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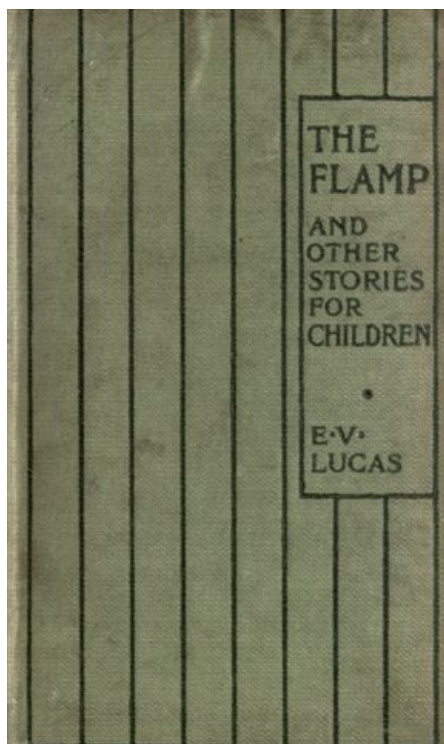
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*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THE FLAMP, THE AMELIORATOR, AND THE SCHOOLBOY'S APPRENTICE ***



The Flamp, The Ameliorator, and The Schoolboy's Apprentice

By E. V. LUCAS

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The Flamp

TO MOLLY AND HILDA.

*That sunny afternoon in May,
How stealthily we crept away,
We three—(Good things are done in threes:
That is, good things in threes are done
When you make two and I make one.)—
To hatch our small conspiracies!*

*Between the blossomy apple-trees
(You recollect?) we sped, and then
Safe in the green heart of the wood
We breathed again.
The purple flood the bluebells made
Washed round about us where we stood,
While voices, where the others played,
Assured us we were not pursued.*

A fence to climb or wriggle through,

*A strip of meadow wet with dew
To cross, and lo! before us flared
The clump of yellow gorse we shared
With five young blackbirds and their mother.
There, close beside our partners' nest,
And free from Mr. C. (that pest!),
And careless of the wind and damp,
We framed the story of The Flamp.*

*And O! Collaborators kind,
The wish is often in my mind,
That we, in just such happy plight,—
With Chanctonbury Ring in sight,—
Some day may frame another.*

E. V. L.
1896.

I

Once upon a time there dwelt in a far country two children, a sister and a brother, named Tilsa and Tobene. Tilsa was twelve and Tobene was ten, and they had grown up, as it were, hand in hand. Their father died when Tobene was only a little piece of pink dimpled dough, and when their mother died too, a few years after, old Alison was told to pack up the things and journey with Tilsa and Tobene to the children's grandfather, the Ligid (or Lord Mayor) of Ule, whom they had never yet seen.

Old Alison was their nurse, and she had been their father's nurse before them. Nothing worth knowing was unknown to old Alison: she could tell them where the fairies danced by night, and the names and habits of the different people who live in the stars, and the reason why thrushes' eggs have black spots and hedge sparrows' none, and how to make Toffee of Paradise, and a thousand useful and wonderful things beside.

Alison was old and wrinkled and bent, but there was not a warmer heart in all the world, and no tongue could say kinder words than hers, and no hands minister so lovingly to those who needed help. It was said that Alison had only to look at a sore place and it was healed again. If any one loved her more than Tilsa it was Tobene; and if any one loved her more than Tobene it was Tilsa; and old Alison's love for them was as strong.

On the day appointed, the three travellers set forth in a chariot driven by postilions, and in the course of a week's journeying through strange countries came at last to Ule.

At the southern gate they were met by the Ligid. They discovered him to be more than a mere person—a Personage!—with white hair, and little beady eyes, and a red nose, and a gold-laced hat.

'Welcome,' said he, 'welcome, Tilsa and Tobene, to the city of Ule.' And then he kissed the air an inch or two from the cheek of his grandchildren and led the way to his house.

II

Ule was a little city in the midst of a wide plain, and round about it was a stout wall. One straight, white road crossed the plain from end to end, entering the city at the northern gate and leaving it by the southern gate. The borders of the plain were blue mountains whose peaks reached the sky, and among these peaks the sun made his bed. At least, so said the good people of Ule.

Nothing could shake their faith, for did they not every morning see him rise from the eastern peaks, fresh and ready for the day's work of warming the air of Ule, and encouraging the trees of Ule to bear fruit and the buds of Ule to spread into flowers? And every evening did they not see him, tired and faint, sink to rest amid the western peaks? The rare strangers who came now and then to the city and heard this story, were apt to smile unbelievably and ask laughingly how, after laying his head among the pillows on the western side of the plain, the sun was able to wake up on the opposite side, many miles distant?

But this question presented no difficulty to the good people of Ule. 'Why,' they would reply a little irritably, for they liked to think that the sun was theirs and theirs only, 'surely the sun can walk in his sleep as well—nay, better—than ordinary folk? A baby could see that!' they would add with a laugh.

So it was settled that the sun spent all his time in the neighbourhood of Ule. If the citizens had ever travelled away from their native part, perhaps they would have thought otherwise; but they rarely, or never, did.

'What!' they would say, in pained astonishment, 'leave Ule! Why?'

'To see the world,' the rash stranger who had made the suggestion might reply.

'The world? This is the world,' would be the answer.

And they really believed that it was. The knowledge that thousands of other places, no whit less happy than themselves, or even more happy, were in existence would have made the Ulians quite bad-tempered. And beyond doubt they were in need of no other cause to excite their anger, for had they not the Flamp?

III

The Flamp was a monster who dwelt in a cave somewhere in the mountains that surrounded the plain. Once every year, on Christmas night, the Flamp came into the city and threw the population into a frenzy of terror. That on this night of the year, a night set apart for joyfulness and festivity, the Loathly Beast (for so he was called by orators in the City Council when they had used the word Flamp often enough) should invade their city, seeking his prey, seemed to the Ulians an act of the grossest cruelty and injustice. Almost as soon as darkness had fallen on Christmas Day, the noises in the city would cease, and the house-holders and their families would sit within barred doors, with uplifted fingers, holding their breath, and listening, listening. Then in the far distance *flob! flob!* faint, *FLOB!! FLOB!!* less faint, *FLOB!!! FLOB!!!* less faint, every moment louder, coming nearer and nearer, until the earth shook, and the Flamp's flobbering, flamping feet filled the air with deafening thuds.

All keys were turned, all bolts were drawn, all blinds were down, by the time he entered the city. Not a light was visible. The Flamp was heard sniffing at this door, fumbling at the handle of that, knocking at another, while the *shuff! shuff!* of his sides against the walls was quite audible. Now and then he would sit down in the road and sigh deeply, and the trembling listeners near by could hear the splashing of his tears on the stones.

After passing through every street, the Flamp would turn out of the gate once more, and swing off across the plain to his cave in the mountains, the earth would cease to tremble, and fainter and fainter would sound his footfalls: *FLOB!!! FLOB!!! FLOB!! FLOB!! flob! flob!* until at last all was still again. Then with white faces and shaking limbs the citizens would crawl to bed, bemoaning their lot.

The next day the streets were examined to see if any damage had been done, but nothing was ever found except pools of water where the Flamp had sat down to sigh and weep. One strange thing was observed after every visit of the Flamp: these pools were always opposite houses where there were children.

'He comes for the children,' was the natural conclusion of the people. 'See how the Monster cries with rage and disappointment when he finds all doors barred to him.'

Measures had of course been taken to keep the Flamp out of Ule. The gates were barricaded: he broke them down as easily as you break new toys; spring guns were placed in the roads: they went off, the bullets struck his hide, and, rebounding, smashed several windows, while one even ricocheted against the statue of the Ligid in the market-place and chipped off a piece of his Excellency's nose; poisoned meat was spread about temptingly: in the morning it was found all gathered together on the doorstep of the Sanitary Inspector. Thus in time it became clear that the Flamp was not to be checked, and for many years before the time of our story no other attempts had been made.

IV

The first knowledge of the Flamp which came to Tilsa and Tobene was gained at breakfast on Christmas morning, when the Ligid warned them of the precautions necessary in the city at night, and besought them to make no noise lest the attention of the Loathly Beast should be drawn to their house.

'But what is the Flamp?' asked Tilsa.

'What!' said the Ligid. 'A monster, a dreadful monster!'

'What is it like?' Tobene asked.

'Like?' said the Ligid, 'like? Why, no one knows. No one has seen it. But we can hear it—oh, horrible, horrible!' and the little man covered his eyes and shuddered.

'Why does it come?' Tilsa went on.

'To eat us,' said the Ligid.

'How many people has it eaten?' said Tobene.

'Eh!' the Ligid replied. 'Well, I don't—well, I can't exactly—well, I don't think it has ever eaten any one yet. But it wants to and means to.'

'Then how do you know it wants to eat you?' Tilsa persisted.

'Because,' said the Ligid, 'because it sounds like it.'

At night the Flamp came, and the city trembled and the earth shook. Before the Ligid's house it sat down and wept and sighed for fully five minutes, while within doors the Ligid turned all the colours of the rainbow with fright. 'His face was fine,' said Tobene afterwards: 'just like those whirligig things at the end of magic-lantern shows.' From which remark you may judge that Tobene did not share his grandfather's alarm, nor did Tilsa, nor old Alison.

The next morning there was a pool outside the Ligid's house large enough to sail a boat on.

V

One day not long after the Flamp's visit, Tilsa ran into old Alison's room to ask something, and was surprised and grieved to find her nurse rocking to and fro in her chair, with her face covered. Now and then between her fingers trickled the tears, and Alison sighed deeply.

'What is it?' Tilsa asked, kneeling beside her. 'Can I do anything, dear Alison?'

'Only stay here, dearie,' sobbed the old woman. 'I was remembering happier days. Stay here, Tilsa dear. All I want is sympathy.'

So Tilsa stayed, and Alison soon was herself again. 'Thank you, dearie,' she said as she wiped her eyes and jumped up ready to set to work again; 'you have done me a world of good. Always be sympathetic if you can. No one knows how grateful it is.'

It was nearly bed-time, and Tilsa went downstairs to say good-night to the Ligid. On the way her little white forehead was puckered into lines like a railway map.

She entered her grandfather's room softly. The old man was seated on one side of his desk; on the other was the Town Clerk of Ule. Between them was a large sheet of paper with these words at the top:

'A BILL FOR THE CIRCUMVENTION OF THE FLAMP.'

They were too busy to notice Tilsa's entrance.

'We must hurry it through the House,' the Ligid was saying, 'or there won't be time. Rigmarola is a long way off.'

'How long will it take to march the troops here?' the Town Clerk asked.

'Fully six months,' said the Ligid, 'and then they must be drilled. They don't fight Flamps every day, and they may find it difficult to fix upon a mode of attack. What a pity it is,' he added, 'that Ule has no army.'

'It will be expensive,' said the Town Clerk.

'Money,' the Ligid remarked, 'is no object where the circumvention of the Flamp is concerned. The city has suffered long enough.'

'True,' said the Town Clerk.

Tilsa now ventured to interrupt. 'Grandpapa,' she said, 'I've come to say good-night.'

'Eh!' said the old man, now seeing her for the first time. 'Good-night? Oh yes! good-night, my dear'; and after his wont he kissed the air an inch from her cheek.

Tilsa did not at once run out of the room as she generally did, rather glad to have done with the ceremony; instead, she spoke again. 'Grandpapa, I think I know what the Flamp wants when he comes to the town.'

'Eh!' cried the Ligid, who was intent on his Bill again. 'Eh! I thought you'd gone to bed. You know what the Flamp comes for?' he continued.

'Yes,' said Tilsa, 'it's not to eat people at all, or to do any harm; it's for sympathy.'

'Rubbish!' said the Ligid. 'Nonsense—don't meddle with things you don't understand. Run off to bed at once.'

VI

For a long time Tilsa lay awake, putting two and two together and making four every time. Then she jumped out of bed and pattered with her bare feet into Tobene's room.

'Toby,' she said, gently shaking him. 'Toby!'

Tobene thrust out his arms and looked at her with eyes that saw nothing.

'Toby,' Tilsa said again. 'It's me—Tilsa.'

'Yes,' he said in the tone of one who is not much interested. 'What is it?'

'I've found out,' said Tilsa, 'what the Flamp comes for every year.'

'What?' said Tobene.

'Sympathy,' said Tilsa.

'What's sympathy?' said Tobene.

'Oh, it's putting your arms round people and being sorry for them.'

'Pooh,' said Tobene, 'if that's sympathy, you must be wrong. He's too big.'

But Tilsa was not in the least discouraged.

'No, Toby,' she said, 'I'm right. And, Toby, Toby, darling, I want to go and find the Flamp and say I'm sorry for him, and I want you to come with me.'

'Me?' cried Tobene, now wide awake.

'Of course,' said Tilsa. 'We've never done anything alone yet, and I don't want to begin now.'

'Well, I suppose it's all right,' Tobene faltered. 'But he's drefful big, isn't he?'

'I'm afraid he is rather large,' said Tilsa, as cheerfully as she could.

'And isn't he mighty ferocious?'

'Well,' said Tilsa, 'they say so, but nobody's sure. And you know, Toby dear, what silly things the people here say about the sun shining nowhere else but on the plain. We know better than that, don't we? Well, very likely they're just as wrong about the Flamp. So you will go, Toby, won't you?'

'Yes, I'll go,' said Tobene. 'When shall we start?'

'Now,' said Tilsa. 'I want you to dress directly without making any noise. I'm going to write a little note to Alison,—she's too old to come with us,—and then I'll be ready too.'

Tilsa hurried back to her room, and wrote the following note to old Alison:—

MY VERY DEAR ALISON—Toby and me are going to try and find the Flamp and give him simpithy, which I am sure is what he wants, because he cries and makes a noise just like you did to-day, only louder, and that is what you said you wanted, dear Alison. Please don't be frightened, because you said we ought always to give simpithy when we can, however much it costs us. Please tell grandpapa if the Flamp is what I think he is there won't be any need to sircumvent him. With love and kisses, your loving TILSA.

Tilsa slipped the note under Alison's door and then fetched Tobene from his room. They went first to the larder and packed a small basket with food. Tobene's vote was for blancmange and jam tarts, but Tilsa said that bread and biscuits were better.

'How about salt?' Toby asked.

'Salt?' said Tilsa, 'what for?'

'To put on the Flamp's tail and catch him,' said Toby. 'Else how are you going to hug him, Tilsa?'

VII

The two little explorers squeezed through the bars of the northern gate and for an hour or more hurried as fast as they could along the white road. They had no plan. All that Tilsa knew was that the Flamp lived somewhere in the mountains, but whether it was north or south, east or west, she could not say.

At the end of the second hour, Tilsa felt certain that it was time to leave the road, because day was not far off and they were very weary.

'Cheer up, Toby,' she said. 'We'll soon lie down and have some sleep. I'm going to shut my eyes

and I want you to turn me round three times, and whichever way I walk then, that way we shall go.'

This was done, and Tilsa struck off to the left of the road into the plain. Then after walking for nearly an hour longer, they came to a little dell with a pool at the bottom and bushes growing on its sides, and here Tilsa stopped. The two children lay down together under a bush and at once fell asleep.

When Tilsa awoke, it was broad day. She roused Tobene, and they went to the pool and splashed some water over their faces and hands, and then Tilsa opened the basket. Breakfast consisted only of bread and butter and biscuits, but as they were hungry it was better than a banquet. The real business of the day was yet to begin, and Tilsa was wondering how to set about learning the road, when both children were startled by a wee voice.

'I call that piggish,' it said. 'And inconsiderate too.'

Not seeing any speaker, neither child replied but only stared at each other in puzzlement.

'Yes,' the tiny voice continued, 'people can be too tidy. Dropping crumbs is a bad habit in the house, I know, but out of doors it becomes a virtue. People who get up first thing in the morning to gorge themselves with bread and biscuits in this greedy way, and then drop no crumbs—well, piggish and inconsiderate is what I call them.'

The accusation aroused Tilsa. 'We didn't gorge,' she said, 'whoever you are, and we've slept here all night. But here are some crumbs for you, anyway,' and so saying, she broke up a piece of bread and scattered it on the ground.

Immediately a little fiery-crested wren hopped down from a branch of the bush and began to peck among the grass.

'Thank you,' he said when he had finished; 'but if you had done it without being asked it would have been better.'

'We didn't see you,' said Tobene in excuse.

'Doesn't matter,' the wren replied; 'birds is everywhere, and always hungry. Wherever you drop crumbs you may be sure they'll be acceptable. Remember that. Now, is there anything I can do for you?'

'Well,' said Tilsa, 'we want to know the way to the Flamp.'

'Before I tell you,' said the wren, 'you must inform me whether I am speaking to a boy or a girl.'

'I am a girl,' said Tilsa. 'Toby here is a boy.'

'Very well,' the wren answered. 'Then I must talk to Toby. I make it a rule never to join in friendly conversation with women. They wear my feathers in their hats.'

'But men shoot you,' Tobene interposed, angry that Tilsa should be treated in this way.

'True,' said the wren, 'true. But so long as there are men, birds must expect to be shot. It's all in the day's work and must be endured. But for one's body to go to the milliner's is intolerable. Intolerable.' The little creature suddenly swallowed its rage, and continued more sweetly: 'Now, as to the Flamp. What you want, Toby, is a Flamp compass.'

'What's that?' Tobene asked.

'Why, an ordinary compass points to the north, doesn't it? Well, a Flamp compass points to the Flamp,' said the wren. 'Then you can find the way.'

'But where are we to get one?' was Tobene's very natural question.

'The hedgehog makes them,' said the wren. 'On the other side of this dell you will see a line of bushes. The hedgehog lives under the fourteenth. Knock on the ground three times and he'll come out. Now I must be off. Good-morning.' And with these words the fiery-crested wren flitted away.

At the fourteenth bush the children knocked three times on the ground.

'Well?' said a surly voice.

'Please we want a Flamp compass,' said Tilsa.

At once the hedgehog appeared. 'I beg your pardon,' he said in softer tones, 'but I mistook you for the rates and taxes, or I shouldn't have spoke so short. I wasn't expecting customers so early. A Flamp compass? Why, I don't think I have one in stock. You see, since the Flamps died off, the demand has been so small that very few are made. There's my own, which has been in the family for years, but I shouldn't care to part with that except at a high price.'

'How much would you call a high price, sir?' Tilsa inquired a little anxiously.

'Well, I couldn't let it go for anything less than a Ribston pippin, or its value,' said the hedgehog. 'But I'm open to offers,' he continued.

'Toby,' said Tilsa, 'turn out your pockets.'

Tobene did so, and Tilsa examined the produce with a doubtful face.

'Please, sir,' she said, 'would you like for the Flamp compass, which you say is an old one, a piece of string, two marbles, some toffee—although I'm afraid it's rather mixed up with string—eight nuts, a screw, a peg-top, and a knife?'

'The knife will be useful,' said Toby, who was looking on a little ruefully, but convinced that Tilsa, as usual, was doing the right thing and therefore must be supported, 'in case any one tries to snub you.'

'Ah, you needn't trouble about that,' said the hedgehog. 'It's a difficult matter to snub me. You see,' he added, 'by the nature of his construction a hedgehog is not easily sat upon. But to business. Considering that the times are hard, I don't mind accepting your offer, miss.'

So saying, to Tilsa's immense delight, the hedgehog retired under the bush again, and came out carrying the Flamp compass. 'Is there anything else I can do for you?' he asked. 'Any periwinkle brooms or mallow cheeses this morning? We have a nice stock of thistle-clocks just in.'

'No, thank you,' Tilsa replied as they hurried off. 'Nothing more to-day. Good-morning.'

The compass was neatly contrived of the cup of an acorn, through the bottom of which ran a hedgehog's prickle. Balanced on the point was the needle, a spear of dried grass, and over all was a spider's web to serve as glass.

VIII

No matter how the Flamp compass was twisted, the needle pointed steadily to the mountains before them, and the children marched bravely forward. They were hungry and tired, but Tilsa would as soon have thought of asking Tobene to carry her as of turning back. As for Tobene, he put one foot before the other as firmly as he was able, and tried to forget the loss of his treasures.

The worst part of the journey was clambering over the hot rocks when the mountains were reached, and the travellers did at last lose their resolute cheerfulness, and had just sat down in the shade to have a good cry, when they suddenly heard the sound of singing. Not exactly singing; rather a melancholy droning, or chanting, as of a dirge. Listening intently, they could make out these words:

*I'm not in the least in love with life;
I might be, p'raps, if I had a wife
To care for me in a wifely way,
Or a neighbour or two to say good-day,
Or a chum
To come
And give me the news in a friendly talk,
Or share a duet or a meal or a walk.
But all alone in the world am I,
And I sit in a cave,
And try to behave
As a good Flamp should, with philosophy.
I shan't last long, for the cave is damp,
And nothing's so bad for a Flamp
As cramp....*

'It's the Flamp!' said both children together, fearfully.

The chanting began again, and Tilsa and Tobene jumped up and, following the sound of the voice, came to a wide and heavily-trodden path between two rocks. They plodded along it until, rounding a crag, they perceived immediately before them a yawning cave. Although the singer was out of sight, the noise made by him was now almost overwhelming and so dismal that the children were on the point of joining in the lamentation themselves.

A few steps more brought them in sight of the melancholy songster. Seated in a corner of the cave, with his massive head on his fore-paws, the picture of dejection, was the most enormous creature they had ever seen or dreamed about. He was rather like an elephant, but much more immense and without a trunk: a huge, ungainly, slate-coloured animal.

He did not hear them, but sat rocking to and fro in his corner, moaning lugubriously.

'Toby,' said Tilsa, who now was not in the least alarmed, 'can you cough?'

'I'll try,' said Toby, and he coughed.

The Flamp took down one paw from its desert of face and peered out. Then he sprang to his feet and rubbed his heavy, watery, blue eyes in blank astonishment. Tilsa and Tobene did not move. They stood still, gazing into the Flamp's great, mournful face, now wrinkled up with surprise and

excitement.

Then the Flamp spoke—'What?' he said, 'kids? Real kids? Flesh-and-blood kids? Human, rollicking, kind-hearted kids?'

'We are real children,' Tilsa replied at length, 'if that is what you mean, and, oh, we are so glad to have found you! The hedgehog's compass told us to come this way, or we should never have reached you at all.'

'Then you set out intending to find me?' said the Flamp. 'Well, that is a good one. How is it you're not scared, like all the rest of them?'

'I don't know,' said Tilsa. 'I can't think. But we weren't, were we, Toby?'

'No,' said Tobene.

'And what made you come?' the Flamp asked.

'We—we—' Tilsa faltered. 'Well, sir, we thought you wanted sympathy, like Alison did. And so we came to—to try and give you some.'

'And so I do,' the Flamp gasped out. 'And so I do,' and he lifted up his right paw, and brushed it across his eyes. 'You see, it's precious little of it I get. It's very hard, I can assure you, my dears, to be the last of one's race. Why, the land was full of Flamps once, and a fellow need never be in want of company, but now—now they're all dead, all but me, and I'm not long for this life.' The Flamp sighed and dropped a tear, which splashed heavily.

Tilsa felt very sorry. 'Poor—' she began to say, but stopped abruptly. She was intending to say 'Poor Flamp,' but that now seemed to her too familiar; so she altered it to 'Poor gentleman!' although when the word was out, it seemed equally unsuitable.

Tobene said nothing aloud, but nudged Tilsa and whispered, 'Aren't you going to try throwing your arms round him, Tilsa? It's time, isn't it?'

'Hush!' said Tilsa severely.

The Flamp went on: 'And I doubt if any one is keener on company than I am. Over in the city yonder, you know, they have a season called Christmas, when every one is supposed to be friends with every one else; and I thought to myself, That's the time for me. I won't ask for much, I thought, but if just one night in the year they'll look pleased to see me, and say, 'How do?' why I'll be very grateful to them and a deal happier during the months that follow. It wasn't much to ask, was it? But I suppose I didn't go to work the right way, or perhaps I had two legs too many. Anyway, they misunderstood me: thought I'd come to do them harm or something, and tried shooting me and poisoning me and barricading themselves in. Wouldn't even give me a moment's sight of a kid's face. I didn't try any other night. It seemed to me that if at a season of goodwill they would behave like that, my chances at an ordinary time would be less than nothing. But men can't understand animals. Children can, though they're apt to grow out of it. Thank goodness, there's *some* children that stay childlike to the end, however old they may be.' He brushed his paw across his eyes again.

Soon he went on: 'So I've had to live alone, with no company but my own voice. Maybe you heard me singing as you came. It wasn't much of a song, I admit, for elegance of rhyme and metre don't seem to come easy, but a song like that is more comfort than you'd believe.' He paused again.

Then he turned radiantly to his visitors. 'And you've trudged all the way from the city just to be kind to me, have you? Well, that is good of you! Bless your hearts, no one knows how much a deed like that means. Why, it's as good as smush even to know that any one is thinking of you kindly, let alone doing things. I haven't felt so cheery and comfortable for years. But you must be hungry. Now tell me what you would like to eat and I'll try and get it for you, and afterwards you must tell me all about yourselves.'

Tilsa looked at Tobene, and Tobene at Tilsa.

Then Tobene spoke to the Flamp for the first time. 'You said just now that something was as good as smush. Please, what is smush? because if it's something to eat, I should like that.'

The Flamp laughed all over: 'Splendid,' he cried, 'splendid! Something to eat? I should rather think it is. You couldn't have made a better choice. You shall have smush. Sit down here while I get it ready.'

Tilsa and Tobene sat down, and the Flamp retreated farther into the cave. There was a noise of pots and pans.

'Isn't he a whopper?' said Tobene.

'Tremendous,' said Tilsa. 'And what a dear old thing!'

'Yes,' Tobene continued, 'and what a set of donkeys those people at Ule have been all these years. Why, he's as jolly as Alison, in a different way. Do you think he'll give us a ride, Tilsa?'

'Of course he will,' said a deep voice above them. 'But you must eat some smush first,' and looking up, they saw the Flamp on his hind legs, towering into the roof of the cave, and in his paws a large dish and some plates and spoons. 'Now then,' he said, 'eat as much as you can.'

(All that the historian can do towards a description of smush is to say that its colour is pink, and its taste quite indescribable but blessed in the highest degree. When asked about it afterwards, Tilsa and Tobene, even to their old age, would become purple and inarticulate with enthusiasm. Perhaps if each of you thinks of all the most delicious things you have ever eaten, you will come a little nearer to an idea of what smush is like.)

After they had finished, Tilsa told the Flamp all about herself, and Tobene, and old Alison, and her grandfather the Ligid of Ule.

'I expect,' she said, 'they are looking for us now. And I think, sir, if you don't mind, it would be better if you were to go back with us, and then we could let everybody see how kind and gentle you are, and grandpapa won't go on trying to circumvent you.'

'Circumvent?' said the Flamp. 'What's that?'

'I don't know what it means,' said Tilsa, 'except that it's something horrid. And someone named Bill's going to do it.'

'All right,' said the Flamp, 'we will go back together, and the sooner the better, I think, or that dear old Alison of yours will be nervous. Although I should like to keep you here, you know. But you'll promise to come again, won't you, and stay a long time?'

'O yes,' cried Tilsa and Tobene together, 'we should just think we will!'

IX

That night the two children slept soundly in a corner of the cave, while the Flamp sat by and watched them. In the morning, after a breakfast of smush, they climbed on the monster's back and started for the city at a good swinging pace.

'It was like riding on a cloud,' said Tobene afterwards: 'so high up.'

They were well within sight of Ule when—'Look,' said Tobene suddenly, pointing in the direction of a speck on the white road, 'what's that?'

'It moves,' said Tilsa. 'It's a person.'

'We'll soon see what it is,' the Flamp grunted, lengthening his stride. The earth shook as his feet beat upon it.

As they came nearer and nearer, the children saw that the object was a woman. For a moment she stood upright, looking all ways at once as though panic-stricken, and then she suddenly unfurled a green umbrella and sank behind it.

'Why, it's Alison,' cried Tobene. 'Hurrah!'

'Stop, stop!' cried Tilsa to the Flamp. 'Please don't frighten dear old Alison. Let us go down and run to her.'

The Flamp at once stopped and lay on his side, and the children slipped to the ground and scampered as fast as they could towards their nurse. The umbrella did not move. As they drew close they heard the old lady's voice in beseeching tones: 'Please, Mr. Flamp, they're the sweetest children in the world, and if you've swallowed them, you mountaineous wretch you, you may as well swallow me too, for all there's left for me to live for! Besides, I'm their nurse, and I might be useful to them down inside. Ooh! Ooh! Please, Mr. Flamp, they're the sweetest children in the world, and if you've swallowed them, you mountaineous wretch you, you——'

'Alison, dear, it's all right,' Tilsa interrupted, skipping up and pushing the umbrella aside. 'We're as safe and happy as ever we were.'

Alison stared first at one and then at the other of her truant charges. Then—'Well?' she almost screamed, 'is it really you, my dearies?'

'Really!' exclaimed both children at once, and there was such hugging as the plain of Ule had never before seen.

Soon Alison furled her umbrella and pointed to the Flamp, who was smiling and chuckling and soliloquising in the distance.

('It's as good as smush to see this,' he was saying.)

'Is that him?' Alison inquired.

'Yes,' said Tilsa, 'and he's such a dear, you can't think.'

'Yes, come along and be introduced,' said Tobene, and without a word Alison went, being quite assured that if the creature had not harmed her two pets it would not harm her.

'Mr. Flamp,' said Tobene, 'I want to introduce you to this lady, our nurse Alison. She's the best nurse in the world. You ought to get her to tuck you up at night.'

'Tuck *me* up?' cried the Flamp, and—"Tuck *that* up?" cried Alison, both together, and they all laughed, and at once Alison was at home and comfortable.

They went forward to the city, chatting gaily, but when the wall was reached, the gates were found to be barricaded. No sound of life was audible, no moving thing to be seen.

'As I expected,' said the Flamp sadly. 'They heard me coming, and as usual have locked themselves in. What's to be done?'

'The best course,' remarked old Alison, who was always a wonderful manager, whether with the cold mutton or a child in a temper, 'the best course is to wait. You lie down here, Mr. Flamp, and make as little noise breathing as you can; and you, Tilsa, darling, take this pencil and paper and write a note to your grandfather, to be slipped under the gate. They'll venture out soon and find it.'

The Flamp and Tilsa did as they were bid. This was Tilsa's note to the Ligid:—

'MY DEAR GRANDPAPA—There is no need to be frightened. Alison and Toby and me are just outside the gates all safe with the Flamp, who is really and truly the sweetest creature you ever saw. He doesn't want to hurt this city at all, he only wants simpithy like I said he did. If you open the gate and tell the people this you can see for yourself how kind and gentle he is, and that there isn't any need of circumventing him. So please open the gate quickly. Your affectionate grandchild,

TILSA.

The paper was folded and addressed to 'His Excellency the Ligid of Ule,' and Tobene slipped it under the gate. Then the little party sat down to wait. Old Alison took out her knitting, and as she worked, told the others of her adventures in search of them. 'I had to come alone,' she said: 'every one else was frightened.'

X

One hour passed, two hours, three hours, and then a flag of truce appeared above the ramparts.

'Here, Mr. Flamp,' said Alison, 'get up and wave this in reply'; and she gave her handkerchief to the Flamp.

He mounted slowly on his hind feet, and, stepping to the wall, waved the handkerchief over it. A few minutes went by, and then the Ligid's scared face appeared at a loophole. Seeing Tilsa, Tobene, and Alison sitting comfortably in the shade cast by the Flamp's huge body, he seemed to be reassured.

'Alison,' he called out, 'are those really the children?'

'No doubt of it, sir,' said Alison.

'Then wait a little longer,' said the Ligid as he vanished.

He went at once to the Council Chamber and summoned a meeting of the wise men of Ule. 'Apparently,' he said, 'we have misjudged this creature for many years; but our duty now is simple: to draw up as quickly as may be an address of welcome to our eccentric visitor.'

An hour later, a procession of the men of eminence of the city, followed by the inhabitants, marched along the streets to the northern gate. At the Ligid's word of command, the barricades were removed and the gate flung open.

Tilsa and Tobene at once ran to their grandfather and kissed him, while Alison dropped a curtsy. The Flamp stood up and bowed as gracefully as he could, and the Ligid returned the salute, not without some shaking in the knees.

In faltering tones, which afterwards grew more steady, he begged of the Flamp the 'honour of his attention for a few moments,' and forthwith read the address of welcome. It was flowery and extravagant in style, and contained not a few statements which sent a spasm across the Flamp's wide expanse of face, such as might be caused by an attempt to suppress laughter.

At the end, the Flamp bowed again and laid a massive paw upon his heart. Then he replied. He began by thanking the Ligid for his kind welcome, continued with the expression of his determination to do in the future all that he could for the good of the city, and ended with a eulogy of Tilsa and Tobene.

'They are, if I may use the word,' he said feelingly, 'kids which any city should be proud of. And to be the grandfather of such bricks ought to be as good as smush and a perpetual delight. And their nurse, ma'am Alison here, is an old lady as is worthy of them.'

The crowd cheered these remarks again and again, and Tilsa and Tobene, who were not accustomed to such publicity, hardly knew where to look. As for old Alison, she curtsied and went on with her knitting. 'Children,' she said to herself, 'that travel in search of Flamps wear out their stockings. Flattery or no flattery, new stockings must be made.'

Other speeches followed, for Ule was famous for its oratory, the best being from a young statesman who made the admirable suggestion that in commemoration of this auspicious day, a new order of merit should be established, called the Order of the Friends of the Flamp, membership to be conferred upon all persons conspicuous for spontaneous acts of kindness. Further, he proposed that the first persons to add the letters F.F., signifying Friend of the Flamp, to their names, should be Tilsa, Tobene, and old Alison. The project was received with the wildest enthusiasm, and the order was then and there founded. And to the end of the history of Ule, no honour was esteemed more highly by the citizens than the simple affix F.F.

The formal part of the proceedings being finished, the Ligid proclaimed the day a general holiday and in the name of the city invited the Flamp to a grand banquet. Afterwards came sports of all kinds on the plain, in which the Flamp took part, carrying enormous loads of children up and down at a hand gallop, until the Commissioner of Works begged him to move more slowly, owing to the danger caused to the public buildings of Ule by the tremor of the earth. Never in the memory of the oldest inhabitant had such a day of jollification and excitement been spent.

Of course the Flamp was the chief attraction, but Tilsa and Tobene and old Alison were very considerable lions too, and a hundred times they told the story of their adventures. Presuming on his relationship to the explorers, the Ligid, it must be confessed, endeavoured to take to himself some credit for the proceedings, but it is doubtful if he was believed.

One worthy deed, however, he did perform: he publicly burned the Bill for the Circumvention of the Flamp, amid deafening applause.

At last, late in the evening, the Flamp said good-bye, promising to come again soon, and swung off across the plain, the people waving farewell to him from the city wall. And as he moved along, he chanted to himself a new song, which, although not much better in rhyme and metre, was vastly more cheerful than his old dirge. This was the first line of it:

'O life, I think, is a jolly good thing.'

XI

There is no space to tell a thousandth part of the benefits conferred by the Flamp upon the city which once had used him so ill. Suffice it to say, that henceforward the Flamp became the guardian of Ule.

A line of communication was set up between his cave and the city, and when wanted he was signalled for; then at a rush he would cross the plain, ready for any duty.

He helped the people of Ule in countless ways, from overwhelming the attacking force of the King of Unna, without the loss of a single man in the defending army, to lying on the plain in the heat of summer and casting a shadow in which picnic parties might have lunch.

Sometimes the Flamp came when the signal had not been set in motion; and then it was known that he was again in need of sympathy, and the children of the city, headed by Tilsa and Tobene, would run out into the plain to meet him and join in a game, or if it was at night, and he came within the walls, the house-holders would join in the song of welcome which the Poet Laureate of Ule had written for such occasions. And soon the Flamp would return to the mountains happy again.

The Christmas following the Understanding of the Flamp (as the establishment of these new relations was called) was a time of good fellowship, such as no Ulian had dreamed to be possible. Christmas at last really was Christmas. The Flamp as of old came down at evening, but this year no doors were barred, no blinds were drawn; instead he passed from house to house throughout the city, looking in at the upper windows and receiving a welcome at each, and sometimes a piece of plum-cake, sometimes a packet of sweets, all of which passed down his huge red throat. Is it necessary to say that his longest stay was at the nursery window of the Ligid's house?

In fact Tilsa and Tobene, as you may imagine, were always the Flamp's favourites, and every summer it was they, and they alone, who were honoured by an invitation to stay for a fortnight in the Blue Mountains, where they had such a holiday as falls to the lot of few children.

So did Ule, under the Flampian influence, become one of the happiest spots in the world, and strangers poured into the city every day to learn the secret of contentment.

The Ameliorator

TO "EVERSLEY" AND ALL WITHIN IT

I

THE CITY OF BIRDS

Once upon a time there was a city where the good people were under the protection of singing-birds of all kinds: nightingales, thrushes, blackbirds, robins, chaffinches, linnets. As you passed through the streets the song of one at least of these little fellows was certain to strike pleasantly on the ear; for they would perch on the window-sills, or in the branches of the trees before the houses, and fling out their glad notes.

No money could buy the birds. It mattered not how rich a man was, if he were not merry at heart no bird's voice could be his to gladden the hours with song.

Fugitives fleeing across the wide plain at night would, once within the gates of the city, pause a moment with raised finger, listening breathlessly. Then the still air would be filled with beautiful, consoling music, and 'Hark,' they would say, 'the nightingale! A good man lives close by. Let us knock and ask protection.' And travellers hearing a blackbird whistling gaily before a hostelry would know that within doors was brave cheer and jocund company.

Most of the children in the city had each a bird friend, and it was a sad day when the wings spread and the songster flew away, for that meant that in the heart of the child all was not well. Always, however, when the smiles came back, back came also the little feathered companion.

II

THE FOUR CHILDREN

Now this story is about four children in the city who were friends of the birds: Bertram and Beryl, Bobus and Aline. They were for the most part good children, but now and again they made up their little minds that they knew better than anybody else what was the best thing for them; and as it generally happened that their elders refused to take the same view, there came occasionally into their lives intervals of unhappiness when the whole world was most plainly doing its best to spoil their fun and treat them altogether badly. At least so it seemed in the eyes of Bertram and Beryl, Bobus and Aline.

And to those who had the care of Bertram and Beryl, Bobus and Aline, it was apparent one Monday evening that such an interval was about to begin. Bertram's governess had the greatest difficulty in persuading that all-knowing boy that lessons were in the least desirable; Beryl's mother having refused to buy her a new doll, and thus bring her store of dolls from fifteen to sixteen, could induce Beryl to fall in with no plans whatever; and the barometers of Bobus and Aline were unmistakably at 'Set Sulks,' because they too wanted something which was not good for them. Thus, one Monday evening, was it with Bertram and Beryl, Bobus and Aline.

III

THE NEW HOUSE

On the Tuesday morning that followed, the inhabitants of the City of Birds, when they came downstairs and began the business of the day, were astonished to find a new shop in the Market Square; astonished, because no one could remember either what the house was like before, or who had then lived in it, or indeed that there had been a house there at all—not even the house-agent, who felt more than a little annoyed in consequence, deeming himself defrauded of his just fees.

There, however, stood the house, leaving no room for doubt as to its existence. There it stood, spick and span, with white window-curtains tied up with red ribbons, and rows of flower-pots on the sills, and a shining brass handle and knocker on the door, and a dark blind in the shop window through which, howsoever noses might be flattened against the glass, nothing could be seen. Hanging out over the pavement was a quaint sign-board bearing the words

'THE AMELIORATOR.'

And, to crown all, in the branches of the silver birch before the house a thrush was singing, while the swallows were already busy under the gable.

IV

THE BUSINESS CARD

At seven o'clock on the same morning, Bertram awoke. Had any observers been present they would have seen him turn over in bed, push his fists into the air and fight the sunshine which was streaming through the window, and then open his eyes and begin to remember where he was. Then they might have seen him yawn to a greater extent than so small a boy would seem to be capable of. It was when Bertram's waking operations had reached this stage that he remembered what had happened last night: he had been naughty and had gone to bed early in consequence. But he wasn't in the least sorry for it, not he, and his governess was a beast. These were his sentiments as he began to dress. 'I shan't wash this morning,' he said to himself, 'just to spite them.'

It was just as he was turning to leave the room that Bertram caught sight of something white on the floor underneath the window. Picking it up, he saw that it was a card—a business card—which certainly was not there last night. 'It must have blown in,' he thought, and forthwith began to read it. This is what he read:—

THE AMELIORATOR

**begs to inform the Children of the City
of Birds that he has set up in Business
in their midst, and is ready (although not
eager) for their custom.**

**SAD FACES BRIGHTENED WITH THE UTMOST DESPATCH.
TEARS DRIED. DISAPPOINTMENTS RELIEVED.
SORROWS TURNED TO PLEASURES.
BAD GOVERNESSES PUNISHED.
HARD LESSONS MADE EASY.
UNREASONABLE PARENTS BROUGHT TO THEIR SENSES.
TEMPER REPAIRING IN ALL ITS BRANCHES.**

Business Hours—When you wish.

TERMS EASY.

**THE AMELIORATOR,
Market Square,
City of Birds.**

The words seemed to Bertram too good to be true, and he read them again slowly. "Sad faces brightened with the utmost despatch." "Tears dried." That's for girls of course,' he remarked (but why he was so emphatic it is difficult to say, since it was only last night that—but that's of no importance). "Bad governesses punished." Hooroo! "Hard lessons made easy." Now this,' said Bertram, 'is the right kind of fellow, this A-M-E-L-I-O-R-A-T-O-R, this Ameliorator!' and so saying, he pushed the card into his pocket and looked out of the window to whistle good-morning to his robin. But the bird was not there. His face fell again. 'Pooh,' he said, 'they're all against me now, but I don't care,' and as he walked downstairs to breakfast, he made up his mind to be thoroughly fractious.

V

THE CROSS-GRAINED MORNING

In the City of Birds there were several large green gardens set aside for children. These gardens were the finest places in the world in which to play hide-and-peek, because of the summer-houses and grottoes and winding paths; also there were ponds to sail boats on, and trees to climb, and caves for robbers, and a little circle of wet grass in the midst of rhododendron bushes for fairies to plot and plan in; and for very hot afternoons a soft bank where you could lie in the shade of a cedar which seemed to bless the earth with its broad hands.

Every morning after lessons the four children used to meet in one of these gardens and play till dinner-time. Sometimes they would play cricket until they were too tired to run another yard, and then lean over the rim of the fountain and watch the goldfish gliding silently through the water, or they would sail their boats on the pond, or join in the marriage ceremonies of two of the blue ants that lived in the bark of the cedar. There was always plenty of excitement at a blue ant's wedding, on account of the bad behaviour of the company. The bridegroom had a way of ignoring the solemnity of the occasion and trying to walk to church with one of the bridesmaids, or even the bride's mother, while sometimes the bride would forget all about her duties, and leave the procession in order to pick up and stagger away with a ridiculous piece of wood which she could

not possibly really need. Very often the bride had to be changed as often as six times before the church was reached, where Bertram, who always insisted on being the clergy-man, was waiting to perform the service. Ants, it must be confessed, are not good at games: they are too busy, or, as Bertram put it, too selfish. Neither are wood-lice. Just at important moments wood-lice turn sulky and roll themselves into little balls. Worms are most trust-worthy, although never eager for sensible play; but worms are slimy, and Beryl always refused to touch them. Spiders, too, have a way of getting down one's neck. Perhaps frogs are best of all. Frogs are quite satisfactory; they always jump when you touch them up. Toads, on the other hand, are sulky; but their eyes are good to look into.

On this particular morning, Bertram and Beryl, Bobus and Aline met as usual, but for some reason or other they found it impossible to have a really good game; whatever they tried appeared flat and tiresome. They began with cricket and were fairly successful until Bobus hit the ball into the pond, where it immediately sank. Hitherto it always had floated. Cricket, therefore, was over. Hide-and-seek took its place and was going pretty well until Aline fell and hurt her knee. So no more hide-and-seek. They tried the blue ants, and then the lizards that lived under the leaves in the violet bed; but met with nothing but unsociableness. The ants were quite nasty at being interfered with, and one of them crawled up Beryl's arm.

At last the children made up their minds to try no longer, and instead they lay on their backs on the grass and grumbled. It was clear that the world was against them, and what is the good of fighting in the face of such opposition? Bertram began the grumbling. 'Old Tabby,' he said,—that being the way in which he spoke of Miss Tabitha, his governess,—'is a beast. She makes me learn heaps of things which nobody can ever need to know.'

'And I mayn't have a new doll,' said Beryl.

'And I mayn't stay up later than eight,' said Bobus.

'And I mayn't eat cake until I've had three pieces of horrid bread and butter,' said Aline.

'It's a shame,' said all.

'Yes,' Bertram went on, 'and my robin wasn't singing this morning.'

'No more was my linnet,' said Beryl.

'No more was my chaffinch,' said Bobus.

'And no more was my blackbird,' said Aline.

'It's a shame,' said Bertram again; 'everything's against us. Except,' he added, pulling the card from his pocket, 'except the Amel—Amelior—except the Ameliorator.'

'Why, have you got one too?' Aline asked, producing a card exactly like it, and as she did so Beryl and Bobus also each showed one. On comparing notes it seemed that all the cards had come in the night in the same mysterious way.

The four children looked at each other in silence. They all wanted to say the same thing, but no one wished to be first. Bertram, as usual, took the lead: 'Let's go and see the Am—what-d'ye-call-him,' he said.

VI

THE LITTLE OLD MAN

A few minutes later the children stood hand in hand before the new shop in the Market Square, and as they did so they suddenly discovered that their wounded hearts were well again, just as you find that the tooth stops aching at the moment you reach the dentist's doorstep. They might even then have run home again, had not Bertram, feeling a little doubtful of the cure and more than a little inquisitive, peeped into the shop.

'Come in, Bertram,' said a blithe voice, 'I've been expecting you all the morning'; and before he and his companions knew where they were the door was shut, the four children were inside it, each in a comfortable chair, and in front of them was absolutely the pleasantest little old man they had ever seen.

He had a smooth, ruddy face, and white hair, and large round spectacles behind which his eyes danced and sparkled, and a comical kindly mouth, and his clothes were of bright colours that merged into each other as easily as those of the rainbow and were as certain a sign that the sun was shining somewhere. Moreover there was in his appearance a vague but unmistakable likeness to the one person of all persons whom Bertram loved best, and to the one whom Beryl loved best, and to the one whom little Aline loved best, and to the one whom Bobus loved best. Yes, it was very strange, but although all these people were totally different there was something about the little old man that bore resemblance to each of them.

VII

THE STOCK IN TRADE

When the children summoned up enough courage to look round, they saw that the shop was stocked with drawers and bottles and had quite a business-like appearance. One bottle was labelled 'Mixture for Sulks,' and another, 'Bad Temper Lotion.' Then there were 'Cross-patch Powders' and 'Pills against Meddling.' In a prominent place Beryl saw two tall flasks, one almost full of water and the other almost empty, and the water in the one that was nearly full was thick and muddy, but that in the second was clear as crystal. The flask that was nearly full was lettered 'Tears Shed for Ourselves,' and the other, 'Tears Shed for Others.' But also there were pleasanter things than these: there were cupboards full of sweets, shelves of picture books and fairy stories, and a great store of toys. Also there were many drawers, labelled encouragingly, 'Rewards for Good Humour,' 'Prizes for Hard Work,' 'Prizes for Hard Play,' 'Presents for Anticipating Wishes,' 'Gifts for Forgetting Number One,' and so on.

It took only a short time to see these things, and meanwhile the little old man was standing in front of the fire, beaming merrily. Then, when all four had taken a good look, and were feeling rather bad in consequence, for they could not feel entitled to much beyond pills and powders, he led them into the inner room—his consulting-room he called it—saying, 'Come along, little sorrowful ones, and we will inquire into the great trouble.' And at once they had some difficulty in remembering their grievance at all, although an hour ago it had seemed to fill the whole landscape.

VIII

THE ADVICE

'Now,' said the Ameliorator, when they were all comfortably inside the inner room, 'I want to tell you about some of my friends. "Ladies first" is a good rule: let me tell you about a little girl I once knew,—here he laid his hand on Beryl's head—'who had just such soft hair as this, and just such a gloomy little face.' Here Beryl smiled, in spite of herself. 'Yes,' added the Ameliorator, 'and just such a smile now and then. And what do you think the trouble was? Why, although she had no fewer than fifteen dolls, all given to her by thoughtful friends, she wanted a new one. These fifteen dolls were very good ones, especially the faithful old Arthur John, a wooden gentleman of strong affections and no nose worth mentioning, yet nothing would do but she must have an aristocratic pink wax lady in white muslin, that hung in a certain shop window and stared hard all day at the little ragamuffins who pressed their faces against the pane and said, "O my, ain't she a beauty!" Why the little girl wanted her I could never understand, because she had no expression at all, and my young friend had a brother who had declared that if any more "sappy wax dummies" were brought into the house, he would put them to bed in the oven. Still, in spite of this terrible threat, she did want her, and in her despair she came to me about it.

'Well,' added the Ameliorator, 'what do you think I did? I made her sit down by this very table, and I opened this very drawer, and I took out these very pictures, and as I showed them to her' (here he began to lay before the bewildered Beryl picture after picture of ragged street children) 'I told her how these little wretches were forced to run about all day in the gutters, whether it was wet or fine, cold or warm, because they had no nurseries, and how they could get very little to eat, and how the only toys they had were bits of wood and old bottles. And then and there I made so bold as to suggest to my discontented friend—who of course had every reason to be unhappy, when her mother, who already had given her so many nice things, refused to buy her an expensive doll—that if she were not only to stop wishing for any more new toys, but were to send a few of those she already had to be given away to some of these children who had none, why I fancied she would not be altogether miserable any longer. That is what I told her to do, and that is what she did, and I believe I may truthfully say it was a wonderful cure.

'Then—let me see—yes,' the Ameliorator continued more briskly, 'then there was a boy, or—shall I say, a little man?—who once consulted me. The difficulty, if I remember rightly, was intellectual. O yes!—he was convinced that he, being a wise patriarch of eight or nine, knew more than the lady engaged by his parents to teach him. So he applied to her a not very respectful nickname and refused to learn the lessons that she set him, and swaggered about calling her a beast, which is not the right attitude of a gentleman (although old enough to know everything) towards a lady, and made himself as unpleasant as he could.

'By some chance, one of my cards fell into his hands: he read it and was fascinated by the words, "Bad governesses punished." He came to me to arrange for the punishment. The best way, I told him, is shocks. There is nothing like a shock to bring a governess to her senses. "Now, what is the last thing in the world your governess expects from you?" I asked. "Why, that you will learn a lesson of your own accord, without constant jogs from her." So that if he were to do this, I told him, he would give her a severe shock, and thus punish her.

'He went away delighted with the plan. Morning after morning he appeared in the schoolroom

with his task all prepared, and every morning the governess received a new shock. And when I peeped through the window not long after, there they sat, close together, she happy after her punishment, and he happy because (only he didn't know this) he had made her so. For she was unhappy before—very; but young fellows with exalted ideas on their own judgment and knowledge have no time to observe the unhappiness of their governesses or parents, have they, Bertram?'

Bertram did not answer: this shock system of punishment was new to him. He felt muddled, but he began to think he would try it. He was not, however, quite in a condition to see the Ameliorator clearly.

'And little Bobus doesn't like going to bed?' the Ameliorator asked, turning to Bobus. 'My dear sir, it can be made the best thing in the world. Let me tell you how to make it so. Directly you get into bed, begin to think what pleasant little surprise you can give some one on the next day: any one, mother or father, cousin or playmate, nurse or beggar in the street. You will find this such an exciting game that you will run to bed eagerly when the time comes, and, what is more, it makes you readier to get up. At any rate, Bobus, try it.

'And little Aline,' the Ameliorator went on, taking Aline's hand and beaming down upon her with his kindly eyes, which danced more than ever behind his round spectacles, 'little Aline prefers cake to bread and butter! Dear, dear, this is very sad. If she eats three pieces of bread and butter she may have cake, but not till then. Well, I think I should advise her to eat those three pieces. Little girls who eat only cake grow up to be weedy and weak, and unable to do half the good things of life: they can't skate, and they can't dance, and they can't play games. So I should advise Aline to eat the bread and butter.'

IX

THE TOKENS

'Now,' said the little old man, 'you must run home or you'll be late for dinner. But first let me find some little token of our conversation for each,' and so saying, he went to the drawer labelled 'Prizes for Hard Work,' and found something for Bertram; and to the drawer labelled 'Gifts for Forgetting Number One,' and found something for Beryl; and to the drawer labelled 'Presents for Anticipating Wishes,' and found something for Bobus; and to the drawer labelled 'Rewards for Hard Play,' and found something for Aline.

'Now, good-bye,' said he, holding open the door.

But Bertram, who was always the leader, did not move. He seemed still to have something on his mind.

'No, no,' said the Ameliorator, who was a wonderful thought-reader, 'no, no, there is nothing to pay. Why, I have had the pleasure of your company for a whole hour! That's payment enough for any one. Now run along.'

'But,' Bertram faltered, still not moving, 'I haven't earned the "Prize for Hard Work."'

'No,' said each of the others, 'I haven't earned mine either.'

'Ah!' said the Ameliorator, 'but you are going to.'

X

THE RETURN

Hand in hand, silently, the four children walked through the city. And when each one reached home, there, in the branches of the tree before the house, was its bird in full song.

The Schoolboy's Apprentice

TO L. F. G.

Once upon a time there was a schoolboy called Chimp. Chimp was not his name: his name was Alexander Joseph Chemmle. Chimp was short for chimpanzee, an animal which his schoolfellows agreed that he was like.

Chimp usually spent his holidays in his uncle's family; but one summer he travelled on a visit to his father, who was British Consul in a foreign port, so far away that the boy had only a few days at home before it was time again to join the steamer for England.

Chimp, who was always adventurous, had been at sea for only a week on the return journey, when one evening at dusk he lost his hold as he was clambering out to the end of the main crosstrees, and fell overboard. The other passengers were listening to a concert in the saloon ('screeching' Chimp had called it, when he took refuge in the chief engineer's room), and, work being over, the crew were for'ard smoking, so that there was no one except the first officer and the man at the wheel to hear the shout that Chimp sent up from the water. As a matter of fact both men heard it, but it caused them to do no more than say to themselves at the same moment, 'There's that boy again! Up to some mischief, I'll be bound.' No help, therefore, came to Chimp. The great black ship glided by, the screw threshed the water into blinding foam, and when he could see and think again, Chimp was alone in the ocean.

Chimp was a good swimmer. He struck out at once vigorously in the direction of the island which they had passed at sundown. The sea was as smooth as a pond and quite warm, and after several minutes had passed, the boy turned over on his back and floated comfortably, moving his arms just enough to give him an impetus towards the shore. Although he was upset by the accident which had so suddenly substituted the water for the ship (and it was nearing supper time, and there were always ices for supper!), Chimp was not a boy at all given to fear, and he could think of his new plight with composure. His first calm thought was regret for the mongoose which he was taking back to school, 'although,' as he said to himself, 'the chances are, Porker wouldn't let me keep it,' Porker being the way in which Chimp spoke of Dr. Cyril Bigley Plowden, Principal of Witherson College. His second feeling was keenness to play Robinson Crusoe in earnest. Chimp and other boys had often on half-holidays made believe that an island in the river was Juan Fernandez, but the game usually began with one fight to decide who should be Robinson, and ended with another to check the arrogance of Friday. Now, however, he was but an hour or so from an uninhabited island (of course it was uninhabited) and bothered by no rival for chief honours. He decided that to fall into the sea from a steamer at night was a lark. But a little while afterwards he thought of sharks and remembered, with something of a pang, good times in England; then he wondered what would happen on the ship when they missed him; then he glowed at the anticipation of the other boys' envy when they learned where he had been; then he thought of sharks again; and then his feet touched the bottom.

When Chimp at last crawled out of the water, he was nigh dead beat. In the soft still light which the moon poured down he could see beyond the beach a dark strip which seemed to promise a bed. He staggered blindly over the stones to this refuge, found that it was grass, and, sinking upon it, was in a moment asleep.

The sun was high and hot when Chimp awoke. For a moment he looked around him bewildered, wondering why the dream would not finish: then he remembered everything. At the same moment he was conscious, as he afterwards expressed it, that he had had nothing to eat for a hundred years. Chimp stood up, yawned the stiffness out of his bones, and set forth to seek for food and claim his kingdom. He made at once for the highest ground and gathered the island in a bird's-eye view. It seemed to be about eight miles long and three broad, mainly rock, bare and red as a brick. There were a few trees and some wide patches of rank grass. Not a sign of human life was to be seen, but swift green lizards shot across the ground at Chimp's feet, a million grasshoppers shrilled into his ears, and white gulls with cruel eyes hovered and wheeled above him. The prospect did not cheer Robinson Crusoe II., but he set out for the interior of the island, searching every miniature valley for a spring, every tree and shrub for fruit. But he sought in vain. Then recollecting stories of the toothsome of turtles' eggs baked in the sand, Chimp turned to the shore again and explored the coast. At the end of three hours he said disgustedly, 'What a liar Ballantyne was!' and was just sinking down exhausted, when his heart gave a big *plump!* and stood still, for there before him was a well-trodden path.

At first, hungry as he was, Chimp's feeling was grief at the discovery that after all the island was not uninhabited, but his regret soon faded before the anticipation of the meal he would devour in the abode to which the pathway led, and he struck into it with new vigour, taking the inland direction. The path rose with every step. At last, a mile or so from the sea, it turned abruptly round a boulder, and Chimp suddenly found himself in the presence of an elderly man with a long grey beard, who was sitting at a table in the entrance of a cave, writing.

The meeting seemed to be the most unexpected thing that had ever happened to either of them, for the elderly man rose with a start that upset both ink and table, and Chimp caught himself looking round for something to cling to for support. Not finding anything, he sat down on the ground and stared at the elderly man. He would have liked to have gone forward to pick up the ink-bottle, but dared not, on account of a peculiar feeling in his knees. Meanwhile the elderly man stared at the boy, and Chimp wondered if he ever would speak, and if it would be in English when he did. After a long pause the elderly man picked up the ink. Then looking at Chimp still more curiously through his spectacles, he spoke.

'What are you?' he asked, in good English.

'My name,' said Chimp, 'is Alexander Joseph Chemmle.'

'No, no,' the elderly man replied, 'I mean, what are you—what? Not a boy, are you? Not really and truly a boy! Oh say, say you are a boy!'

'Yes,' said Chimp, although for the moment, so intense and unreasonable was the other's excitement about the matter, he almost doubted it. 'Yes, I'm a boy.'

'A boy! a boy!' the elderly man exclaimed joyfully. 'Eureka!' Then he grew calmer, and continued: 'Dear me, this is very interesting. A most fortunate chance! A boy, you say. How extremely happy an accident. Now what kind of boy might you be?'

Chimp was puzzled. 'I suppose,' he thought, 'I ought to call myself a good boy, and yet that isn't exactly how Porker would describe me. And what is more, good boys are such saps.' Then he spoke aloud: 'Well, sir, I'm a fairish specimen of a boy, I think.'

'Good!' said the elderly man. 'Good! An average boy. So much the better. And what does it feel like to be a boy?'

'Whew!' said Chimp to himself, 'I came for breakfast, and all I seem to be getting is an exam.' However, he did his best to answer the question. 'Why, sir,' he said aloud, 'as long as you don't get too many lines and swishings, it feels good to be a boy. But swishing makes it feel bad sometimes.'

'Lines?' inquired the other. 'Swishings? What are they?'

'Why,' said Chimp, 'when Porker canes you, that's swishing, and lines are passages from Virgil which you have to copy out if you make howlers—I mean, if you make mistakes.'

'Yes, yes,' said the elderly man, a little vaguely. 'And so it's good to be a boy?' he added.

A happy thought struck Chimp. 'It is good,' he replied; 'but there are other times when it's bad, besides those I mentioned. When—when you're hungry, for instance.'

'Ah!' exclaimed the elderly man, rising from the table. 'I was forgetting. You must pardon me, Alexander Joseph Chemmle. I have, I fear, nothing to offer you but biscuits and tinned meats. Do you care for tinned meats? I keep most kinds.'

'I like bloater paste,' Chimp said. 'I always take a pot or two back to school.'

'Ah!' cried his host eagerly, 'you like bloater paste best? That's famous! So do I. A community of taste!'

He disappeared into the cave, and in a minute or so came forth again, bearing the bloater paste and a plate in one hand, and the biscuits and a knife in the other. 'Now,' he said, 'fall to, and while you are eating these I must try to find something else. Tinned pears—do you like them?'

Chimp mumbled that he did. He was eating with more enjoyment than he ever had eaten in his life. Ambrosia was nothing to bloater paste.

'It is wonderful—our tastes coincide in everything,' said the elderly man as he entered the cave again. He returned with a tin of pears and some marmalade, a jug of water and a glass. Then he sat on a camp stool and observed his guest.

It was not until Chimp was well forward with the pears that his host spoke again. 'I am sorry, Alexander Joseph Chemmle,' he said, 'to have kept you waiting so long, for I take it that this is not your customary appetite—that you were, in fact, unusually, if not painfully, hungry. But I was so interested by the sight of a real boy that I could think of nothing else. You see, I have never met with a boy before.'

Chimp opened his eyes as wide almost as his mouth. 'But,' he began in his astonishment, 'they are as common as dirt, boys are. There's heaps of them—loads.'

'True,' the other made answer, 'true. But when one abandons the world, and, embracing the profession of the hermit, devotes one's life to solitude and reflection, one is deprived of the pleasure of intercourse with so attractive a personality as that of the average boy.'

'Ye-es,' dubiously from Chimp. 'But,' he added, 'you were a boy yourself once.'

'No,' the Hermit made reply. 'Never.'

'Never a boy!' Chimp exclaimed. 'Well, that beats everything.'

'Never,' repeated the recluse. 'You see,' he remarked in explanation, 'I was articled by my parents to a hermit at a very tender age—to the learned man, in fact, who preceded me in the tenancy of this modest cell. We plunged immediately into the fascinating study of metaphysics, and the period of boyhood slipped by unnoticed.'

Chimp whistled,—he had no words adequate to the occasion.

'For many years,' the Hermit continued, 'I did not feel the loss of this experience, being deeply engrossed in other subjects; but now, in the fall of life, I find myself regretting it keenly. Much as I love my studies, much as I am attached to the solitary life, I sometimes think it a finer thing to have been a boy even than to have been a hermit.'

Chimp thought it would be kind of him to say something cheery, yet could hit upon nothing but, 'Oh no, not at all,' just as if the Hermit had apologised for treading on his toe; yet it seemed to please the old man.

'However,' he broke off, 'this is by the way. Come, Alexander Joseph Chemmle, tell me about your adventures; how did you find your way to this island? How is it you are alone? Tell me everything.'

Chimp, wincing a little at the appalling formality of the Hermit's mode of address, began. By the time his story was finished it was evening, for the Hermit asked numberless questions which sent Chimp off on numberless side tracks of narrative. At the end of the recital the bloater paste was produced again, and Chimp again ate heartily.

'Now,' said the Hermit, 'I will show you something of the island.'

So saying, he took his staff and they set forth. First they visited the spring whence the Hermit brought water, and then climbing to a peak of rock, the Hermit described the island as it lay beneath them.

'There,' said he finally, indicating the little creek to which the footpath led, 'that is where the boat lands that once a year brings me my provisions. It puts off from my Aunt Amelia's yacht—*The Tattooed Quaker*. My Aunt Amelia is the only relative that remains to me. It is she who supplies the tinned meats and the pears. She really has admirable taste, although her choice in names may be a little fantastic. In addition to the provisions, it is my aunt's custom to send a letter beseeching me to return in the yacht to England, and declaring that if I do not, that particular supply of food will be the last. For forty years she has done this. She is a noble woman, my Aunt Amelia.'

'When is the boat due?' Chimp asked, thinking more of its possible effect upon himself than upon the Hermit.

'Soon, soon,' the old man replied, with something very like a sigh. 'In a fortnight's time, in fact.'

'What a pity!' said Chimp. 'And I say, sir,' he added, 'how decent to be you. Only there ought to be some niggers.'

The Hermit sighed. They walked back without speaking, and not ten minutes had passed before Chimp was sound asleep in a corner of the cave, while the Hermit lay gazing at the stars.

On awaking, Chimp found that the cave was empty. For a moment he thought himself still dreaming, but the table laid for breakfast recalled him to facts, and he fell to thinking of the Hermit. 'Rum old beggar!' he mused. 'A screw loose somewhere, I guess.' When the Hermit returned, it was plain that the old man had something on his mind, as the saying is. He spoke not at all at breakfast, except, when laying the table, to remark that potted ham and chicken make a pleasing variety upon bloater paste. But after breakfast, placing one seat in the shade for Chimp and one for himself, he talked.

'I have been thinking deeply, Alexander Joseph Chemmle,' he began. 'During the night I have reviewed my life, and now more than ever I am conscious of the limiting influence exerted upon a philosopher by the loss of boyhood. The suspicion has been with me for years: it is now a certainty. You are not likely, my young friend, to be with me long, for *The Tattooed Quaker* will, of course, carry you back to England next week. But in the intervening time I want you, so far as is within your power, to make a boy of me. I put myself unreservedly in your hands. Consider me your apprentice. Will you do this?' The Hermit watched Chimp's face anxiously.

Chimp was staggered completely. A screw loose, he had thought; but surely it was the height of madness for a man to wish to be a boy again. Chimp and his companions spent a large part of their time in wishing to be men: the other side was not to be believed. But he pulled himself together with the thought that to humour this old lunatic might be funny, and would last only a week. After all, to find a cracked man on the island was better than to find no man at all, now that Ballantyne had been proved to be so wrong. And just then the boy caught a glimpse of the Hermit's anxious eager eyes. 'All right,' he said quickly, 'I'm game. But it'll be rather difficult, you know.'

'Difficult!' exclaimed the Hermit, with an expression of mingled pain and alarm. 'How? Not seriously, I trust?'

'Oh no!' said Chimp; 'but you're rather old, you see, and boys are not in the habit of wearing beards three feet long; although,' he added encouragingly, noting the look of disappointment on the Hermit's face, 'I don't see why they shouldn't. Why, there was a fellow at our school who had whiskers before he was fourteen, and we shaved them too. Tied him down and cut off one side one day and the other the next. After that he bought a razor.'

'Is—is that action typical of the boy?' the Hermit asked.

'Well, they get up to larks now and then,' Chimp admitted.

'As time is short,' said the Hermit, 'I am disposed to begin this morning—at once. That is not too soon for you, I hope, Alexander Joseph Ch—?'

'Oh, please don't,' Chimp interrupted. 'You know, boys don't call each other by all their names like that; they either stick to the last one or invent a nickname.'

'I am sorry to have hurt your feelings,' said the Hermit. 'If you will tell me your nickname I will call you by it.'

'I think,' replied Chimp, unwilling to explain his own, 'that perhaps we'd better begin now and give each other fresh ones.'

'Very well,' said the Hermit, after a minute's thought, 'I shall call you Simian, or, for the sake of brevity, Sim.'

'Simeon?' cried Chimp. 'Oh, that's not the thing at all! A nickname should describe a fellow, you know—it shouldn't be just another ordinary name.'

'Yes,' replied his apprentice, 'and I mean to call you Sim, an abbreviation of Simian. And what will you call me?'

Chimp pondered awhile. 'I shall call you,' he said at length, 'Billykins, because of your long goat's beard.'

And thus began the Hermit's apprenticeship.

'It is too hot for footer,' said Chimp, after he had collected his thoughts, 'so we will make a start with a little cricket practice. Cricket,' he explained, 'is a game—the best game in the world. You ought to see W. G. and Ranji. But of course you don't know who they are. Oh dear, oh dear, what you are missing out here! W. G., that's W. G. Grace, the champion of the world. Your beard, Billykins, must have been rather like his a few years ago. And Ranji, that's Ranjitsinhji.'

'Yes, yes,' the Hermit remarked feebly, depressed by the weight of his stupendous ignorance.

Chimp went on with fine authority. 'Now, while I am cramming this sock with stuff to make a ball, you be sharpening these sticks for wickets. You've got a knife, I suppose?'

The Hermit admitted that he had not.

'What!' cried Chimp; 'no knife? Why, you'll never be a boy without a knife. Let me look at your pockets?'

The Hermit had but one pocket, and a handkerchief was all it held.

'Awfully clean,' was Chimp's contemptuous comment. 'And nothing else? Oh, this will never do! Look at mine now,' and turning out his pockets, he displayed a double-bladed knife containing several implements, including a corkscrew and an attachment for extracting stones from horses' feet, a piece of string, a watch spring, twenty or thirty shot, a button, a magnet, a cog-wheel, a pencil, a match-box, a case of foreign stamps all stuck together with salt water, a whistle, a halfpenny with a hole in it, and a soaked and swollen cigar which the Captain had given him.

'Are all these things quite necessary?' the Hermit asked humbly.

'No,' said Chimp, 'not quite all. The knife is, and the string is, and a fellow likes his smoke, you know. Collecting stamps is rather decent, but you needn't unless you want to. There's butterflies and birds' eggs, if you like. The other things are useful: the more you have the better for you.'

'String,' said the Hermit, 'I possess—but no pocket-knife. But if you permit it, I will carry my table-knife in future. 'Tis a simple weapon, I know: but on the other hand you see that on this island the opportunities of extracting stones from horses' hoofs are rare.'

'I suppose it must do,' said Chimp doubtfully. 'But you must add a few other things, or we shan't have anything to swap. Boys are great at swapping, you know.'

'Swapping?' the Hermit asked.

'Yes: when you want one thing, giving another for it. For instance, if you had a white rat' (the Hermit shuddered) 'and I gave you a brass cannon for it, that would be a swap.'

'Very well,' the Hermit replied seriously, 'I will add a few things; but, if you don't mind, not rats of any colour, nor in fact any live stock.'

'Just as you like,' said the magnanimous Chimp. 'You wouldn't do for Billy Lincolne though: he usually carries half a dozen frogs in his trousers' pockets.'

When the cricket gear was complete, Chimp stepped out twenty-two yards and pitched the stumps. 'You go in first,' he said.

The Hermit seized the bat.

'Now all you have to do at first,' Chimp continued, 'is to keep the ball out of the wicket. Hit it any way you like, and hold your bat straight.'

The Hermit obeyed to the letter. To Chimp's intense astonishment he punished the bowling all round, pulling off balls to square leg in a shameless fashion.

Chimp was kept busy, and at last he grew almost vexed. 'Well, you mayn't have much science,' he cried, as, nearly out of breath, he flung himself down after some miles of running, 'but you've got a gorgeous eye. Why, you hit everything. You've played before, haven't you?' he added suspiciously.

The Hermit smiled again. 'A little,' he admitted. 'Yes, my late instructor, the sage to whom I was confided by my parents many, many years ago, he and I occasionally had a game together. It was

our only recreation. I thought it hardly worth while to mention it, expecting that all skill had left me.'

'By jingo! though, it hasn't,' Chimp exclaimed. 'You're a regular W. G. in your way. But, I say, another time you know how to do a thing you might let a fellow know first.'

'This is too silly,' was Chimp's persistent thought during the next few days, but he kept up the game of make-believe like a hero. As a matter of fact, it was sound amusement to explore the island and plunge on sudden impulses into a score of high-spirited enterprises, although the presence of the old man panting at his side touched him rather sadly now and then. The Hermit, however, endured stolidly and pluckily, and neither of them ever let the time appear to drag.

Chimp and his apprentice bathed together, and hunted for anemones among the rocks; they gave chase to butterflies and lizards; they told stories; they even pretended to be Robinson Crusoe and Friday, the part of Friday falling to the Hermit.

'You see, Billykins,' Chimp said, 'you are better suited to the part: you can make such a whacking footprint.'

'I think I am progressing well, Simian,' remarked Chimp's apprentice at breakfast one morning, 'although I must admit that many impulses and movements that come naturally to you are acquired by me with difficulty. Last evening's attempt at leap-frog, for example, has left me so stiff that I can hardly move, and I assure you that it has never before occurred to me to climb that tree all the years I have known it. Perhaps in a week or so, when my hands are healed, I may try again. But I can see, Sim, that it must be very good to be a boy—very, very good.'

'Why yes, Billykins,' Chimp broke in, 'but you don't know really anything about it yet. And I'm afraid you can't know on this island. There isn't the company and there isn't the means. I can't even make you an apple-pie bed, when you sleep in a single blanket; and a booby-trap needs a door. And when there are only two people, and no one else to laugh, it's no fun to stick a cactus in a fellow's chair. Tuck, too! What do you know about tuck? What can you know about tuck when there's no shop for chocolate and Turkish Delight and things like that? Tinned stuff is all very well, but it gets jolly tedious. And birds'-nesting, and ratting, and setting night lines, and dodging game-keepers, and breaking into orchards! You haven't even elastic to make a catty with, or so simple a contrivance as a fish-hook. Still we might rig up a bow and arrow.'

'But,' the Hermit objected, 'there is nothing to shoot.'

'Oh yes!' said Chimp, 'sea-gulls.'

'We can't eat sea-gulls,' his apprentice replied. Then anxiously, 'Boys don't eat sea-gulls, do they?'

'Why, no, Billykins; but that isn't the thing. Bringing them down is the thing. It's sport.'

That evening after tea, Chimp approached his apprentice with a troubled expression.

'I think I ought to tell you, Billykins,' he goaded himself to say, 'that some boys fall in love. Not all, mind. I never did it myself—I think it's footle—but lots and lots do. I suppose you'd like to try it, you're so thorough; though I don't see how you're going to manage exactly.'

'You mean,' said the Hermit, 'on an island so poor in opportunities? Yes, it would be difficult. Still, give me the outline.'

'Well, Billykins, it isn't very clear,' said Chimp. 'I believe though, that the fellow feels sort of jolly inside while it's going on. But it never lasts long.'

'And it's not compulsory?' the Hermit asked in some trepidation.

'Oh no, Billy, not at all.'

'Then we will dismiss love along with sport,' was the Hermit's decision.

Thus, in games and rambles and conversation, the time passed by, until it was the evening before the day that would bring *The Tattooed Quaker*, and Chimp and his apprentice were sitting before the cave, watching the sinking sun.

'Well,' said the Hermit, 'only a few more hours, Sim, and you will be on the way home again. Then I must to work once more. My great work on Man and his place in Society, scientifically considered, awaits me. But I shall miss you, Sim,' the old man added; 'you have been a very pleasant chapter in my life. Don't forget me altogether, will you; and you'll pay my Aunt Amelia a visit, won't you, and tell her about me?'

Chimp had a little difficulty in replying. He felt girlish, that is to say, gulpy and tearful. At last, 'Why don't you come back too?' he asked.

'I?' said the Hermit. 'Oh no, there is no place for Hermits in your country.'

'I don't know about that,' said Chimp, speaking more naturally again. 'You might make a lot of money showing yourself in caravans at fairs. People would go miles to see a hermit. I paid a penny once to see a fat woman, and there was no end of a squash in the tent. You must come. I'll take you to my uncle's, where I live in the vacs. and Jim—that's my cousin—Jim and me'll give you a ripping time.'

The Hermit smiled sadly. 'No, no,' he said. After a short silence he spoke again. 'Tell me, Sim—I ask merely out of curiosity—are boys always contented with their surroundings?'

'Not by a long chalk,' Chimp answered. 'They're always running away.'

'Ah!' said the Hermit. 'How often have you run away?'

'Well, not at all, so far,' said Chimp, 'although Goring minor and I did get all ready to bunk once, only Mother Porker copped us on the landing. But we meant it, I can tell you. We were going to walk to Portsmouth, sleeping under hay ricks, and hide ourselves as stowaways on board a man-of-war, and show up when we got to sea, and do something heroic to please the Captain, and after that win loads of prize-money and come back covered with glory. Boys often do that in books. But old Mother Porker copped us on the landing.'

'Bed-time,' said the Hermit.

When they rose the next morning, there, in the offing, heading straight for the island, was *The Tattooed Quaker*. They hurried to the peak, and the Hermit waved his handkerchief. The signal was seen on deck, and an answering flag scurried up to the mast-head. After breakfast Chimp and his apprentice walked down to the creek to welcome the yacht's boat.

The Captain looked at Chimp in amazement. 'What, Master Augustus!' he said when he had shaken hands with the Hermit and delivered Aunt Amelia's letter, 'what! have you got a pupil, then?'

'No,' replied the Hermit, 'he's not my pupil, he's your passenger'; and so saying, he introduced Chimp, and then stood aside to see what his aunt had to say; while the crew waited for the Captain's orders to move the stores from the boat to the cave.

When the Hermit had finished reading, he returned the letter to its envelope and slipped it into his pocket.

'Well, Master Augustus, are you coming back with us?' said the Captain, exactly as he had asked the question for the past forty years.

The Hermit laughed in negative reply, exactly as he had laughed once a year for the past forty years.

'Now then, my men, be quick,' said the Captain.

In the boat was a large hamper in which to convey the stores over the rocks to the cave. Two of the sailors held it at each end, and the Hermit accompanied them, while Chimp and the Captain strolled away together. Three times the hamper was borne from the boat to the cell. There then remained only a dozen or so of parcels, which the men might easily carry in their hands. This time the Hermit did not accompany them.

When the last of the stores were safely within the cave the boatswain blew his whistle as a signal that all was ready, and Chimp and the Captain of *The Tattooed Quaker* hurried back to the creek.

'Where is Master Augustus?' the Captain inquired. 'The young gentleman wants to say good-bye to him.'

'He must be in the cave,' said Chimp. 'I'll run and see.'

But the cave was empty. Chimp climbed the rock before the entrance and called, 'Bi-i-illykins, Bi-i-illykins!' No answer. 'I must have missed him on his way back to the creek,' he thought, and hurried to the shore again.

'Be quick!' cried the Captain. 'Time's up!'

'But I can't find him,' Chimp called, floundering from boulder to boulder.

'Can't find him?' echoed the Captain. 'That's very rum. I suppose he wants to avoid the pain of parting. Come along; we can't stay any longer now.'

So with a heavy heart Chimp took his place in the boat and watched how with every stroke of the oars the distance widened between himself and the island.

'Weigh the anchor!' cried the Captain, the moment they were on board.

The Tattooed Quaker was a superb yacht, and in the ardour of exploration Chimp forgot the Hermit and everything else. He examined the cabin and the berths, he made friends with the steward, he descended into the lazarette, where peering into the refrigerator, he found half a game pie, and forthwith devoured it. He conversed learnedly with the engineers about the size of the cylinders; he decided which hammock would best minister to his own comfort; he overhauled the Captain's stock of books, and by the time these duties were accomplished *The Tattooed Quaker* was well out to sea, and the island was only a thin line on the horizon. And then a feeling of sadness for the loss of poor old Billykins, left there all alone again, took hold of the boy, and he retired dismally to his hammock to mope.

After dinner, however, at which meal he revived marvellously, he was in gay enough spirits to tell the story of the Hermit's apprenticeship. The Captain was in ecstasies. 'What a yarn for the old lady!' he remarked again and again. 'What a yarn!'

Suddenly, as they sat in the darkling cabin, there appeared in the doorway a figure which seemed in the gloom to resemble an elderly man with a long grey beard.

'Mercy! What's that?' the Captain shouted, leaping from his chair and drawing back. 'Who are you? What do you want?'

The figure took a step into the room. 'Simian,' it said, 'don't you recognise me?'

'Why, it's Billykins!' cried Chimp, running forward and seizing the Hermit's hand.

'Great Heavens! Master Augustus!' exclaimed the Captain. 'Where did you spring from?'

'From the hamper!' said the Hermit.

Chimp and the Captain stared at each other for a moment, and then—'What!' roared the Captain, 'a stowaway! Well, you're something like an apprentice, you are!' And he smote the table till the ship trembled, and laughed like the north wind.

The Hermit waited patiently till the storm abated, while Chimp gazed at him in wonderment and admiration.

Then, in the lulls of the Captain's merriment, he explained. 'You see,' he said, 'this boy has changed me considerably. I see things with new eyes. And when I was standing there by the boat, the desire to run away and be for ever quit of the island and solitude came strongly upon me.'

'Oh, what a model apprentice!' the Captain exclaimed.

'So,' continued the Hermit, a little abashed, 'well—so I crawled into the hamper.'

'Hooray!' cried Chimp; it's splendid. But aren't you hungry?'

'Hungry?' said the Captain, 'I should think he is. Steward!' he called, 'bring some supper for Master Augustus.'

The steward came running into the cabin and stood transfixed—all eyes. His appearance set the Captain off again; 'Don't be scared,' he said; 'he's alive, right enough.'

'I didn't see the gentleman come aboard,' the steward found words to say.

'No,' said the Captain, 'no more didn't I. No more didn't no one. Master Augustus has his own way of coming aboard.'

At this the Hermit laughed too, and the spell being broken, the steward brought supper as to a man of flesh and blood.

'So I'm a runaway, Sim,' the Hermit said cheerily when he had finished; 'and there was no Mother Porker to catch me on the landing.'

'Catch you? No! You're A1 at it!' Chimp replied.

'Yes,' resumed the Hermit, stretching his limbs, 'we're going to be comrades again. But when we're in England, mind, no fairs, Sim, no caravans.'

Chimp laughed.

'And we'll go and see Ranji,' said the Hermit.

THE END

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