well, I want a horse story, and I know she'd just as soon tell one as not, if somebody would only ask her. Those girls will be wantin' another cat story if we don't start something else. Girls always do like cats," said Roy, a little scornfully. "Say, Sam, you ask her, will you?"

"Why don't you ask her yourself?"

"Oh, I don't know. I tried to yesterday, but somehow I couldn't get it out."

"Well, I'll tell you what I will do," said good-natured Sammy. "You come round to-night after I get my chores done up, and we'll go together and have it over with."

"All right; I'll come," said Roy.

They found Miss Ruth alone, for it was Thursday night and the minister's family were at the prayer-meeting. The September evening was chilly, and she was sitting before an open fire.

"You do the talking," Roy whispered at the door, and accordingly Sammy, after fidgeting in his seat a little, opened the subject.

"Roy wants me to ask you," he began, and then stopped at a punch in the side from Roy's knuckles, and began again: "Me and Roy would like—if it wouldn't be too much trouble, and you'd just as soon as not—to have you tell us a horse story next time." Then in a loud whisper aside to Roy: "You *did* ask me! You know you did."

"Well, you needn't put it all on me, if I did," Roy answered, in the same tone.

Miss Ruth appeared not to notice this by-play.

"A horse story," she said pleasantly; "yes, why not?"

"You see," Sammy continued, "we like to hear about cats well enough, and that ant battle was first-rate—I'd like to have seen it, I know; but Roy, he says the girls might be writin' notes askin' you to tell more cat stories and—and—well"—

"Yes, I see," she said; "too much of a good thing. Well, I will tell no more cat stories, and it shall be all horse next Wednesday. Will that suit you, Sammy? And Roy, do you like horses very much?"

"Yes, 'm," said Roy, bashfully.

"He says," said Sammy, rather enjoying the office of spokesman, "when he grows up he means to have a fast trotter. I'd like to own a good horse myself," continued Sam.

"I know a boy about your age," said Miss Ruth, "whose father gave him, for a birthday present, a Canadian pony; a funny looking little beast, not much larger than a big dog, but strong enough to carry double Herbert's weight."

"Like the Shetland ponies at the show?"

"Yes; but larger, and not so costly. He is a thick-set, shaggy fellow, always looking as if he were not half-groomed, with his coat all rough and tumbled, his legs covered with thick hair, his mane hanging on both sides of his neck, and his forelock always getting into his bright little eyes."

"What color?" said Roy.

"Dark brown; not handsome, but so affectionate and intelligent that you would love him dearly. He is as frolicsome as a kitten, and I laughed and laughed again to see him racing round the yard, hardly able to see for the shag of hair tumbling over his eyes, playing queer tricks and making uncouth gambols, more like a big puppy than a small horse. To be sure he has a will of his own, and has more than once—just for fun—thrown his young master over his head; but he always stands stock still till the boy is on his back again, and as Herbert says: 'It is only a little way to fall from his back to the ground.'"

"How fast will he go?" Roy asked.

"Fast enough for a boy to ride. From five to seven miles an hour, perhaps, and keep it up all day, if need be, for the Canadian horses have great strength and endurance. The last time I saw Herbert he told me a pretty story about Elf King."

"Is that his name?"

"Yes; isn't it a pretty name? Elf for fairy, you know, and King for the head of the fairies. But perhaps I am keeping you, boys. Is there any thing you ought to be doing at home?"

"No, no!" both answered together, and Sammy answered that he did up all his chores before he

came away.

"Very well; then I will tell you about Elf King's visit to the blacksmith."

"Instead of next Wednesday?"

"Oh, dear, no! I have a long story for next Wednesday. This is very short, and doesn't count; is just a little private entertainment thrown in on our own account."

Roy, who had all this time sat uncomfortably on the edge of his chair, settled back, and Sammy made use of his favorite expression:—

"All right!"

"When Elf King came into Herbert's possession he had never been shod; but very soon he was taken to the village blacksmith and four funny little shoes fitted to his feet, which, when he was accustomed to, he liked very much.

"One day the blacksmith saw the pony trotting up to his shop without a halter. He supposed the little thing had strayed from home, and drove him off, and when he refused to go, threw stones at him to make him run away. But in a few moments back he came again. When the blacksmith went out a second time to drive him off he noticed his feet and saw that one shoe was missing. So he made a shoe, the pony standing by, quietly waiting. When the new shoe was fitted Elf King pawed two or three times to see if it felt comfortable, gave a pleased little neigh, as much as to say, 'Yes, that's all right; thank you!' and started for home on a brisk trot.

"Think how surprised and pleased Herbert was when he went to the stable to ride Elf King to the blacksmith's, to find that the sharp little pony had taken the business into his own hands."

"I tell you," said Roy, "that's a horse worth having. What do you suppose that boy would take for him?"

"More money than you could raise in a hurry," said Sammy. "Miss Ruth, if you had a horse now that jibbed, would you lick him?"

"That jibbed," she repeated doubtfully.

"Why, yes; stopped in the road, you know; wouldn't go."

"Oh, yes; now I understand. No, indeed, Sammy! If I had a horse that—jibbed, I should be very patient with him and try to cure him of the bad habit by kindness. I should know that beating would make him worse."

"Well, that's what I think, and the other day pa and I were huskin' corn in the barn, and there was a horse jibbed on our hill, and the driver got down and licked him with the butt end of his whip, and kicked him with his great cowhide boots, and I asked pa if I might take out a measure of oats and see if I couldn't coax that horse to take his load up the hill—you see pa owned a jibber once and I knew how he used to manage him. And pa said I might, only I'd better look out or the fellow would use me as he was usin' the horse. But I wasn't afraid, for he was half-drunk, and I knew I could clip it faster'n he could.

"Well, sir, I went out there and I stood around a while, and says I, 'What'll you bet I can't get your horse to the top of the hill?' And he said he wouldn't bet a red cent. 'Well,' says I, 'will you let me try just for fun?' and he said, 'Yes, I might try all day if I wanted to.' And I got him to stand one side, where the horse couldn't see him, and I went up to the horse's head and stroked his nose and gave him a handful of oats, just a little taste, you know, and when he was kind of calmed down I went a ways ahead holdin' out the measure of oats, and if that horse didn't follow me up that hill just as quiet as an old sheep, and the man he stood by and looked streaked, I tell you!"

Sammy told his story with considerable animation and some forcible gestures.

"That was well done," said Miss Ruth, "and I hope the cruel fellow profited by the lesson you gave him. I don't think I'm naturally vindictive, but when I see a man beating a horse I find myself wishing I was strong enough to snatch the whip from him and lay it well about his own shoulders. But come, boys, the fire is down to coals—just right for popping corn. Sammy, you know the way to the kitchen. Ask Lovina for the corn-popper and a dish, and, Roy, you'll find a paper bag full of corn in the cupboard yonder. Quick, now, and we'll have the dish piled by the time Susie and Mollie are back from meeting."

"Haven't we had a gay old time," said Roy, on the way home, "and ain't you glad I put you up to coming, Sam Ray?" And Sammy admitted that he was.

"Now, girls and boys," said Miss Ruth, on the next Wednesday afternoon, "I am going to take you on a long journey,—in fancy, I mean,—over the hills and plains and valleys, to the country of the Far West, with its rolling prairies and big fields of wheat and corn. You shall be set down in a green meadow, with a stream running through it, shallow and clear at this time of year, but a little later, when the September rains have filled it, rushing along full of deep, muddy water.

"Under a big oak in about the middle of the pasture you will find an old horse feeding. He is fat

and sleepy looking, and has a kind face, and a white spot on his forehead. This is Old Star, Farmer Horton's family-horse. You may pat his neck and stroke his nose and feed him a cookie or a bit of gingerbread,—I am afraid the old fellow hasn't teeth enough left to chew an apple,—and then you may sit near him on the grass, and while I read aloud to you, fancy that he is talking, and, if you have plenty of imagination, you will get

THE STORY OF OLD STAR, TOLD BY HIMSELF.

"I hope nobody thinks I am turned out in this pasture because I am too old to work. Horses pass here every day drawing heavy loads, older by half a dozen years than I am, poor broken-down hacks too, most of them, while I—well, if it wasn't for a little stiffness in the joints and a giving out of wind, now and then, I can't see but what I'm as well able to travel as I ever was.

"The fact is, I never was put to hard work. There were always horses enough besides me on the place to do the farm work and the teaming—Tom and Jerry and the colt, you know; not Filly's colt: he died, poor thing, before he was a year old, of that disease with a long name that carried off so many horses all over the country: but a great shambling big-boned beast old master swapped a yoke of steers for, over to Skipton Mills. We called him Goliath, he was so tall: strong as an elephant, too: a powerful hand at a horse-rake and mowing-machine. Well, well, how time flies, to be sure! He's been dead and gone these five years, and Tom and Jerry, they were used up long ago—there's a deal of hard work to be done on a farm of this size, I can tell you; and as to Filly, she came to a sad end, for she got mired down in the low pasture, and had to be hauled out with ropes, poor critter, and died of the wet and the cold.

"Well, as I was saying, I never was put to hard work. I was born and raised on the place, and I do suppose—though I say it, who shouldn't—that I was an uncommon fine—looking colt, dark chestnut in color, and not a white hair on me except this spot in my forehead that gave me my name. When I was three months old, master made a present of me to his oldest boy on his sixteenth birthday, and every half-hour Master Fred could spare from his work, he used to spend in dressing down and feeding me and teaching me cunning tricks. I could take an apple or a lump of sugar from his pocket, walk down the slope behind the barn on two legs, with my forefeet on his shoulders, and shake hands, old master used to say, 'just like a Christian.'

"Master Fred set great store by me, as well he might. He's traveled hundreds of miles on my back over the prairies, and we've been out together many a dark night when he'd drop the lines on my neck and say, "Well, Star, go ahead if you know the way, for not one inch can I see before my nose." That was after he learned by experience that I knew better than he did where to go, and when to stop going. For he lost his temper and called me hard names one night, when I stopped short in the middle of the road and wouldn't budge an inch for voice or whip, with the wind blowing a gale, and the rain coming down in bucketsful. But when a flash of lightning showed the bridge before us clean washed away, and only a few feet between us and the steep bank of the river, Master Fred changed his tune. Afraid! not I; but I'm willing to own I *was* a little scared the day we got into the water down by Cook's Cove, for you see I was hitched to the buggy and the lines got tangled about my legs, and there were chunks of ice and lots of driftwood floating about, and the current sucking me down; but master had got to shore and stood on the bank calling, "This way, Star, this way!" and when I heard his voice I—well, I don't know how I managed to do it, but I turned square round and swam upstream with the buggy behind me, and got safe and sound to land. I've heard Master Fred say my back was covered with river-grass, and I trembled all over with the fright and the hard pull.

"But, dear me, all that happened long ago when master was courting old Tim Bunce's daughter Martha, down Stony Creek Road. How that girl did take to me! She used to say she knew the sound of my hoofs on the road, of a still night, when we were a mile away; and she'd say over a little rhyme she'd got hold of somehow:—

'Star, Star, good and bright,
I wish you may and I wish you might
Bring somebody to me I want to see to-night.'

"If she said that twice, looking straight down the road, she told us we were sure to come. She was a plump rosy-cheeked girl when Master Fred brought her to be mistress here, though you mightn't think it to see her now, what with the cooking and the dairy-work and raising a big family of children. But if you want to know what mistress was like twenty years ago, you've only to look at our Ada.

"Now, there's a girl for you, as good as she is pretty, and getting to be a woman grown; though I remember, as though it happened yesterday, her mother's coming out one spring day to where I was nibbling grass in the door-yard, with her baby in her arms, and holding up the little thing to me, and saying, 'This is Ada, Star,—you must be good friends with Ada,' Friends! I should say so. Before that child was a year old, she used to cry to be held on my back for a ride, and when she was getting better of the scarlet fever, she kept saying, 'Me 'ant to tee ole 'Tar,' till, to pacify her, they led me to the open window of the room where she lay, and she reached her mite of a hand from the bed to stroke my nose and give me the lump of sugar she had saved for me under her pillow.

"Bless the child! And it was just so with all the rest, Tim and Martha and Fred and Jenny and baby May—there was a new baby in that house every year. Those young ones would crawl over me, and sit on me, when I was lying down in the stable; ride me, three or four at a time, without

bridle or saddle, and cling to my neck and tail when there was no room left on my back. They shared their apples and gingerbread with me, and brought me goodies on a plate sometimes so that I might eat my dinner, they said, 'like the rest of the folks,' I fetched them to and from school, and trotted every day to the post-office and the Corners to do the family errands; and when our Ada was old enough to be trusted to drive, the whole lot of them would pile into the carryall, and away we would go for a long ride, through the lanes and the shady woods that border the pond, stopping a dozen times for the girls to clamber out and pick the wild posies and for the boys to skip stones or wade in the water. For *I* was in no hurry to go on. There was plenty of tender grass to be cropped by the roadside, and the young leaves of the maples and white birch were sweet and juicy.

"Take good care of them, Star,' mistress used to say, standing in the door-way to see us off; 'you have a precious load, but we trust you, kind, faithful old friend,'

"And so she might. I knew I must just creep down the hills with those children behind me, and never stop for a drink at Rocky Brook, though I were ever so thirsty, because of the sharp pitch down to the watering-trough. And though from having been scared nearly to death, when I was a colt, by a wheelbarrow in the road, I always *have* to shy a little when I see one, our Ada will tell you, if you ask her, that in the circumstances, I behaved very well.

"*She* behaved well. She always chose the well-traveled roads, and gave me plenty of room to turn. Once, I remember, they all wanted to take a short cut by way of an old corduroy road; and though, if master had been driving, I should have made no objection, and, as like as not, with a little jolting and pitching, we should have got safe over, I didn't feel like taking the responsibility, with all those young ones along, of going that way; so I tried to make our Ada understand the state of my mind, and after a while she did; for she said: 'Well, Star, if you don't want to draw us over those logs, I'm not going to make you,' Now, wasn't that sensible?

"Well, if I was proud and happy to be trusted with master's family on week-days, think how I must have felt of a Sunday morning in the summer time, with mistress dressed in her silk gown, and our Ada in muslin and pink ribbons, and the boys in their best clothes, and master riding alongside on Tom or Jerry, all going to meeting together. I liked hearing the bells ring, and I liked being hitched under the maple-trees, with all the neighbors' horses to keep me company. We generally dozed while the folks were indoors, and woke up brisk and lively, and started for home in procession.

"But, dear! dear! there came a time when, with five horses on the farm, not one could be had to give the children a ride or to do a stroke of work, when master had to foot it to the Corners, and the two steers, Old Poke and Eyebright, dragged mistress and the children to meeting in the ox-cart.

"For we were all down with the epizoötic, coughing and sneezing enough to take our heads off, and so sick and low, some of us, that we couldn't stand in our stalls, and a man with a red face, Master Fred had over from Skipton Mills, pouring nasty stuff down our throats, and making us swallow big black balls of medicine that hurt as they went down—as if we hadn't enough to suffer before! But our Jenny came to the stable with a piece of pork-rind, and a bandage she'd made out of her little red-flannel petticoat, and she wanted Master Fred to put it on my neck; for, says she: 'That's what ma put on me when I had the sore throat,'—the blessed child!

"Well, we all pulled through except Filly's colt. He keeled over one morning, poor fellow! and was dragged out and buried under the oaks in the high pasture. But for some reason, I didn't pick up as quick as the others. The cough held on, and I was pestered for breath, and I didn't get back my strength; and what I ate didn't seem to fatten me up much, for Master Fred says one day, laughing, 'Well, Old Star, we've saved your skin and bones, and that's about all!' However, I got round again, only my legs had a bad habit of giving way under me, without the least bit of warning.

"Our Ada did all she could to keep me up, holding a tight rein, and saying, 'Steady, Star! steady!' when she saw any signs of stumbling. But trying to keep from it seemed to make me do it all the more, and down I would come on my poor knees and spill those children out of the wagon, like blackberries from a full basket.

"One day, after this had happened, master told our Ada she was not to drive me any more, and before I had got over feeling bad about that, there came some thing a great deal worse; for I was standing by the pump in the backyard one day, and master and mistress were in the porch, and I heard him tell her he had had an offer from Jones the milkman, to buy me. 'Twould be an easy place, and he'd promised to treat me well, and he'd about made up his mind to take up with it; for he couldn't afford to keep a horse on the place that—well, I don't care to repeat the rest of the speech. 'Twas rather hard on me, but I haven't laid it up against master. Fact is, he had a deal to worry him about that time, for he was disappointed in the wheat crop, and the heavy rains had damaged his corn, and he was feeling mighty poor.

"But mistress was up in arms in a minute. 'What, sell Star!' says she, 'our good, faithful Star, who's been in the family ever since you were a boy! and to Ki Jones to peddle milk round Skipton Mills and Hull Station! O pa!' says mistress, says she, 'have we got down so low as that? Why 't would break our Ada's heart, and mine too, to see Star hitched to a milk-cart. Rather than have you do that, says she, 'I'll go in rags, and keep the children on mush and molasses;' and she put her apron to her eyes.

"Well, well, don't fret!' says master,—and I thought he looked kind o' ashamed,—'I haven't sold him yet I've a notion to turn him out to grass a while, and see what that'll do for him,' So the next day he put me in this pasture.

"You see that plank bridge yonder, over the creek? That's where our Ada fell into the water. Master has put up a railing, and made all safe since the accident happened. 'T was a risky place always, though the children have crossed it hundreds of times, and none of them ever tumbled over before.

"But I hadn't been here a week, when one sunshiny afternoon our Ada came through the pasture, on her way to visit the sick Simmonses—there's always some of that tribe down with the chills. She came running up to me—her little basket, full of goodies, on her arm,—stopped to talk a minute and feed me an apple, and then passed along, while I went on nibbling grass, till I heard a scream and a splash, and knew, all in a minute, she must have fallen off the plank bridge into the water. Dear! dear! what was to be done? I ran to the fence, and looked up and down the road. Some men were burning brush at the far end of the next field. I galloped toward them, and back again to the creek, and whinnied and snorted, and tried my best to make them understand that they were needed; but they didn't appear to notice, and I just made up my mind, that if any thing was done to save our Ada from drowning, I was the one to do it.

"I made my way through the alder-bushes down by the bank, to a place where the current sets close in shore. At first I couldn't see any thing, then all at once, there floated on the muddy water close to me, the little red shawl she wore, then a hand and arm, and her white face and brown hair all streaming. I caught at her clothes, and though Ada is a stout girl of her age, and the wet things added a deal to her weight, I lifted her well out of the water. I remember thinking, 'If only my poor legs don't give out, I shall do very well,' And they didn't give out, for when help came—it seems those men in the field *had* noticed me, and came to see what was the matter—they found me all in a lather of sweat, and my eyes starting out of their sockets, but with my feet braced against a rock, keeping our Ada's head and shoulders well above water.

"They got her home as quick as they could, and put her to bed between hot blankets, and the next day she was none the worse for her ducking, though she carried the print of my teeth in her tender flesh for many a day; for how was I to know where the child's clothes left off and her side began.

"Of course they made a great fuss over me. Mistress came running to meet me, and put both arms around my neck, and said: 'O Star, you have saved our darling's life!' and the little ones hugged and kissed me, and the boys took turns rubbing me down; and I stood knee deep in my stall that night in fresh straw, and besides my measure of oats, had a warm mash, three cookies, and half a pumpkin-pie for my supper.

"But master only patted my neck, and said: 'Well done, Old Star!' Master Fred and I always did understand one another.

"There hasn't been any thing more said about selling me to Ki Jones. In the winter I have a stall at the south side of the stable, where I get the sun at my window all day, and in summer I live in this pasture, with shady trees, and cool water, and grass and clover-tops in plenty. I have nothing to do the live-long day, but to eat and drink and enjoy myself; but I do hope folks passing along the road don't think I'm turned out in this field because I'm too old to work."

"Good-by, Old Star!" said Mollie, as her aunt laid down the paper. "We are much obliged for your nice story, and we hope you'll live ever so many years. I wouldn't hint for the world that you aren't as smart as you used to be."

"Isn't he rather a self-conceited old horse?" said Nellie Dimock.

"Well, yes; but that is natural. I suppose he has been more or less spoiled and petted all his life."

"When he told about going to meeting," Fannie Eldridge said, "it reminded me of a story mamma tells, of an old horse up in Granby, that went to church one Sunday all by himself."

"How droll! How did it happen, Fannie?"

"Why, he belonged to two old ladies who went to church always, and exactly at such a time every Sunday morning Dobbin was hitched to the chaise and brought round to the front door and Miss Betsey and Miss Sally got in and drove to church. But one Sunday something hindered them, and Dobbin waited and waited till the bell stopped ringing and all the other horses which attended church had gone by; and at last he got clear out of patience, and started along without them. Mamma says the people laughed to see him trot up to the church-door and down to the sheds and walk straight into his own place, and when service was over back himself out and trot home again."

"What did Miss Betsey and Miss Sally do?"

"Oh, they had to stay at home. When they came out they saw the old chaise ever so far off, going toward the church, and they felt pretty sure old Dobbin was going to meeting on his own account. That is a true story Miss Ruth, every word of it—mamma says so."

"Our old Ned cheated us all last summer," said Florence Austin, "by pretending to be lame. He really was made lame, at first, one day when mamma was driving, by getting a stone in his foot,

and she turned directly and walked him all the way back to the stable. But when William had taken out the stone, he seemed to be all right, and the next afternoon mamma and Alice and I started for a drive. We got about a mile out of town, when all at once Ned began to limp. Mamma and Alice got out of the phaeton, and looked his feet all over, for they thought may be he had picked up another stone; but they couldn't see the least thing out of the way, only that he limped dreadfully as if it half-killed him to go. Well, there was nothing to be done but to give up our drive; for we couldn't bear to ride after a lame horse!"

"I can't either!" Mollie interjected.

"Well, he had been lately shod, and our coachman thought that perhaps a nail from one of the shoes pricked his foot, so he started to take him to the blacksmith's. But don't you think, as soon as Ned knew that William was driving, he started off at a brisk trot and wasn't the least bit lame I but the next time mamma took him out, he began to limp directly, and kept looking round as much as to say: 'How can you be so cruel as to make me go, when you must see every step I take hurts me?' But when mamma came home with him again, William said: 'It's chatin' you he is, marm.'"

"And what did your mother do?"

"Well, as soon as she made up her mind that he was shamming, she took no notice of his little trick, but touched him up with the whip, and made him go right along. He knew directly that she had found him out. Oh, he is *such* a knowing horse! The other day Alice was leading him through the big gate, to give him a mouthful of grass in the door-yard. Alice likes to lead him about. When he stepped on her gown, and she held it up to him all torn, and scolded him, she said: 'O Ned! aren't you ashamed of yourself? how could you be so clumsy and awkward?' and she said he dropped his head and looked so sorry and ashamed, as if he wanted to say: 'Oh, I beg pardon! I didn't mean to do it,' that she really pitied him, and answered as if he had spoken: 'Well, don't worry, Ned; it's of no consequence,' Ned is such a pet. Papa got him in Canada, on purpose for mamma and Alice to drive; and it was so funny when he first came—he didn't understand a word of English, not even whoa. He belonged to a Frenchman way up the country, and had never been in a large town, and acted so queer—like a green countryman, you know, turning his head and staring at all the sights. And it's lovely to see him play in the snow. He was brought up in the midst of it, you know. When there's a snow-storm he's wild to be out of the stable, and the deeper the drifts, the better pleased he is. He plunges in and rolls over and over, and rears and dances. Oh, it is too funny to see him! But I beg pardon, Miss Ruth! I didn't mean to talk so long about Ned."

"We are all glad to hear about him," she said, and Susie added that it was very interesting.

"My Uncle John owned a horse," said Roy Tyler, "that opened a gate and a barn-door to get to the oat-bin, and he shut the barn-door after him too. I guess you can't any of you tell how he did that!"

"He jumped the gate, and shoved his nose in the crack of the door and pried it open," said Sammy.

"No, he didn't. That wouldn't be *opening* the gate, would it?" Roy retorted. "And how did he shut it after him?"

"I think you had better tell us, Roy," said Miss Ruth.

"Well, he reached over the fence, and lifted the latch with his teeth, that's how he opened the gate; and he shut it by backing up against it till it latched itself. Then he pulled out the wooden pin of the barn-door, and it swung open by its own weight—see?"

"Well, pa had a horse that slipped his halter and shoved up the cover of the oat-bin, when he got hungry in the night and wanted a lunch," said Sammy; "and I read about a horse the other day which turned the water-tap when he wanted a drink, and pulled the stopper out of the pipe over the oat-bin, just as he 'd seen the coachman do, so the oats would come down, and"—

"But really now," Ruth Elliot, interrupted, "interesting and wonderful as all this is, we must stop somewhere. I have another story to tell you, about a minister's horse, but it can wait over till next week. Lay aside your work, girls; it is past five o'clock."

CHAPTER IX.

TUFTY AND THE SPARROWS.

Florence Austin came early to the Society the next Wednesday afternoon, and found Miss Ruth on the piazza,

"I am glad to see you, Florence," she said. "I was just wishing for a helper. Mollie and Susie have gone on an errand, and I am alone in the house, and here is a whole family in trouble that I can't relieve."

"What is the matter?" said the little girl.

"A baby bird has fallen out of the nest, and I am too lame to-day to venture down the steps; and papa and mamma are in great distress, and the babies in the nest half-starved, and can't have their dinner because the old birds dare not leave poor chippy a moment lest some stray cat should get him. See the little thing down there in the grass just under the woodbine!"

Florence descended the piazza-steps at two jumps, and was back with the young bird in her hand.

"Now where shall I put him, Miss Ruth?"

Ruth Elliot pointed out the nest. It was in the thickest growth of the woodbine, just over their heads; and when Florence had climbed in a chair, she had her first look at a nest of young birds. The little city girl was delighted.

"How cunning!" she exclaimed. "Oh, how awfully cunning! four in all—three of them with their mouths wide open. No wonder this little fellow got pushed out. Here, you droll little specimen, crowd in somewhere! He isn't hurt at all, for he seems as lively as any of them."

As Florence jumped down from the chair, Susie and Mollie and the Jones girls came up the walk.

"What are you two doing?" Mollie called out.

"Florence has just restored a lost baby to his distressed family," her aunt answered. "Come into the house, girls, and let papa and mamma Chippy get over their fright and look after the babies. Florence, I am greatly obliged to you. I should have felt very sorry if harm had come to the little one, for I have watched that nest ever since the old birds began to build."

The little girl replied politely that she was glad she had been of use.

"I know what chippies' nests are made of," said Mollie: "fine roots and fibers, and lined beautifully with soft fine hair,"

"Did you watch the birds while they were making it, Mollie?"

"No; but one night after tea, when Auntie and Susie and I were playing at choosing birds,—telling which bird we liked best and why, you know,—papa came along and said: 'I choose the chirping sparrow for my bird'; and when we laughed at him and called for his reasons (because chippies are such insignificant things, you know, and no singers), he told us he liked them because they were tame and friendly, and because they built such neat, pretty nests; and he pulled an old nest he had saved in pieces, and showed us how it was put together."

"Yes," said Susie; "and the other reason he gave for liking them best was, that they got up early and rang the rising-bell for all the other birds. That was such a funny reason for papa to give, for we all know he dearly loves his morning nap."

"Really, now, do the chippies get up first in the morning?" said Florence.

"With the first peep of day," Miss Ruth answered. "This morning I heard their cheerful twitter before a ray of light had penetrated to my room; and a welcome sound it was, for it told me the long night was over. One dear little fellow sang two or three strains before he succeeded in waking any body; then a robin joined in, in a sleepy kind of way; then two or three wrens, and then a cat-bird; and, last of all, my little weather-bird, which, from the topmost branches of the elm-tree, warbled out to me that it was a pleasant day. Oh, what a sweet concert they all gave me before the sun rose!"

"I never heard of a weather-bird, Aunt Ruth."

"Your Uncle Charlie gave him that name, Susie, when we were children. His true name is Warbling Verio; but we used to fancy the little fellow announced what kind of day it would be. If clear he called out: 'Pleasant day!' three times over, with a pause between each sentence and a long-drawn-out Yes at the close; or, if it rained, he said 'Rainy day' or 'Windy day,' describing the weather, whatever it might be, always with an emphatic *Yes*.

"One day he talked to me, but it was not about the weather. Things had gone wrong with me all the morning. I had spoken disrespectfully to my grandmother, and had been so cross and impatient with baby Walter that mother had taken him from me, though she could ill spare the time to tend him. Then I ran through the garden to a little patch of woods behind the house, and sat on an old log, in a very bad humor.

"Presently, high above my head in the branches of the walnut-tree, the weather-bird began his monotonous strain. I paid no attention to him at first, I was so taken up with my own disagreeable thoughts, till it came to me all at once that he was not telling me it was a pleasant day, though the sun was shining gloriously and a lovely breeze rustled the green leaves. What was it the little bird was saying over and over again, as plain as plain could be? 'NAUGHTY GIRL! NAUGHTY GIRL! NAUGHTY GIRL! Y-E-S.'

"I rubbed my eyes and pinched my arm, to make sure I was awake; for I thought I must have dreamed it. But no, there it was again, sweet, sad, reproachful: 'NAUGHTY GIRL! NAUGHTY GIRL! NAUGHTY GIRL! Y-E-S,'

"I jumped up in a rage, and called it a horrid thing; and when it wouldn't stop, but kept on

reproaching me with my evil behavior, I could bear it no longer, but put my fingers in my ears and ran back to the house and up to my own room, where I cried with anger and shame. But solitude and reflection soon brought me to a better state of mind; and, long before the day was over, I had confessed my fault and was forgiven. But though I wanted very much to see a new water-wheel Charlie set up that afternoon in the brook, I dared not go through the wood to get to it, lest that small bird should still be calling, 'Naughty girl! Y-e-s.'

"Charlie grumbled the next morning when I wakened him out of a sound sleep by shouting gayly from my little bed in the next room that his weather-bird was calling, 'Pleasant day!' 'Why, what *should* he call,' he wanted to know, 'with the sun shining in at both windows?'

"I never told my brother how the bird had given voice to my accusing conscience, nor has the lesson ever been repeated; for from that day to this the Warbling Verio has made no more personal remarks to me."

"There's a bird down in Maine" said Ann Eliza Jones, "they call the Yankee bird, 'cause he keeps saying, 'All day whittling—whittling—whittling.'"

"Yes; and the quails there always tell the farmers when they must hurry and get in their hay," said her sister. "When it's going to rain they sing out: 'More wet! more wet!' and 'No more wet!' when it clears off."

"Aunt Ruth," said Mollie, "please tell us about the funny little bantam rooster who used to call to his wife every morning: 'Do—come out—n-o-w!'"

"Very well; but we are getting so much interested in this bird-talk that we are making rather slow progress with our work. Suppose we all see how much we can accomplish in the next ten minutes."

Upon this Mollie caught up the block lying in her lap, Florence re-threaded her needle, Nellie Dimock hunted up her thimble, which had rolled under the table, and industry was the order of the day.

And while they worked, Miss Ruth told the story of

THE WIDOW BANTAM.

"She belonged to our next-door neighbor, and we called her the Widow because her mate—a fine plucky little bantam rooster—was one day slain while doing battle with the great red chanticleer who ruled the hen-yard.

"I took pity on the little hen in her loneliness, and singled her out from the flock for special attention. She very soon knew my voice, would come at my call, and used to slip through a gap in the fence and pay me a visit every day. If the kitchen door were open she walked in without ceremony; if closed, she flew to the window, tapped on the glass with her bill, flapped her wings, and gave us clearly to understand that she wished to be admitted. Once inside, she set up a shrill cackling till I attended to her wants, and scolded me at the top of her voice if I kept her long waiting. When she had eaten more cracked corn and Indian meal than you would think so small a body could contain, she walked about in a slow, contented way, and was ready for all the petting we chose to give her.

"She was a pretty creature, with a speckled coat and a comb the color of red coral: very small, but lively and vigorous, and exhibiting in all her movements both grace and stateliness. She would nestle in my lap, take a ride on my shoulder, and walk the length of my arm to peck at a bit of cake in my hand, regarding me all the while with a queer sidelong glance, and croaking out her satisfaction and content. When she was ready to go she walked to the kitchen door, and asked in a very shrill voice to be let out. She continued these visits till late in the fall, when she was shut up with the rest of our neighbor's flock for the winter.

"One bitter cold day in January we heard a faint cackle outside, and, opening the kitchen door, found our poor widow in a sorry plight. One foot was frozen, her feathers were all rough and dirty, her wings drooping, her bright comb changed to a dull red. How she escaped from the hen-house, surmounted the high fence, and hobbled or flew to our door, we did not know; but there she was, half-dead with hunger and cold.

"We did what we could for her. I bathed and bandaged the swollen foot, and made a warm bed for her in a box in the shed, from which she did not offer to stir for many days. I fed her with bits of bread soaked in warm milk, and Charlie said, nursed and tended her as if she had been a sick baby. She was very gentle and patient, poor thing! and allowed me to handle her as I pleased, always welcomed my coming with a cheerful little cackle, and, as she got stronger, trotted after me about the shed and kitchen like a pet kitten.

"In the spring, when she was quite well again, I restored her to her rightful owner. Perhaps she had grown weary of her solitary life, for she seemed delighted to rejoin her old companions; but every day she made us a visit, and at night came regularly to roost in the shed.

"One morning we heard two voices instead of one outside our window, and behold! Mrs. Bantam had taken another mate—a fine handsome fellow, so graceful in form and brilliant in plumage that we at once pronounced him a fit companion to our favorite hen. They were evidently on the best of terms, croaking and cackling to each other, and exchanging sage opinions about us as we

watched them from the open door. I am sure she must have told him all about her long illness the previous winter, and pointed me out as her nurse, for he nodded and croaked and cast sidelong looks of friendly regard in my direction.

"But when Mrs. Bantam came into the kitchen for her luncheon she could not induce Captain Bantam to follow. In vain she coaxed and cackled, running in and out a dozen times to convince him there was nothing to fear. He would not believe her nor budge one inch over the door-sill. She lost patience at last, and rated him soundly; but as neither coaxing nor scolding availed, and she was eating her meal with a poor relish inside, while he waited unhappily without, we settled the difficulty by putting the dish on the door-step, where they ate together in perfect content.

"But a more serious trouble came at bed-time, for Mrs. Bantam expected to roost as usual in the shed, while the Captain preferred the old apple-tree where the rest of the flock spent their nights. The funny little couple held an animated discussion about it which lasted far into the twilight—and neither would yield. The Captain was very polite and conciliatory. He evidently had no mind to quarrel: but neither would he give up the point. He occasionally suspended the argument by a stroll into the garden, where, by vigorous scratching, he would produce a choice morsel, to which he called her attention by an insinuating 'Have a worm, dear?' She never failed to accept the offering, gulping it down with great satisfaction, but was too old a bird to be caught by so shallow a trick, for she would immediately return to her place by the shed window, and resume her discourse. When she had talked herself sleepy she ended the contest for that night by flying through the window and settling herself comfortably in the old place, while the Captain took his solitary way across the garden and over the fence to the apple-tree.

Every night for a week this scene occurred under the shed window; then, by mutual consent, they seemed to agree to go their several ways without further dispute. About sunset the Captain might be seen politely escorting his mate to her chosen lodging-house, and, after seeing her safely disposed of for the night, quietly betaking himself to his roost in the apple-tree.

"He was at her window early every morning crowing lustily. Charlie and I were sure he said: 'Do—come—out—now! Do—come—out—n-o-w!' and were vexed with the little hen for keeping him waiting so long. But his patience never failed; and, when at last she flew down and joined him, a prouder, happier bantam rooster never strutted about the place. All day long he kept close at her side, providing her with the choicest tidbits the garden afforded, and watching her with unselfish delight while she swallowed each dainty morsel. In the middle of the day they rested under the currant-bushes, crooning sleepily to each other or taking a quiet nap.

"One day we missed them both, and for three weeks saw them only at intervals, Mrs. Bantam always coming alone, eating a hurried meal, and stealing away as quickly as possible; while the Captain wandered about rather dejectedly, we thought, in the society of the other hens.

"But one bright morning we heard Mrs. Bantam clucking and calling with all her old vigor; and there she was at the kitchen-door, the prettiest and proudest of little mothers, with three tiny chicks not much larger than the baby chippies you saw in the nest, Florence, but wonderfully active and vigorous for their size. We named them Bob and Dick and Jenny, and, as they grew older, were never tired of watching their comical doings. Their mother, too, afforded us great amusement, while we found much in her conduct to admire and praise. She was a fussy, consequential little body, but unselfishly devoted, and ready to brave any danger that threatened her brood. Charlie and I learned more than one useful lesson from the bantam hen and her young family.

"One of these lessons we put into verse, which, if I can remember, I will repeat to you. We called it

CHICKEN DICK THE BRAGGER.

'Scratch! scratch!
In the garden-patch,
Goes good Mother Henny;
Cluck! cluck!
Good luck! Good luck!
Come, Bob and Dick and Jenny!

A worm! a worm!
See him squirm!
Who comes first to catch it!
Quick! quick!
Chicken Dick,
You are the chick to snatch it!

"Peep! peep!
While you creep,
My long legs have won it!
Cuck-a-doo!
I've beat you!
Don't you wish you'd done it?"

Dick! Dick!

That foolish trick
Of bragging lost your dinner;
For while to crow
You let it go,
Bob snatched it up—the sinner!

Bob! Bob!
'T was wrong to rob
Your silly little brother,
And in the bush
To fight and push,
And peck at one another.

But Bobby beat,
And ate the treat.—
Dear children, though you're winners,
Be modest all;
For pride must fall,
And braggers lose their dinners.'

"And now I will tell you an adventure of young Dick's, in which a habit he had of crowing on all occasions proved very useful to him. He grew to be a fine handsome fellow, and was sold to a family who lived on the meadow-bank.

"There was a big freshet the next autumn, the water covering the meadows on both sides of the river, and creeping into cellars and yards and houses. It came unexpectedly, early one morning, into the enclosure where Dick, with his half-dozen hens, was confined, and all flew for refuge to the roof of the neighboring pig-pen. But the incoming flood soon washed away the supports of the frail building, and it floated slowly out into the current to join company with the wrecks of wood-piles and rail fences, the spoils from gardens and orchards, in the shape of big yellow pumpkins and rosy apples, bobbing about in the foaming muddy stream, and all the other queer odds and ends a freshet gathers in its course.

"From his commanding position, Dick surveyed the scene, and thought it a fitting occasion to raise his voice. He stretched himself to the full height of his few inches, flapped his wings, and crowed—not once or twice, but continually. Over the waste of waters came his shrill 'Cock-a-doodle-doo!' All the cocks along the shore answered his call; all the turkeys gobbled, and the geese cackled. His vessel struck the heavy timber of a broken bridge, and lurched and dipped, threatening every moment to go to pieces. The waves splashed and drenched them, and the swift current carried them faster and faster down to the sea. It was all Dick and his little company could do to keep their footing, and still the plucky little fellow stood and crowed.

"A neighbor who was out in his boat gathering drift-wood, recognizing Dick's peculiar voice, went to the rescue, and, taking this strange craft in tow, brought the little company, with their gallant leader, drenched and dragged but still crowing lustily, safe to land.

"And that is all I can tell you about Dick, for it is five o'clock, and time to put up our work."

"I like every kind of bird," said Florence Austin at the next meeting of the Society, "except the English sparrows. They are a perfect nuisance!"

"Why, what harm do they do?" Nellie asked.

"Harm!" said Florence; "you don't know any thing about it here in the country. We had to cut down a beautiful wisteria-vine that climbed over one side of our house because the sparrows would build their nests in it, and made such a dreadful noise in the morning that nobody on that side of the house could sleep. And they drive away all the other birds. We used to have robins hopping over our lawn, and dear little yellow-birds used to build their nests in the pear-trees; but since the sparrows have got so thick, they have stopped coming. My father says the English sparrow is the most impudent bird that ever was hatched. He actually saw one snatch away a worm a robin had just dug up. I believe I hate sparrows!"

"I don't," said Nellie. "I have fed them all winter. They came to the dining-room window every morning, and waited for their breakfast; and a funny little woodpecker, blind of one eye, came with them sometimes."

"They do lots of good in our gardens," said Mollie, "digging up grubs and beetles. Papa told us so."

"There's nobody in this world so bad," said Susie, sagely, "but that you can find something good to say about them." At which kindly speech Aunt Ruth smiled approval.

"I think," she said, "this will be a good time to tell you a story about an English sparrow and a canary-bird I will call it

TUFTY AND THE SPARROW.

"One morning in April a young canary-bird whose name was Tufty escaped through an open window carelessly left open while he was out of his cage, and suddenly found himself, for the first time in his life, in the open air. He alighted first on an apple-tree in the yard, and then made a

grand flight half-way to the top of the elm-tree.

"The sun was bright and the air so still that the light snow which had fallen in the night yet clung to the branches and twigs of the tree, and Tufty examined it with interest, thinking it pretty but rather cold as he poked it about with his bill, and tucked first one little foot, and then the other, under him to keep it warm. Presently he heard an odd little noise below him, and, looking down, saw on the trunk of the tree a bird about his own size, with wings and back of a steel-gray color, a white breast with a dash of dull red on it, and a long bill, with which he was making the noise Tufty had heard by tapping on the tree.

"'Good-morning!' said Tufty, who was of a friendly and social disposition, and was beginning to feel the need of company.

"'Morning!' said the woodpecker, very crisp and shorthand not so much as looking up to see who had spoken to him.

"If you had heard this talk you would have said Tufty called out: 'Peep! peep!' and the woodpecker—but that's because you don't understand bird-language.

"'What are you doing down there?' said Tufty, continuing the conversation.

"'Getting my breakfast,' said the woodpecker.

"'Why, I had mine a long time ago!' said Tufty.

"He didn't in the least understand how that knocking on the tree was to bring Mr. Longbill's morning meal; but he was afraid to ask any more questions, the other had been so short with him.

"Just then he heard a hoarse voice overhead saying, 'Come along! come along!' and, looking up, saw a monstrous black creature sailing above the tops of the trees. It was only a crow on his way to the swamp, and he was trying to hurry up his mate, that always would lag behind in that corn-field where there wasn't so much as a grain left; but Tufty, which by this time you must have discovered was a very ignorant bird, thought the black monster was calling *him*, and piped back feebly: 'I can't! I can't!' and was all of a tremble till Mr. Crow was quite out of sight.

"He sat quiet, looking a little pensive, for the fact was, he was beginning to feel lonely, when there flew past him a flock of brown birds chirping and chattering away at a brisk rate. 'Now for it!' thought Tufty, 'here's plenty of good company;' and he spread his wings and flew after them as fast as he could. But he could not keep up with them, but, panting and weary, alighted on the roof of a house to rest. And here he saw such a pretty sight; for on a sunny roof just below him were two snow-white pigeons. One was walking about in a very consequential way, his tail-feathers spread in the shape of a fan, and turning his graceful neck from side to side in quite a bewitching fashion. Just as Tufty alighted, the pretty dove began to call: 'Come, dear, come! Do, dear, do!' in such a sweet, soft, plaintive voice, as if his heart would certainly break if his dear *didn't* come, that Tufty, who in his silly little pate never once doubted that it was he the lovely white bird was pining for, felt sorry to disappoint him, and piped back: 'Oh, if you please, I should like to ever so much! but you see I must catch up with those brown birds over there;' and, finding his wind had come back to him, he flew away. The pigeon, which had not even seen him, and had much more important business to attend to than to coax an insignificant little yellow-bird, went on displaying all his beauties, and crooning softly, 'Do, dear! do! do! do!'

"Tufty had no trouble in finding the brown birds, for long before he came to the roof of the barn where they had alighted he heard their loud voices in angry dispute; and they made such an uproar, and seemed so fractious and ill-tempered, that Tufty felt afraid to join them, but lingered on a tree near by.

"Presently one of them flew over to him. She was a young thing—quite fresh and trim-looking for a sparrow.

"'Good-morning!' she said, hopping close to him and looking him all over with her bright little eyes,

"'Good-morning!' said Tufty, as brisk as you please.

"'Now, I wonder where you come from and what you call yourself,' said the sparrow. 'I never saw a yellow-bird like you before. How pretty the feathers grow on your head!' and she gave a friendly nip to Tufty's top-knot.

"Tufty thought she was getting rather familiar on so short an acquaintance, but he answered her politely, told her his name, and that he came from the house where he had always lived, and was out to take an airing.

"'I want to know!' said the sparrow. 'Well, my name is Brownie. Captain Bobtail's Brownie, they call me, because Brownie is such a common name in our family. It's pleasant out-of-doors, isn't it? Oh, never mind the fuss over there!'—for Tufty's attention was constantly diverted to the scene of the quarrel—they are always at it, scolding and fighting. Come, let's you and I have a good time!'

"'What is the fuss about?' said Tufty.

"'A nest,' said Brownie, contemptuously. 'Ridiculous, isn't it? Snow on the ground, and not time to build this two weeks; but you see, *he* wants to keep the little house on top of the pole lest some

other bird should claim it, and *she* wants to build in the crotch of the evergreen, and the neighbors are all there taking sides. She has the right of it—the tree is much the prettier place; but dear me! she might just as well give up first as last, for he's sure to have his way—husbands are such tyrants!' said Captain Bobtail's Brownie, with a coquettish turn of her head; 'but come, now, what shall we do?'

"I'm too cold to do any thing,' said Tufty, dolefully.

"The sun was hidden by a cloud and a cold wind was blowing, and the house-bird, accustomed to a stove-heated room, was shivering.

"Take a good fly,' said Brownie; 'that will warm you,'

"But I'm hungry,' piped Tufty.

"All right!' said Brownie. 'I know a place where there's a free lunch set out every day for all the birds that will come—bread-crumbs, seeds, and lovely cracked corn. Come along! you'll feel better after dinner,'

"So they flew, and they flew, and Brownie was as kind as possible, and stopped for a rest whenever Tufty was tired, and chatted so agreeably and pleasantly, that before they reached their journey's end Tufty had quite fallen in love with her. Then, too, the sun was shining again, and the brisk exercise of flying had set the little bird's blood in motion, so that he was warm again, but oh, so hungry!

"They came at last to a brown cottage with a broad piazza, and it was on the roof of this piazza that a feast for the birds was every day spread. But as they flew round the house Tufty became very much excited.

"Stop, Brownie!' he cried; 'let me look at this place! Surely I've been here before. That red curtain, that flower-stand in the window, that—Oh! oh! there's my own little house! Why, Captain Bobtail's Brownie, you've brought me home!'

"Now, all this time Tufty's mistress had been in great trouble. As soon as she discovered her loss she ran out-of-doors, holding up the empty cage and calling loudly on her little bird to return. But he was high up in the elm-tree watching the woodpecker, and, if he heard her call, paid no attention to it. Very soon he flew after the sparrows, and she lost sight of him. Not a mouthful of breakfast could the poor child eat.

"I shall never see my poor little Tufty again, mamma!' she said. 'I saw him flying straight for the swamp, and he never can find his way back!' and she cried as if her heart would break.

"In the middle of the forenoon her brother Jack called to her from the foot of the stairs:—

"What will you give me, Kittie,' he said, 'if I will tell you where Tufty is?'

"O Jack! do you know? Have you seen him? Where? where?' cried the little girl, coming downstairs in a great hurry.

"Be quiet!' said Jack. 'Now, don't get excited; your bird is all right, though I'm sorry to say he's in rather low company,' And he led her to the dining-room window that looked into the garden, and there, sure enough, was Tufty on a lilac-bush. Brownie was there too. She was hopping about and talking in a most earnest and excited manner. It was easy to see that she was using all her powers of persuasion to coax Tufty not to go back to his old home, but to help her build a little house out-of-doors, where they could set up housekeeping together.

"Kittie knew just what to do. She ran for the cage and for a sprig of dried pepper-grass (of all the good things she gave her bird to eat, he liked pepper-grass best), and, standing in the open doorway, called: 'Tufty! Tufty!' He gave a start, a little flutter of his wings, and then, with one glad cry of recognition, and without so much as a parting look at poor Brownie, flew straight for the door, and alighted on the top of his cage.

"How strangely things come about, mamma?' Kittie said that evening as they talked over this little incident. 'Jack has laughed at me all winter for feeding the sparrows, and called them hateful, quarrelsome things, and said I should get nicely paid next summer when they drove away all the pretty song-birds that come about the house. And now, don't you see, mamma, one of the sparrows I have fed all winter—I knew her right away by a funny little dent in her breast—has done me such good service? Why, I am paid a hundred thousand times over for all I have ever done for the sparrows.'"

"And what became of poor Brownie?" Nellie asked. "I almost hoped Tufty would stay out with her, she was such a good little sparrow."

"She lingered about the garden for a while, making a plaintive little noise; but when the family of Brownies came to dinner she ate her allowance, and flew away with them, apparently in good spirits. But Tufty moped for a day or two, and, as long as he lived, showed great excitement at the sight of a flock of sparrows; and it is my private opinion that, if a second opportunity had been given him, Kittie Grant's Tufty would have gone off for good and all with Captain Bobtail's Brownie."

Susie Elliot walked part of the way home with Florence Austin, and the two little girls, who were fast becoming intimate friends, talked over the events of the afternoon.

"How much your auntie knows about animals and birds!" said Florence; "she seems almost as fond of them as if they were people."

"Yes," Susie answered; "she was always fond of pets, papa says; and, ever since she has been ill, she has spent a great deal of time watching them and studying their ways. I think it makes her forget the pain,"

"Is it the pain that keeps her awake at night, Susie? You know she said this afternoon she was glad to hear the chippy-birds, because then she knew the long night was over; and she looked so white, and couldn't get down those three little easy steps to pick up the baby-bird. But she walks about the garden sometimes with a crutch, doesn't she?"

"Oh, yes! and she's better than when she first came here to live, only she never can be well, you know. Today is one of her poor days; but she used to be so ill that she was hardly ever free from pain. You never would have known it, though, she was always so cheerful and doing something to give us good times."

"Can't she ever be made well, Susie? There's doctors in town, you know, who cure *every thing*," said the little girl.

Susie shook her head.

"Papa says she has an incurable disease;" and then seriously—"I think if Jesus were here he would put his hands on auntie and make her well."

CHAPTER X.

PARSON LORRIMER'S WHITE HORSE.

"And now for the story of the minister's horse," Mollie Elliot said, when Miss Ruth's company of workers had assembled on the next Wednesday afternoon. "I suppose he was an awfully good horse, which set an example to all the other horses in the parish to follow. Say, Auntie, wasn't he?"

"When my grandmother was a little girl," Ruth Elliot began, "she lived with her father and mother in a small country town among the New Hampshire hills: and of all the stories she told in her old age about the quiet simple life of the people of Hilltown, the one her grandchildren liked best to hear was

THE STORY OF PARSON LORRIMER'S WHITE HORSE.

"Parson Lorrimer had lived thirty years in Hilltown before he owned a horse. He began to preach in the big white meeting-house when he was a young man, and, as neither he nor his people wanted a change, when he was sixty years old he was preaching there still. It was a scattered parish, with farm-houses perched on the hill-sides and nestled in the valleys; and the minister, in doing his work, had trudged over every mile of it a great many times. He made nothing of walking five miles to a meeting on a December evening, with the thermometer below zero, or of climbing the hills in a driving snow-storm to visit a sick parishioner. He was a tall, spare man, healthy and vigorous, with iron-gray hair, a strong kind face, and a smile in his brown eyes that made every baby in Hilltown stretch out its arms to him to be taken.

"Not a chick or child had Parson Lorrimer of his own. He had never married, but lived in the old parsonage, a stately mansion, with rooms enough in it to accommodate a big family, with only an elderly widow and her grown-up son to minister to his wants and to keep him company. His study was at the back of the house, and looked out upon the garden and orchard, so that the smell of his pinks and roses came to him as he wrote, and the same robins, year by year, built their nests within reach of his hand in the branches of the crooked old apple-tree that shaded his window.

"The minister was fond of caring for living creatures, both small and great, and every domestic animal about the place knew it. The cat jumped fearlessly to his knee, sure of a welcome. The cow lowed after him if he showed himself at the window. The little chicks fluttered to his shoulder when he appeared in the door-yard, and the old sow with her litter of pigs kept close at his heels as he paced the orchard, pondering next Sunday's sermon.

"He remembered them all. There was always a handful of grain for the chickens in the pocket of his study-gown, a ripe pumpkin in the shed for Sukey; and the good man would laugh like a school-boy, as the funny little baby-pigs rolled and tumbled over each other for the apples he tossed them. A great, good, gentle man, learned and wise in theology and knowledge of the Scriptures, with tastes and habits as simple as a child.

"But I must hurry on with my story, or you will think I am telling you more about the parson than his horse. The good man realized, one day, that he was not as young as he used to be, and that climbing Harrison Hill on a July afternoon and walking five miles in a drizzling rain after a preaching service were not so easy to do as he had found them a dozen years before. So he wisely concluded to call in the aid of four strong legs in carrying on his work, and that is how he came to buy a horse.

"The people of Hilltown heartily approved of this plan, and several were anxious to help him.

"Deacon Cowles had a four-year-old colt, raised on the farm, 'a real clever steady-go-in' creetur, that he guessed he could spare—might be turned in for pew-rent;' and Si Olcott didn't care if he traded off his gray mare on the same conditions. She was about used up for farm-work, but had considerable go in her yet—could jog round with the parson for ten years to come.

"The minister received these offers with politeness, and promised to think of them; and then one day after a brief absence from home, set every body in the parish talking, by driving into town seated in an open wagon, shining with fresh paint and varnish, and drawn by a horse the like of which had never been seen in Hilltown before.

"He was of a large and powerful build, and most comely and graceful in proportion, with a small head, slender legs, and flowing mane and tail. In color, he was milk-white, while his nose and the inside of his pointed ears were of a delicate pink. He held his head high, stepping proudly and glancing from side to side in a nervous, excited way; but he had a kind eye, and the watching neighbors saw him take an apple from the hand of his new master, after they turned in at the parsonage gate. In answer to all questions, the parson said he had purchased the horse at Winterport, of a seafaring man, that he was eight years old, and his name was Peter. But to neither man nor woman in Hilltown did he ever tell the sum he paid in yellow gold and good bank-notes for the white horse,

"A few days after the purchase, Parson Lorrimer attended a funeral, and when the service at the house was ended, and he had shaken hands all round with the mourners, and exchanged greetings with neighbors and friends, he stepped out to the side-yard, where he had fastened his horse, and drove round the house to take his place before the hearse; for in Hilltown it was the custom for the minister to lead the procession to the burying-ground.

"It was Peter's first appearance in an official capacity, and he stepped with sufficient dignity into the street, where a long line of wagons and chaises, led off by the mourners' coach and the big black hearse, waited the signal to start, while in the door-yard and along the sidewalk were ranged the foot-passengers; for at a funeral in Hilltown everybody went to the grave.

"A passing breeze caught a piece of paper lying in the road, and flirted it close to Peter's eyes. He gave a tremendous leap sideways, and it was a marvel no one was struck by his flying heels, then gathering himself together he ran. How he did run! The good folks scattered right and left with amazing quickness, considering their habits of life; for in the slow little town, every body took things fair and easy, and the white horse dashed past the string of wagons, the mourners' equipage, and the tall black hearse. There was a cloud of dust, a rattling of wheels, a clatter of hoofs, and Peter and the parson were far down the road. The people gazed after their departing spiritual guide in speechless astonishment. The mourners' heads were thrust far out of the coach windows. Even the sleepy farm-horses pricked up their ears: while old Bill, the sexton's clumsy big-footed beast, which for fifteen years had carried the dead folks of Hilltown to their graves, and had never before been known, on these solemn occasions to depart from his slow walk, made a most astonishing departure; for, taking his driver unawares, he suddenly started after the flying white steed, breaking into a lumbering gallop, that set plumes nodding, curtains flapping, and glasses rattling, and made the huge unwieldy vehicle lurch and bob about in a way to threaten a shocking catastrophe.

"A vigorous twitch of the lines, and a loud 'Whoa, now, Bill! Whoa, I tell ye!' soon brought the sexton's beast to a stand-still. I am sure he must have shared his master's surprise at such unseemly conduct, who wondered 'What in time had got into the blamed crittur!' But neither voice nor rein checked Peter's speed. On he flew, down the hill past the post-office, the meeting-house, and the tavern. It was a straight road, and his driver kept him to it. Fortunately there were no collisions, and at the last long ascent his pace slackened and he turned of his own accord in at the parsonage gate.

"At the village store and the tavern that evening, Peter's evil behavior was talked about.

"'He's a sp'iled horse,' Jonathan Goslee, the minister's hired man, said, 'though you can't make parson think so. He's dead sure to run ag'in. A horse knows when he's got the upper hand, jest as well as a child, and he'll watch his chance to try it over ag'in, you see if he don't.'

"But the next time Peter shied and tried to run, it was the minister who got the upper hand; and when the short excitement was over, and the horse quiet and subdued, he was driven back to within a few paces of the object of his fright. A neighbor was called to stand at his head, while his master took down the flaming yellow placard that had caused all the trouble, and slowly and cautiously brought it to him, that he might see, smell, and touch it, talking soothingly to him and petting and caressing him. When he had become accustomed to its appearance, and had learned by experience that it was harmless, it was nailed to the tree again and Peter passed it the second time without trouble.

"'If I'd owned the horse,' the minister's helper said, when he told this story, 'I s'pose I should have *licked* him by,—but I guess, in the long run, parson's way was best.'

"This was one of many lessons Peter received to correct his only serious fault. He was willing and swift, intelligent and kind, but so nervous and timid, and made so frantic by his fear of any unknown object, that he was constantly putting the minister's life and limbs in jeopardy. But he had a wise, patient teacher, and he was apt to learn.

"My grandmother was fond of telling some of the means adopted to bring about the cure;—how one day after Peter had shied at sight of a wheelbarrow, the parson trundled the obnoxious object about the yard for half an hour in view of the stable window, then emptied a measure of oats in it, and opened the stable door; how the horse trotted round and round, drawing each time a little nearer, then came close, snorted and wheeled,—his master standing by encouraging him by hand and voice,—until, unable longer to resist the tempting bait, he put his pink nose to the pile and ate first timidly, then with confidence. After that, the old lady said, Peter felt a particular regard for wheelbarrows in general, hoping in each one he happened to pass to find another toothsome meal.

"He suffered at first agonies of terror at sight of the long line of waving, flapping garments he had to pass every Monday in his passage from the big gate to the stable; but, through the minister's devices, grew so familiar with their appearance, that he took an early opportunity of making their closer acquaintance, and mouthed the parson's ruffled shirt, and took a bite of the Widow Goslee's dimity short-gown.

"And so the kindly work went on. Peter gained trust and confidence every day, learning little by little that his master was his friend, that under his guidance no harm came to him, no impossible task was given to him; until at length confidence cast out fear, and the white horse became as docile and obedient as he had always been willing and strong.

"These qualities, on one occasion, stood him in good stead; for the parsonage barn and stable one night burned to the ground. Peter's stall was bright with the red light of the fire, and the flames crackled overhead in the barn-loft when the parson led out his favorite, trembling in every limb, his eyes wild with terror, but perfectly obedient to his master's hand. It was as if he had said: 'I must go, even through this dreadful fire, if master leads the way.'

"There was a Fourth of July celebration in the next parish, and Parson Lorrimer was invited to deliver the oration. He rode over on horseback, took the saddle from Peter's back, and turned him loose in a pasture where other of the guests' horses were grazing. A platform was erected on the green, with seats for the band, the invited guests, and the speaker of the day; while the people gathered from both parishes were standing about in groups waiting for the exercises to commence. Flags were flying, bells ringing, and a field-piece, that had seen service in the War of the Revolution, at intervals belched out a salute in honor of the day. The band was playing a lively tune, when suddenly there was a stir and a dividing to the right and left of the crowd gathered about the stand, and through the lane thus formed came the minister's white horse.

"He trotted leisurely up, stopped before the platform, and made a bow, then began to dance, keeping time to the music, and going round and round in a space quickly cleared for him by the lookers-on. I don't know whether it was a waltz the band was playing, or if horses were taught to waltz so long ago; but whatever kind of dance it was,—gallopade, quickstep, or cotillion,—Peter, in his horse-fashion, danced it well. Faster and faster played the music, and round and round went the pony. The people laughed and shouted, and Peter made his farewell bow and trotted soberly out of the ring, in the midst of a great shout of applause.

"How did Parson Lorrimer feel? Of all that amused and wondering crowd, not one was more taken by surprise than he—both at this exhibition of Peter's accomplishments and at the tale it told of his early days; for it was impossible to doubt that at some time in his life he had been a trained horse in a circus. From the field near by he had recognized the familiar strains that used to call him to his task, and had leaped the fence and made his way to where the crowd was gathered, to play his pretty part on the village green, before the sober citizens of Centerville and Hilltown, as he had played it hundreds of times before, under the canvas, to the motley crowd drawn together by the attractions of the ring.

"Of course the minister felt sorry and ashamed when he learned, in this public way, of the low company Peter had kept in his youth. Whenever a traveling circus had stopped at Winterport, Parson Lorrimer had not failed to warn his young people from the pulpit to keep their feet from straying to this place of sinful amusement. But mingled with his chagrin, I think he must have felt a little pride in the ownership of the beautiful creature, so intelligent to remember, and so supple of limb to perform, the unaccustomed task.

"He took pains to narrate more fully than he had thought necessary before, how he had come in possession of the animal. He had gone, he said, on business to Winterport, and on the wharf, early one morning, had met a man in the dress of a sailor leading the white horse. In answer to inquiries, the stranger said he had taken the horse in payment of a debt, and was about to ship him on board a trading-vessel then lying in the dock, bound to the East Indies. Would he sell, the minister asked, on this side of the water? Yes, if he could get his price. While they talked, Parson Lorrimer caressed the horse, who responded in so friendly a way that the minister, who had lost his heart at first sight to the beautiful creature, then and there made the purchase, waiting only till the banks were open to pay over the money. He had asked few questions; had known, he said, by Peter's eyes that he was kind, and by certain unmistakable marks about him that he came of good stock. Of the stranger, he had seen nothing from that day, and could not even remember his name.

"'I always knew,' Jonathan Goslee said, 'that the critter had tricks and ways different from common horses, I've catched him at 'em sometimes. One day I found him with his bran-tub bottom upwards, amusin' himself tryin' to stand with all four legs on it at once. And he'll clear marm's clothes-line at a leap as easy as you'd jump over a pair of bars. But I never happened to

catch him practisin' his dancin'-lesson—must have done it, though, on the sly, or he couldn't have footed it so lively that day over to Centerville. Well, sometimes I think—and then ag'in I don't know. If that there sailor feller stole the horse he sold in such a hurry to parson, why didn't the owner make a hue and cry about it, and follow him up? 'Twould have been easy enough to track the beast to Hilltown. And then ag'in, if 'twas all fair and square, and he took the horse for a debt, why didn't he sell him to a show company for a fancy price, instead of shippin' him off to the Indys in one of them rotten old tubs, that as like as not would go under before she'd made half the voyage. But there, we never shall get to the bottom facts in the case, any more than we shall ever know how much money parson paid down for that horse,'

"And they never did.

"My grandmother remembered Parson Lorrimer as an old man, tall and straight, with flowing white hair, a placid face, and kind, dim eyes that gradually grew dimmer, till their light faded to darkness. For the last four years of his life he was totally blind, She remembered how he used to mount the pulpit-stairs, one hand resting upon the shoulder of his colleague, and, standing in the old place, with lifted face and closed eyes, carry on the service, repeating chapter and hymns from memory, his voice tremulous, but still sweet and penetrating.

"She remembered going to visit the old man in his study. It was summer-time, and he sat in his arm-chair at the open window, and on the grass-plat outside—so near that his head almost touched his master's shoulder—the old white horse was standing; for they had grown old together, and together were enjoying a peaceful and contented old age. Every bright day for hours Peter stood at the window, and in the winter-time, when he was shut in his stable, the old man never failed to visit him.

"But one November afternoon, Parson Lorrimer being weary laid himself down upon his bed, where presently the sleep came to him God giveth to his beloved.

"The evening after his funeral a member of the household passing the study-door was startled at seeing in the pale moonlight a long, ghostly white face peering in at the window.

"It was only Peter, that had slipped his halter and wandered round to the old place looking for his master. He allowed them to lead him back to his stable, but every time the door was opened he whinnied and turned his head. As the days passed and the step he waited for came no more, hope changed to patient grief. His food often remained untasted; he refused to go out into the sunshine; and so, gradually wasting and without much bodily suffering, he one day laid himself down and his life slipped quietly away.

"He was buried outside the grave-yard, at the top of the hill, as near as might be to the granite head-stone that recorded the virtues of 'Ye most faithful Servant and Man of God Silus Timothy Lorrimer Who for 52 Yrs did Minister to This Ch and Congregation in Spiritual Things.

'The faithful Memory of The Just
Shall Flourish When they turn To Dust.'

"Peter has no head-stone to mark his grave, but his memory is green in Hilltown. The old folks love to tell of his beauty, his intelligence, and his life-long devotion to his master; and there is a tradition handed down and repeated half-seriously, half in jest, that when Gabriel blows his trumpet on the resurrection morning, and the dead in Hilltown grave-yard awake, Parson Lorrimer will lead his flock to the judgment riding on a white horse."

CHAPTER XI.

THE QUILTING.

The patchwork quilt was finished. The pieces of calico Miss Ruth from week to week had measured and cut and basted together, with due regard to contrast and harmony of colors, were transformed into piles of gay-colored blocks; the blocks multiplied and extended themselves into strips, and the strips basted together had kept sixteen little hands "sewing the long seam" for three Wednesday afternoons. And now it was finished, and the quilting had begun.

Miss Ruth had decided, after a consultation with the minister's wife, that the girls might do this most important and difficult part of the business. She wanted the gift to be theirs from beginning to end—that, having furnished all the material, they should do all the work. How pleased and proud they were to be thus trusted, you can imagine, while the satisfaction they took in the result of the summer's labor repaid their leader a hundred-fold for her share in the enterprise.

Never was a quilt so admired and praised. Of all the odds and ends the girls had brought in, Ruth Elliot had rejected nothing, not even the polka-dotted orange print in which Mrs. Jones delighted to array her baby or the gorgeous green-and-red gingham of Nellie Dimock's new apron.

It took two long afternoons of close work for the girls (not one of whom had ever quilted before) to accomplish this task; but they did it bravely and cheerfully. There were pricked fingers and tired arms and cramped feet, and the big dictionary that raised Nellie Dimock to a level with her

taller companions must have proved any thing but an easy seat; but no one complained.

Let us look in upon the Patchwork Quilt Society toward the close of this last afternoon.

"I was sewing on this very block," Mollie Elliot is saying, leaning back in her chair to survey her work, "when Aunt Ruth was telling us how Captain Bobtail's Brownie brought Tufty home.

"That pink-and-gray block over there in the corner," said Fannie Eldridge, pointing with her needle, "was the first one I sewed on. I made awful work with it, too; for when Dinah Diamond set herself on fire with the kerosene lamp I forgot what I was about, and took ever so many long puckery stitches that had to be picked out,"

"If I should sleep under that bed-quilt," said Sammy Ray (Sammy and Roy had been invited to attend this last meeting of the Society), "what do you suppose I should dream about?"

No one could imagine.

"A white horse and a yellow dog," the boy said, "'cause I liked those stories best."

"Yes," said Mollie; "and of course Nellie Dimock would dream about cats, wouldn't you, Nell? and Roy Tyler about moths and butterflies, and Florence Austin about birds, and I—well, I should dream of all the beasts and the birds Aunt Ruth has told us about, all jumbled up together."

"I shall always remember one thing," Nellie Dimock said, "when I think about our quilt."

"What is that, Nellie?"

"Not to step on an ant-hill if I can possibly help it, because it blocks up the street, and the little people have to work so hard to cart away the dirt."

"I ain't half so afraid of worms as I used to be," Eliza Ann Jones announced, "since I've found out what funny things they can do; and next summer I'm going to make some butterflies out of fennel-worms,"

"Roy says," Sammy began, and stopped; for Roy was making forcible objections to the disclosure.

"Well, what does Roy say?" Miss Ruth asked, knowing nothing of the kicks administered under the table.

"He won't let me tell," said Sammy.

"He's always telling what I say," said Roy. "Why don't he speak for himself?"

"Well, I never!" said Sammy. "I thought you was too bashful to speak, and so I'd do it for you."

"What was it, Roy?"

"Why, I said, when I owned a horse, if he should happen to shy, you know, I'd cure him of it just as that minister cured Peter."

Here there was a pushing back of chairs and a stir and commotion, for the last stitch was set to the quilting. Then the binding was put on, and the quilt was finished; but the September afternoon was finished too, and Lovina Tibbs lighted the lamps in the dining-room before she rang the bell for tea.

Lovina had exerted herself in her special department to make this last meeting of the Society a festive occasion. She gave to the visitors what she called "a company supper"—biscuits deliciously sweet and light, cold chicken, plum-preserves, sponge-cake, and for a central dish a platter containing little frosted cakes, with the letters "P.Q.S." traced on each in red sugar-sand.

When the feast was over, one last-admiring look given to "our quilt" and the girls and boys had all gone home, Susie and Mollie sat with their mother in Miss Ruth's room.

"Auntie," said Susie, who for some moments had been gazing thoughtfully in the fire, "I have been thinking how nice it would be if, when our quilt goes to the home missionary, all the interesting stories you have told us while we were sewing on it could go too. Then the children in the family would think so much more of it—don't you see? I wish there was some way for a great many more boys and girls to hear those stories."

"Why, that's just what Florence Austin was saying this afternoon," said Mollie. "She said she wished all those stories could be printed in a book."

"You hear the suggestion, Ruth," Mrs. Elliot said.

But Ruth smiled and shook her head,

"They are such simple little stories," said she.

"For simple little people to read—for of such is the kingdom of heaven.' Think, Ruth, if, instead of one Eliza Jones 'making butterflies out of fennel-worms' next summer, and in that way getting at some wonderful facts far more effectively than any book could teach her, there should be a dozen, aria perhaps as many boys resolving, like Roy, to use kindness and patience instead of cruelty and force in their dealings with a dumb beast. But you know all this without my preaching. Ten times one make ten, little sister."

"If I thought my stones would do good," she said.

"Come, I have a proposition to make," said the minister's wife. "You shall write out the stories—you already have some of them in manuscript—and I will fill in with the doings of the Patchwork Quilt Society. Do you agree?"

And that is how this book was written.

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