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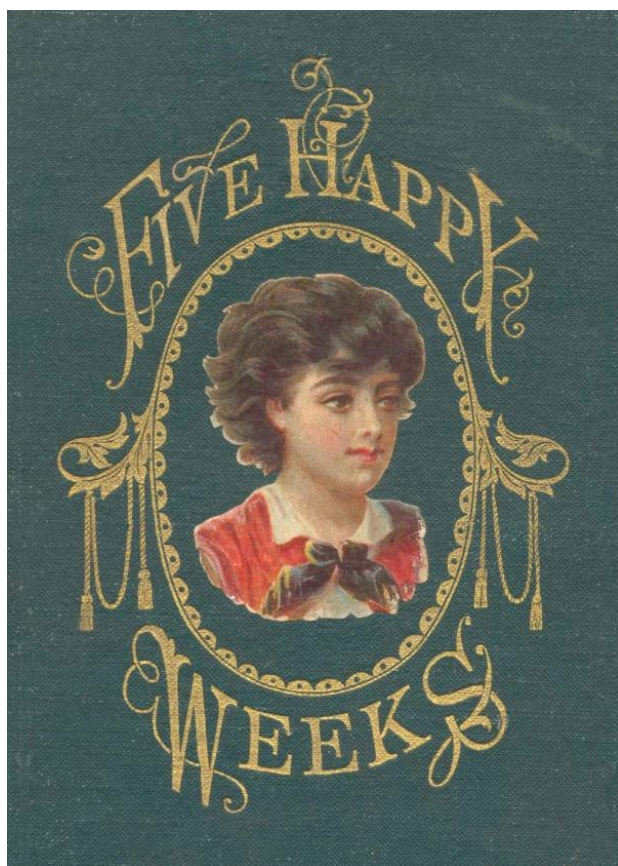
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FIVE HAPPY WEEKS.

BY

MARGARET E. SANGSTER.

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FIVE HAPPY WEEKS.

CHAPTER I.

"GOOD-BY, MAMMA!"

"I don't see how I can do such a thing," said mamma, shading her eyes with a hand so white

and thin that you could almost see through it. "I never, never can go away, for five weeks, and leave these children; I should not have a moment's peace."

"But, my darling," said papa, "the doctor says it is the only thing that will restore your health. The children will be nicely taken care of, and I am sure they will be as good and obedient as possible while you are gone."

"You are going too, William; you seem to forget that. And we have never been away from them before. What if Edith or Mabel should be sick, or Johnnie should fall and break his arm, or—"

"Don't conjure up dreadful possibilities, Helen," said papa; "I'll tell you how we will manage it. This house shall be shut, and we'll take grandma and the children with us as far as Norfolk, and leave them there with your Aunt Maria, while we make our trip. And we will stop for them on our way home. What do you think of that plan?"

"Well," said mamma, with a faint smile, "I think I'll leave it to you. It tires me to have to reason things out. Auntie would be kind to them, I know, and I should feel easier if this house were shut up altogether."

Mrs. Evans had been ailing all the long cold winter, and as Spring began to approach, she drooped more and more, until her husband and her friends feared she would die. Then Dr. Phelps advised a short journey to Florida and Mexico. He said she needed sea-air, and change, and flowers. So it was settled that she should attempt it.

The children were having a frolic in the play-room while this talk had been going on. Johnnie and Mabel had been arranging a little basket of fruit for their mother, oranges, apples and grapes, and now they were disputing as to which should present it to her.

"I ought to, I'm the oldest," said Johnnie. "I'm the biggest and the strongest, and I will take it in to mamma myself."

"The bigger and the stronger ought to yield to the smaller and the weaker," said a sweet voice. The children looked round, and saw a little lady whom they all liked. She was Miss Simms, the dressmaker. Her face was as round as an apple, she had two bright black eyes, and when she laughed the dimples seemed to chase each other over her cheeks.

"I'm so glad you've come," said Mabel, running away from the fruit to put her two fat arms as far round Miss Simms as they would reach.

"I am glad, too; it's jolly," said Johnnie. "But I'd like to know why you think the bigger ought to give up to the littler. That's what I can't understand. In the history books they never do it. The strong always whip the weak."

"Well," said Miss Simms, "I'm not much of a scholar, and I've never read many history books, as you call them, Master Johnnie; but I've read my Bible, and I get my learning out of that. I'll tell you some of my verses, and you can see what you make of them."

"Give to him that asketh thee, and from him that would borrow of thee turn not thou away."

"Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth."

"Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the children of God."

"All things whatsoever ye would that men should do unto you, do ye even so to them, for this is the law and the prophets."

"There," finished Miss Simms, "if that is the law and the prophets, Johnnie, oughtn't you to give up to Mabel and Edith, once in a while?"

"I don't ask him to very often," said Edith.

"Well, I do!" said Mabel.

"Yes, Miss Simms, I believe I ought to, more'n I have," said Johnnie, quite earnestly. "I'm bound to be a gentleman; and a gentleman is always polite to the ladies. I've seen that with father and mother many a time. So, Mabel, you take mamma her fruit;" and with that, Johnnie handed her the basket, and made a low bow.

Miss Simms seated herself in the window, took out her scissors and a great roll of patterns, and then said,

"Edith, dearie, will you ask your grandma or Aunt Catharine, if they know where the merino is for your new dresses?"

"Are we to have new dresses?" said Edith; "it's the first I've heard of it."

"Oh, children don't know everything in *this* house," said Miss Simms, laughing. Grandma came bustling in with bundles nearly as big as herself.

"You had better measure Edie first, as she is on the spot; and then I'll help sew on her skirt, while you are cutting out for Mabel."

"I'm glad I'm not a girl," said Johnnie, "always having to bother with new frocks."

"Mrs. Evans is wise to go South now," said Miss Simms to grandma. "I've been hoping she would, it's far too bleak for her here."

Edith opened her blue eyes very wide, and then they filled with tears. She hid her head in her grandma's bosom.

"Why, child, you little goose, it is to make your dear mother well. And you three small folks are going part way with her."

At this Edith's sudden tears dried up very quickly, and her face made itself into a question mark.

"You three children, and I myself, are going to see your Aunt Maria, in Virginia."

Johnnie began to turn somersaults to show his delight at the news. He ran off for further information, and came back saying, "I never heard anything so splendid in my life. We are to start a week from to-day Edith. Mamma's going South to get well, and we're going South too, to get acquainted with our Aunt Maria."

The children thought they must pack up their treasures at once; and as everybody was just then too busy to notice them very much, they made a remarkable collection. Edith brought out her Paris doll, and its wardrobe, her baby carriage hung with blue satin, and its pillows trimmed and ruffled with lace, her favorite books, and her best china tea-set.

"I could not travel in comfort without Miss Josephine," she said with much dignity, as she seated herself in the parlor, with her treasures around her. "I could not stir a step without her."

Mabel brought her Maltese kitten, and her Spitz dog, and tied a cherry ribbon round Fido's neck, and a blue one round Queenie's.

"Now I am ready to go!" she said.

As for Johnnie, he had so large a collection of must-haves, and can't-do-withouts, that he went to ask his father's advice. Mr. Evans came into the parlor, and laughed as he looked at his little girls, and their anxious faces.

"My dears," he said, "we are not to be off for a week yet, and when we start we cannot carry much baggage. The old Romans called baggage *impedimenta*, because it hindered them on their way; and that is just what it is, a hinderance. We must leave all our treasures at home."

"Even Queenie and Fido? They will break their hearts," said Mabel.

"Even Miss Josephine?" said Edith. "She will pale away and die without me!"

"If I could take my wheelbarrow and my box of tools, I would be satisfied," exclaimed Johnnie.

"Now, children," Mr. Evans explained, "you are going to see a good many new things; and if you leave your property at home, it will be safe, and will seem new and delightful when you get back. Fido and Queenie will go to Aunt Catharine's and pay a visit too."

"I don't believe the week will ever come to an end," sighed Edith, and she repeated the sigh a dozen times that busy week. But it did. Miss Simms cut and basted and fitted. Friends came to help. The furniture was covered. The house was securely fastened. At last they all went on board the Richmond steamer, on which they spent two very sea-sick nights and a day. After that it stopped at the Norfolk wharf. It lay there some hours, but before it started again, Aunt Maria came with a great roomy carriage, and took away the children. At the last moment grandma had decided not to go, so the brother and sisters felt rather forlorn when they went away with the strange auntie.

"Good-by, mamma!" cried three brave little voices, however, and three handkerchiefs were waved, as they saw mamma smiling back cheerfully to them from the deck of the "Old Dominion."

"In five weeks we'll see her again. It seems like for ever," said Edith to Johnnie.

"Five weeks," said Aunt Maria, "is a very short while, when people are having a really happy time. Just make up your minds to make each other as happy as you can, my dears; you are going to see my family pretty soon."

"There's the thea-thickness going back," little Mabel murmured.

"Never cross a bridge till you come to it, Mabel. It's a poor way to fret over troubles that are five weeks off. I have known people who were very sea-sick coming, and not in the least so going back. It may be that way with you, little one; so look on the bright side."

CHAPTER II.

AUNT MARIA'S FAMILY.

But where were Aunt Maria's family? The carriage, when it left the wharf, had been driven up a long narrow street, quite different from any the children had ever seen before. On either side irregularly built houses, most of them old and dingy, stood close together. Here and there was a new one, which had the air of having dropped down by mistake. They left this street, and turning into another, crossed a bridge, which spanned an arm of the river that ran through part of the town. Now the houses began to be large and stately, and were surrounded by ample gardens, and walls of brick or iron railings separated them from each other and the street.

Aunt Maria's coachman drove on and on, and the children began to think he was going to drive into the river, for he seemed to be approaching nearer and nearer to it. They looked out and saw a broad sheet of water, over which many sloops and schooners, and many little row-boats were moving. The light of the setting sun was touching the white sails and the waves with a rosy glow. At the very water's edge they stopped, and Aunt Maria led the way into her house.

It was a large mansion. One side of it was covered with ivy, and an immense live-oak tree stood in the garden. Two or three tall magnolias, and a number of fig-trees were scattered through the yard. Though it was still wintry and cold at home, here the trees were in leaf, and there were flowers in bloom.

A colored woman, with a red and yellow turban on her head, and a blue and white checked dress on, came forward to receive the children. Their trunks were carried up stairs, and opened, and they took off their travelling dresses, and proceeded to get ready for dinner.

"Aunt Chloe will help you dress," Mrs. MacLain said. But Edith and Mabel were unused to colored servants, and stood in great awe of her. They were glad when she left the room to get some wood.



"It too cold for missy without any fire," said she, as she went away.

"O Edith," Mabel whispered, "if we were only at home! I don't like it here, I just hate it!"

"Never mind, it won't last always," said Edith. "I wish I had asked mamma what to wear. Do you think we ought to put on our best frocks the first day?"

"We're company, and company always *do* put on their goodest things," said Mabel.

"But not when they've come to stay so long. I suppose mamma would say, 'Use your own judgment,' but I haven't any judgment, I'll ask Aunt Chloe."

"La, honey, *I* don't know," said she. "Reckon I'll 'quire o' Miss Mariar."

Aunt Maria came back with her, looked over the children's wardrobe, and told them to put on a crimson delaine dress, and a white apron. It was what they usually wore afternoons at home.

Johnnie had had no such trouble. His clothing was to him of no great importance, so long as it had buttons and strings on.

But where was Aunt Maria's family? The table was only spread for four. The children looked at

each other, but were too polite to ask questions.

"Bring Lucifer Matches," said Aunt Maria to Henry the waiter. As it was broad daylight, the children wondered why she asked for matches. Henry came back soon, followed by a funny little Scotch terrier, who bounded up to his mistress, and looked at her with intelligent eyes.

"Lucifer Matches," said Mrs. MacLain, "is my special and particular pet. I call him Luce for short. Johnnie, you may play with him as much as you like."

"Come in, you angel!" the lady then exclaimed, as if to encourage somebody who was hesitating at the door. Six eyes followed hers. The angel was a huge black cat, with green eyes, that shone like emeralds. Mabel felt like getting down to pet her, and Edith who did not admire cats, felt a cold chill creep down her back.

So, you see, the dog, the cat, the horses, the geese, the cow, and the chickens, with the people who took care of them, composed Aunt Maria's family.

After dinner, they had family worship. "We will have family prayers before you are all tired and sleepy," their aunt said. The servants all came in, and Mrs. MacLain read a chapter from John, and gave out a hymn, which everybody sang. It was the beautiful hymn,

"Dear refuge of my weary soul,
On Thee, when sorrows rise,
On Thee, when storms of trouble roll,
My fainting hope relies."

It was a great comfort to Edith to sing this, for it was one of her mamma's favorites. After the singing they all knelt in prayer and Aunt Maria asked God to take care of this family that was divided for the present. "Be with the sick mother, and make her well," she prayed, "and bless these dear little ones under this roof."

So the children felt safe, and at home. It makes everybody feel safe and at home even in a strange house, if there is prayer in it, and Jesus is loved and worshipped there.

Bright and early next morning, Mabel was dressed and out of doors, with a piece of corn-bread in her hand to feed the chickens and geese. She felt the least bit of terror when the geese craned their long necks and hissed at her, but they soon stopped this and became very friendly.

Folks talk about dumb creatures, but they are not very dumb, are they, children? though they have not the gift of speech. They soon learn to know who love them, and they testify their affection in many pleasant ways. Now Luce was not a dog to strike up friendships with everybody, but he and Johnnie seemed to like each other at first sight. Of course, the very first evening, bedtime came early, and weary eyes were very glad to shut. But before noon the next day Johnnie had discovered that his new companion could perform ever so many tricks: he could shoulder arms, stand on his hind feet, pretend to smoke a pipe, carry a basket, and beg in the most enchanting manner. Johnnie played soldier with Luce for flag-bearer, for nearly an hour, till his auntie called him in.

"I think, dear," she said, "that I must have you read a while every morning. Edie has promised to practise an hour a day, and Mabel is going to sit by me and crochet. All work and no play would never do, but all play and no work would make you all wish you had never seen Locust Hall."

"Now, Aunt Maria, how can you say that! I am sure I should be perfectly happy if I could play with Luce and do nothing else all day long."

"Well, I'll let you try it, some day, on this condition: you will promise, as an honorable boy, that no matter how tired you get, you will keep to your part of the bargain."

Johnnie was about to promise, when Edith called out:

"Better think about it first, Johnnie. I once tried playing a whole day, and it was tiresome enough, I can tell you, before I got through with it. It was *dreadful*."



"If we agree to do it, I'll keep to my part, Aunt Maria; but as Edith says, I'll think about it first." So Johnnie went off to the library, and took down a volume of stories about the Revolutionary war.

CHAPTER III.

VIOLETS AND ROSES.

A few days passed by, and there came a letter from papa saying that mamma was feeling better. This was very delightful to the little girls and Johnnie, though they had had a talk before it came about the duty of being sorrowful under the circumstances. It happened this way: they were outdoors playing May Queen.

"I never saw anything so sweet as these violets," cried Edith, in a rapture. They were as sweet as they could be, little English violets, white as snow, and perfuming the air. The flowers had come to Virginia early in the new spring, and already there were early roses, slender lilies of the valley, with tiny cups to catch the dewdrops, and the fragrant yellow jasmine flinging its golden bells over every roadside fence and tree. Old Uncle Moses had taken the children to the woods, and there they had seen the jasmine in its glory, and the white stars of the dogwood shining through the green branches far and near.

"'Pears like," said Uncle Moses, after one of these expeditions, "'pears like God must love posies, de way he scatter dem roun' dis yer land."

For all that Miss Josephine had been left at home, the little girls had not been obliged to live without a doll. Kind Aunt Maria had given them each one soon after their arrival. Out in the garden, then, with the dollies, Luce full of enthusiasm, and barking and rolling like an animated puff-ball, or else sitting up as straight as a judge, they were playing queen. Mabel had just fastened the wreath on Edith's head, when Johnnie very gravely observed,

"I think we are heartless wretches."

"Johnnie, where *do* you learn those big words?"

"Well, we're having such nice times, and never thinking of poor mamma. We ought to be miserable, if we had any feeling. I heard Aunt Chloe the other day say, 'Pore things, dey a'n't ole 'nuff to know what dey'd lose, if dey done lose dere mudder.'"



Mabel's ready tears began to flow.

"O dear! O dear!" she sobbed, "mamma is going to die! What shall we do?"

"Hush, Mabel!" said Edith. "If we ought not to play, why we'll stop; but there isn't any use in crying so. Do please hush this instant."

A quick step came down the walk. The children, looking up, saw the young lady who lived in the next house. She had a sunbonnet on her head, and a light shawl was thrown around her, and in her hand was a pretty little bark canoe, in which was her knitting-work.

"O Miss Rose, beautiful Miss Rose!" exclaimed Edith, "you're the very person we wanted to see."

"Mith Rothe, when thith canoe geth too old for you, you'll give it to me, won't you?" said Mabel, putting her hands lovingly up towards the fanciful basket.

"Mabel," Johnny said in a tone of reproof, "how often has mamma told you never to ask for things in that way?"

"Never mind your little sister, Johnnie," the young lady said, "but sit down and let me hear why you were all looking so serious when I came up. What lovely garlands you have made, and what a charming morning this is! God is very good to give us so many bright days, and so much joy in them, isn't he?"

Before any one could reply, a servant came up, with a request that the children would go to their Aunt Maria on the porch, and hear a message from their mother.

"Good! good!" Johnnie said, clapping his hands; but Edith and Mabel went more soberly. Miss Rose seated herself in a favorite spot of hers, a rustic chair under the oak-tree, and waited their return. She was fond of children, and since the little visitors had been there, she had often gone in with her knitting to talk and play with them.

After they had heard the letter, they were dismissed by Mrs. MacLain, who had her key-basket on her arm, and was very busy with her housekeeping. They trooped back to their friend Miss Rose, and grouped themselves around her, and the little girls began to weave a wreath for her hair, while Johnnie made her a bouquet.

"The question is, Miss Rose, whether we ought to be happy while we are away from mamma and papa."

"And while mamma is sick."

"And perhaps might die."

Miss Rose put her work down on her lap, and with one soft hand smoothed away the thick curls that had a way of falling over and shading Johnnie's forehead and eyes. She thought to herself, "What a pretty boy he is! How noble and open and candid those eyes and that brow!" Johnnie was a very truthful little fellow, and though he had faults, he would have scorned to tell a lie or do

anything mean. At this moment Charlie Hill, Aunt Chloe's boy, passed by with his fishing-rod and line. So Johnnie could not stay to hear Miss Rose then. He caught up his straw hat, seized his shrimp-net, and ran off, without even saying, "Excuse me."

"That wath very imperlite," observed Mabel. "And Johnnie began asking the questions too! He ithn't very thad."

"Dear children," said Miss Rose, "you are only little and young, to be sure, but you may as well learn that God never wants you to *try* to be miserable. He means you to be as merry and happy as you can be. Consider a minute. Have you ever been very unhappy when you have been good?"

"No," said Edith.

"I have," said Mabel, "when I've had the toothache."

Miss Rose laughed.

"Well, that was a pretty good cause; but generally, when children are not naughty, they are happy. You would only vex your dear mamma, and make her feel badly, if you were moping and fretting here, where she sent you to be with your auntie. Then you would spoil auntie's pleasure if, instead of laughing and singing, you were crying and sitting in the corner. She would say, 'O dear, what queer children these are! I'll be glad when they're gone away.'"

"That would be dreadful! to have Aunt Maria think that," said Edith. "But tell us your opinion about it."

"My opinion is, that it is every one's duty to be as cheerful as he can be all the time. If things vex us and trouble us, let us say, 'Never mind.' If it rains to-day, it will be clear to-morrow. If we pray to our Father, about everything, we will never need to be sorrowful long."

Then Miss Rose taught them a pretty little verse:

"Casting all your care upon Him, for He careth for you."

Kneeling that night by her little white bed, Edith said her prayers as usual, and then added another petition:

"Dear Lord Jesus, make me happy every night and day, so that I shall love everybody, and everybody love me."

Edith was already one of those children whose lives are like "a little light, within the world to shine."

CHAPTER IV.

CHERRIES ARE RIPE.

Faster and faster flew the May days by, and all the world was beautiful. The strawberries grew red and sweet upon the vines, and the children went out with the pickers to gather them, but they didn't work very steadily at this, for the sun was hot, and picking berries is apt to make the back ache. But the cherries most delighted them, and when Aunt Maria told them that they could have just as many cherries to eat as they wanted, and gave them one tree all to themselves, they hardly knew how to express their joy. It was not only in eating the cherries, that they had pleasure, for Aunt Maria let them have a tea-party, and said they might choose their guests.

"They don't know anybody but the Lesters and the Randolphs," she said complacently to Miss Rose.

"I shouldn't be a bit surprised if Edith and Johnnie invited a lot of little ragamuffins from Wood's Alley," replied Miss Rose.

Wood's Alley was one of those wretched neighborhoods, which in cities have a way of setting themselves down near rich people's doors. It was the short cut to Main street, and when the people near Aunt Maria's were in haste, they often took it, rather than go a long way round. The windows in Wood's Alley were broken and dingy, and the interiors—which means all you could see as you passed by, looking at open doors—were dirty, smoky, and uninviting. Children fairly swarmed there, black and white, and as ragged as they could be. Mabel had made Aunt Maria very angry one day, by taking off her best hat, and giving it to a little beggar girl from Wood's Alley, who had been lingering near the gate, and casting admiring looks at it.

"She ought to have known better than to take it from you," Aunt Maria said. "She is nothing but a little thief, and you are a very improvident child. To-morrow I'll take you to church in your old hat."

This did not trouble Mabel much. Mabel did not yet care enough for her clothes, and more than once she had given her things away before. Her mother had been trying to teach her discretion in

giving, for some time.

"Well, Rose," said Aunt Maria, "if I thought they would do that, I would tell them to have a picnic out-doors, for I don't want Wood's Alley in my dining-room. Those children are just as like their mother as they can be."

"Auntie," said Johnnie, "there's a splendid boy named Jim Cutts. He's been fishing with Charlie and me. Can he come to the party?"

"Jim Cutts!" echoed Mrs. MacLain with a sigh. Then she answered,

"Yes, dear, have whom you please; but let your table be out under the trees, on the lawn."

"That'll be splendid!" said Johnnie, running off.

They had ten or twelve little children at their party, and Dinah brought them sandwiches, cakes, and milk, and they had all the cherries they could eat. Edith taught them one of her Sunday-school hymns, and Johnnie made Luce perform all his most cunning tricks for their entertainment. Mabel lent her new doll to the poorest girl, to take home for the night, on the promise that it should surely come home next morning.

The promise was kept.

When the company had gone, Aunt Maria called them in, and made them take a thorough bath, and put on clean clothes all the way through. Then she bade each sit down, in the room with her, and read a chapter in the Bible. As Mabel could not read, she gave her a picture Bible to look at. She sat by, with so grave a face, and had so little to say, that they all began to feel uncomfortable, and wished themselves somewhere else. Edith's face was covered with blushes, Mabel began to swallow a lump in her throat, and Johnnie at last, growing angry, determined to stand it no longer. He shut up his Bible, and marched to Aunt Maria, who looked at him through her spectacles, and said:

"Well, sir? Who told you to shut up your book?"

"It does no good to read the Bible when anybody's mad with you," said Johnnie. "What have we done, Aunt Maria?"

"I did not *say* you had done anything."

"But you look so cross, and sit up so straight, and—who ever heard of reading the Bible, in the middle of the afternoon, on a week day?" said Johnnie with an air of assurance.

"Well, Johnnie, to tell the truth, I did *not* like your bringing all the riff-raff of the town to eat my nice cherries."

"But you said we might do it."

"I should think, Johnnie, you would have liked better to have such friends as Percival Lester and Reginold Randolph, or Maggie and Clara Vale, to play with. I fear you have low tastes, child."

At this charge, little Johnnie colored up, but he stood his ground.

"The reason we asked them was because they couldn't buy any fruit, if they wanted it ever so much; and we thought it would please them and make them happy."

Edith had been thoughtfully turning over the leaves of her Bible, and now she said:

"Auntie, here are some verses I once read to mamma:

"When thou makest a dinner or a supper, call not thy friends, nor thy brethren, neither thy kinsmen, nor thy rich neighbors, lest they also bid thee again, and a recompense be made thee.

"But when thou makest a feast, call the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind; and thou shalt be blessed, for they cannot recompense thee, for thou shalt be recompensed at the resurrection of the just."

"There," said Johnnie, "haven't we made a Bible feast?"

"Yes, my dears," Aunt Maria replied, "and I beg your pardon. The truth is, I have not been very much displeased with you, but thought I would try you a little. Now as you have had a good rest, you may all go out and play."

"I think Aunt Maria ith a naughty woman," said Mabel in a very low voice to Edith, as they left the room.

Rose, who had been present all the while, heard her, and so did Aunt Maria, but neither said a word, till the children were out of hearing. Then Rose said,

"I'm afraid I agree with little Mabel. Dear Mrs. MacLain, what made you pretend to be vexed, if you were not?"

"I am not obliged to explain my actions to every one, am I, Rose?" said the lady. "Children are a sort of a puzzle to me, never having had any of my own; and I don't believe I know how to bring them up. But these of Helen's are pretty good, especially Johnnie."

Aunt Maria had some very stylish friends who occasionally visited her. They sent word beforehand concerning their coming, and great preparations were made. On the day of their arrival, the little folks were arrayed in their very best, and Edith and Mabel took their dolls, and were seated in the parlor, that they might not get into the least disorder.

"Mrs. Featherfew is very particular," said Aunt Maria. "She will be sure to take notice, if you don't behave splendidly."

"I'll be glad when she's been and gone," remarked Johnnie.

Mrs. Featherfew however was quite different from what the children had been led to expect. She was a slender pretty looking lady, who seemed to float down the long parlor, she walked so lightly and gracefully, her long silk dress trailing behind her. The next day the two little girls amused themselves by playing "Mrs. Featherfew," Edith putting on a long gown of her aunt's for the purpose.

Two very elegant children came with Mrs. Featherfew, Wilhelmine and Victorine. They spoke very primly and politely, and seemed to our little folks like grown-up ladies cut down short. But when after dinner they all went out into the grounds to play, Mine and Rine, as they called each other, could play as merrily as the others.

The little girl to whom the dolly had been lent happened to be looking through the palings, just when the fun was at its height. She had rather a dirty face, and a very torn dress.

"Do look at that impertinent creature actually staring at us, as if she belonged here!" exclaimed Victorine, with amazement.

"Go right away, child," said Wilhelmine.

Now as these little girls were guests themselves, they were taking too much responsibility in ordering anybody off. Edith's face flushed, and she felt vexed. She would have preferred, after all her Aunt Maria had said about it, to have the Alley children keep a little more distance; but she could not let anybody hurt their feelings.

"That little girl is a friend of mine, Wilhelmine," spoke out the loyal little soul bravely. It was not in Edith, to be ashamed of any friend, no matter how humble.

Wilhelmine looked surprised, and Johnnie went on to tell how they had gotten acquainted. Before he had finished, the little visitors were so interested in the ragged girl, that they each gave her a bright five-cent piece.

So Edith did good by her fearlessness. We never know how much good we may do, by speaking according to our conscience.

The Featherfew girls had a very nice time, and went away well pleased; but they told their mamma that the Evans children were very droll.

"It's the way they have been brought up, I imagine," said Mrs. Featherfew.

Two or three days after that, the children were in a part of the garden, in which was a bridge over a darling little brook, as Edith called it. They were expecting their parents by the first steamer, and Johnnie had been gathering a basket of the ripest and reddest cherries he could find, to have them all ready for offering to mamma on her arrival. As he was running lightly over the bridge, his foot slipped, and he came near falling in, but Edith and Mabel flew to the rescue, and held him up by his cap, and his curls, and his arm, till he recovered his balance. One foot was very wet. It had gone "way, way in," and in that condition, splashed and barefoot, for he pulled off the wet boot and stocking, he went back to the house with the girls.

Just as they reached the front door, a carriage drove up. A gentleman sprang out, and lifted a lady next, and the servants began to take off the bags and trunks. Could that be mamma? It needed only a glance to satisfy the eager children, and in a moment all three were rapturously hugging and kissing her and their father.



Mamma had grown quite plump and rosy. She was ever so much better, and Johnnie asked, the first thing, whether she could bear a noise now.

"A little noise, dear, I hope," she said smiling. It had been a great trial to Johnnie to keep so still as had been necessary when they were at home.

"She is not so very strong yet, Master John," said Mr. Evans. "I'm afraid an earthquake or a volcano would use her up. We'll have to take care of her yet awhile."

But the children found that they had gotten their old mamma back. She was a great deal nicer than anybody else, they thought.

That night, when it grew almost bedtime, and Chloe appeared as usual at the parlor door, with the candles on a silver tray, and the great silver snuffers, ready to light the young folks up stairs, they went and kissed their father and mother and Aunt Maria for good night. But when they were undressed, and the little dresses and skirts were hung smoothly over the chairs, the little shoes and stockings set side by side on the floor, and the little nightgowns on, somebody came quietly in, somebody who sat down in the rocking-chair, and with one little white-robed figure in her lap, and another with an arm thrown around her neck, and another on a footstool at her feet, heard their hymns, and told them a little story, and listened while each prayed to the dear Saviour. The three little hearts were satisfied that night, because they had had their mother to comfort them and bless them again.

A few days after that, they bade good-by to the beautiful seaside home, and to Luce, and the black cat, and the horses and cow, the geese and the chickens. To Miss Rose and Aunt Maria they gave a very warm invitation to come and see them in their own home.

Fido and Queenie had been well taken care of at Aunt Catharine's house, but they seemed very glad indeed to have their little mistress back. Johnnie declared that Fido couldn't hold a candle to Luce, and he and Mabel had several disputes over it. Indeed one day they became so angry at each other, that Mrs. Evans sent the little brother to his own room and the little sister to hers, to stay until they were ready to ask each other's pardon. Edith, serene and peaceful, kept out of all such troubles.

"Miss Simms," said Johnnie one day, "what is the reason nobody ever is angry with Edith? She seems to please people without trying to."

"I think Edith has found out a great secret very early in her life," Miss Simms answered.

"I wish I knew it, then; I'm always being scolded, and I try to be as good as the other fellows. But it isn't of any use, that I can see. To-day I had been perfect all day in school, you know, Miss Simms, and just a minute before recess, I spoke; and Miss Clark was mean enough to make me stay in. She read off the boys' names who had violated any rule, this way:

"Willie Simpson, late;

"Thomas Miller, missed his geography;

"Johnnie Evans, whispering.

"These little boys must spend this recess in the school-room.' I leave it to you, Miss Simms, if that wasn't mean."

"Was it the rule that you must lose your recess, if you spoke?"

"Yes, if we spoke without permission."

"And you knew all about it?"

"Oh! yes!"

"Well, *I* don't see how Miss Clark could help herself or you, if you disobeyed. You were both bound by the rule, you see, Johnnie."

"That's only one thing. I forget to hang up my hat on the nail, and I bring mud in on my boots, and I lose my speller, and I lose my temper too, and I'm just tired of trying any more."

Johnnie stood like a little "knight of the rueful countenance," hat in hand.

Miss Simms measured two breadths of silk; "snip, snip," went her shining scissors, and she threaded her needle. "Dear me, what a hard needle to thread; my eyes are beginning to fail me," she said.

"I'll thread it for you, let me. My eyes are bright and sharp," said Johnnie.

"Thank you," she said. "Now, Johnnie, don't you want to know Edith's secret. It is a word of four letters, LOVE. Love to God, and love to everybody else. That makes Edie's good time."

"How can I get it too?" said Johnnie.

"I must tell you some of my verses, I think:

"Ask, and ye shall receive.

"Seek, and ye shall find.

"Knock, and it shall be opened to you.

"For every one that asketh receiveth.

"And he that seeketh findeth.

"And to him that knocketh, it shall be opened."

"I'll ask," said Johnnie.

These five happy weeks were long spoken of as "the time when we stayed at Aunt Maria's house," and their memory has not yet faded away from the children's minds. They are expecting a visit soon from Aunt Maria, Miss Rose, and Chloe; and Lucifer Matches is coming too.

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK FIVE HAPPY WEEKS ***

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