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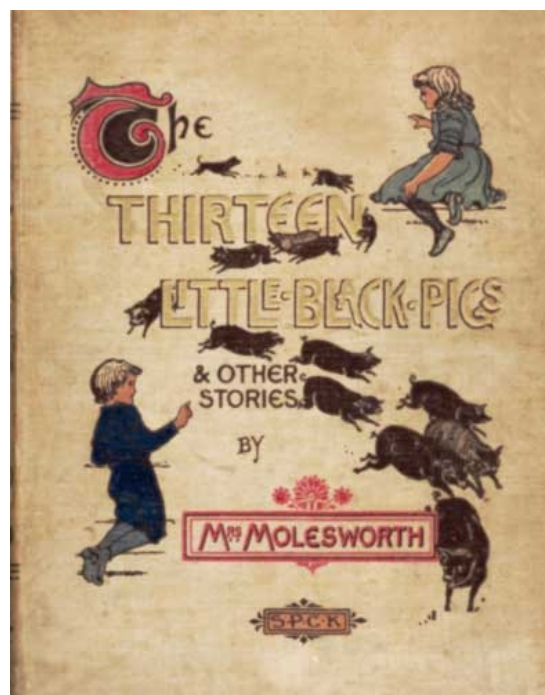
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THE THIRTEEN LITTLE BLACK PIGS AND OTHER STORIES

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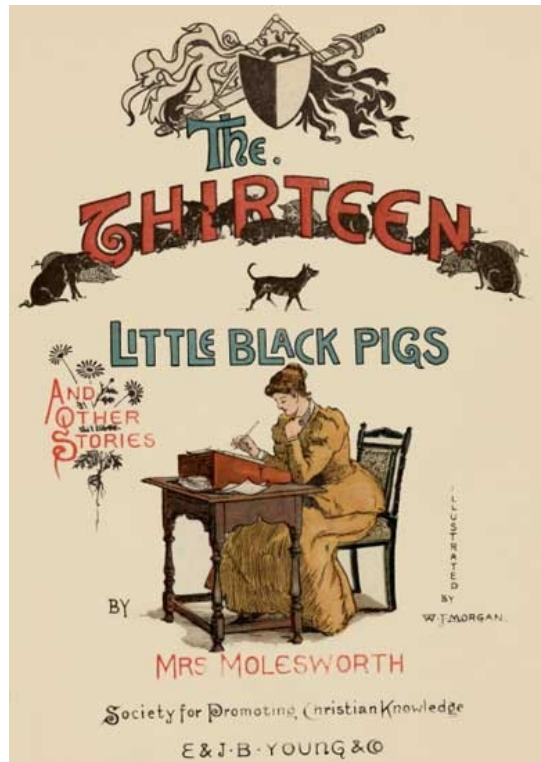
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MRS MOLESWORTH

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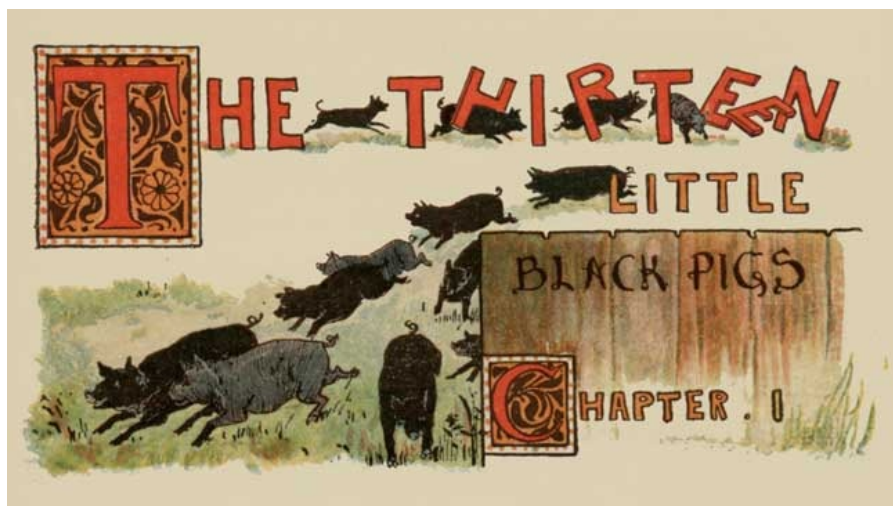
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THE THIRTEEN LITTLE BLACK PIGS

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CHAPTER. I

The house stood on rising ground, and the nursery was at the top of the house—except of course for the attics above—so there was a good view from the two large windows. This was a great comfort to the children during the weeks they were busy getting better from a long, very long, illness, or illnesses. For they had been so unwise as to get measles, and scarlet fever, and something else—I am not sure if it was whooping-cough or chicken-pox—all mixed up together! Don't you think they might have been content with one at a time? Their mamma thought so, and the doctor thought so, and most of all, perhaps, nurse thought so.

But when they began to get really better, they themselves weren't so sure about it. Maxie said to Dolly that he really thought it was rather clever to have finished up all the illnesses at once, and Dolly agreed with him, adding that their cousins had been nearly as long "with *only* measles." But nurse, who heard what they were saying, reminded them that instead of them "finishing up the illnesses," as Master Max said, it might have been the illnesses finishing *them* up. Which was true enough, and made Max, who was the older of the two, look rather grave. [Pg 8]

And then the getting better was *very* long, especially as it was early spring, and there were lots of damp and chilly days still, and for weeks and weeks there was no talk or thought of their going out, and it was very difficult indeed not to get tired of the toys and games their mother provided for them, and *even* of her very nicest stories. Besides, a mamma cannot go on telling stories all day, however sorry she is for her little invalids, and however well she understands that when people, little or big, have been ill and are still feeling weak, and "unlike themselves," it is very, *very* difficult not to be discontented and quarrelsome. So but for the nursery windows I don't quite know what the children would have done sometimes.

The windows both looked out at the same side, which was a good thing in some ways and a bad thing in others. Each child had a special one, and as Dolly said to Maxie, "if yours had been at the back, you could have told me stories of what you saw, and I could have told you stories of what I saw."

"It couldn't have looked out at the back," said Max, who was more of an architect than his sister, for he was two years older, "for it's there the nursery's joined on to the house. It could only have looked to the side, and the side's very stupid—just shrubs and beds, nothing to see except the gardeners sometimes, and p'r'aps there'd have been a scroodgy bit of seeing round to the front, so I'd rather have it as it is. Indeed, if there had been one at the side, I wouldn't have had it for my window at all." [Pg 9]



"You'd have had to," said Dolly, her voice sounding rather "peepy," "'cos I'm a girl, and I *hope* you're a gentleman."

"I'm the eldest," said Max, "and that always counts. Stuff about being a gentleman; the Prince of Wales won't give up being king to let his sister be queen, will he?"

This was rather a poser.

"Papa says," Dolly began, but she stopped suddenly. "Oh Maxie," she went on, in *quite* a different tone of voice, "what *is* coming into Farmer Wilder's field? It isn't turkeys this time. Oh, Maxie, what can it be?" [Pg 10]



For they were both at their posts, though for the last few minutes Max had not been giving much attention to the outside world, and I rather fancy too, that Dolly's eyes were quicker than his.

He turned to the window now—it *was* a very nice look-out certainly, at that side of the house. First there was their own lawn, which the gardeners were now busy "machining," as the children called it, and skirting it at the right the broad terrace walk where the dogs loved to follow their father as he walked up and down, often reading as he went. Then on the left there were the "houses," where there was always some bustle of washing the glass or moving the pots, or watering or *something* going on. And though hidden from the view of the front of the house, there was, farther back, a path to the poultry-yard, where two or three times a day their mamma's pet beauties were fed, and the noise and chatter of the pretty feathered creatures could be heard even through the closed nursery windows. For this was not the big poultry-yard, but their mother's own particular one. [Pg 11]

And most interesting of all, perhaps, further off beyond the lawn, divided from it by a "ha-ha," there was the great field let to Farmer Wilder, where all sorts of creatures were to be seen in their turn; sometimes cattle, sometimes sheep, sometimes only two or three quiet old horses. There had been nothing but horses there lately—not since the turkeys had been taken away—so it was no wonder that Dolly's eyes were caught by the sight of a sudden arrival of new-comers.

There they came—rushing, scrambling, tumbling over each other—one, two, three—no, it was impossible to count them as yet—they were just a mass of rolling jerking black specks against the green grass, and for a minute or two, the children stared and gazed and wondered, in complete silence.

What could they be?

"Are they little bears?" Dolly was on the point of saying, only she stopped short for fear of Maxie's laughing at her, as he had done that time when they were staying at their grandmamma's in London, and she had asked if it was rabbits that had nibbled the crocuses in the square gardens.

"Rabbits in London!" said Max, with lordly contempt. "What a baby you are, Dolly!"

Dolly had never forgotten it; she hated being called "a baby" in that tone, and very likely Max would laugh even more if she asked if these strange visitors were little bears.





So she waited. Then said her brother in his grand, big man tone, as if he had known it all the time, which he hadn't—

"They're pigs—just little black pigs of course. Can't you see their curly tails, Dolly?"

"Yes," said Dolly in rather a disappointed tone, "I can, now I know they're pigs. But I thought that they were something curiouser than pigs—though," and her voice grew more cheerful again, "I never saw quite *black* pigs before, did you, Maxie? What makes them black, I wonder?"

"You've seen black men?" said Max. "Well, it's like that—there's black men and proper-coloured men, so there's black pigs and proper-coloured pigs."

"But black men are painted black. Christy minstrel men are, I know, for nurse told me so when I was frightened of them. And *pigs* couldn't paint themselves black. But oh, Max," she broke off, "do

look how they're running and jumping now. They're all over the field. One, two, three, four—there's *thirteen* of them, Maxie."

"No," said Max, after a moment or two's silence, "there's only twelve."

Dolly counted again—it was not very easy, I must allow. But she stuck to it.

"There are *thirteen*," she repeated.

Two could play at that game.

"There are *twelve*, I tell you, you silly," said Max, without taking the trouble to count them again as carefully as Dolly had done.



CHAPTER II

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"There are *thirteen*," repeated Dolly again. "Look, Max, begin at the side of the field nearest the gate—there are three close together, and then—oh dear, two have run back to the others, and—no, I can't count aloud, but I'm sure—" and she went on to herself, "one, two, three, four,"—"there are thirteen, I'm as sure as sure."

"And *I'm* as sure as sure, or surer than sure, that there are only twelve," said Max, aggravatingly.



"Master Max and Miss Dorothy, come to your tea," said nurse's voice from the table. "And it's getting chilly—the evenings aren't like the middle of the day—you mustn't stand at the windows any more. It's draughty, and it would never do for you to be getting stiff necks or swollen glands or anything like that on the top of all there's been."

call it twelve-and-a-half and split the difference"

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The two came slowly to the tea-table, but their looks were not very amiable.

"You're so rude," said Dolly to her brother, "contradicting like that. I never saw anybody so *persisting*."

"How can you help persisting when you know you're right?" said Max. "I can't tell *stories* to please you."

But I must say his tone was more good-natured than Dolly's.

"Well," said she, "can *I* tell stories to please *you*? I *know* there are thirteen."

"And I *know* there are only twelve," retorted Max, more doggedly.

After that they did not speak to each other all through tea-time. Nurse, who often complained of the chatter-chatter "going through her head," should have been pleased at the unusual quiet, but somehow she wasn't. She had a kind heart, and she did not like to see the little couple looking gloomy and cross.

"Come, cheer up, my dears," she said, "what *does* it matter? Twelve or thirteen, though I don't know what it is you were talking about—call it twelve-and-a-half and split the difference, won't that settle it?"

It was rather difficult not to smile at this suggestion—the idea of chopping one of the poor little pigs in two to settle their dispute was too absurd. But Dolly pinched up her lips; *she* wasn't going to give in, and smiling would have been a sort of *beginning* of giving in, you see. And Max, to save *himself* from any weakness of the kind, started whistling, which nurse promptly put a stop to, telling him that whistling at table was not "manners" at all!

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This did not increase Master Max's good temper, especially as Dolly looked very virtuous, and as if *her* "manners" could never call for any reproof. And a quarter-of-an-hour or so later, when mamma came up to pay them a little visit, it was very plain to her that there was a screw, and rather a big screw, loose somewhere in the nursery machinery. For Max was sitting in one corner pretending to read, and Dolly was sitting in another corner—the two furthest-off-from-each-other corners they could possibly find—pretending to sew, and on both little faces the expression was one which mammas are always very sorry indeed to see.

But mammas learn by experience to be wise. And all wise people know that when other people are "upset" or "put out," *or*, to say it quite plainly, "in a bad temper," it is no use, even though it is rather difficult not to do so, to go "bang at them," with some such questions as these: "What *is* the matter with you?" "What *are* you looking so cross about?" "Have you been quarrelling, you tiresome children?" and so on. Especially if, as these children's mamma just now was clever enough to find out, the angry feelings are beginning to soften down into unhappiness, and the first little whisper of "wishing I hadn't been so cross"—or "so unkind," is faintly making its way into the foolish, troubled little hearts. At that moment a sharp or severe word is sadly apt to drown the gentle fairy voice, and to open the door again to all the noisy, ugly imps of obstinacy and pride and unkind resentment, who were just *beginning* to think they had best slink off.

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So this loving and wise—wise because she was loving, and loving because she was wise!—mother said nothing, except—

"I am so sorry not to have come up before, dears, but I have been very busy. Has it been a very dull afternoon for my poor little prisoners?"

"Not so very," said Dolly, slipping off her seat, and sidling up to her mother, who had settled herself on the old rocking-chair by the fire, with a nice comfortable look, as if she were not in a hurry. "Not so very—we read some stories, and I did six rows of my knitting, and Max cut out some more paper animals for poor little Billy Stokes—and—then we went to our windows and began looking out," but here Dolly's voice dropped suspiciously.

"Well," said her mother, "that all sounds very nice. But what happened when you were looking out at your windows?"

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"Nothing *happened*," said Max, slowly.



"Well—what did you see? And what did you *say*? I can tell from your faces that things haven't gone cheerfully with you all the afternoon—now have they?" said mamma.

"No," Dolly replied eagerly, "they haven't. Only p'r'aps we'd better say nothing more about it. I don't want it all to begin again. If Max likes I'll try to forget all about it, and be friends again."

"I don't mind being friends again," said Max, "I'd rather. But I don't see how we *can* forget about it—they're sure to be there again to-morrow, and then we *couldn't* forget about them. Oh, I wonder if they're there still, if it's not too dark to see them," he went on, suddenly darting to the window. "Then mamma could count them, and that would settle it."

"This is very mysterious," said mamma, smiling, "Dolly, you must explain."

But Max was back from the window before Dolly could begin, and his first words were part of the explanation.

"They're gone in," he said in a disappointed tone, "but I don't know that it matters much. For it would have been too dark for you to count them properly, mamma. It was a lot of little pigs, mamma, in Farmer Wilder's field; little black pigs—twelve of them."

"*Thirteen*," said Dolly.

"No, no!" began Max, but he stopped. "That's it, you see, mamma," he said, in a melancholy tone.

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"That's *what*?" asked mamma.

"The—the quarrel. Dolly will have it there were thirteen, and I'm sure there were only twelve."



"And," said Dolly, laughing a little—though I must say I think it was mischievous of her to have snapped in with that "thirteen"—"nurse heard about 'twelve' and 'thirteen,' but she didn't know what it was about, so she asked us if we couldn't split the difference. Fancy splitting up a poor little pig."

"There isn't one to split, not a *thirteen* one," said Max, rather surlily.

"Yes there is," retorted Dolly.

Mamma looked at them both.

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"My dear children," she said. "You really *must* be at a loss for something to quarrel about. And after all, you remind me of—"

"What do we remind you of, mamma?" asked both, eagerly, "something about when you were a little girl?"

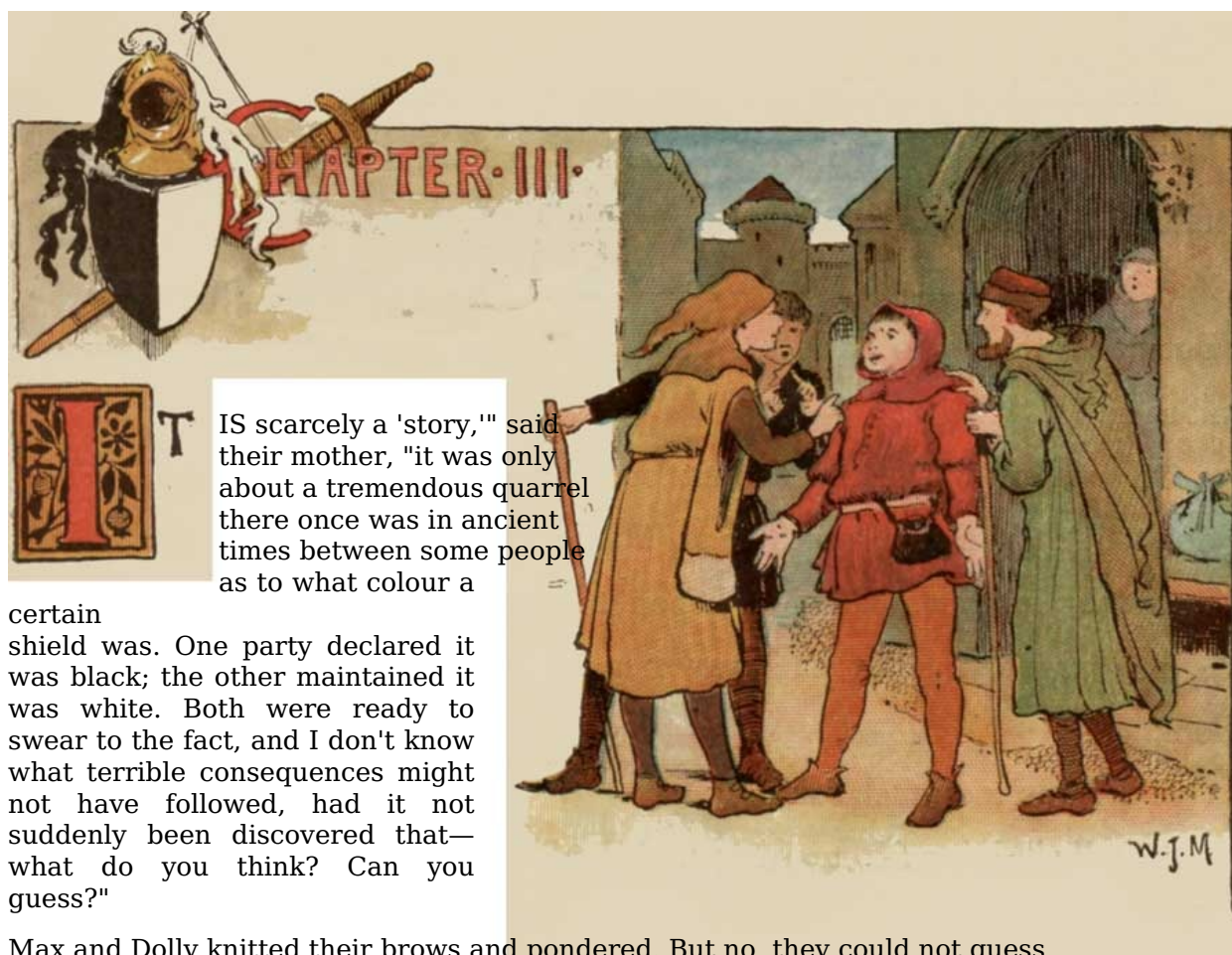
"No, only of an old story I have heard," said mamma.

"Oh, do tell it," said Max and Dolly.



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CHAPTER III



IT IS scarcely a 'story,'" said their mother, "it was only about a tremendous quarrel there once was in ancient times between some people as to what colour a

certain shield was. One party declared it was black; the other maintained it was white. Both were ready to swear to the fact, and I don't know what terrible consequences might not have followed, had it not suddenly been discovered that—what do you think? Can you guess?"

Max and Dolly knitted their brows and pondered. But no, they could not guess.

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"What was it, mamma?" they asked.

"One side of the shield was black and the other white," said she, with a quiet little smile, "so both were right and both were wrong."

The children considered. It was very interesting.

"But," said Max, "it *couldn't* be like that with Dolly and me—there couldn't be thirteen and *not* be thirteen."

"No, it is difficult, I own, to see how that could be," said mamma. "But queer things do happen—there are queer answers to puzzles now-and-then."

"I wish it was settled about ours," said Dolly, with a sigh. "I—I don't like quarrelling with

dear Maxie," and she suddenly buried her face in her mother's lap and began to cry—not loudly, but you could see she was crying by the way her fat little shoulders quivered and shook.

This was too much for Max.

"Dolly," he said, tugging at her till she was obliged to look up, "*don't*—I can't bear you to be unhappy because of—because of me—do kiss me, Dolly, and don't let us ever think any more about those stupid little black pigs."

So they kissed each other, and it was "all right."

"But," said Dolly, "I'm so afraid it'll begin again when we see them. Could papa ask Farmer Wilder to put them somewhere else, mamma? We can't leave off looking out of our windows, *can we?*"

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"I think it would be rather a babyish way of keeping from quarrelling, to ask to have the temptation to quarrel put away," said mamma. "Besides—it would *have* to be settled, you see."

"Yes, but," said Dolly, "then one of us would have to be wrong, and I'd rather go on fancying that *somehow* neither of us was wrong."

"That's rubbish," said Max, "it *couldn't* be."

"Listen," said mamma; "promise me that neither of you will look out of the window to-morrow morning before you see me. Then if it is really a fine mild day, the doctor says you may both go a little walk."

"*Oh, how nice!*" interrupted the little prisoners. "And I will take you myself," their mother went on. "Immediately after your dinner—about two o'clock will be the best time. And we will see if we can't settle the question of the thir—no, I had better not say how many—of the little black pigs, in a satisfactory way."

Mamma smiled at the children—her smile was very nice, but there was a little sparkle of mischief in her eyes too. And *I* may tell *you*, in confidence, though she had not said so to Max and Dolly, that that afternoon she had passed Farmer Wilder's when she was out walking with their father, and had stood at the gate of the very field which the children saw from the nursery window, where the little black pigs were gambolling about. And Farmer Wilder had happened to come by himself, and he and his landlord—the children's father, you understand—had had a little talk about pigs in general, and these piglings in particular. And so mamma knew more about them than Max and Dolly had any idea of.

How pleased they were when they woke the next morning to think that they were really going out for a little walk—out into the sweet fresh air again, after all these weary dreary weeks in the house. And it was really a very nice day; there was more sunshine than had been seen for some time, so that at two o'clock the children were all ready—wrapped up and eager to start when their mother peeped into the nursery to call them.

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At first the feeling of being out again was so delicious it almost seemed to take away their breath, and they could not think of anything else. But after a few minutes they quieted down a little, and walked on with their mother, one at each side.

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"We kept our promise, mamma," said Dolly, "we didn't look out of our windows at all this morning. Nurse let us look out of the night nursery one for a little—it's turned the other way, so we couldn't see the pigs."

"But we'll *have* to see them in a minute," said Max, "when we come out of this path we're close to the gate of the big field, you know, mamma."

"I know," said mamma, "but I want to turn the other way—down the little lane, for before we go to the field to look at the pigs, I want to speak to Farmer Wilder a moment."

A few minutes brought them to the farm, and just as they came in sight of it, Mr. Wilder himself appeared, coming



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towards them. Max and Dolly started a little when they first saw him; something small and black was trotting behind him—could it be one of the piglings? Their heads were full of little black pigs, you see. No, as he came nearer, they found it was a small black dog—a new one, which they had never seen before.

"Good morning, Mr. Wilder," said their mother, "that's your new dog—Max and Dolly have not made acquaintance with him yet. 'Nigger,' you call him? He's a clever fellow, isn't he?"

"A bit too clever," replied the farmer. "He's rather too fond of meddling. Yesterday afternoon he got into the big field where we'd just turned out all the little black pigs, and he was chasing and hunting them all the time."

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"They'll not get fat at that rate," said the children's mother, smiling. "What a lot of them there are—twelve, didn't you say, yesterday?"

"Yes—a dozen—nice pigs they are too," said the farmer, "perhaps it would amuse the children to see them—black pigs are rare in these parts."

He turned towards the field, Max, Dolly and their mother following.

"Mamma," said Max, eagerly, "did you hear? There's only twelve."

"But I saw *thirteen*," said Dolly.

"Yes," said mamma. "You were right as to the number of pigs, Max, but Dolly was right as to the number of black creatures she counted, for Nigger was there. So you were wrong in your *counting*, Max, and Dolly was wrong in the number of pigs, and so—"

"Both were right and both were wrong," cried the children together, "like the people who quarrelled about the shield!"

"Just fancy!" said Dolly.

"It *is* queer!" said Max.

And when they got to the gate and stood looking at the pigs—I think Dolly preferred keeping the gate between her and them—they counted again, and this time there were only twelve! For Nigger was standing meekly at his master's heels, having been whipped for his misdemeanours of the day before.

"Any way, mamma," said Dolly, as they made their way home again after a pleasant little walk, "it shows how silly it is ever to *quarrel*, doesn't it?"

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"Yes, it does," Max agreed.

And you may be sure mamma was *quite* of the same opinion!



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Right Hand And Left

An old friend had come to see the children's mother. They had not met for several years, and the visitor was of course interested in seeing all the little people.

So mamma rang the bell for all five to come down from the nursery. Lily and Belle, being the two eldest, came first. Lily was eleven, Belle's ninth birthday was just passed. They were followed by their two brothers, Basil and George, who were only seven and five, and Baby Barbara, a young lady of two. They were a pleasant-looking little party, and their kind-faced new friend asked many questions about them, as each was introduced to her by name. [Pg 30]

The children did not care very much for her remarks as to whom each of them was like, for she spoke of relations most of them were too young to remember, or had scarcely ever heard of, as she was an elderly lady.

But the two older girls at least, listened with all their ears to one or two little things their own dear mother herself said about them.

"Lily," she said, as she drew forward the fair-haired little girl, "is already quite my right hand."

Lily's eyes sparkled with pleasure, but Belle grew rather red, and turned away. She was not the least like Lily, her hair was dark and cut short round her head, for she had had a bad illness not long ago.

The stranger lady had quick eyes.

"And Belle?" she said, kindly. "You can't have two right hands of course. But I've no doubt she is a helpful little woman too, in her way."

"Oh, yes!" said her mother, "she is. And she is getting on well with her lessons again, in spite of having been so put back last year."

"And," said the old lady—who had noticed the rather sullen look on Belle's little brown face—"I hope the two sisters love each other dearly, besides being a pair of extra hands to their mother." [Pg 31]

Lily smiled back in reply.

"Yes," she said, "I am sure we do."



Soon after, their mother sent them all upstairs again. Nurse had come down to fetch Baby, and the two boys trotted off together. Lily took Belle's hand as they got to the foot of the stairs.

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"Isn't she a nice lady?" she said, for Lily was feeling very pleased just then with herself and everybody else—I must say she was very seldom a cross little girl, but she was perhaps rather too inclined to be pleased with herself—"and didn't you like," she went on, "what mamma said of us two, to her?"

"No," said Belle, roughly, pulling herself away from her sister. "I don't want to be counted a clumsy, stupid, left hand. I don't wonder you're pleased, you always get praised."

"Oh, Belle!" said Lily. "I really don't think you need be so cross about it. You know you're younger than I."

But Belle would not answer, and all the rest of the afternoon she remained very silent and gloomy, looking, to tell the truth, as if that strange invisible little "black dog," that we have all heard of, I think, had seated himself comfortably upon her shoulders, with no intention of getting off again in a hurry.

It was a fine summer's day, almost too hot indeed, so the children had tea early and went out a walk afterwards, returning in time to spend half-an-hour with their mother, before she went to dress for dinner.

This half-hour was generally a very happy time for all the children. But to-day one little face was less bright than usual, and mamma's eyes were not slow to notice it, though she said nothing.

When the three little ones had gone off to bed, their mother glanced at the two elder girls.

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"You are quite ready, I see, for coming into the drawing-room before dinner," she said.



"Yes, mamma," Lily replied, "all except washing our hands. They do get so quickly dirty in this hot weather, if we romp about at all."

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"Then I think you might practise a little, papa likes to see one of you in the drawing-room when he comes in, and to-night Belle shall be with me while I'm dressing."

"Very well, mamma dear," said Lily, running off as cheerfully as usual. Being with their mother when she was dressing was a great treat, it didn't happen every night, and the little girls took it in turns. This evening I don't think Lily was at all sorry to be without her sister's company, for the little black dog, or at least his shadow, was still on Belle's shoulders.

Belle sat quietly in a corner of the room, her mother said very little to her, not even when Collins, the maid, had gone.

"You must wash your hands, I think, before coming down to the drawing-room," she said at last, as she poured some nice warm water into a pretty little basin with rose-buds round the edge, which the children admired very much.

"Thank you, mamma," said Belle, brightening up a little, "and may I use your beautiful pink scented soap, please?"

"Certainly dear," said her mother, and Belle set to work to wash her little brown hands, which, it must be confessed, were decidedly in need of it.

Rather to her surprise, her mother stood beside her looking on.

"Are you watching to see if I wash them quite clean, mamma?" asked the little girl.

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"No, dear, I'm sure you will do that. I was wondering if it has ever struck you how prettily and kindly your little hands behave to each other. Right hand is the cleverest and quickest, of course, but left hand is always willing and ready too. They take care not to hurt or scratch each other, and if by chance one is ever hurt, the other is as tender as possible not to rub or touch the sore place." [Pg 36]

Belle went on washing her hands, or rather bathing them in the water, for by this time they were quite clean. She looked at them as she did so, but she did not speak.

"And another thing," said her mother, "take one out of the water, and see how helpless the other is, even clever right hand can do very little without her sister, and it is the same in all the work you do, one hand would be very little use without the other."

Belle's face grew rosy.

"Mamma dear," she said, as her hands wiped each other dry on the nice soft towel, "I know what you mean. You're like a fairy, mamma, you can see into my heart. I didn't like that lady thinking Lily was your right hand, and me no good to you. It made me feel as if I didn't love Lily."

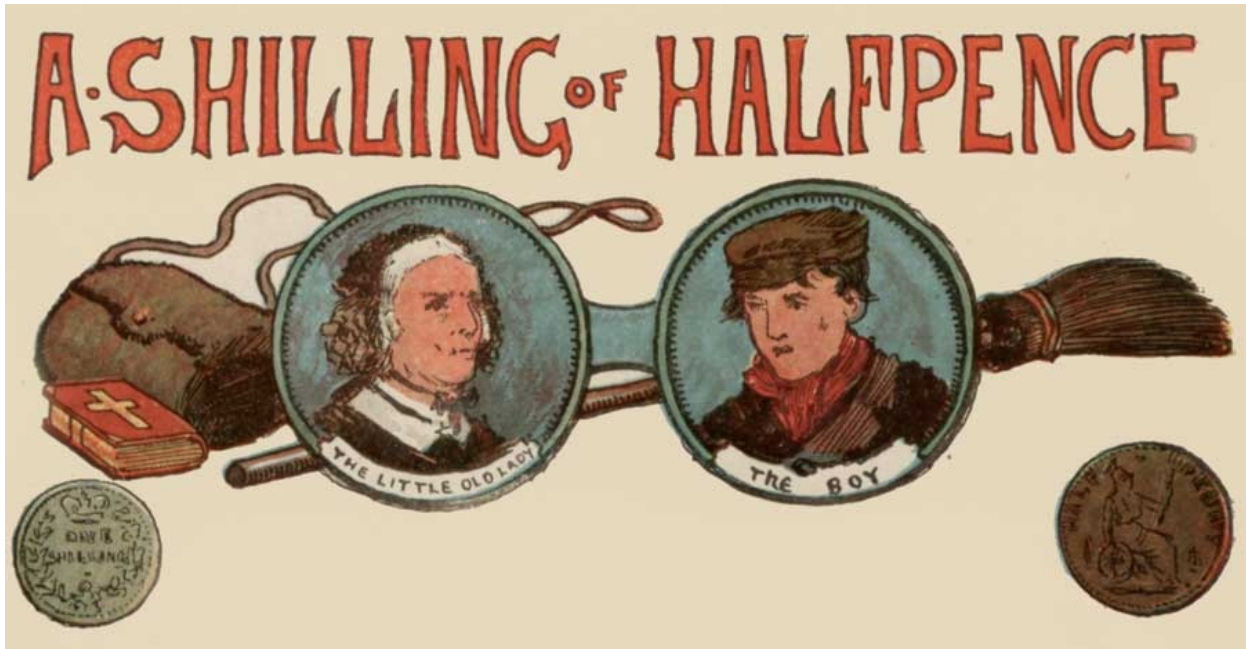
"But nobody said you were no good, Belle dear. You made that up in your own silly little head. For you know even though Lily is older, you can still help me a great deal, and even help her to help me," said her mother.

"Like as if you were the head, and we your two hands," answered Belle. "Well, mamma, I won't mind now even if you count me only your left hand, and I'll always remember what you've said."

She kissed her mother, quite happy now, and when they were going to bed that night she told Lily all about it. [Pg 37]

"I am afraid," said Lily, looking sorry, "that I was too proud of what mamma said of me. But if each of us is always as kind to the other as right hand is to left hand, and left hand to right hand, it will be all right, won't it dear?"





A SHILLING OF HALFPENCE

She was a lonely little old lady. She was one of those who had "seen better days," as it is called. I am afraid there are a great many people in the world of whom this can be said, and the saddest part of it is that they are very, very often, *old* people.

It is sad to see anyone in want even of comforts, and still more of really needful things, but I think it is worst of all to see very old or very young folk deprived of what they should have. Middle-aged men and women seem more fit for the battle of life than those who are already tired by what they have come through, or those who have not yet got to their full strength and courage.

My little old lady was not what is commonly counted *very* poor. She had enough to eat—certainly her appetite was small—and enough to pay the rent of the two neat little rooms, furnished with what she had been able to keep of her own old furniture, which had once stood in a very different kind of house; and enough, with *great* care, to dress herself nicely; and, what she considered quite as important as any of these things, she managed to have enough to give her mite of help to those still poorer and more closely pressed than herself.

[Pg 39]

How I got to know her I am not at liberty to say. But I will tell you about the first time I ever saw her and *him*, the other person of this little story.



It was a cold, but for a wonder in London in the winter, a bright and dry morning. All the better, you will say—of course everybody must like nice clean streets and pavements much more than sloppy rain and mud. But no; not quite *everybody*. Think of the crossing-sweepers! Dirty, muddy days are their harvest-time, especially Sundays, when in the better parts of the town there are so many more rich and well-to-do foot passengers than on other days. It was a real disappointment, and worse than a disappointment—a real serious trouble to little Billy Harding, when, after the best breakfast his poor mother could give him—and that isn't saying very much—he hurried downstairs from the attic which was his home, brush in hand, to find the pavements dry as a bone, and the roads almost *clean*!

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"I made sure it were going to rain beautiful," he said to himself, dolefully, "it looked so uncommon like it, last night."

But the wind had veered round to the east while Billy was fast asleep, and as everybody knows, the east wind, which "is neither good for man nor beast," hasn't *even* the good quality of bringing profitably dirty streets for the poor crossing-sweepers.

There was nothing for it but to go to his post, however, and there it was I saw him that same cold, dry, clean Sunday morning, when I myself was on my way to church. Very likely I should never have noticed *him*, nor *her* either, if I had met them separately, but it was the seeing them standing together, talking earnestly, that caught my attention, and the anxious, rather troubled expression on the little old lady's face, and the bright eager look on the boy's, made me wonder what it was all about. A dreadful idea crossed my mind for an instant—could he be a naughty boy? had he possibly been trying to pick the old lady's pocket, and

was she talking to him in hopes of making him repentant, as is sometimes the way with tender-hearted old ladies, instead of giving him in charge to a policeman? (Not that there was any policeman in view!) But another instant made me feel ashamed of the thought—a [Pg 41] second glance at the boy's honest face was enough.

Now I will tell you what had happened; how I came to know it does not matter.



I told you my little old lady always managed to give away something to others. One of her habits was to put one shilling into the box in the church porch "for the poor of the parish," the first Sunday of every month, and if you knew how *very* little she had to live on, you would agree with me that this shilling, which was not her only charity, was a *good deal*. The morning I am writing of was the first Sunday of the month, and as she set off for church she held in her thin old fingers inside her well-worn muff two coins—a shilling and a halfpenny, the halfpenny being intended for the first crossing-sweeper she met on her way. This was another of her little customs. She had some way to go to church, and she did not always choose the same streets, so she had no special pet crossing-sweeper, and this morning it was Billy into whose hand she dropped the coin she was holding in her tremulous fingers. [Pg 42]

"Thank you, ma'am," said Billy, tugging at his ragged cap with the same hand in which he had received the money, for he had his brush in the other, and he was anxious to show his gratitude. It was his first receipt that morning!

"Poor boy," thought the old lady, "he does look cold. I wish I could have made it a penny."

But the kind wish had scarcely crossed her mind before she heard a voice beside her.

"Please ma'am," it said, "do you know what you give me just now?"

And Billy, red with running, held out a very unmistakable *shilling!*

The old lady gasped, and drew out the coin she was firmly clasping in her muff. It was a rather extra worn halfpenny! [Pg 43]



"Oh, my good boy!" she began, but Billy interrupted her. He saw at once how it was. And if he gave a little sigh, can you wonder? It *would* have been "jolly," if she had replied, "All right, my boy. I meant it for you," and as he had run after her he had thought it *might* be so. For Billy was wise in some things, as the poor learn to be. He knew that it is not by any means those who have most to give who give most.

But a glance at the troubled old face told him the truth.

"All right, ma'am," he said again. "'Twas a mistake. Mistakes will happen," and he dropped the silver piece back into her hand.

"Take the halfpenny at least, my boy," said she. "It was very good, very good indeed of you to tell me of my mistake. If it was money I could spare on myself—but—it is my rule to give this once a month at church, and—I could not make it up again." [Pg 44]

"All right, ma'am," Billy repeated for the third time, anxious to be off before the old lady could hear the choke of disappointment in his voice.

(It was just then I passed them.)

"But I'll tell you what I'll do," she went on, brightening up. "I'll pay you the shilling in halfpence, every week. I'm sure I can manage that. So you look out for me each Sunday morning, and I'll have it ready," and off she trotted, quite happy at having thus settled the difficulty. "I shouldn't feel *honest*" she said to herself, "if I didn't make it up to him after really *giving* it to him. And a halfpenny a week even I can manage extra."

For of course Billy's halfpenny was not to interfere with her regular Sunday morning's dole to the first crossing-sweeper she met.

I think she was right. I am sure that the halfpennies he received so regularly till what she thought her debt to him was paid, helped to make and keep Billy Harding as honest as a man as he had been as a child.

The next winter saw no little old lady trotting along to church in the cold. She went away for her treat of the year—a fortnight in the country; but she fell ill the very day she came back, and never was able to go out again. It fell to my share—she asked me to do it—to tell the little crossing-sweeper when she died, and to give him a small present she had left him. He rubbed his sleeve across his eyes—he didn't want me to see he was crying. [Pg 45]

"'Twill seem quite strange-like never to see her no more," he said. "I were just beginning to wonder when she'd be back. Twenty-four Sundays and she never missed, wet or dry! I'd have liked her to know I goes too, reg'lar, to church in the afternoons as she wanted me to."

And for his own sake, as well as for the dear old lady's, I never lost sight of poor Billy from that time. [Pg 46]





A FRIEND IN NEED

Laurence was a little English boy, though he lived in Paris. He had several older brothers and sisters, but none near him in age. So he was often rather lonely, for he was only six years old, and too young to do many lessons. Half-an-hour in the morning and half-an-hour in the afternoon made up his school time, though of course his next brother and sister, who were twelve and thirteen years old, had to do a great deal more than that.

I daresay they would not have minded doing a little *less*. I know they were always very pleased to have a holiday, or even a half-holiday, and in the evenings when their lessons were done they were very kind and ready to play with their little brother. [Pg 47]

Laurence had a German nursery-maid. She was a good girl, but not very lively or quick, and she could not speak either French or English. When she first came to take care of Laurence he only knew a very few words of German, so you can imagine that his walks with Emma, as she was called, were not very amusing. But after a while Laurence got on with his German, much faster than Emma did with either French or English, which of course was as it should be, seeing that she had come on purpose to teach him her language. And then he and his nurse became very good friends in a quiet way. For he was rather an unusually quiet little boy, and he thought a great deal more than he spoke.

Still he *did* sometimes wish he had a brother or sister near his own age. It did not seem quite fair that he should be so alone in the family. Hugh and Isabel were such nice friends for each other, and so were the two still older sisters and the big brother of all, who was called Robert. Now and then when little Laurence was trotting along the street by Emma's side he would look with envy at other children, two and three together, and wish that one of them "belonged" to him.

But there were others alone, even more alone than he was. This he found out before long. At the corner of the "Avenue" where he lived, there was a large house opening into a courtyard, like all large houses in Paris, and just inside this court-yard Laurence often saw a little girl not much bigger than he was, always playing about by herself. She was the daughter of the "*concierge*," or porter, who took care of the big house, and though she was neat and tidy she was not at all a rich little girl. For though the house was a big one, it was not lived in by rich people, and the *concierge* and his wife and little girl had only two small rooms for their home. [Pg 48]

Laurence did not know the little girl's name, but in his own fancy he called her "Gay." She always looked so bright and happy. And after a while the two children began to smile at each other as if they were friends, and sometimes Gay would call out, "Good morning, Sir. What a nice day!" or some little speech like that, to which Laurence would reply, "Good morning, Miss," like a little gentleman, lifting his cap as he spoke. Of course these remarks were made in French. In English they do sound rather odd, I must allow.

One day Laurence and Emma set off for rather a long walk. It was the day before Isabel's birthday, and he wanted to buy a present for her at one of the very large shops. He was not sure what the present was to be, but he *thought* that he would choose a pincushion, as he had seen some very pretty little fancy chairs and sofas not long ago at this same big shop, which Emma told him were pincushions. He knew exactly what part of the shop to go to, and [Pg 49]

he had his money—a whole franc—that is about tenpence of English money, in his little purse safe in his pocket.

They reached the shop without any adventure or misadventure, and soon Laurence, holding the maid's hand, was walking slowly past the counters or tables where lots of tempting pretty things were displayed. It was some time before they found the particular table where the fairy-like furniture was laid out. But at last Laurence gave a little cry of joy.



"There they are, Emma," he said in German, "the dear little armchairs and sofas and ottomans—blue and rose and white, and all with gold backs and legs. Now which would Isabel like?" [Pg 50]

It was a great question, but at last they decided on a rose-coloured arm-chair. The price he was sure was all right, as Emma had seen that the things were all marked one franc. But alas, when the shopman gave Laurence the little paper bill, and the boy as proud as possible went to the desk where it was to be paid, the clerk held out his hand,—



"Five centimes more, if you please—one sou."

A sou is about the same as an English halfpenny, and it is often called a "five centime piece"—for there are ten centimes in each *two-sous* piece, just as there are four farthings in one English penny. [Pg 51]



"Another sou?" said Laurence. "But I have not got one. Emma, have you got one?"

Emma had nothing at all in her pocket. It was stupid of her, but she had not thought of bringing her purse. However it was so little, and she began asking the clerk in her very bad French, mixed with German words, to let the little gentleman have the pincushion for a franc.

The clerk shook his head.

"At least," said poor Laurence, "let me have it now and I will bring the sou to-morrow, or my mamma will send it."

[Pg 52]

Again the man shook his head. Perhaps he was in a bad temper, perhaps he did not feel the more good-natured because he may have thought the boy and his nurse were German. For at that time the French nation did not love Germans. Let us hope they have learnt better since.

"Pass on, sir," he said sharply, "you are blocking the way," and the people standing round began to laugh. The tears rose to the little boy's eyes.

"Oh! what shall I do?" he cried, "and to-morrow is Isabel's birthday."

Then came a little voice beside him.

"Sir—may I offer it? Will you accept this sou from me?" and a small hand held out the coin. It was little Gay.

"Oh thank you, thank you," exclaimed Laurence joyfully, and the grim clerk received the sou and the parcel was handed to him.

How he thanked the kind little girl! She was there with her mother, and while the good woman was choosing an umbrella at a stand close by, Gay, as I must still call her, had noticed her little friend and wondered what he was in difficulty about. And of all the people near him in the shop, she alone had the kind thought of offering him the sou.

I need not tell you that after this the good little girl was looked upon by Laurence as quite a friend. He went with Emma the next morning to pay back the five centime piece, and when New Year's Day came, a pretty present for Gabrielle, which was her real name, was one of the gifts which Laurence and his mother had the greatest pleasure in choosing.

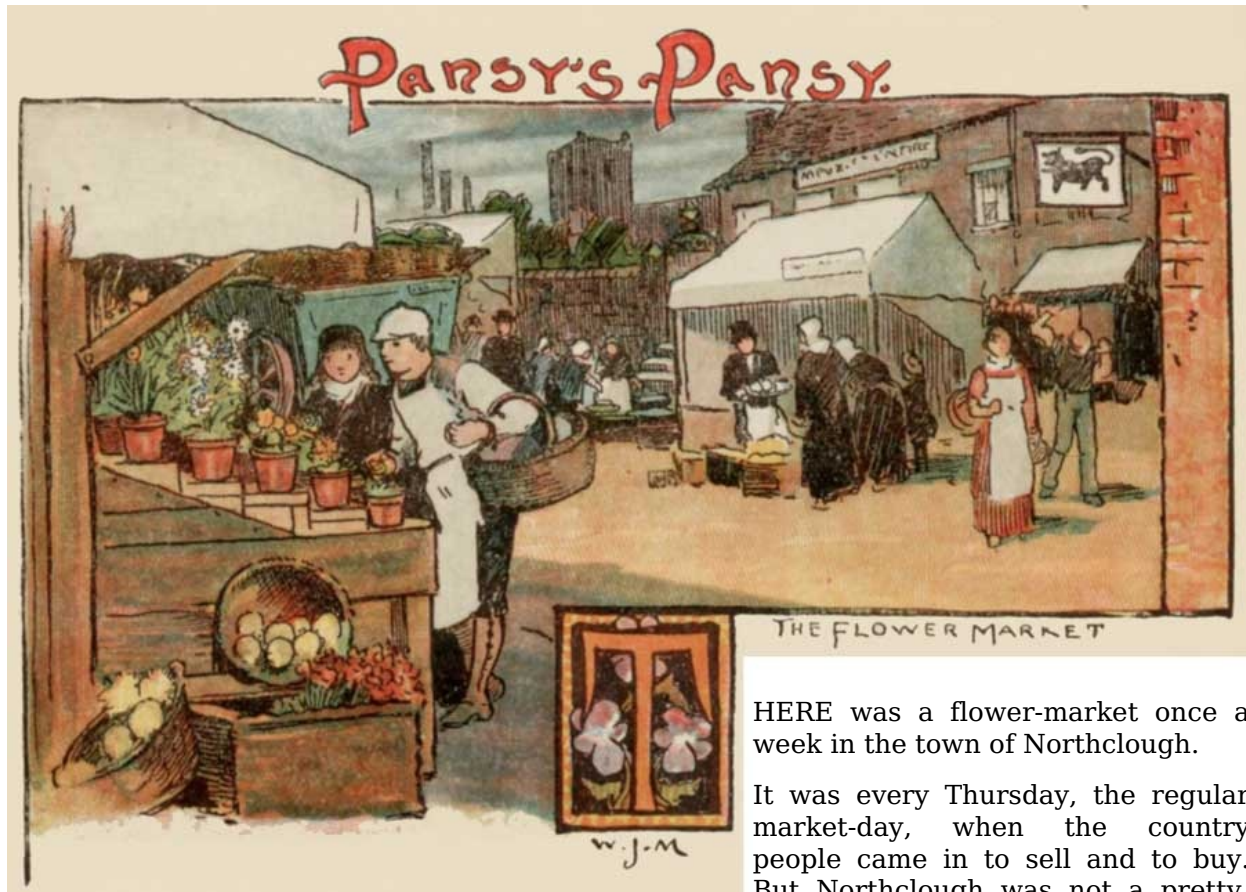
[Pg 53]

Was it not nice that the little girl was called "Gabrielle," for Laurence was able to go on calling her "Gay," as it made such a good short name for the real one.



[Pg 54]

PART I.



HERE was a flower-market once a week in the town of Northclough.

It was every Thursday, the regular market-day, when the country people came in to sell and to buy. But Northclough was not a pretty,

old-fashioned country town, such as you would very likely fancy from the mention of markets and country folk. Once, long ago, it had been a village, a rather lonely and out-of-the-way village, though never a pretty one. For it was up in the north, as its name tells, in a bare and cold part of the world, where the grass is never very brightly green, and the skies much more often grey than blue. [Pg 55]

And now, as far as looks go, any way, it had changed from bad to worse. The village had grown into a smoky town, where there were lots of high chimneys, and constant sounds of machinery booming away, and railway trains shrieking and whistling in and out of the stations. There was no longer any ivy on the old church, which the oldest people could remember almost buried in it. And the new churches which had been built since, already looked old themselves—no stones could keep clean or fresh in such smoky grimy air. [Pg 56]



But some of the old customs still lingered on, and one was the weekly market, which was held just outside the old church walls—the walls of the church-yard, I should say—every Thursday, just as it had been since the village first grew into a small market town, more than a hundred years ago. And what some people would have done without the pleasure and amusement of this market, I should be afraid to say. I mean some *little* people, the children of the vicar, who lived with their parents in a grey old house, as grey and old as the church itself, which stood at one side of the market place.

It was grey and grim outside, but inside the father and mother made it as bright and cheery as they could. In winter I think they managed this better than in summer, for good blazing fires do a great deal, especially of an evening when the curtains are drawn and the cold north wind, howling and blustering outside as if in a rage at not being able to get in, only makes the house seem still cosier. And one of the good things about the north is that coals are cheap and plentiful, so that though the vicar was not rich, there was no need to go without [Pg 57]

comfortable fires.

But in summer it was sometimes *not* easy to make the old house look cheerful. Very little sunshine could get in, for on two sides the neighbouring houses almost shut out the light. And the sun had hard work, persevering though he is, to get through the murky air—murky even in summer—that hangs like a curtain over what is called a "manufacturing town." Then there was no garden of any kind, as the new schools had been built on what was once the vicarage lawn, though after all I hardly think a garden would have been much good, and perhaps the children's nurse was right when she said:

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"Better without it, 'twould only have been a trap for more soots and smuts, and it's hard enough to keep the pinafores clean for half-an-hour together as it is."

Nurse had come with their mother from the south, and she didn't take kindly to the greyness, and the smokiness, and the grimness at all. But she took very kindly to the babies, which was after all of more consequence.



There were four of them—they were "leaving off being babies" now, as little Ruth, the youngest but one, said indignantly, when some one spoke of her and Charlie in that disrespectful way. "Charlie's three and I'm four, and Pansy's nearly six, and Bob's seven past."

That was Ruth's description of the family, and I think it will do very well, though some people might say it began at the wrong end.

And these were the little people who would have been badly off without the weekly market, which they looked forward to as the "next best" treat to having tea in the dining-room on Saturday evenings with mamma.

Their nursery windows overlooked the market place. The nurseries were the brightest rooms in the house, and as it was a large house, whatever its faults in other ways, there were three of them. The day nursery in the middle and a large bedroom on one side, and on the other a small one which was beginning to be called "Miss Pansy's room." And on Thursdays Pansy's room was in great request, as from *its* window one had the best view of all of the market, especially of the corner where the flowers were.

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There was always *something* to be seen on the flower-stalls, even in winter, when there was nothing else there were evergreens, holly and mistletoe of course, in plenty, as Christmas came on. And though some other parts of the market might be more amusing and exciting, where the cocks and hens, and geese and ducks, were all to be heard gabbling, and quacking and clucking and crowing, for instance; or the railed-in place where there were generally a few calves or poor little frightened sheep bleating and baa-ing, yet the little girl's first thought was always the flower corner. First thing on Thursday morning, sometimes before it was light, she would lie wondering what sort of dear little plants there would be *this* week, and hoping it would be a fine day, so that nurse would let her poke her head out through the bars a tiny bit, so as to see better, without calling to her that she would catch cold. [Pg 60]

Pansy's birthday was in May—she was going to be six. She liked having a birthday because mamma always invited herself to tea in the nursery, and if it happened to be one of papa's not very busiest days, he would sometimes join them too. That *was* delightful.

Generally she got two or three simple presents, and always one very good and valuable one from her godmother. But strange to say this handsome present never pleased her half so much as the little trifling ones. Her godmother was kind, but she was old and unused to children, and she had not seen Pansy since she was very tiny, so her thought was more perhaps about helping Pansy's mother than pleasing Pansy herself. And so the present was sure to be a new frock—or stuff to make one with, or a nice jacket, or even once—that was *rather* a funny present for a little girl, I think—a new set of china tea-cups and saucers and plates and milk jugs and everything complete for a nursery tea-service.

But "to make up" for godmother's presents being so very "useful," Pansy's mother always gave her something pretty and pleasant, a doll, or some doll's furniture, or picture books or some nice ornament for her room. Any little girl of six or seven can easily fancy the kind of presents I mean. [Pg 61]

This sixth birthday, however, was going to be rather different. For on this day the godmother thought it was time to give Pansy a present of another kind. What that was, I will tell you in the next part.



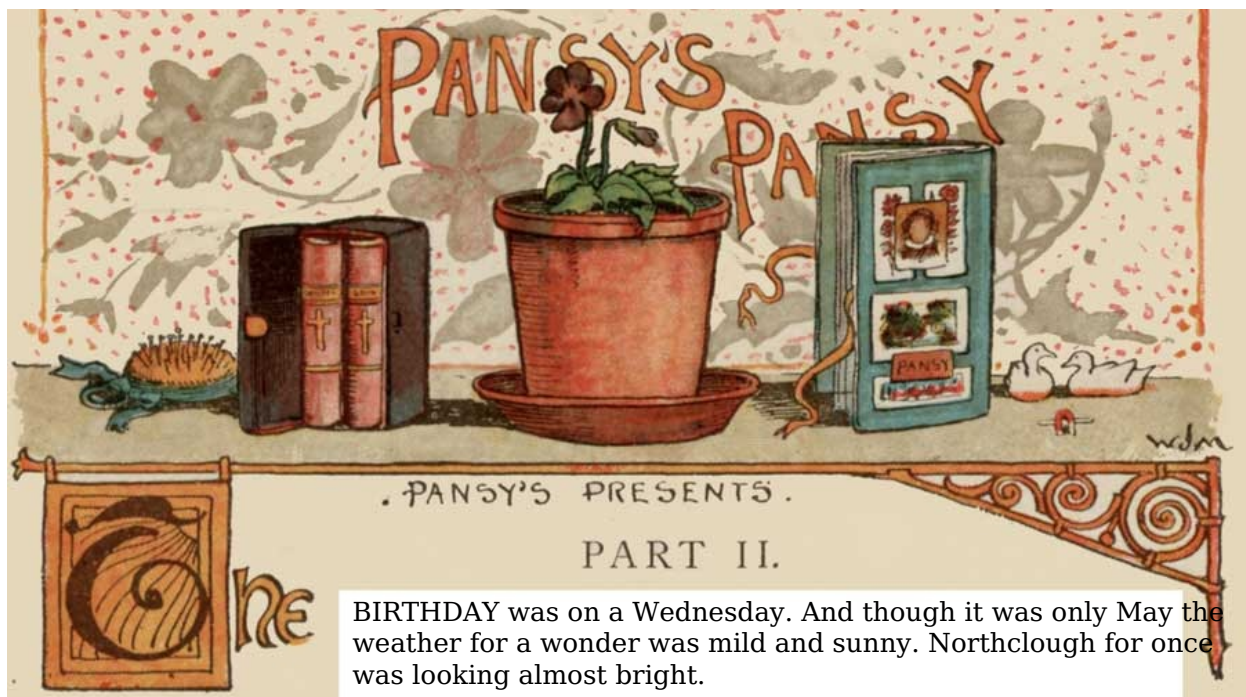
[Pg 62]

PANSY'S PANSY.

PANSY'S PRESENTS.

PART II.





"It *is* nice for you to have such a fine day to be six years old on, Miss Pansy dear," said nurse, when she came in to wake up the two little sisters and to give her own birthday present of a neat little pincushion for Pansy's toilet table. And the boys had something for her too, at least it was called "the boys'," to please Charley, though in reality it was Bob who had bought it, or the things to make "it" with. For the "it" was a little blotting-book covered outside with thick cardboard on which pretty pictures were pasted. It was very cleverly made, for Bob was wonderfully neat-handed for such a little boy, and it had taken quite a lot of contrivance to get it done without his sister's finding out about it. And Ruth's present was a pen-wiper.

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Pansy *was* pleased.

"I can write to godmother now without having to ask mamma to lend me her writing-case," she said. "I suppose," she went on, "I shall have to write to her to-day; there's sure to be a useful present come from her," and Pansy sighed a little, for the writing to godmother was the one part of her birthday she did *not* enjoy.

Nurse could not help smiling at what she would have called Miss Pansy's "old-fashioned" way of speaking. She always talked of godmother's "useful presents," because she had so often been told that frocks and jackets and so on were such nice, useful gifts. And perhaps I should have mentioned before, that godmother did not forget the little people at Northclough Vicarage at Christmas, something useful was sure to come then, for she was great aunt to them all as well as godmother to one.

But before nurse had time to speak, the door opened and the children's mother came in. They were at breakfast in the day nursery by this time. She had a bright smile on her face and a small parcel in her hand.

"Good morning, darlings, to you all," she said, "and many, many happy returns to my Pansy. Papa told me to kiss you for him too, he won't be in till dinner-time I'm afraid. There now, a kiss for him and one for myself," Pansy was in her mother's arms long before this, "*and* a present from godmother."

[Pg 64]

Mamma sat down on the nursery rocking-chair as she spoke, and laid the parcel on her knee, and Pansy, stooping down beside her, began to undo the string which fastened it.

"Is it not a useful present this time, mamma?" she asked, for certainly it did not look like a hat or a frock, or a hamper of china.

"I hope you will think it so," said her mother smiling, "and pretty too."

"A *book*," exclaimed the little girl, "and oh, yes, it *is* a very pretty one. And oh, mamma, it's *two* books, in a 'lovely'"—Pansy still said some words rather funnily—"case, all red leather, and, oh! my own name, 'Pansy,' *how* nice! What can they be? A prayer-book and a hymn-book, with such beautiful big letters, and 'reds' in the prayer-book. How I wish it was Sunday, for me to take them to church."

She was truly delighted—her little face all rosy with pleasure. Mamma could not resist giving her another kiss.

"You will take the greatest care of them, I know, dear," she said. "And now I have only a very tiny present from papa and me," and she held out a bright new shilling. "You may buy *anything* you like with it, dear."

This was delightful news. What between her pride in her beautiful "church books," as she called them, and thinking over what her shilling would buy, the little girl had hard work to eat her breakfast that morning, even though, in honour of the birthday, it was an extra nice one. [Pg 65]



You will think I am a very long time getting to *the* "pansy," which gives its name to this little story, but we are coming to it now.

There was a great consultation held in Pansy's room, and this was what the children decided; sixpence should be spent on a pair of ducks to float in a basin of water attracted by a magnet, a toy which they had seen in a shop window with the price marked in plain figures. And sixpence should be spent, for Pansy's own special pleasure, in a flower growing in a pot, such as they had often seen on the flower-stall below their windows. The ducks could be bought that very morning, which Pansy was glad of, as she knew that Bob and Ruth were even more anxious to have them than she was herself. But for the flower she would have to wait till the next day. [Pg 66]



However, the birthday passed very happily, and it was very nice to wake in the morning with the feeling that part of its pleasures were still to come, and mamma promised to go with her herself to the stall to choose the flower. [Pg 67]

It was to be a pansy. Not a *quite* fully blown one, her mother advised her, for then it would be the sooner over, but one nearly so. There had been quite a good choice of them for the last week or two; the only difficulty would be what colour to have.

"Yellow ones are very pretty," said the little girl as she skipped along by her mother's side that Thursday morning on their way to the market, for though it was just below the vicarage

windows, you had to make quite a round to get to it from the front door, "yellow ones, and those brown ones too are very nice, but I *think* I like the purple ones best—I mean the violet-coloured ones—don't you mamma?"

"I think I do," her mother agreed. "They remind one of the dear little wild pansies, or dog violets, too."

And by good luck, the old woman who kept the flower-stall, had some beautiful purple pansies, none of the paler ones were half so pretty that day, so the choice was not so difficult after all. Mamma picked out a beauty, with two flowers on it, one almost full blown, and the other not far behind, and a proud little girl was Pansy, as, after having paid her sixpence she trotted home again, her precious namesake tightly clasped in her arms.

"I don't think I've ever had such nice birthday presents, have I, mamma?" she said, as she lifted up her own soft little face, as sweet and as soft as the flower, for a kiss, before hurrying upstairs to the nursery to show her treasure. [Pg 68]

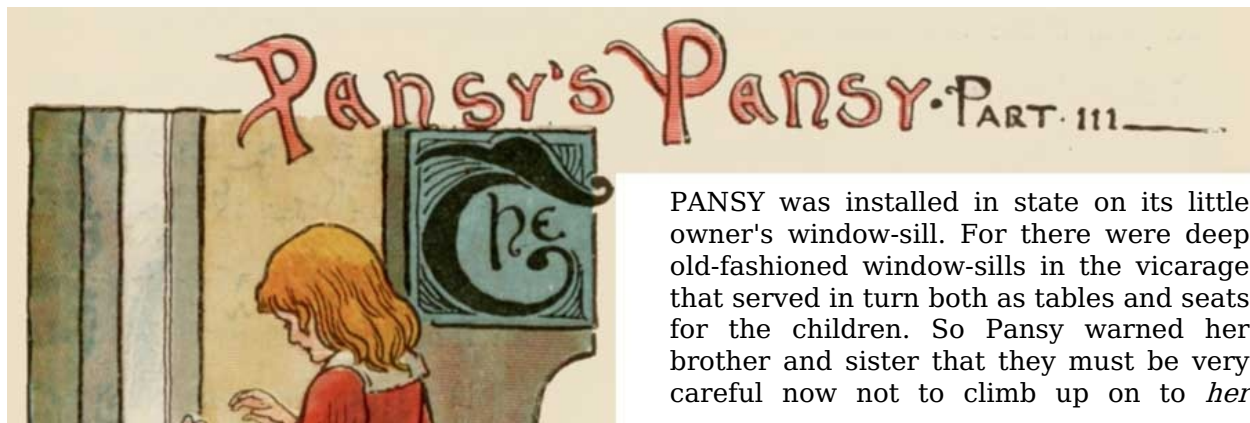


And it made her mother very happy to see that her little daughter had that best of all fairy gifts, a grateful and contented heart.

But Pansy had her troubles like other people, as you will hear. [Pg 69]

PANSY'S PANSY.

PART III.



PANSY was installed in state on its little owner's window-sill. For there were deep old-fashioned window-sills in the vicarage that served in turn both as tables and seats for the children. So Pansy warned her brother and sister that they must be very careful now not to climb up on to *her*



window-sill without asking her first, so that she could move the flower-pot out of the way.

Bob and Ruth both promised. And indeed they were very nearly quite as much taken up with the pretty flower as Pansy herself. If she *could* have forgotten to water it, she would have been well reminded to do so. I don't think there was ever a plant more watched, and cared for. It was Pansy's first thought in the morning and last at night. Every little speck of dust was tenderly wiped off its leaves, it was moved from one part of the room to another to get the sunshine, of which, as I have told you, there was seldom more than a scanty amount at Northclough, and the window-sill, its own particular home, was kept as clean as if the pansy was a fairy princess who got out of her flower-pot at night to take a little exercise on her terrace. [Pg 70]

And very soon the two flowers were at their perfection; they were very fine ones really, and I think Pansy knew every mark on their faces as well as a mother knows the dimples in her darling's cheeks, even the freckles on her darling's forehead. Truly the little girl had got a good sixpenceworth of pleasure out of her purchase.

The weather grew warmer, early in June it was really sultry for a few days. Pansy began to be careful in a new way for her pet. It must not be allowed to get *too* hot, or to be broiled up by the sun, so a shady corner was chosen for the flower-pot during the middle of the day. And it really seemed grateful for the care bestowed upon it. Never did a pansy prosper better, or lift itself up in fresher beauty to greet its little gardeners. [Pg 71]



But one day, unfortunately, Bob had an inspiration, if you know what that is.

"Pansy," he said to his sister, "I've been thinking if you want the flowers to last as long as they possibly can, you must really give them a little more fresh air. It's all very well in the daytime when your window's open, but at night I'm sure the pansy feels choky and stuffy. You see flowers aren't like us, except hot-house ones of course, they're used to live out-of-doors."

Pansy looked very anxious.

"I wonder if it's that," she said. "I noticed, though I tried to think it was fancy, that one of the biggest flower-leaves," (she meant "petals," but she was too little to know the right word),

"not the *leaf*leaves you know, was a tiny atom of a bit crushed up, almost like," and here Pansy dropped her voice, as if what she was going to say was almost *too* dreadful to put in words, "almost like as if it was beginning to—to wither a little."

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Bob nodded his head.

"That's it," he said, "I bet you anything that's it. It's want of fresh air. Well, Pansy, I've measured the ledge outside, it's quite wide enough to hold the flower-pot and the saucer, and though it slopes downwards a very little, it's nothing to make it stand unsteady. Now suppose, last thing at night, we put it outside, I'm sure it would freshen it up, and flowers are just as used to night air as to day air."



Pansy agreed; she examined the outer sill with Bob, it seemed all right. So that evening when the children's bedtime came, Pansy little girl was told by Pansy little girl what her kind mamma and uncle had planned for her benefit, and with what Pansy called a kiss, a very butterfly kiss it was, for the little girl was as afraid of hurting the pansy as if it had been a sensitive plant, the flower-pot was placed on the ledge outside.

First thing next morning Pansy flew to look at the flower.

"Have you had a good night, my darling? oh, yes, I think so. You look very fresh and well, though a *little* wet." For a gentle shower had fallen in the night. "Perhaps the rain will have done you good."

Bob was quite sure it had, certainly the crumpled look on the purple petal was no *worse*, so the plan was kept to, and every night the pot was carefully settled on the ledge.

I think it was on the third morning that the dreadful thing happened which I must now tell you of.

When Pansy opened the window to draw in her dear flower and bid it good morning, there was no pansy, no flower-pot, *nothing* to be seen!

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With a sort of shriek Pansy flew across the day nursery to the bedroom where nurse was dressing baby Charley, while Bob, all ready, was giving the last touch up to his curly hair.



"Nurse, Bob," she cried, "have you *possibly* brought the pansy in while I was asleep?"

But nurse and Bob shook their heads. Then they all hurried back to Pansy's room, and nurse, bidding the children stand back, peered out of the window. There was a tiny strip of ground railed in between the house and the street. Nurse drew her head in again.

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"Master Bob," she said, "run down and ask cook to let you out by the back-door. I think I see the poor flower down there. It must have fallen over."

Yes, *knocked* over by a stray cat, most likely. The children had never thought of cats. There it lay! Bob and the cook did their best, but there was little to do. It was a poor little clump of green "leaf-leaves" only that remained, when the sad procession from the nursery tapped at their mother's door, Pansy's face so disfigured by crying that you would *scarcely* have known her.

Mamma was very sorry for her, very, *very* sorry. She knew that to Pansy it was a real big sorrow, trifling as some people might think it. But, still, as she told the little girl, sorrows and troubles *have* to come, and till we learn to bear them and find the sweet in the bitter we are not good for much. So she encouraged Pansy to be brave and unselfish and not to make the nursery life sad and miserable on account of this misfortune. And Pansy did her best. Only she begged her mother to take the flower-pot away.

"I think I would like it to be buried," she said with a sob. "It's like when Bob's canary died."

But two or three days after that, it may have been a week even, one morning mamma came into the nursery looking very happy and carrying something in her hand over which she had thrown a handkerchief.

"Pansy dear," she said, "I waited to tell you till I was quite sure. I did not 'bury' your pansy root, and I have been watching it. And do you know there is another bud just about to burst, and a still tinier one, all green as yet, but which will come on in time. In a week or two you will have two new flowers quite as pretty, I hope, as the other ones."

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"Oh mamma," said Pansy, clasping her hands together. Her heart was too full to say more.

And the buds did blossom into lovely flowers, even lovelier, the children thought, than the first ones. For there was the intense delight of watching them growing day by day, the gardener's delight which no one can really understand who has not felt it.

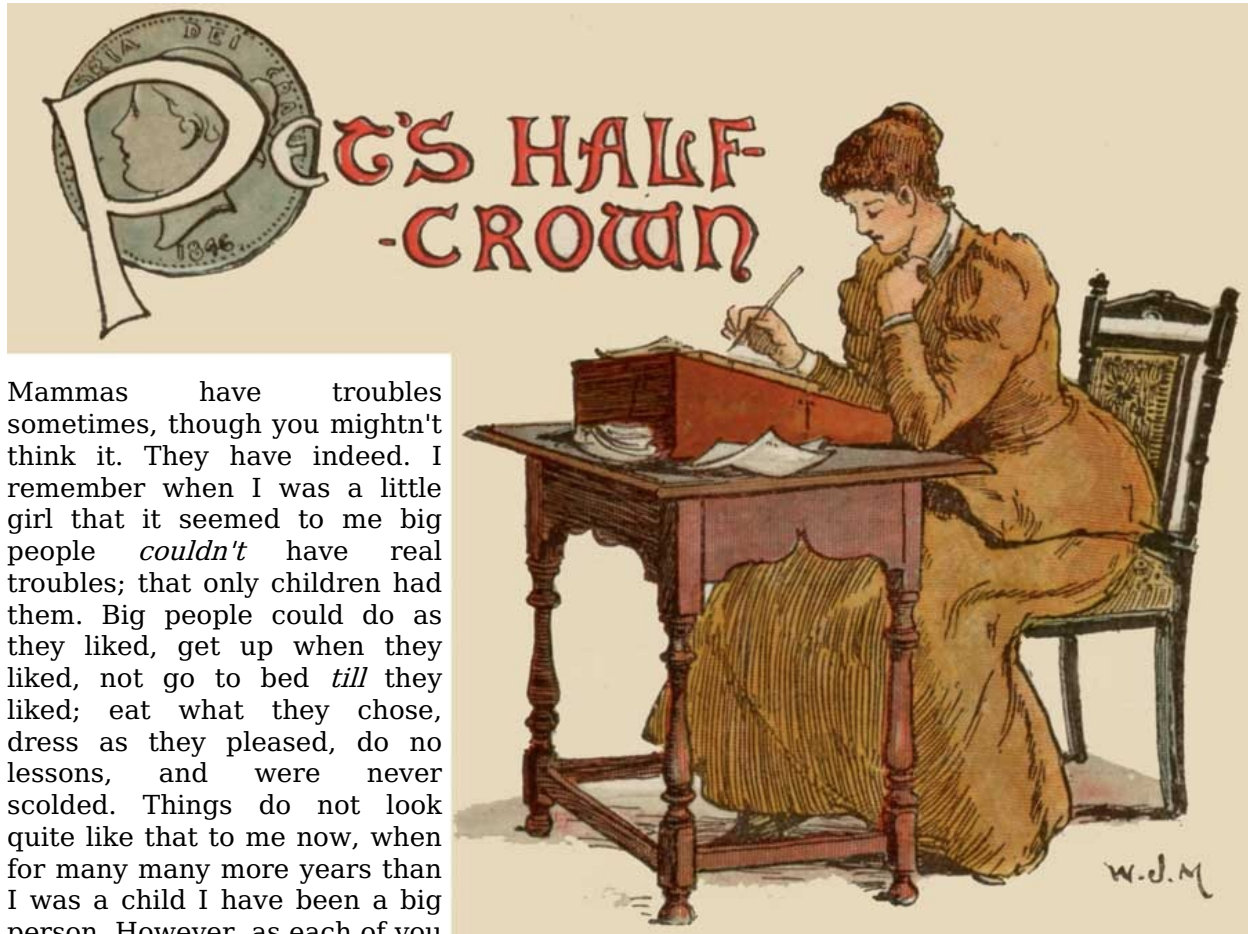
No accident happened this time, and when the season was over, the pansy root was planted in a corner of the little strip of flower border at the side of the house, where it managed to get on very well, and perhaps will have more buds and flowers for several springs to come.

There is one thing more to tell. Pansy's godmother was so touched by the story of the pansy, that she sent an "extra" present to the vicarage children that summer, though it wasn't any "birthday" at all. The present was a beautiful case of ferns, with a glass cover, so that it could stand in the house all the year round. It was placed in the window of the landing on to which the nursery opened, and there, I hope, it stands still. For it would be impossible to tell the delight this indoors forest gives to the children, who have grown so clever at managing

it, that Bob really thinks they should try for a prize at the next "window gardening" exhibition.

For there *are* such cheerful things as that, one is glad to know, even at smoky Northclough! [Pg 76]

PET'S HALF-CROWN



Mammas have troubles sometimes, though you mightn't think it. They have indeed. I remember when I was a little girl that it seemed to me big people *couldn't* have real troubles; that only children had them. Big people could do as they liked, get up when they liked, not go to bed *till* they liked; eat what they chose, dress as they pleased, do no lessons, and were never scolded. Things do not look quite like that to me now, when for many many more years than I was a child I have been a big person. However, as each of you

will find out for himself or herself all about big people in good time, I won't try to explain it to you. Only, I do think the world might get on better if little people believed that big ones *have* their troubles, and—if big people believed and remembered the same thing about little ones. [Pg 77]

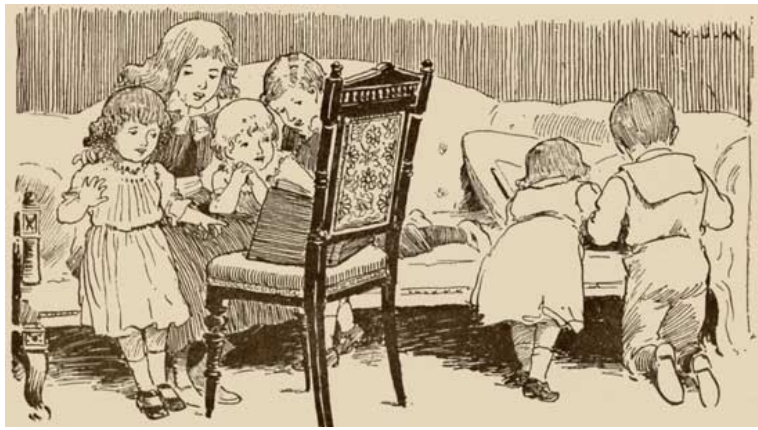
Some children seem wise before their time. They early learn what "sympathy" means—they begin almost before they can talk to try to bear some part of other people's burdens.

A little girl I once knew, who was called "Pet," (though of course she had a proper name as well,) was one of these. She was a gentle little thing, with large soft rather anxious-looking blue eyes; eyes that filled with tears rather *too* easily, perhaps, both for her own troubles and other people's.

But she got more sensible as she grew older, and by the time she was ten or so she had found out that there are often much better ways of showing you are sorry for others than by crying about them, and that as for crying about *ourselves*, it is always a bad plan, though I know it can't quite be helped now and then.

Pet was the eldest, and a very useful "understanding" little eldest she was. *She* knew that her mother had troubles sometimes, and she did her best to smooth them away whenever she possibly could.

One of the things she was often able to do to help her mother was by keeping her little brothers and sisters happy and amused when they came down to the drawing-room in the evening, and now and then, if it were a rainy day, earlier. For mamma felt sorry for the children if they were shut up in the nursery for long, and as all little people know, a change to the drawing-room is very pleasant for them, though sometimes rather tiring for mammas. [Pg 78]



It happened one afternoon, a very wet and cold afternoon in January, when there was no possibility of going out, that *all* the children were downstairs together. There were four of them besides Pet, and it was not very easy to amuse them all. But Pet was determined to do her very best—for she knew that mamma was *particularly* busy that day, as she had all her accounts to do. And indeed poor mamma would have been very glad to have a quiet afternoon, but nurse had a headache, and baby, who had had a bad night, was sleeping peacefully for the first time, and must not be disturbed. There was nothing for it but to bring the little troop downstairs.

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"We will be very good and quiet, mamma dear," said Pet. "You can go on doing your accounts, for I know you can't do them this evening, as aunty is coming. Charley and I,—Charley was the next in age to Pet—"will show all our best picture-books to the little ones."

Charley was very proud to hear himself counted a big one with Pet, and he did all he could to help her. They really managed to keep the others quiet, and Pet was hoping that mamma was getting on nicely with her long rows of figures, and that soon she would be calling out gladly, "All right. I can come and play with you now," when to her distress she heard her mother give a deep sigh.

"Oh, dear mamma, what's the matter?" she said, "are we disturbing you?"

"No, darling, you are as quiet as mice," her mother replied. "But I don't know how it is—I have counted it all up again and again, and I am *sure* I have put down everything I have spent, but I am half-a-crown wrong. Dear, dear—what a pity it is! Just as I thought I had finished."

And again mamma sighed. She did not like to think she had perhaps lost half-a-crown, for she and Pet's father had not any half-crowns to spare.

"I will just go and see if possibly it is in my little leather bag that I always take out with me," she said. And she rose as she spoke and left the room.

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Pet felt sure it was not in the little bag, for she had been standing by when her mother emptied it.

"Poor mamma," she said softly. "I can't bear her to be troubled."

Then the colour rose into her face and her eyes sparkled.

"Charley," she whispered, "keep the little ones quiet for one minute," and off she flew.

She was back in *less* than a minute, though she had found time to run up to her room and take something out of a drawer where she kept her treasures. Then she ran across to her mother's writing-table and slipped this something under the account-books, lying open upon it.

And almost immediately mamma came back.

"No," she said sadly, "it was not in my bag. I fear I have lost it somehow, for I am sure my accounts are right. I must just put it down as lost."

But in another moment came a joyful cry.

"Pet," she exclaimed, "*would* you believe I could be so stupid? Here it is—the missing half-crown—slipped under my account book! I *am* so pleased to have found it. Now, children dear, mammy can come and play with you with a light heart."

"I am so glad you are happy again, mamma darling," said Pet; and if her mother noticed that her little girl's cheeks were rosier than usual, and her eyes brighter, no doubt she only thought it was with the pleasure of all playing together. For I don't think they had ever had a

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merrier visit to the drawing-room.

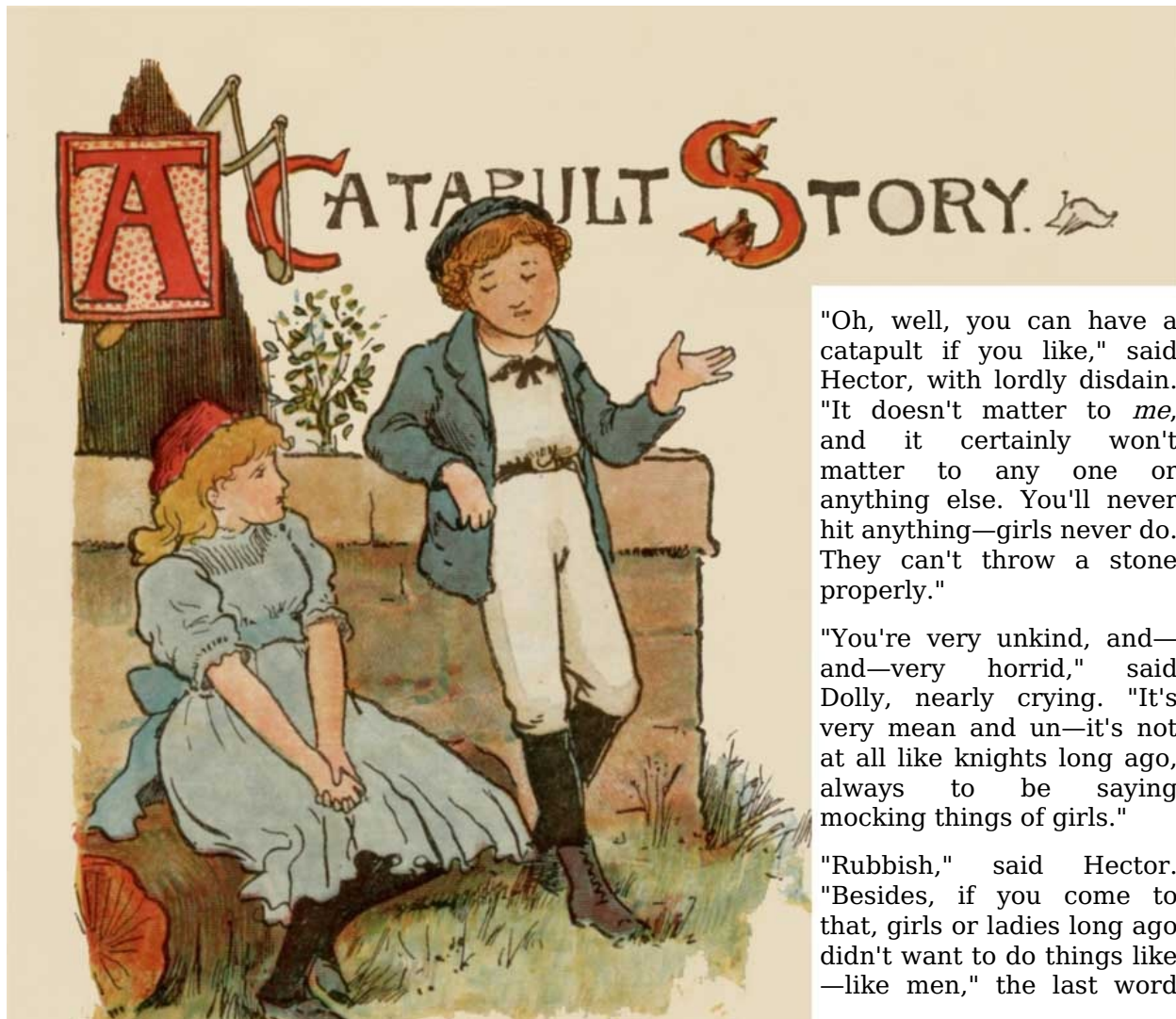


You have guessed the secret before this, I am sure? That little Pet had fetched her own half-crown to play a loving trick with it. It was her only half-crown, her only money, except one sixpenny-bit and two pennies! But she gave it gladly, just saying to herself that it was a very good thing Christmas-time was over and no birthdays very near at hand.

And she kept her secret well. So well, that though a great many years have passed since then, it was only a *very little while ago* that her mother heard, for the first time, the story of her child's loving self-denial. The smile on mamma's face, and the knowledge that she had brought it there were Pet's only reward. [Pg 82]

A CATAPULT STORY.

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"Oh, well, you can have a catapult if you like," said Hector, with lordly disdain. "It doesn't matter to *me*, and it certainly won't matter to any one or anything else. You'll never hit anything—girls never do. They can't throw a stone properly."

"You're very unkind, and—and—very horrid," said Dolly, nearly crying. "It's very mean and un—it's not at all like knights long ago, always to be saying mocking things of girls." [Pg 84]

"Rubbish," said Hector. "Besides, if you come to that, girls or ladies long ago didn't want to do things like—like men," the last word

enough to be down on him if he talked big. "They stayed at home and did sensible things, for women; cooking and tapestrying, and nursing wounded soldiers."

"They had to go out to the battle-fields sometimes to get the wounded soldiers—*there!*" said Dolly triumphantly. "And what's more, some of them *did* know how to fight, and did fight. Think of Jeanne d'Arc, and—and—somebody, I forget her name, who defended her husband's castle."

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"All right," said Hector. "I'm not quarrelling with your having a catapult, and you can defend your husband's castle with it if you like—that's to say if you ever get a husband. *I* should think a girl who knew how to sew nicely, and to keep her house very neat and comfortable, a much nicer wife than one who went about catapulting and trying to be like a man. And you know you're not really so grand and brave as you try to make out, Dolly. You screamed like anything the other day when I threw a piece of wood that looked like a snake at you."

"It was very mean and cowardly of you to try to frighten me," said Dolly. "And I know somebody that needn't boast either. Who was it that ran away the other day when Farmer Bright's cow got into our field? Somebody thought it was a bull, and was over the hedge in no time, leaving his sister to be gored or tossed by the terrible bull."

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Hector grew red. He was not fond of this story, which had a good deal of truth in it. It seemed as if a quarrel was not very far off, but Hector thought better of it.

"I was very sorry afterwards that I ran away," he said. "You know I told you so, Dolly, and I really thought you were close beside me till I heard you call out. I don't think you need cast up about it any more, I really don't."

Dolly felt penitent at once, for she was a kind little girl, and Hector's gentleness touched her.

"Well, I won't, then," she answered, "if you'll teach me how to catapult."

Hector did his best, both that day and several others. But I must say I have my doubts as to whether catapults are meant for little girls. Dolly tried over and over and over again, but she never could manage to hit anything she aimed at. And at last her patience seemed exhausted.

"I'm tired of it," she said. "I'll give it to Bobby. I shan't try to catapult any more."

And it would have been rather a good thing if she had kept to this resolution.

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But the next day when she was out in the garden with her brothers, admiring Hector's good aim and the wonderful way in which he hit a little bell which he had hung high up on the branch of a tree as a sort

of target, it came over her that she would try once again.

"Look at that bird, up on the top of the kitchen-garden wall," she said. "I'll have a go at it."

Hector laughed.

"I think the bird's quite safe," he said.

Dolly thought so too. She did not want to hurt the bird, she was really speaking in fun. But all the same she aimed at it, and—oh, sad and strange to say—*she hit it!* a quiver of the little wings, and the tiny head dropped, and then—in a moment it had fallen to the foot of the high wall on which it had perched so happily a moment before!

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The children rushed forward breathlessly. Dolly could not believe that she had hurt it, scarcely that she had hit it.

But alas! yes. It was quite dead.

Hector held it in his hand. The bright eyes were already glazed—the feathers limp and dull.

And oh, worse and worse, it was a wren. A little innocent, harmless wren.

Dolly's sobs were bitter.

"I'll never touch a catapult again," she said. "A nasty horrid cruel thing it is. And I didn't really mean to hit the poor wren."

"It was only a fluke, then," said Hector, who, in spite of his sorrow for the wren, had felt some admiration for his sister's skill.

"N—no, not that," she said. "I *did* aim, but I never thought I'd hit it. Still, Hector, it shows you I *can* hit, you see;" and the thought made her leave off crying for a moment or two. But the sight of the poor little wren changed her triumph into sorrow again.

"I've done with shooting," she said, as she threw the unlucky catapult away.

And then she covered up the dead wren in her handkerchief and went in to tell her troubles to "mamma."

Her mother was very sorry too.

"You must think of it as a sort of accident," she said. "But let it be a lesson to you, dear Dolly, never to do anything half in joke, or for fun as it were, which could cause trouble to any one if it turned into earnest." [Pg 89]

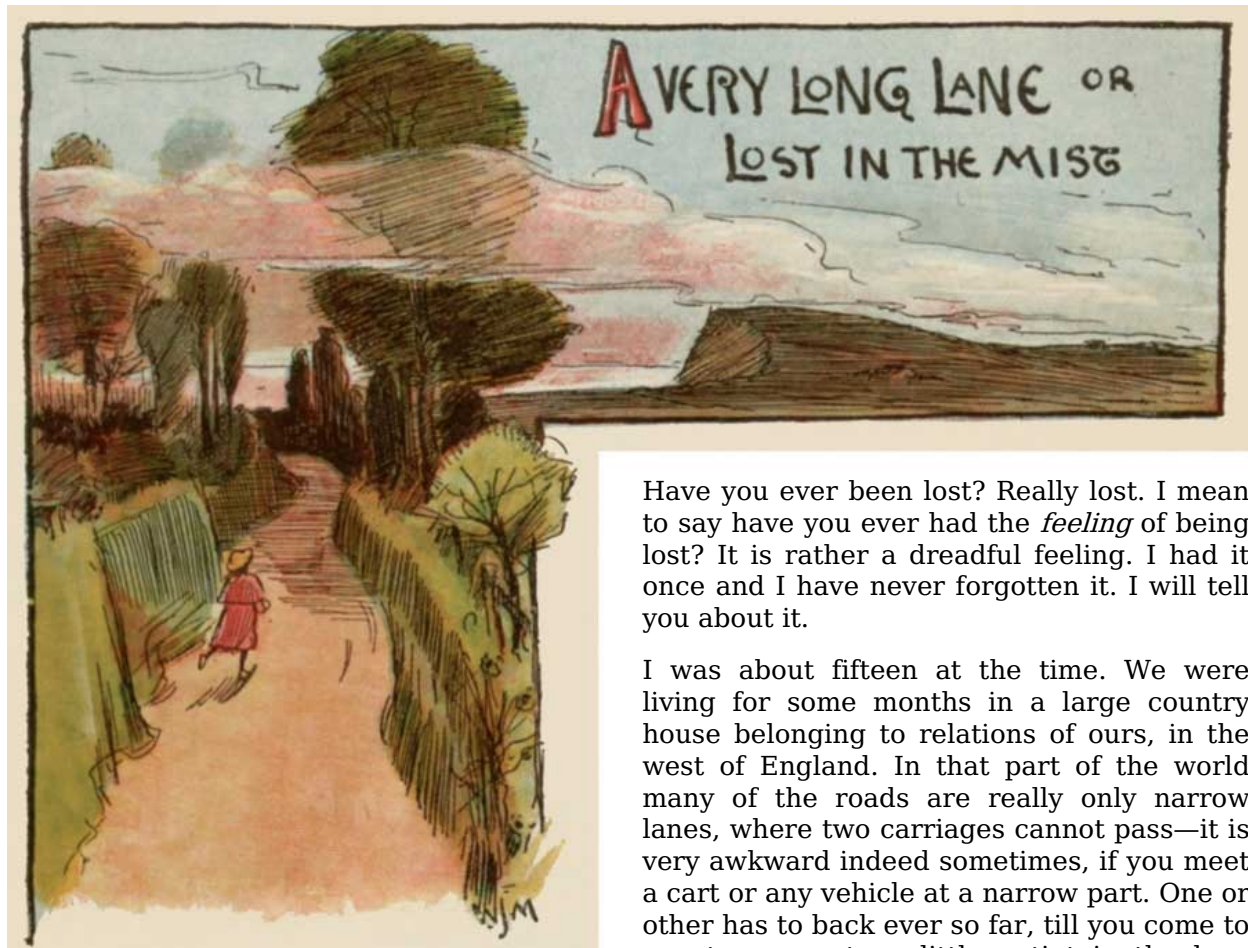
There was some comfort in the thought that it was late autumn, and not spring-time, so there was no fear of poor little Jenny Wren's death leaving a nestful of tiny orphan fledglings. And Hector helped Dolly to bury the bird in a quiet corner of the garden.

But all the same, Dolly has never liked catapults since that unlucky day!



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A VERY LONG LANE OR LOST IN THE MIST



Have you ever been lost? Really lost. I mean to say have you ever had the *feeling* of being lost? It is rather a dreadful feeling. I had it once and I have never forgotten it. I will tell you about it.

I was about fifteen at the time. We were living for some months in a large country house belonging to relations of ours, in the west of England. In that part of the world many of the roads are really only narrow lanes, where two carriages cannot pass—it is very awkward indeed sometimes, if you meet a cart or any vehicle at a narrow part. One or other has to back ever so far, till you come to a gateway or to a little outjutting in the lane [Pg 91]

making it wider just there. And these lanes are sunk down below the level of the fields at their sides, and there are high hedges too, so that really you may drive for miles and miles and scarcely know where you are. It is difficult to know your way even in broad daylight—even the people who live there always, have often to consult the finger-posts, of which, I must allow, there are plenty! And for strangers or new-comers it is *very* puzzling.

We got on pretty well however. My elder sisters drove about a great deal in a jolly little two-wheeled pony cart, and as I was small and light, I was often favoured with an invitation to accompany them, sitting in the back seat, which was *not* luxurious.

"It does very well for Thecla," my sisters used to say, "she is so thin. And she's as handy as a boy about jumping out to open the gates."

I didn't mind—I was only too pleased to go, in any way, and rather proud to be called handy.

So I got to know the country pretty well, and I would not have been afraid, by daylight at least, to go a good distance alone.

One day some friends who lived about three miles off, came to luncheon with us. There were two or three grown-up ladies, and a girl just about my age, named Molly. She was my principal friend while we were living there, as she was very nice and we suited each other very well. The older people, both of her family and of mine, drove away in the afternoon to a large garden party some way off, to which we were thought too young to go, or very likely there was not room for us in the carriages. But we were very happy to stay behind. We were to have tea together, and then it was arranged that I was to take Molly half-way home. [Pg 92]



"Be sure you are not later in starting than half-past five," said my mother, "so that you can be back before it begins to get dark," for it was already September.

And Molly's mother repeated the warning, only adding, "I am not the least anxious about Molly—she knows the way so well. But it might be puzzling for Thecla, as our lanes are really a labyrinth after dark."

"Oh I am *sure* I couldn't get lost between here and Three Corners," I said, laughing. "Three Corner Court" was the quaint name of Molly's home.

Well—we found the afternoon only too short—we enjoyed our nice tea very much, and felt rather reluctant to set off as soon as it was over. [Pg 93]

"It is barely half-past five," I said. But Molly was very determined.

"We must start," she said. "I feel responsible for you, Thecla, for you will have to come back alone."

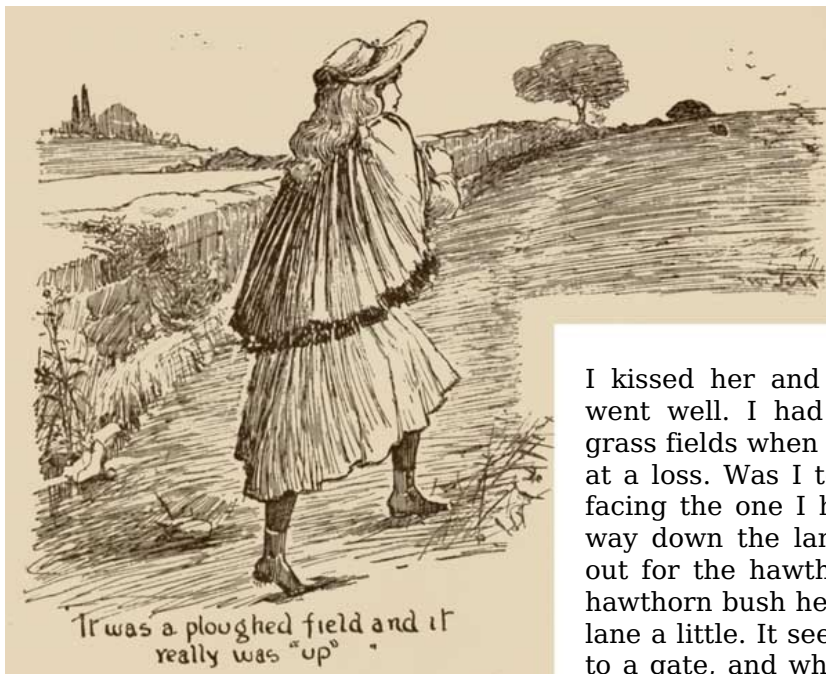
"As if I *could* lose my way, when I have only to come straight back the way you take me," I said, "and I have been a bit of that way before."

We were not going by the road but by a short cut, part of which was a foot-path through the fields, and *generally*, I had driven to Three Corners, so that there was some reason for Molly's carefulness.

"Don't be too sure," she said, "you don't know how like some of the fields are to each other, as well as the lanes. We have regular landmarks we depend upon."

Off we set, in very good spirits, laughing and talking. We laughed and talked a little too much perhaps, for though the very first part of the way was through our own grounds, where I could not of course have gone astray, we soon came to a succession of fields—several of them ploughed land—which certainly were very like each other. We crossed two or three lanes, going a few steps in one direction or the other to get to the gates, and keeping always in the same line ourselves. Suddenly Molly stopped in the middle of a very interesting discussion of a book we had been reading.

"Thecla," she said, "you've come more than half way—you must turn back now, for it will be getting dusk. And oh dear, I didn't point out the old hawthorn at the gate of the great Millside field—and it *is* so easy to mistake it for Southdown field, and then you'd get all wrong." [Pg 94]



"I'm sure I remember it," I said, "and I don't see how I *could* go wrong if I keep in the same direction."

"Ah, but it's so easy to get out of the same direction without knowing it," she said, "once the sun's gone. Now *do* be careful," and she repeated a few more warnings.

I kissed her and ran off gaily. For a while all went well. I had crossed two lanes and three grass fields when I found myself for the first time at a loss. Was I to go straight through the gate facing the one I had come out by, or go a little way down the lane? Was this the place to look out for the hawthorn bush? If so, there was no hawthorn bush here, so I decided to go down the lane a little. It seemed a good way before I came to a gate, and when I did, there was no bush or tree of any kind. But I felt sure that up this field

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was in the right line, so on I went. It was a ploughed field and it really was "up," for it sloped rather steeply. Oh how tired I was when I got to the top! But now I thought all my troubles were over—I had only to go a quarter of a mile along the lane, to reach our own back entrance to the stables.

"What a good thing I am so near home," I thought, as I became aware that almost in a moment a thick grey mist had risen—all around was bathed in it, and I ran on as fast as I could.

The mist now and then cleared a little, but the night was falling fast and I saw no sign of the white gates I was looking for. I ran the faster—but the hedges remained unbroken, and after a while I was forced to own to myself that somehow or other I had *got into the wrong lane!* Oh dear! I dared not turn back—I just ran on, and the mist grew thicker again. I soon got so tired, that the temptation was strong to sit down at all costs. And if I had done so I might have fainted or fallen asleep, and not perhaps been found till too late!

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It was a dreadful feeling—after a while I think I began to get rather dazed and stupefied, from fatigue and anxiety. I had only just a sort of instinct that at all costs I *must* keep going.



"The lane must lead to somewhere," I said to myself, though really it seemed as if it was endless. I must have been running, or half running and sometimes walking for nearly an

hour when at last—the mist having cleared a little—I saw a light in front, a little to one side. It seemed to bob up and down as I ran—the lane was uneven just here, and once or twice I was afraid it had gone. But no—there it was again, and to my joy I found it came from a cottage window across a field to the right.

"I shall find I am miles and miles from home," I thought, and just fancy my surprise when I knocked at the door and asked my way, to be told that I was not half-a-mile from the hall."

I had gone thoroughly wrong almost from the first, and the long lane skirted the fields away up on higher ground behind our house as it were, where I had had no business to be at all.

They were just sallying out with lanterns to look for me, but they never would have thought of that lane, and there I might easily have been left all night if my strength had really failed.

Oh how glad I was to change my damp clothes and to have a nice hot cup of tea in my mother's room beside the fire!

Since then I have never boasted about being sure to find my way.

EDMUND EVANS, ENGRAVER AND PRINTER, RACQUET COURT, FLEET STREET,
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