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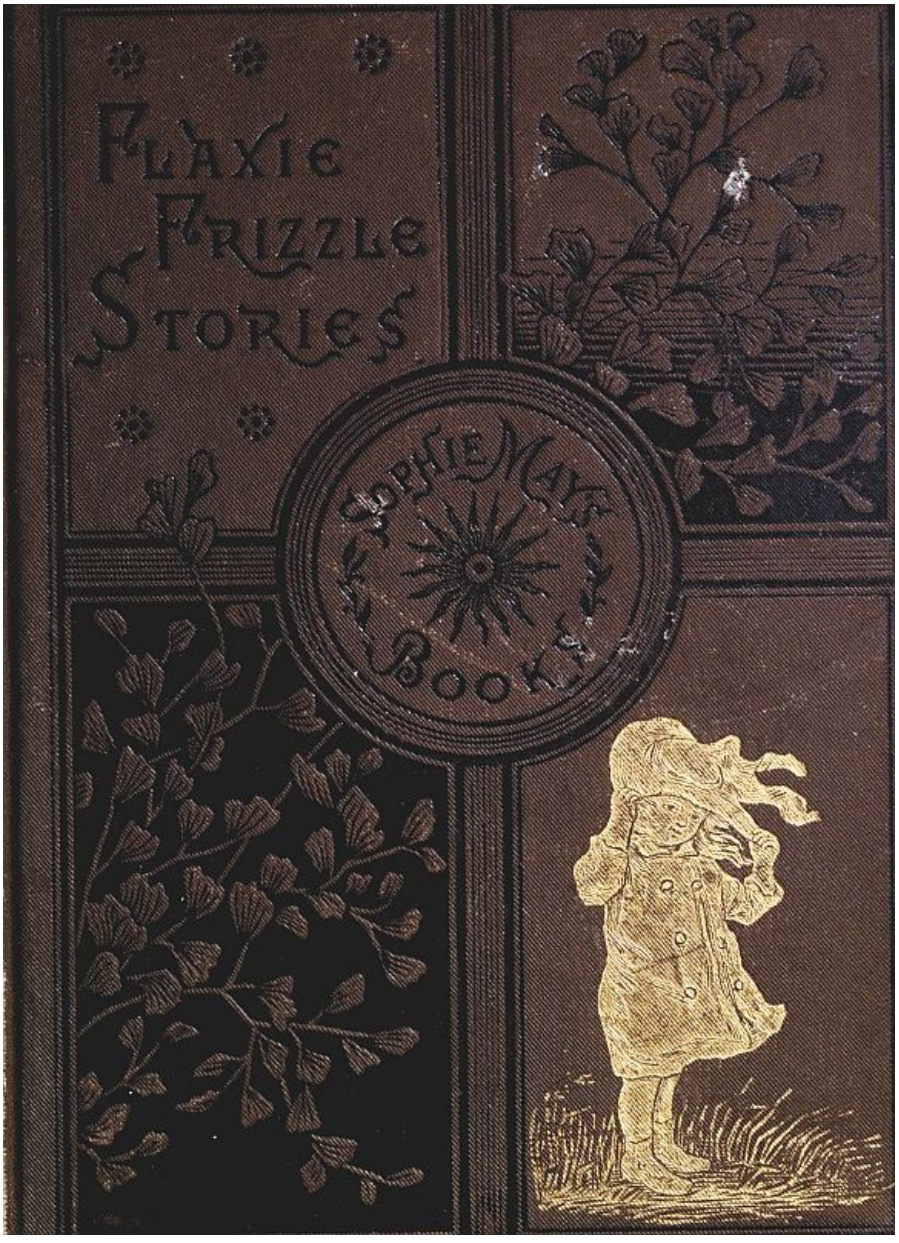

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FLAXIE GROWING UP

BY
SOPHIE MAY
AUTHOR OF LITTLE PRUDY STORIES DOTTY DIMPLE STORIES
LITTLE PRUDY'S FLYAWAY STORIES ETC

Illustrated

BOSTON 1895
LEE AND SHEPARD PUBLISHERS
10 MILK STREET NEXT "THE OLD SOUTH MEETING HOUSE"

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 [2]

TO
Mary Louise Gibbs. [3]

CONTENTS. [4] [5]

FLAXIE GROWING UP.

[6] [7]

CHAPTER I.
PUNISHING ETHEL.

“Stop, Ethel,” said Mary Gray authoritatively, “stop this moment, you are skipping notes.”

The child obeyed gladly, for music was by no means a passion with her, and she especially disliked practising when Mary’s sharp eye was upon her.

“I’m obliged to be severe with you, Ethel, for it never will do to allow you to play carelessly. You are worse than usual this morning, because Kittyleen is waiting in the dining-room. It’s very unfortunate that Kittyleen has to come here in your practising hour, and it makes it pretty hard for me; but what do you think or care about that? If you ever learn to play decently, Ethel Gray, ’twill be entirely owing to me, and your teacher says so. There! run off now and play with Kittyleen; but, remember, you’ll have to finish your practising this afternoon.” [8]

Ethel made her escape, and Mary seated herself in the bay-window at her sewing with a deep sigh of responsibility. Her mother was ill; Julia, the eldest of the family, was confined to her room with headache, and the children had been left in Mary’s care this morning with strict charges to obey her.

“The children” were Philip, a boy of eight and a half, and Ethel, a little girl nearly six; but as Phil was now skating on the pond, and Ethel playing dolls in the dining-room with her young friend, Kittyleen Garland, Mary was free to pursue her own thoughts, and her work was soon lying idly in her lap, while she looked out of the window upon the white front yard facing the river. [9]

There was no one in the room with her but her grandmother, who sat knitting in an easy-chair before the glowing coal fire. Grandma Gray did not seem to grow old. Father Time had not stolen away a single one of her precious graces. He had not dimmed her bright eyes or jarred her gentle voice; the wrinkles he had brought were only “ripples,” and the gray hair he had given her was like a beautiful silver crown.

Grandma looked up from her knitting; Mary looked up from her sewing. Their eyes met, and they both smiled.

“A penny for your thoughts, my child.”

“Oh, I was only thinking, grandma, it does seem as if something might be done to prevent people from calling me Flaxie Frizzle—I’m just worn out with it. It did very well when I was a little child; but now that I’m twelve years old, I ought to be treated with more respect. It’s very silly to call people by anything but their real, true names; don’t you think so? Oh, here comes the Countess Leonora!” cried Mary in a different tone, dropping her work, breaking her needle, and pricking her finger, all in a second of time. [10]

“*Who?* I didn’t understand you, dear.”

“Oh, it’s only Fanny Townsend, grandma. We have fancy names for each other, we girls, and Fanny’s name is Countess Leonora,” cried Mary, quite unaware that there was anything “silly” in this, or that grandma was amused by her inconsistent remarks. The dear old lady smiled benevolently as a small figure in a brown cloak rushed in, breathless from running. It was not Fanny Townsend and Mary Gray, it seemed, who began to chat together in the bay-window, but the Countess Leonora, and her friend, Lady Dandelina Tangle. Lady Dandelina was telling the Countess that her mother and sister were ill, and that she was left in charge of the castle. [11]

“Don’t you miss your brother Preston *so much*, Lady Dandelina?”

“Indeed I do, Countess; but young men are obliged to go to college, you know. And I can bear it better because my cousin, Fred Allen, of Hilltop, is with us. He will stay, I don’t know how long, and go to school. I only wish it was my sister Milly!”

"So do I, Lady Dandelina. Oh, I saw that old teacher of ours, Mr. Fling, as I was coming here. [12]
He stood on the hotel-piazza talking with Miss Pike."

"Mr. Fling?" said Mary, laughing. She had dropped her work, for how could she sew without a needle?

"Yes; and said he, 'How's your health, Miss Fr-an-ce-s?' as if I'd been sick. I like him out of school, Dandelina; but in school he used to be sort of hateful, don't you know?"

"Not exactly hateful," replied Mary, stealing a glance at grandma. "*I* call it troublesome."

"Yes; how he would scold when we got under the seat to eat apples?"

"Oh, I never ate but one apple, Fan, I'm sure I never did. I was pretty small then, too. How queer it is to think of such old times!"

"Why, Flaxie, 'twas only last winter!"

"Are you sure, Fan? I thought 'twas ever so long ago." [13]

"Your reminiscences are very interesting, my dears," said grandma, rising. "I wish I could hear more, but I shall be obliged to go up stairs now, and leave your pleasant company."

As the serene old lady passed out at one door, little Ethel, very much excited, rushed in at another; but the girls, engrossed in conversation, did not look up, and she stood for some time unheeded behind Mary's chair.

"I want to ask you, Flaxie—" she said.

"Mr. Fling and Miss Pike were talking about a spelling-school," said Fanny, emerging from "old times" at a bound. "She's going to have an old-fashioned one out in her school at Rosewood to-morrow night."

"I want to ask you, Flaxie—" repeated Ethel.

"They 'choose sides.' Do you know what that is?" [14]

"No, I'm sure I don't. I wish Preston was here, and he'd take me out in the sleigh. Miss Pike would let *our* family go, of course."

"I want to ask you—" said little Ethel again.

"Why, Ethel, child, I thought you were in the other room," said Mary impatiently. "Don't you see, I want to hear about the spelling-school; and it's *so* thoughtful and kind of little girls to give big girls a chance to speak!"

But next moment, ashamed of her ill-nature, and remembering her maternal responsibility, she drew Ethel to her side and kissed her.

"Wait a minute, Leonora, till we find out what this means," said she, surprised to see her [15]
usually quiet little sister in this wild state. "Tell me all about it, dear."

Thus encouraged, Ethel broke forth indignantly, "Kittyleen is very disagreeable! And besides, she knocked me down!"

Fanny began to laugh. "Oh, what a Kittyleen!"

"Hush, Fan," said Mary, warningly, drawing up her mouth like grandma's silk "work-pocket." "It doesn't seem possible, Ethel. I never heard of Kittyleen's behaving so before. What had you done to vex her?"

"I—I—knocked her down—first," confessed Ethel, in low, faltering tones.

And Fanny laughed again.

"Fanny Townsend, do be quiet. I have the care of this child to-day. Ethel, where is Kittyleen?"

"Gone home."

"Ah. Ethel, Ethel, it will be my duty to punish you. Fanny, *can* you be quiet?" [16]

"*You* punish her? Oh dear, that's too funny!"

"Yes, I have full authority to punish her if I choose," said Mary, elevating her chin.

She was subject to little attacks of dignity; but instead of being duly impressed, Fanny only laughed the more, while shamefaced little Ethel hid her head and felt that she was trifled with.

"May I ask what amuses you, Miss Townsend?" said Mary, with increased dignity.

"Oh don't, oh dear, what shall I do? You're so queer, Flaxie Frizzle!"

"Well, if you go on in this way, I shall be obliged to take Ethel out of the room. Have you no judgment *at all*, Fanny Townsend?"

"Oh dear, oh dear, I shall die laughing! shall have to go home! If you could see just how you [17]
look, Flaxie Frizzle! *Good*-by. I *can't* help it," said Fanny, reeling out of the door.

Mary drew a long sigh. “Now come to me, Ethel. This is a dreadful thing, and you’re a perfectly awful child; but it will not do to speak to mother about it, when she has pneumonia, and a blister on the chest. She said *I* must take care of you.”

Ethel did not stir. Mary paused and gazed reproachfully across the room at her, not knowing in the least what to say next. She had never before undertaken a case of discipline, and rather wondered why it should be required of her now. But she had been given “full authority over the children,” and what did that mean if she was not to punish them when they did wrong?

To be sure Julia’s headache might be over to-morrow, and Julia could then attend to Ethel; but [18]
Mary was quite sure it would not do to wait an hour or a minute; the case must be attended to *now*. “It is my duty, and I will not shrink from it. I’ll try to act exactly as mamma always does,—not harsh, but sad and gentle,—Ethel, my child, come here.”

“Don’t want to,” said Ethel, approaching slowly and sullenly, drawing her little chair behind her.

“Not that way, dear; mamma never allows you to go all doubled up, dragging your chair like a snail with his house on his back. There, sit down and tell me about it. What made you so naughty?”

“My head aches. Don’t want to talk.”

“Were you playing dolls?”

“Yes. Pep’mint Drop is jiggly and won’t sit up.”

“Peppermint Drop is very old and has rheumatism, Ethel; she was my dolly before ever you [19]
were born.”

“Well, my head aches. Don’t want to talk.”

“But you must talk. I’m your mother to-day.”

“*You?*” Ethel looked up saucily, and Mary felt half inclined to laugh; but when one has the care of a young child one must be firm.

“Ethel, I *am* your mother to-day. What were you doing with those dolls?”

“Nothing! Kittyleen pulled off Pep’mint’s arm.”

“Yes, and then?”

“Then she was cross.”

“No, no. What did you do to her?”

“Tipped her over.”

“Ethel! Ethel!”

“Well, she tipped *me* over too.” [20]

“This is perfectly dreadful!” exclaimed Mary, as solemnly as if she had never heard it before. And then she sat in deep thought. What *would* mamma have done in this case? *Did* Ethel’s head ache? Possibly. Her cheeks looked hot. Mamma was tender of the children when they were ill, and perhaps would not approve of shutting Ethel in the closet if she had taken cold.

“Ethel,” said Mary in natural tones, “I’m going to be very sweet and gentle. You’ve been extremely to blame, but perhaps Kittyleen may forgive you if you ask her.”

“H’m! Don’t want her to!”

“What! Don’t want her to forgive you?”

“No, I don’t; Kittyleen was bad *herself!*”

“But you were bad first, Ethel.”

“H’m! If I ask her to forgive me she’ll think she was good!”

Mary looked at stubborn Ethel sorrowfully. Oh, how hard it was to make children repent! [21]

“Perhaps I’d better leave her by herself to think. Mamma does *that* sometimes.” Then aloud: “Ethel, I’m now going into the kitchen, and I wish you to sit here and think till I come back.”

“No, you mustn’t; my mamma won’t allow you to shut me up, Flaxie!”

“But I’m not shutting you up; I only leave you to think.”

“Don’t know how to think.”

“Yes, you do, Ethel, you think every time you wink.”

“Well, may I wink at the clock then?” asked the child, relenting, for it was one of her delights to sit and watch the minute-hand steal slowly over the clock’s white face.

"Yes, you may, if you'll keep saying over and over, while it ticks, 'I've been a naughty girl—a naughty girl; mamma'll be sorry, mamma'll be sorry.'" [22]

PUNISHING ETHEL.—PAGE 17.

"Well, I will, but hurry, Flaxie; don't be gone long."

In fifteen minutes Mary returned to find the child in the same spot; her eyes pinker than ever with weeping.

"Just the way I used to look when mamma left *me* alone," thought Mary, encouraged.

"Well, Ethel," with a grown-up folding of the hands which would have convulsed Fanny Townsend. "Well, have you been thinking, dear?"

"Yes, and I'll tell mamma about it; I shan't tell you."

"Mamma is very sick, my child."

"Then I'll tell Ninny." Ninny was the children's pet name for Julia.

"No, Ninny has a headache. I'm your mamma this afternoon. And I won't be cross to you, darling," added Mary, with humility, recalling some of her past lectures to this little sister. [23]

"Well," said Ethel faintly, with her apron between her teeth. "I wasn't *very* bad to Kittyleen, but if she wants to forgive me I'll let her."

"O sweetest, you make me so happy!"

"Don't want to make *you* happy," returned Ethel disdainfully; "don't care anything about *you!* But mamma's sick. And you—won't you write her a letter?"

"Write mamma a letter?"

"No, *Kittyleen*, write it with vi'let ink, won't you, Flaxie?"

The note was very short and written just as Ethel dictated it:

> MY AFFECTIONATE FRIEND,—I am very sorry I knocked you down first. I will forgive you if you will forgive me.
>
> ETHEL GRAY.

Ethel meant just this, no more, no less. She was sorry; still, if she had done wrong so had Kittyleen; if she needed forgiveness Kittyleen needed it also. [24]

"Now, put something in the corner," said she, looking on anxiously, as Mary directed the envelope. "You always put something in the corner of *your* notes, Flaxie; I've seen you, and seen you."

"Do I? Oh yes, sometimes I put 'kindness of Ethel' in the corner, but that is when *you* carry the note."

"Put it there now."

"But are you going to carry the note?"

"No, Dodo will carry it if I give her five kisses."

"Then, I'll write 'Kindness of Dora.'"

"No, no, I'm the one that's kind, not Dodo," insisted the child.

And "Kindness of Ethel" it had to be in the corner in large, plain letters.

Dora laughed when she read it, and Mary smiled indulgently. [25]

Kittyleen did not smile, however, for she did not know there was any mistake. She accepted Ethel's doubtful apology with joy, and made her nurse Martha write in reply, "I forgive you." And in the left-hand corner of *her* envelope were the words "Kindness of Kittyleen," for she supposed that was the correct thing, and she never allowed Ethel to be more fashionable than herself if she could possibly help it.

Mary felt that on the whole her first case of discipline had resulted successfully, and was impatient for to-morrow to come, that her mother might hear of it and give her approval.

CHAPTER II.
ASKING FOR "WHIZ."

[26]

NEXT day Mrs. Gray was somewhat better, and when Mary knocked softly at the chamber door, Julia replied, "Come in." The little girl had not expected to see her mother looking so pale and ill; and the tears sprang to her eyes as she leaned over the bed to give the loving kiss which she meant should fall as gently as a dewdrop on the petal of a rose. It did not seem a fitting time for the question she had come to ask about the spelling-school. Julia was brushing Mrs. Gray's hair, and Mary kissed the dark, silken locks which strayed over the pillow, murmuring, "Oh, how soft, how beautiful!"

[27]

"Well, my dear," said Mrs. Gray, with an affectionate smile, which lacked a little of its usual brightness, "how did you get on yesterday with Ethel? She is such a quiet little thing that I'm sure you had no trouble."

"No trouble!" Mary's look spoke volumes. "I suspect there's some frightful revelation coming now," said Julia. "Did you irritate her, Flaxie?" For Ethel's quietness was not always to be relied upon. She was like the still Lake Camerino of Italy, which so easily becomes muddy that the Italians have a proverb, "Do not disturb Camerino." Dr. Gray often said to Mary, when he saw her domineering over her little sister, "Be careful! Do not disturb Camerino."

"No, indeed, Ninny, I was very patient," replied Mary with pride. "But for all that I had to punish her!"

[28]

Mrs. Gray turned her head on her pillow, and looked at Mary in astonishment.

"Did you think I gave you authority to punish your little sister? That would have been strange indeed! I merely said she and Philip were to obey you during the afternoon."

Mary felt a sudden sense of humiliation, all the more as Julia had suspended the hairbrush, and was looking down on her derisively—or so she fancied.

"Why, mamma, I must have misunderstood you. I thought it was the same as if I was Julia, you know."

"Julia is eighteen years old, my child. You are twelve. But what had Ethel done that was wrong?"

Then Mary told of the quarrel with Kittyleen, and the notes which had passed between the two little girls. Though naturally given to exaggeration, she had been so carefully trained in this regard that her word could usually be taken now without "a grain of salt."

[29]

Mrs. Gray looked relieved and amused.

"So that was the way you punished your little sister? I was half afraid you had been shutting her up in the closet, or possibly snipping her fingers, either of which things, my child, I should not allow."

"No, ma'am." Mary felt like a queen dethroned.

"You were 'clothed with a little brief authority' yesterday, to be sure, but you should have waited till to-day and reported any misbehavior to me, or—if I was too ill to hear it—to Julia."

"Yes, mamma," said Mary meekly.

[30]

"Not that I blame you for this mistake, dear. You have shown judgment and self-control, and no harm has been done as yet, I hope. Only remember, if you are left to take care of the children again, you are not the one to punish them, whatever they may do."

"Yes, ma'am," repeated Mary; but her face had brightened at the words "judgment and self-control."

"I am afraid Ethel's repentance doesn't amount to much," said Julia.

"I thought of that myself. I'm afraid it doesn't," admitted Mary.

She watched the brush as it passed slowly and evenly through her mother's hair. Her color came and went as if she were on the point of saying something which after all she found it hard to say.

"Mamma, Miss Pike is going to have—spelling-school to-night."

[31]

Mrs. Gray's eyes were closed; she did not appear to be listening.

"It's in her schoolhouse at Rosewood, and anybody can go that chooses."

"Ah?"

"Papa isn't at home this morning." A pause. "And Fred Allen and I—Now, mamma, I'm afraid you'll think it isn't *quite* best; but there's a moon every night now; and *did* you ever go to an old-fashioned spelling-school, where they choose sides?"

"Flaxie, don't make that noise with the comb," said Julia. "I suppose you and Fred would like the horse and sleigh, and Fred hasn't the courage to ask father; is that it?"

"Oh, may we go, mamma? Please may we go?"

"What, to Rosewood in the evening—two miles?" [32]

"Oh, I wish I hadn't asked you. I wish I hadn't asked you; I mean I wish you wouldn't answer now, not till I tell you something more."

"Well, I will not answer at all; I leave it to your father."

"Oh, I don't mean that; I don't want you to leave it to papa."

"Flaxie," remonstrated Julia, "can't you see that you are tiring mother?"

"I won't tire her, Ninny. I only want her to think a minute about Whiz, how old he is and lame. He doesn't frisk as he used to, does he, mamma? And I'm sure Miss Pike will want *me* at her spelling-school, we're such friends. And Fanny Townsend is going, and lots and lots of girls of my age."

"My dear, I leave it entirely to your father," said Mrs. Gray wearily. [33]

"Yes, mamma; but if you'll talk to him first, and say Fred's afraid to ask him, and—and Whiz is so old——"

Julia frowned and pointed to the door. Mary ought to have needed no second warning. She might have seen for herself the conversation was too fatiguing.

"What does make me so selfish and heedless and forgetful and everything that's bad," thought she, rushing down-stairs. "I love my mother as well as Ninny does, and am generally careful not to tire her; but if I once forget they think I always forget, and next thing papa will forbid my going into her room."

Fred stood by the bay window awaiting his cousin's report.

"O Fred, I don't know yet; mamma isn't well enough to be talked to, and we'll have to wait till [34]
papa comes home. *Perhaps* papa won't think you are too young to drive Whiz just out to Rosewood. It isn't like going to Parnassus, ten miles; you know he didn't allow that."

"Pretty well too if a fellow fourteen years old can't be trusted with that old rack-o-bones," said the youth scornfully, remembering that Preston at his age had driven Whiz; but then Preston and Fred were different boys.

"Well, I'll be the one to ask him," said Mary. "Shouldn't you think the moon would make a great difference? *I* should."

It was while Dr. Gray was carving the roast beef at dinner that Mary came out desperately with the spelling-school question. He seemed to be thinking of something else at first, but when brought to understand what she meant, he said Miss Pike was a sensible woman, and he [35]
approved of her, and Mary and Fred "might go and spell the whole school down if they could."

This was beyond all expectation. Fred looked gratified, and Mary, slipping from her chair, sprang to her father and gave him a sudden embrace, which interfered with his carving and almost drove the knife through the platter.

All the afternoon her mind was much agitated. What dress should she wear? Did Ninny think mother would object to the best bonnet? And oh, she ought to be spelling every moment! Wouldn't grandma please ask her all the hard words she could possibly think of?

Grandma gave out a black list,—*eleemosynary*, *phthisic*, *poniard*, and the like,—and though Mary sometimes tripped, she did admirably well. Logomachy, anagrams, and other spelling [36]
games were popular in the Gray family, and all the children were good spellers. Dr. Gray said, "They tell us that silent letters are to be dropped out of our language, and then the words will all look as they sound; but this has not been done yet, and meanwhile it is well to know how to spell words as they are printed *now*."

Julia was in her mother's room, and Mary was left again with the care of the children; but in her present distraction she quite forgot Ethel, and the child, left to her own devices, managed to get the lamp-scissors and cut off her hair. The zigzag notches, bristling up in all directions, were a droll sight.

"Oh, you little mischief," cried Mary, angry, yet unable to help laughing. "This all comes of my reading you the story of the 'Nine Little Goslings' yesterday. Tell me, was that what made you [37]
think of it?"

Ethel nodded her sheared head silently.

"Oh, you dreadful child. When I was trying so hard to interest you! *I* didn't want to read to you! And to think you must go and do this! What do people mean by calling *you* good? I never cut off *my* hair, but nobody ever called *me* good!"

Mary was seized again with laughter, but, recovering, added sternly:—

“It’s very hard that I can’t shut you in the closet, but you’ll get there fast enough! Yes, I shall report you, and into the closet you’ll go, Miss Snippet. Oh, you needn’t cry; you’re the worst-looking creature in town, but the blame always falls on *me!* Just for those ‘Nine Little Goslings.’ And here was I working so hard to get ready for spelling-school and—”

The jingle of sleigh-bells put a sudden stop to this eloquence. Ethel wiped her eyes and stole to [38]
the window without speaking. She was usually dumb under reproof, and perhaps it was her very silence which encouraged Mary to deliver “sermonettes,” though I fear these sermonettes hardened instead of softening little Ethel’s heart. The young preacher was smiling enough, however, when she went out to enter the sleigh; and Julia, who tucked her in, looked as if she were trying her best not to be proud of her bright young sister. Mary felt very well pleased with herself in her new cloak and beaver hat, with its jaunty feather; but she was not quite satisfied with cousin Fred.

“He can’t drive half as well as Preston; and, worse than that, he doesn’t know how to spell,” thought she, as they drove on in time to the merry music of the bells. They had gone about half a [39]
mile, and Fred had used the whip several times with a lordly flourish, always to the great displeasure of Whiz, when they were suddenly brought to a pause by a loud voice calling out,—

“Stop! Hilloa, boy, stop!”

To say that they were both very much frightened would be no more than the truth. Mary’s first thought was the foolish one, “Oh, can it be a highway robber?” while Fred wondered if anything was amiss with the harness. It might be wrong side upward for aught he knew.

But they were both alarmed without cause. As soon as Fred could rein in his angry steed, it appeared that the owner of the voice was only Mary’s old friend and former teacher, Mr. Harrison Fling, and all he wished to say was,—

“Well, Miss Mary and Master Fred, are you going to spelling-school?” [40]

“Yes, sir,” said Fred, touching his cap; while Mary hoped nothing had happened to the spelling-school to prevent their going.

“And may I ride with you?” asked the young man, with a persuasive bow and smile.

“Yes, sir, if you like,” replied Fred, rather relieved to find it was no worse, though certainly not pleased.

“I’ll drive, of course,” said Mr. Fling serenely, seating himself, and taking Mary in his lap. “Master Fred, your aunt will thank me for happening along just as I did, for you were going at breakneck speed. You would have been spilled out at the next corner.”

Fred’s brows were knitted fiercely under his cap. Was it possible that Mr. Fling was regarded as a gentleman?

“Miss Flaxie,” pursued the interloper, “I hope you’re as glad to see me again as I am to see [41]
you. Don’t you feel safer now I’ve taken the reins?”

Mary did not know what reply to make. She was not glad to see him, yet she did feel safer to have him drive. She laughed a little, and the laugh grated unpleasantly on Fred’s ears. This was the first time he had ever taken his young cousin to ride, and he thought it would be the last.

Mr. Fling talked all the way to Miss Pike’s school-house, apparently not minding in the least that nobody answered him. “Now, children,” said he, lifting Mary out, and planting her upon the door-stone before Fred could offer his hand, “now, children, with your permission, I’ll drive a little farther. I’d like to drop in on a few of my old friends in this neighborhood. Give my very best [42]
regards to Miss Pike, and tell her I hope to be back in season to hear a little of the spelling.”

“With your permission,” indeed! Fred was incensed. If Mr. Fling had been a person of his own age, he would have said to him, and very properly, too, “I have no right to lend Dr. Gray’s horse, and you have no right to ask me for him.” But as Mr. Fling was at least a dozen years older than himself, such a speech would have been impertinent; and Fred could only look as forbidding as possible, and preserve a total silence, while Mr. Fling caught up the reins again, and was off and away without further ceremony.

“Isn’t he a funny man?” said Mary. “Funny” was not the word Fred would have used.

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[43]

CHAPTER III.

THE SPELLING-SCHOOL.

The spelling-school had not yet begun, but Fanny Townsend and her brother Jack had already arrived, and so had Mr. Garland, and his nephew, Mr. Porter. Miss Pike expressed pleasure at seeing them all, and stood at the desk some time with her arm around Mary’s waist, chatting about “old times” at Laurel Grove, at Hilltop, and at Washington. Mary was feeling of late that there were many old times in her life, and that she had lived a long while. She had been quite a traveller, had seen and known a variety of people, but nobody—outside her own family—that is, [44]
no grown person,—was so dear to her as this excellent young lady, who was known among

strangers as “the homely Miss Pike.” Mary had attended her school at Hilltop with Milly Allen, and afterward Miss Pike had been a governess in Dr. Gray’s family, and still later had spent a winter with the Grays at Washington. She had a decided fancy for Mary; and in return the little girl always called Miss Pike her “favorite friend.” It is only to be wished that every little girl had just such a “favorite friend.”

But it was now time for the exercises to begin. At a tap of the bell everybody was seated. The scholars were nearly all older than Mary, she and Fanny being perhaps the youngest ones there.

“This is an old-fashioned spelling-match,” explained Miss Pike to her visitors, “and we will now [45]
announce the names of the two ‘captains,’ Grace Mallon and James Hunnicut. They will take their places.”

Upon this James Hunnicut, a large, intelligent-looking boy of fifteen, walked to one side of the room and stood against the wall, and Grace Mallon, a sensible young girl of fourteen, walked to the other side of the room, and took her place exactly opposite James. They both looked very earnest and alive.

Grace had the first choice; next James; and so on for some minutes. There was breathless interest in it, for, as the best spellers would naturally be chosen first, the whole school sat waiting and hoping. The house was so still that one heard scarcely a sound except the names spoken by the two captains, and the brisk footsteps of the youths and maidens crossing the room, as they were called, now to Grace’s side, now to James’s, there to stand like two rows of soldiers [46]
on drill.

Miss Pike could not but observe the sparkle of satisfaction in some faces, and the gloom of disappointment in others; and she rejoiced with the good spellers and grieved with the poor ones, like the dear, kind woman she was.

Out of courtesy, Mary Gray and Fanny Townsend were chosen among the first. James Hunnicut supposed it would be ungallant to neglect visitors, though he did wince a little as he called Mary Gray’s name, thinking, “What do I want of a baby like that? Of course she’ll miss every word.”

Mary answered James’s call with a throbbing heart, proud, delighted, yet afraid. Next Grace Mallon called Fred Allen, and thought, when he walked over to her side with his well-bred air, [47]
that she had secured a prize. How could she suspect that a distinguished-looking lad like that was not a “natural speller,” and did not always do as well as he knew, on account of his habit of speaking before he thought? In fact, he missed the very first word, *exactly*, making the first syllable *eggs* in his ruinous haste. Of course he knew better, but no allowance was made for mistakes, and like a flash the word was passed across the room to Mary, who spelled it correctly.

Fred felt disgraced, lost all confidence, and, if he had dared, would have asked to be excused from duty. Captain Grace would have excused him gladly, but such a thing was never heard of; he must stand at his post, and blunder all the evening.

It was the custom, when a word was missed on one side and corrected on the other, for the [48]
successful captain to swell his own numbers by “choosing off” one from the enemy’s ranks. Captain James now “chose off” one of Captain Grace’s best soldiers, and the game went on.

Next time it was one of Captain James’s men—Fanny Townsend—who blundered, and it was Captain Grace’s turn to choose off.

For some time the numbers were about even; but as Fred Allen invariably missed, and there were Jack Townsend and other poor spellers below him to keep him company, Captain James began to have a decided advantage. He kept choosing off again and again,—Mary Gray, among the rest,—while Captain Grace bit her lips in silence.

But the moment she had it in her power she called a name in a ringing voice, and it was “Mary Gray.” Mary had spelled all her words promptly,—they had usually been hard ones, too,—and her [49]
blue eyes danced as she tripped across the room in answer to the call. Was there a ray of triumph in her glance as it fell on cousin Fred, who was propping his head against the wall, trying to look easy and unconcerned? Fred, who was so much older than herself, and ciphering at the very end of the arithmetic? Fred, who had always looked down on little Flaxie as rather light-minded?

There he stood, and there he was likely to stand, and Jack Townsend, too, while the favorite spellers with ill-concealed satisfaction were walking back and forth conquering and to conquer.

Mary Gray was called for as often as the oldest scholar in the room, and, as she flitted from east to west, her head grew as light with vanity as the “blowball” of a dandelion. She threw it [50]
back airily, and smiled in a superior way when poor Fred missed a word, as if she would like to say to the scholars, “I came here with that dunce, it’s true, but please don’t blame *me* because he can’t spell.”

“That’s a remarkably bright, pretty little girl, but I fancy she wouldn’t toss her head so if there was much in it,” whispered Mr. Garland’s nephew to Miss Pike, while Mr. Garland was putting out the words.

Miss Pike had been pained by Mary’s silly behavior, but replied:—

“You are wrong, quite wrong, Mr. Porter, she is a dear little girl and has plenty of sense.”

It was positively gratifying to the good lady afterwards to hear Mary mis-spell the word *pillory*, for the mortification humbled her, and from that moment there was no more tossing of curls.

When the time was up, Captain James's side had conquered most victoriously, numbering [51]
twice as many as the other side. The two captains bowed to each other and the game was over. Then Fred Allen, Fanny Townsend, and all the other wallflowers were allowed at last to move. It was time to go home.

The girls and boys, all shawled and hooded and coated and capped, went toward the door, chatting and laughing.

James Hunnicut said to Grace Mallon, "Beg your pardon; I didn't mean to take *all* your men."

"Oh," returned Grace, undaunted, "I had men enough left, and dare say I should have got every one of yours away from you if we'd only played half an hour longer."

"Ah, you would, would you? Well, we'll try it again and see. Isn't that little girl of Dr. Gray's a [52]
daisy?"

"Not quite equal to the Allen boy; I admire *him*," returned Grace in an undertone; but Fred heard and buttoned his overcoat above a swelling heart.

"Good night, we're all so glad you came," said Miss Pike, shaking hands warmly with him and Mary. Then off she went, and half the school followed, walking and riding by twos and threes and fours.

But where, oh where, in the name of all the spelling-schools, was Fred's horse? There wasn't the shadow of him to be seen. Where was Fred's sleigh? There was not so much as the tip of a runner in sight. Where was Mr. Fling? Gone to Canada, perhaps, the smooth-faced deceitful wretch!

Fred would "have a sheriff after him," so he assured cousin Flaxie, and that immediately. [53]

Mary stamped her little low-heeled boots to keep her feet warm, and highly approved of the plan.

"Oh yes, Fred, do call a sheriff; I'm perfectly willing;" and the situation seemed delightfully tragic, till somebody laughed, and then it occurred to her that sheriffs, whatever they may be, do not grow on bushes or in snow-banks. And, of course, Mr. Fling had not gone to Canada, Fred knew that well enough; he had only "dropped in" at somebody's house and forgotten to come out.

"The people, wherever he is, ought to send him home," said James Hunnicut sympathetically.

"That's so," assented two or three others. "It's abominable to go 'round calling with a borrowed horse and sleigh."

So much pity was galling to both Mary and Fred, making them feel like young children, who [54]
ought not to have been trusted without a driver. Why wouldn't everybody go away and leave them. The situation would surely be less embarrassing if they faced it alone.

Fred was angry and undignified. He had had as much as he could bear all the evening, and this was a straw too much. Mary, on the other hand, had enjoyed an unusual triumph; but how her feet did ache with cold! The blood had left them hours ago to light a blazing fire in her head; and now to stand on that icy door-stone was torture!

"I know I shall freeze, but I'll bear it," thought she, taking gay little waltzing steps. "How they
do admire me, and it would spoil it all to cry. Why, all the great spelling I could do in a year [55]
wouldn't make up for one cry."

Just as she had got as far as to remember that she had heard of a man whose feet "froze and fell off," Grace Mallon asked when her brother Phil would have a vacation? She had shut her teeth together firmly, but being obliged to answer this question, her voice, to her dire surprise and confusion, came forth in a sob! Not one articulate word could she speak; and there was Captain James Hunnicut looking straight at her! Keener mortification the poor child had seldom known. Following so closely, too, upon her evening's triumph! But at that moment Mr. Garland, who was about driving off with his nephew, stopped his horse and said: "This is too bad! Here,
Miss Flaxie, here's a chance for you to ride with us. We can make room for her, can't we [56]
Stephen? But as for you, Master Fred, I see no other way but you must wait for your horse."

Mary, utterly humbled, sprang with gratitude into Mr. Garland's sleigh, without trusting herself to look back.

And Fred did "wait," with a heart swelling as big as a foot-ball, and saw his cousin bestowed between the two gentlemen, who smiled on him patronizingly, as upon a boy of four in pinafores.

This was hard. And when Mr. Fling appeared at last, laughing heartlessly, and drove the half-frozen boy part of the way home, leaving him at the hotel, the most convenient point for himself, and advising him to take ginger-tea and go to bed,—this oh, this, was harder yet!

But it was Mrs. Gray who suffered most from this little *fiasco*. Before the children returned she [57]
was flushed and nervous, and Dr. Gray blamed himself for having allowed them to go.

"I'm thankful, my daughter, that you've got here alive," said she, sending for Mary to come to

her chamber; “Whiz is a fiery fellow, and Fred isn’t a good driver.”

“Was it as delightful as you expected, Mary? And did you spell them all down?” asked her father.

“Yes, sir, it was delightful; and I spelled ever so many hard words, and only missed one; but Fred spells shockingly,” replied Mary, taking up a vial from the stand and putting it down again.

“So, on the whole, I see you didn’t quite enjoy it,” said Mrs. Gray, rather puzzled by Flaxie’s disconsolate look.

“Not quite, mamma; don’t you think Mr. Fling was very impolite? And oh, I must warm my feet, [58] they are nearly frozen,” said Mary, questioning within herself why it was that, whenever she had a signal triumph, something was almost sure to happen that “spoiled it all.”

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[59]

CHAPTER IV.

THE MINISTER’S JOKE.

The spelling-school, with its triumphs and chagrins, had partially faded from Mary’s memory, to become one of her “old times;” for winter had gone, and it was now the very last evening of March.

You may not care to hear how the wind blew, and really it has nothing to do with our story, only it happened to be blowing violently. Tea was over, and everybody had left the dining-room but Mary and cousin Fred. Mary had just parted the curtains to look out, as people always do on a windy night, when Fred startled her by saying, in a whisper, “Flaxie, come here.”

She dropped the curtain hastily, and crossed the room. What could Fred be wanting of her, and [60] why should he whisper when they two were alone, and the wind outside was making such a noise?

“Put your ear down close to my mouth, Flaxie. You mustn’t tell anybody, now remember.”

“Why not, Fred? It isn’t best to make promises beforehand. Perhaps I ought to tell.”

“Ought to tell? I like that! Then I’ll keep it to myself, that’s all.”

“Now, Fred, I didn’t say I *would* tell. And, if it’s something perfectly right and proper, I won’t tell, of course.”

“Oh, it’s right and proper enough. Do you promise? Yes or no?”

“*Yes*, then,” said Flaxie, too anxious for Fred’s confidence, and too much honored by it to [61] refuse, though she knew from past experience that he frequently held peculiar views as to “propriety.”

“Here, see this,” said he, taking a smooth block of wood from his pocket and whispering a word of explanation. “Won’t it be larks?”

She drew back with a nervous laugh. “Why, Fred!”

“And I didn’t know but you’d like to go with me, Flaxie, just for company.”

“But do you think it’s exactly proper? He’s a minister, you know.”

“Why that’s the very fun of it,—just because he *is* a minister! It’s the biggest thing that’ll be done to-morrow, see if it isn’t?”

Mary looked doubtful.

“I was a goose to tell *you*, though, Flaxie; I might have known girls always make a fuss.”

“Oh, it isn’t because I’m a girl, Fred! Girls like fun as well as anybody, only girls have more [62] ——.” She did not know whether to say “delicacy” or “discretion,” but decided that either word would give offence; “girls are different.”

“Then you won’t go with me? No matter. I believe, after all, I’d rather have one of the boys.”

“Yes, oh yes, I will go with you; I’d like to go,” exclaimed Mary, desperately, throwing discretion to the winds.

“Agreed, then,—to-morrow morning on the way to school. And now mind, Flaxie, don’t put this down in your journal to-night, for that would let it all out.”

“Why, nobody ever looks at my journal! It would be dishonest.—Why, Fred,” in sudden alarm, “did *you* ever look at my journal?”

“Poh! what do I care for your old scribblings?” The boy’s manners had been falling to decay all [63] winter for lack of his mother’s constant “line upon line.” “Only your journal is always ’round, and you’d better be careful, that’s all.”

Next morning it rained, and Mary walked to school with Fred under the gloom of a big

umbrella, Phil having been sent on in advance.

"Pretty weather for April Fools," remarked Fred, carefully guarding under his arm a neat little package containing a block of wood, with a card, on which were the words, simple but significant, "April Fool."

Arriving at Rev. Mr. Lee's door-yard, he walked up the narrow gravel-path with Flaxie beside him, "just for company."

"Now don't laugh and spoil it," said he. And, to solemnize his own face, he tried to think of the [64]
horrible time last summer, when he and his brother John went for pond-lilies, and were upset and nearly drowned. Mary looked as if she were thinking of an accident still worse, her face drawn to remarkable length, and her mouth dolefully puckered.

"You don't suppose Mr. Lee will come himself, do you?" whispered Fred, ringing the door-bell very gently.

"Oh Fred, let's go away. Just think if he should put you in a sermon? He put somebody in once for stealing watermelons. He didn't say the name right out, but——"

Two early dandelions by the front window seemed bubbling over with merriment and curiosity; but before they or Fred had learned who stole the watermelons, Fred stopped his cousin by saying contemptuously, "When a man gets nicely fooled he won't put *that* in a sermon, you'd better believe." And then, gathering courage, he rang louder. [65]

Mary was deliberating whether to run or not, when the housemaid appeared.

"Will you give this to Mr. Lee? Very important," said Fred, handing her the dainty little parcel.

She looked at it, she seemed to look through it; a merry glint came into her eyes.

"I was afraid somebody was dead," said she. "You rung so loud, and you looked so terrible solemn, both of you."

"Solemn?" echoed Fred; and then it was he, not Mary, who broke down and smiled.

"Mr. Lee's gone to a *funeril*," continued Hannah, looking through and through the parcel again; "but I'll give it to him when he comes home, and tell him who brought it."

Did Fred wish her to tell him? He began to doubt it. [66]

"Come, Flaxie, we must go."

"Fred," said the little girl, as they hurried out of the gate, "I can't help thinking; shan't we feel sorry next Sunday?"

"Nonsense!" returned her cousin. He had already thought about Sunday, and fancied himself looking up to the pulpit to meet Mr. Lee's eye. Had he been quite respectful to that learned and excellent man?

"Nonsense! ministers are no better than other folks!"

It was too late to repent; but he wished now he had waited till afternoon and thought of all the possible consequences. *Perhaps* the fun wouldn't pay. These doubts, however, he did not mention to the boys at school, but told them he had made "a splendid fool" of the minister.

That evening, as he and Mary stood by the carriage-way gate, and he was opening it for Dr. [67]
Gray to drive into the yard, who should be passing on the other side of the street, but Mr. Lee.

"How do you do, Dr. Gray," said he; and came over to do a trivial errand, which Fred fancied must have been made up for the occasion; it was something about a book which he wished to borrow some time, not now. Then, turning to guilty Fred, who had not dared slip away,—

"Good evening, Master Fred," with extreme politeness; "I was very sorry not to be at home this morning when you left your card."

Your card! Those were his words.

"*My* card! Does he think I signed *myself* April Fool? My goodness, so I did! People always put their own names on their visiting-cards, sure enough! It's I that am the April Fool, and nobody [68]
else," thought the outwitted boy, not venturing to look up.

A blush mounted to Mary's forehead, and she too looked at the ground.

"Pray call again, Master Fred," said Mr. Lee; and his manner was as respectful as if Fred had been at least a supreme judge.

"What's all this?" asked the doctor sternly as the clergyman walked away.

"'Twas a little kind of a—a joke, you know, sir, for fun. I didn't mean anything. I like Mr Lee first rate," stammered Fred, scanning his boots, as if to decide whether they were big enough for him to crawl into and hide.

Dr. Gray never needed to be told more than half a story.

"Oh, I see! You've made an April Fool of yourself. Ha, ha! Mr. Lee is too sharp for you, is he? And so, Mary, you went with Fred?" [69]

The doctor looked grave. It was not easy to let this pass. "Wait here, both of you, till I come back," said he, driving into the stable.

"This is a great go," thought Fred. "Hope the boys won't hear of it."

"Fred," said Dr. Gray, returning,—and he spoke with displeasure,—"I am disappointed in you. And in you too, Mary."

"Oh, papa," wailed a little voice from under Mary's hat. Her head was bowed, and her tears were falling.

"I was the one that thought of it; I was the one that asked her to go," spoke up Fred, all the manliness in him stirred by his cousin's tears.

"No doubt you were; and I'm glad to hear you acknowledge it," said Dr. Gray, resting his hand on his nephew's shoulder. "But Mary knew better than to be led away by you. My daughter, jests of this sort may be tolerated in your own family or among your schoolmates; but do you think they are suitable to be played upon ministers?" [70]

"No, sir," sobbed Mary.

"Well, then, let this be a lesson to you." This was a favorite speech with the doctor. "Kiss me, my child; and now run into the house. I shall never refer to this matter again, and it is not necessary to mention it to your mother. But Fred," he added, as Mary swiftly escaped, "do you think your conduct has been gentlemanly and courteous? Ought you to have taken this liberty with a comparative stranger,—a person, too, of Mr. Lee's high character?"

"No, sir."

"Do you think your mother would be pleased to hear of it?"

"I know she wouldn't," admitted Fred frankly. [71]

Dr. Gray's countenance softened.

"I don't like to be harsh with you, for you meant no impertinence; still, if I am to treat you as my own child, as your parents desire, I believe I shall have to bid you ask Mr. Lee's pardon. What say you to that? It's the way I should treat Preston."

"All right," replied Fred sadly.

Next morning saw the lad, cap in hand, knocking at the door of the minister's study. Mary had half-offered to go with him, but he had scorned to accept the sacrifice.

"Come in," said Mr. Lee, opening the door.

Fred advanced one step into the room. There was an awful pause, during which those very dandelions of yesterday winked at him from a silver vase, and his well-pondered speech began to grow hazy.

"My uncle sent me to apologize," he faltered forth. "I didn't mean to be disrespectful to a—to a minister. For I think—of course I think—that ministers——" [72]

Here a certain twinkle in Mr. Lee's eye distracted Fred, and his speech flew right out of the window. "For I *don't* think," added he, in wild haste, "that ministers are any better than other folks."

It was just like Fred. He had meant to say something entirely opposite to this; but the "imp of the perverse" was apt to seize his tongue. Oh, dear, he had finished the business now!

"I agree with you, my boy; ministers aren't any better than other folks, certainly," said Mr. Lee, laughing outright in the most genial way.

"Oh, that wasn't what I meant, sir. Please don't think I meant to say that," pleaded Fred, feeling himself more than ever the most foolish of April fools. [73]

But the good-natured clergyman drew him into the room. "Come, now," said he, still laughing, though not sarcastically at all, just merrily, "let me have the call I missed yesterday. Your cousin Preston is one of my best friends, but I think you've never entered my study before."

It was a cosy, sunny room, and, beside books, held a large cabinet, and a green plant-stand, blooming with flowers. Fred seated himself on the edge of a chair, ready for instant departure; but Mr. Lee chatted most agreeably, telling interesting stories, and inquiring about Hilltop people, till he forgot his embarrassment, and was soon asking questions in regard to the different objects in the cabinet.

What was that whitish, buff-colored stuff? *Coquina?* Oh! And people built houses of it? Possible? Was it really made of shells? How strange!—Well, that tarantula's nest was a queer concern! Why, it shut down like a trap-door exactly. Looked as if it had a hinge, and a carpenter made it.—Was that an eagle's claw?—Oh, and *that?* A rattlesnake's rattle?—Was this a scorpion? —And so on. [74]

It was a varied collection, and Mr. Lee seemed to have nothing to do that morning but to exhibit it. Not another word about the April Fool; but Fred felt that he was forgiven, or, rather, that no forgiveness was needed, as no offence had been taken.

"I tell you, Flaxie," confided he to his cousin afterward, "I never liked Mr. Lee half so well; never dreamed he was so bright and sharp. *He* likes fun as well as we boys. Only somehow—Well, I wouldn't do it again; it was foolish. See here, Flaxie, have you put this in your journal? Well, [75] don't you now! If the boys should find out—"

"What do you mean about my journal?" returned Mary, drawing up her mouth like the silk "work-pocket," to mark her displeasure. "Anybody'd think my journal was a newspaper."

Fred smiled wisely.

CHAPTER V. [76]

CHINESE BABIES.

THE journal was a pretty little red book, which lay sometimes on the piano, sometimes on the centre-table, and was often opened innocently enough by callers. If it had been the simple, matter-of-fact little book that it ought to have been, the reading of it would have done no harm. But Mary had a habit of recording her emotions, also her opinions of her friends,—a bad habit, which she did not break off till it had nearly brought her into trouble.

"What does Fred Allen mean by calling me 'Miss Fanny dear, with mouth stretched from ear to [77] ear'?" asked Fanny Townsend, indignantly.

"How do you know he did?"

"Saw it in your journal. And you put a period after 'Miss'! Needn't accuse me of laughing, Flaxie Frizzle, when I happen to know that my mother considers *you* a great giggler, and dreads to have you come to our house."

"Does she? Then I'll stay away! And if I did put a period after 'Miss' it was a mistake. But I've no respect for people that read other people's private journals!"

"Hope you don't call that private. Why, I thought 'twas a Sabbath-school book, or I wouldn't have touched it." And whether she would or not, Fanny was obliged to laugh; so the breach was healed for the time. But after this Mary began a new journal, which she conducted on different [78] principles, trying moreover to keep it in its proper place in her writing-desk.

There were secret signs and mysterious allusions in this new journal, however, the letters "C. C." recurring again and again in all sorts of places, without any apparent meaning or connection. She evidently enjoyed scribbling them, and no harm was done, since nobody but "we girls" knew what they meant. "C. C." was a precious secret, which we may pry into for ourselves by-and-by.

Mary was now in her thirteenth year, and though she still enjoyed hanging May-baskets, driving hoops, skipping the rope, and even playing dolls, her growing mind was never idle. She enjoyed her lessons at school, for she memorized with ease; she liked to draw; but sitting at the piano was a weariness; and she considered it a trial that, in addition to her own practising, she [79] should be expected to teach and superintend Ethel. She was strict with her little pupil, and found frequent occasion for sermonettes, but Ethel got on famously, and Mary received and deserved high praise as teacher.

She missed her cousin Fred when he went home at last, not to return, but she told Lady Fotheringay (Blanche Jones) in confidence that she "could improve her mind better when he was gone." Moreover, Preston would soon be home for his summer vacation.

She was beginning to question what she was made for. Something grand and wonderful, no doubt; something much better than studying, reading, sewing, and doing errands. There were times when this favored child of fortune even said to herself that life was hard, and that her mother was over-strict in requiring her to mend her clothes and do a stint of some sort of sewing [80] on Saturdays. Wasn't she old enough yet to have outgrown stints?

"Why can't pillow-cases be hemmed by machine?" complained she to Ethel. "And there *you* are,—almost six years old, with not a thing to do! I can tell you I used to sew patchwork at your age by the yard! C. C. I keep saying that over to comfort myself, Ethel, but *you* don't know what it stands for. Oh no, *not* chocolate candy; better than that!—Wish I lived at the south, where colored servants do everything. There's Grandma Hyde now; if we had her black Venus, and her black Mary, and her yellow Thomas, I shouldn't have to dust parlors and run of errands! Mamma is always talking to me about being useful. *Little* girls are never talked to in that way; it's we older girls who have to bear all the brunt. It tires me to death to sew, sew, sew! Now it's such fun [81] to run in the woods. Mr. Lee says we ought to admire nature, and I'm going after flag-root this afternoon instead of mending my stockings—I think it's my duty!"

As Mary rattled on in this way, little Ethel listened most attentively. Her sister Flaxie stood as a pattern to her of all the virtues,—ah, if Flaxie had but known it!—and she looked forward to the time when she should be exactly like her, with just such curls, and just that superior way of lecturing little people. It was not worth while to be any better than Flaxie. If Flaxie objected to

sewing and mending, Ethel would object to it also.

"If my mamma ever makes me sit on a chair to sew patchwork, I'll go South! If she makes me [82]
mend stockings, I'll go in the woods! I won't be useful if Flaxie isn't; no indeedy!"

Thus while Flaxie's sermonettes were forgotten, her chance words and her example took deep hold of the little one's mind.

Everybody said Mary was growing up a sweet girl, more "lovesome" and womanly than had once been expected. In truth Mary thought so herself. Plenty of well-meaning but injudicious people had told her she was pretty; and she knew that Mrs. Lee liked to look at her face because it was so "expressive," and Mrs. Patten because it was so "thoughtful," and somebody else because it was so "intelligent." Ethel had a figure like a roly-poly pudding; but Mary was tall and slight, and even Mrs. Prim admitted that she was "graceful."

One Sunday morning early in May she sat in church, apparently paying strict attention to the [83]
sermon, but really thinking.

"I dare say, now, Mrs. Townsend is looking at me, and wishing Fanny were more like me. Nobody else of my age sits as still as I do, except Sadie Stockwell, and she has a stiff spine. There's Major Patten, I remember he said once to father, 'Dr. Gray, your second girl is a child to be proud of.' I know he did, for I was coming into the room and heard him."

Directly after morning services came Sunday school, and Mary was in Mrs. Lee's class. Mrs. Lee was an enthusiastic young woman, fond of all her scholars, but it was easy to see that Mary was her prime favorite. Mrs. Gray's class of boys—Phil being the youngest—sat in the next seat. The lesson to-day was short, and after recitation Mrs. Lee showed her own class and Mrs. Gray's [84]
some pictures which her uncle had brought her from China.

"What *is* that queer thing?" said Fanny, as she and Mary touched bonnets over one of the pictures.

"That is called a baby-tower. My uncle says it is a good representation of the dreadful place they drop girl-babies into sometimes. You know girls are lightly esteemed in heathen countries."

"Drop girl-babies *into* it?" asked Blanche Jones. "Doesn't it hurt them?"

"Not much, I believe; but it kills them."

"Oh, Mrs. Lee!" It was Mary who spoke, in tones of horror.

"The tower is half full of lime, and the lime stops their breath. So I presume they hardly suffer at all."

Mary's eyes were full of tears, and she sprang up eagerly, exclaiming,—

"Oh, Mrs. Lee! Oh, mamma, did you hear that? I declare, it's too bad! Can't the missionaries [85]
stop their killing babies so?"

"You sweet child," said Mrs. Lee.

But Mrs. Gray only said,—

"Yes, my daughter, the missionaries are doing their best; but everything can't be done in a day."

"But it ought to be done this very minute, mamma."

Mary's whole face glowed; and Mrs. Lee, who sat directly in front of her, could not refrain from leaning over the pew and kissing her.

"We ought to bring more money, seems to me," suggested good, moon-faced Blanche Jones, pressing her fat hands together.

"Yes, a cent every Sunday is too little," said one of Mrs. Gray's little boys.

"Yes, a cent *is* too little," agreed Fanny Townsend earnestly.

"How thoughtless we've been," said Mary, in high excitement. "For my part, I mean to give [86]
those Chinese every cent of my pin-money this month. Do you care if I do, mamma?"

"No; you have my full consent. Only do not make up your mind in a hurry," replied Mrs. Gray; but her manner was cold in comparison with Mrs. Lee's cordial hand-shake and "God bless you, my precious girl."

"I'm a real pet with Mrs. Lee," thought Mary, her heart throbbing high.

Blanche, Fanny, and the two older girls in the class,—Sadie Patten and Lucy Abbott,—were silent. They knew that Mary's pin-money amounted to four dollars a month, and though they had thought of doing something themselves, this brilliant offer discouraged them at once: they could not make up their minds to anything so munificent.

Going home that noon, Mary "walked on thorns," though she tried to be humble. By the next [87]
day, her feelings toward the Chinese had undergone a slight chill; and when her mother alluded to Captain Emerson—Mrs. Lee's uncle—and his pictures, Mary did not care to converse on the

subject. She even felt a pang of regret at the recollection of her hasty promise. Those girl-babies were far off now; she could not see them in imagination, as at first. Days passed, and the poor things were fading out of mind, buried deep in the lime of the tower.

"My daughter," said Mrs. Gray, on Saturday, "let me see your portmonnaie." It contained three dollars and a half now. Mrs. Gray counted the bills. "Have you any especial use for this money, Mary?"

"I don't know. *Would* you buy those stereoscopic views of Rome and the Alps that Mr. Snow said I could choose from different sets?" [88]

Mrs. Gray smiled quietly.

"What good will the views do the babies in China?"

There was a sudden droop of Mary's head.

"Why, mamma, as true as you live I forgot all about those babies; I really did! You see, mamma, I didn't stop to think last Sunday. Must I give all my money to Mrs. Lee—three dollars and a half?"

"To Mrs. Lee? I was under the impression that you were to give it to the missionaries to convert the Chinese."

"Oh, yes, but I *said* it to Mrs. Lee; the missionaries don't know anything about it."

"So it seems," returned Mrs. Gray dryly; "you said it to Mrs. Lee merely to please *her*." Mary's head sank still lower. "Well, you might ask Mrs. Lee to let you off, my daughter." [89]

"But, mamma, how it would look to go to her and ask that! I couldn't!"

"Then you'll be obliged to give the money," responded Mrs. Gray unfeelingly. How easily she might have said, "Never mind, Mary, I will see Mrs. Lee and arrange it for you." And she was usually a thoughtful, obliging mother. Mary pressed the bills together in her hand, spread them out tenderly, gazed at them as if she loved them. It was a large sum, and looked larger through her tears.

"I can't ask Mrs. Lee to let me off; you know I can't, mamma. I'd rather lose the money!"

"Lose the money!" So that was the way she regarded it! A strange sort of benevolence surely!

"*Take heed, therefore, that ye do not your alms before men to be seen of them; otherwise ye have no reward of your Father which is in heaven.*" This was Mr. Lee's text next day. [90]

"Oh, that means me," groaned Mary inwardly. "I've been seen of Mrs. Lee, and I've been seen of Blanche and Fanny and the other girls; and that's just what I did it for, and *not* for the people in China! Oh, dear! oh, dear! to think what a humbug I am!"

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[91]

CHAPTER VI.

OLD BLUFF.

AND now we come to an episode of the highest importance to five young misses of Laurel Grove. General Townsend owned an unoccupied house about two miles from town, at the foot of a steep hill called Old Bluff; and it had occurred to the active mind of Mary Gray that this would be a fine place for "camping out."

It was April when she hinted this to Fanny Townsend, but it was May before Fanny spoke of it to her father.

"I'm waiting till some time when you come to my house to tea, Dandelina; and we mustn't get to laughing, now you remember." [92]

Mary seated herself at the Townsend tea-table one evening with nervous dread; for, next to Mrs. Prim, Mrs. Townsend inspired her with more awe than any other lady in town. When she thought it time for Fanny to speak, she touched her foot under the table, and Fanny began.

"Papa, I have something to say."

Fanny had the feeling that she was not highly reverenced by her family, on account of her unfortunate habit of giggling; but her face was serious enough now. "Papa, may we girls go down to the farm next summer,—to that house with the roses 'round it,—and camp out? The girls all want to, and we—we're going to call it Camp Comfort." (The reader will perceive that this explains the letters "C. C.") She was sorry next moment that she had spoken, for her mother said, just as she had feared she might, "What will you think of next, Fanny?" [93]

But her father seemed only amused. "Camp out? We girls? How many may ye be? And who? Going to take your servants?"

"You'll each need a watch-dog," suggested Fanny's elder brother, Jack.

"You'll come home nights, I presume,—servants, watch-dogs and all," said her father.

"O no, indeed! It wouldn't be camping out if we came home nights! And nobody has a dog but Fanny, and we shouldn't want any servants," cried Mary Gray, whose views of labor seemed to have changed materially.

"We intend to do our own work," remarked Fanny. Whereupon everybody laughed; and General Townsend asked again who the girls were? "Oh, Flaxie Frizzle and Blanche Jones and I, [94]
papa; that makes three, rather young; and then Sadie Patten and Lucy Abbott, they're rather old; that makes five. Sadie and Lucy will be the mothers,—I mean if you let us go."

"That 'if' is well put in," said brother Jack.

"But what will you do for a stove?" asked General Townsend, wishing to hear their plans, "there's none in the house."

"My mamma has a rusty stove, and our Henry Mann could take it to Old Bluff," replied Mary.

"But there's no furniture,—not a chair or a table."

"They have too many chairs at Major Patten's and Mr. Jones's; their houses are running over with chairs."

"Well, what about dishes?"

"Why, papa," said Fanny eagerly, "only think what lots of dishes *we* have, just oceans, all [95]
broken to pieces!"

"Ah, shall you eat from broken dishes?" asked Mrs. Townsend coolly. "And perhaps you'll sleep on the floor?"

"O no, Mrs. Townsend, our house is full of beds! Mamma has some of them put in the stable, and Blanche Jones's house is full of beds, and they have to keep some of them in the attic. Everybody has everything; we've talked it all over. And there's our big express wagon, and our Henry Mann to drive."

Mary paused for breath.

"Yes, papa, Dr. Gray's express wagon is very large; and we have a push-cart, you know. So can't we go?" coaxed Fanny, true to first principles.

"What have *I* to do about it, little Miss Townsend? It seems you have already made your plans [96]
and invited your guests. How happened you to think to ask my permission for the rent of the house."

"Finish your supper, Frances, and do not sit there with your bread in the air," said Mrs. Townsend in a decided tone. "You forget that I am to be consulted as well as your father. And that's not all. I've no idea that Dr. Gray, or Major Patten, or Mr. Jones, or Mrs. Abbott will consent to this camping out, as you call it; so you must not set your hearts on it, you and Flaxie."

But it chanced that every one of the parents did consent at last; and one morning in the latter part of June you might have seen some very busy girls loading a push-cart and an express wagon, with the help of their brothers and Henry Mann, while Fanny laughed almost continually, and Mary Gray exclaimed at intervals,—

"O won't it be a state of bliss?" [97]

There were four bedsteads, eight chairs, one old sofa, one table, one rusty stove, a variety of old dishes,—not broken ones,—beside a vast amount of rubbish, which the mothers thought quite useless, but which the daughters assured them would be "just the thing for our charades."

"I'm not going to Old Bluff to assist in such performances as charades, so you may just count me out," said Preston, who was to take turns with Bert Abbott in being a nightly guest at Camp Comfort; since the parents would not consent that the girls should spend one night there alone.

"As if boys were the least protection," said Lucy Abbott, Preston's cousin.

"Still they may be useful in getting up games," returned Sadie Patten hopefully. "And Jack Townsend's cornet is charming."

"So it is; it goes so well with your harmonica. And we'll make the boys stir the ice cream," said [98]
Lucy, the head housekeeper.

There was an ice-house connected with their cottage, and ice cream was to be permitted on Sundays, and lemonade at pleasure.

"But where are the lemons?" said Mary, flying about in everybody's way.

"Oh, we shall buy fresh lemons every morning of our grocer who comes to our door," said Lucy grandly. "What I want to know is, if my hammock was packed?—Children, did you see three hammocks in that push-cart?—Boys, I hope you'll hang up those hammocks before we get there! Don't go racing now and spilling out things!—There, I don't believe anybody thought to put in that spider," added she anxiously, as the five girls had bidden good-by to their families in the cool [99]
of the morning, and were walking in a gay procession toward their house in the country.

"Bliss was it in that dawn to be alive,
But to be young was very Heaven."

Old Bluff was a steep, though not very high mountain on the Canada side, and if it is not gone, it stands there yet, hanging defiantly over the blue brook called the *river* Dee, and throwing its huge shadow from shore to shore.

Old Bluff is a stern, bareheaded peak, and few are the flowers that dare show their faces near it. It is chiefly the hardy wintergreen and disconsolate little sprigs of pine and spruce which huddle together along its sides.

At the foot of this famous bluff, on the New York side, stood General Townsend's old-fashioned farm-house, a story and a half high, with a white picket fence around it, and a red barn at one [100] side. The house many years ago had been white; and the panes of glass in the windows were not only very small, but weather-stained and streaked with rainbow hues. London Pride or "Bouncing Bet" grew near the broad front door-stone, together with a few bunches of southernwood, which Dr. Gray thought had a finer odor than any geranium. The front yard was grassy, and the fence lined with roses of various sorts.

It was the first summer for years that this pleasant old place had been vacant, and now it might be applied for any day; but meanwhile the five girls, called "the quintette," and the three attendant cavaliers, called "the trio," were welcome to rusticate in it, and call it a "camp" if they chose.

After the furniture was set up, and there had been a reasonable amount of play at hide and [101] seek in the barn, and the first supper had been eaten—the tablecloth proving to be too small for the table—Mary went to one of the front "rainbow-windows" to watch for Preston.

"I mean to be a true woman."

This was what she usually said to herself when resolved not to cry. But there *was* something lonesome in the thought of going to bed without kissing her mother.

"Nobody else feels as I do, and I wouldn't mention it for anything; but I'd give one quarter of my pin money—one whole dollar—to see mamma and Ethel."

She had supposed that in camping out all care would be left behind. Her mother had excused her from lessons and sewing, and she had looked for "a state of bliss;" but it is forever true—and Mary was beginning to find it so—that wherever we are, there is "something still to do and bear." [102]

Homesickness was a constitutional weakness with Mary, but she disdained the cowardice of running home; she would be a "true woman," and crack walnuts to please Lucy.

"Well, this is a hard-working family," said Preston, arriving presently in state on his bicycle, as Lucy and Sadie were engaged in putting the supper dishes in the kitchen cupboard.

"Yes, Mr. Gray; and we allow no idlers here. Please may I ask what ails our window shades, sir?"

The poor old green-cloth curtains were tearing away from the gentle clasp of Sadie Patten's tack-nails, and leaning over from the tops of the windows as if already tired of the sun and wanting a little rest.

"Well, let's see your hammer."

"No, I'm using it, I'm a young lady now and do as I please," cried Mary, springing up from the [103] kitchen hearth, and scattering her walnuts broadcast, "catch me if you can."

"Is that so? Well, then, now for a race from here to the sweet-apple tree. One, two, three, begin!" And Preston started off at the top of his speed, Mary just before him, her face aglow, her hair streaming in the wind. As she skimmed over the ground, shouting and laughing, she seemed for all the world like a little girl, and not in the least like a young lady. She was soon caught and obliged to surrender the hammer, whereupon Preston nailed the curtains neatly, and went whistling about the house, giving finishing touches here and there to the rickety furniture.

"O thank you. You've been a great help. Now, in return, you shall have a spring-bed to sleep [104] on, the only one we have in the house," said Lucy, with a mischievous glance at Sadie.

The spring-bed did not fit the bedstead, and the chances were that it might fall through in the night.

"You're too tremendously kind, too self-sacrificing," said Preston, suspecting at once that something was wrong.

But he had his revenge. The bedstead was extremely noisy, and the roguish youth, unable to sleep himself on account of mosquitoes, rejoiced to think that he was probably keeping his cousin Lucy awake.

"Good morning, Preston, I hope you rested well," said she, as they all met next morning in the front yard.

"O very.—it's *so* quiet in the country," returned he demurely. "Did you ever *hear* anything so quiet?"

"Never; except possibly a saw-mill," said Sadie Patten. "Lucy and I wondered if you could be [105] alive, you were so still!"

"It *was* sort of frightful. No sound broke the awful silence, save the warning voice of the mosquito.—By the way, girls, why don't you call this spot Mosquito Ranch?"

"I'll tell you what we used to call it at our house,—we always called it 'Down to the Farm,'" remarked little Fanny.

"It ought to be Rose Villa," said Lucy. "Just see our rose-tree that reaches almost to the eaves. We measured it yesterday, and it's seven feet high."

"That will do for a tree," said Preston, plucking one of the pure, white roses and thrusting it into his button-hole; "but you can't eat roses, you know."

He had built a fire in the kitchen stove, but the young ladies seemed to have forgotten entirely [106] that there was such a thing in the world as breakfast.

"O, yes, we must prepare our simple morning meal," said cousin Lucy. "Girls, where's my blue-checked apron? Preston, we've heard there are lovely trout in that brook across the field. Not the *river*-brook."

"Have you, really? Then I go a-fishing; I'd rather do that than starve.—No, Fan, you needn't come, I won't have anybody with me but Flaxie."

Very proud was Mary that she could be trusted to keep silence in the presence of the wise and wary trout. It was beautiful there by the brook-side, in the still June morning, sitting and watching the "shadowy water, with a sweet south wind blowing over it." There was no house within half a mile, and perhaps the Peck family and the Brown family—the nearest neighbors—were still asleep, for there was no sound, except the "song-talk" of the birds, and the whisper of [107] the wind through the trees. It was a very light whisper, reminding Preston of the words,—

"And then there crept
A little noiseless noise among the leaves,
Born of the very sigh that silence heaves."

Mary's breath was a "noiseless noise," too; it hardly stirred the folds of her buff print dress; it was the very "sigh" of "silence," and Preston thought he should tell her so, and praise her when they got home; but it happened that he forgot it.

The trout came, as they usually did when he called for them; but it must be confessed that they were never eaten. Lucy put them in the spider, Sadie salted, Fanny turned, and finally Blanche Jones burned them. The "morning meal" was as "simple" as need be, with cold bread and butter, [108] cold tongue, and muddy, creamless coffee, the milk having turned sour. In the midst of their repast, the young campers were surprised by a loud peal of the door-bell.

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[109]

CHAPTER VII.
CAMP COMFORT.

"Buttons," said Lucy to her cousin Preston, "you'll have to go to the door."

"Yes," said Sadie, "as Buttons is the only servant we keep, he must answer the bell."

Preston obeyed, laughing. A droll little image of dirt and rags stood at the door, holding a ten-quart tin pail.

"Good morning," said Preston, surprised at the shrewd, unchildlike expression of her face, for she was perhaps twelve years old and looked forty. The little girl seemed equally surprised. "What's them things?" said she, pointing to Preston's spectacles. "What do you wear 'em for?" [110]

"Do you want anything, little girl?" asked he, frowning, or trying to frown.

"I say, what do you wear glasses for? *You* ain't an old man."

"No matter what I wear them for—" very sternly. "Do you want anything, child?"

"Yes, I came to ax you for some swifts."

"What do you mean by swifts?"

"Lor now, don't you know what swifts is? Swifts is something folks reels yarn on."

"Well, we haven't any in this house, little girl, and if that's all you came for, you'd better run home."

"Hain't got no swifts?" shuffling forward with her small, bare feet, and peeping into the house

through her straggling locks of hair. “Well, you’ve got a spin-wheel, hain’t ye?”

“No, we’ve nothing you want. You’d better go.” [111]

By that time Mary and Fanny were at the sitting-room door, curious to see the stranger.

“How d’ye do? Do you children live here all alone? Guess I’ll come in,” said the waif, brushing past Preston, who did not choose to keep her out by main force, and entering the sitting-room where the breakfast-table was spread. “I live over t’other side of Bluff. My name’s Pancake.”

“Oh, I know who you are then,” said Fanny, not very cordially; for she had heard her father speak of a poor, half-starved, vagrant family of that name; harmless, he believed, but not very desirable neighbors.

“My name’s *Pecy* Pancake,” added the waif obligingly, and bent her snub nose to sniff the burnt trout.

“*Peace*, probably,” said Preston, aside.

“No, *Pecielena*. Hain’t you got no lasses cake? Oh, what cunning little sassers;” handling the [112]
salt glasses. “Where’s the cups to ’em? How came you children to come here alone?”

“We came because we *chose*,” said Mary, with crushing emphasis.

“We *wished* to come,” said Fanny, trying to be as dignified as Mary, though she felt her inferiority in this respect always.

In no wise disconcerted, Miss Pecielena Pancake started on a tour of observation about the room.

“You look like you’d been burnt out or somethin’. Who does your work? Got any cow? Oh, you hain’t? Well, *I’ve* got a cow. This here is my milk bucket. I’ll fetch ye some milk.”

“No, no, no,” exclaimed Lucy, in alarm. “Our milk is to be brought from town.”

“Is, hey? Well, I’ll fetch you some sour milk; five cents a quart.” [113]

“Don’t take the trouble,” said Sadie mildly; “we are not fond of sour milk.”

After a long inspection of the room, Pecy gazed observantly out of the window.

“Look here! What’s them things hanging up in the trees? Look like fish-nets. I’ve seen folks in Rosewood swing in just such; be they swings?—Well, I reckon I must be a-goin’. But we paster our cow this side the river, and I’ll call agin when I come to milk.”

“Is it possible that creature is really gone?”

“Hope she stayed just as long as she wished to,” said Lucy, shutting the door forcibly.

“Oh, she’s only half civilized, and doesn’t know any better,” returned the more charitable Sadie.

“Young ladies,” said Preston, flourishing his arms preparatory to a speech, “it seems you have [114]
settled in a refined and cultivated neighborhood—*very!* I never knew before why you couldn’t stay at home; but I now see that Laurel Grove is unworthy of you. You pined for the advantages of elevated, intellectual society, such as can be found only at Old Bluff.”

“Buttons,” said Lucy, shaking the broom at him, “we permit no impertinence from servants. Go, pump a pail of water directly, and then you may wipe the dishes.”

Preston “struck an attitude” again.

“Honored ladies, there’s a limit to all things. Buttons will cook, he will answer door-bells, he will scrub, if need be; but wipe dishes he will not, *no*, not if you flay him alive! Farewell! Once again, farewell!”

“Don’t go, Preston,” entreated Mary, as her brother mounted his “steed,” the bicycle; “do stay [115]
to dinner.”

“Couldn’t; might starve.”

“Fie, Buttons,” cried the older girls, “you’re no gentleman!”

“A servant is not expected to be a gentleman.”

“But do dine with us, *Mr. Gray*.”

“Thank you, not to-day. Good-by, I’ll send Abbott to watch to-night.” Preston and his cousin Bert Abbott, being in college together, called each other by their surnames, to the no small amusement of Bert’s sister Lucy.

“He calls sleeping here ‘watching,’” laughed Sadie, as Preston glided away, bowing and waving his hand. “But here comes our grocer. Why, who is that with him?”

For as the wagon stopped at the gate, Mr. Fowler lifted a little girl over the wheels.

"Kittyleen! Kittyleen Garland! Dear me, where did you pick *her* up, Mr. Fowler?" [116]

For it was not to be supposed that Kittyleen came from home. She was an innocent little truant, whose mother never objected to her straying about the streets.

"Glad to see you, Kittyleen; you can go and play in the barn with Flaxie and Fanny," said Lucy hospitably; and then, turning to Sadie, "Now, what shall we order for dinner?"

Sadie looked helpless.

"What would *you* advise, Mr. Fowler? Our fathers said we might have *anything*, and they'd settle the bills; but I——"

"Lemons," struck in Lucy, ashamed of Sadie's weakness.

"A dozen, and some fresh butter. Lard,—perhaps ten pounds, for pies."

"Anything else," asked the grocer, deferentially, as he jotted these orders into a notebook. "I'll [117] bring them to-morrow—a real pretty situation here. What do you call it? Old Maid's Hall?"

"No, a convent," said Sadie quickly, "for we shall have to fast if you're not coming back with our groceries till to-morrow."

"Why, Miss Sadie, it's all of two miles, and it won't pay to come twice a day," said the grocer, wiping his heated brows.

"Well, we shall have to fast, then. This is a convent, as I told you, and we are nuns—*Capuchin* nuns—for you know Capuchin nuns are famous for fasting."

"So they be," laughed Mr. Fowler, though it was the first time in his life he had ever heard of a Capuchin nun; "so they be," and rode away laughing, to tell Dr. Gray and Major Patten, whom he met in the village, "that those children were having a high old time down there at the cottage, [118] and were bright as pins, every one of 'em."

"They forgot to order meat, but hadn't I better take down some Cape Cod turkey to keep off starvation?" He meant salt codfish.

"How do you suppose they'll make way with ten pounds of lard, though?"

"Never mind," replied Dr. Gray, throwing his head back to laugh; "they beg not to be interfered with, and we'll let them have their own way for a while."

Starvation was not likely to ensue for some days, as the young campers had been bountifully supplied by their mothers with bread, pies, cake, and cold meats.

"Oh, housekeeping is just play and takes no time at all," said Sadie Patten; "now let's get up some charades and rehearse for to-morrow night, and invite the three boys—Kittyleen must be amused, you know."

The charade which follows was their first attempt of the sort at Camp Comfort, the music [119] between the acts being supplied by Jack Townsend's cornet and Sadie Patten's harmonica.

A PANTOMIME.

The stage was out of doors. Two posts were driven into the ground, and between them hung the red table-cloth suspended from a fish-line. This was the drop-curtain.

The audience, in chairs, or on the ground, were directly in front of the stage. At a whistle from the invisible depths the drop-curtain was raised by Blanche Jones, revealing the manager, Preston Gray, who made a low bow, and said, "Ladies and gentlemen, it is with profound pleasure that I present to you the two stars of tragedy, Madame Graylocks, of the Tuscarora Opera [120] Company, and Don Albertus of the Cannibal Islands."

The two "stars" then step forward, to be greeted by the audience with deafening cheers. Miss Graylocks (alias Mary Gray), her face and hands well stained with walnut-juice, is clad in blue jacket, gray skirt and red-topped boots (Sadie Patten called them "galligaskins"), with a stove-pipe hat on her head. An ounce of black worsted floats down her shoulders for hair. She makes a deep courtesy, Don Albertus (Bert Abbott) a low bow.

He is an Indian chief, clad in a red and green dressing-gown, with a feather duster on his head for a war-plume. His face, like Madame Graylocks', is a fine mahogany color.

Their "unrivalled performance," announces the manager, "is to be a charade in two syllables."

[121]

FIRST SYLLABLE.

The stage is now observed to be strewn with sticks and twigs, to resemble the outskirts of a forest. No word is spoken; but as a tin pail hangs on a pole over something that looks like a fireplace, it would seem that the worthy couple are keeping house, and that the squaw is preparing dinner. But as yet there is no fire. The squaw collects branches and twigs, lays them crosswise under the tin pail. Her lord and master seats himself on the ground, watching her in scowling silence. The soup must boil; but how can she make a fire? She rubs two stones together

Indian-fashion, but cannot strike a spark. She tries with all her might, dancing up and down and shaking her head dolefully. The chief laughs at her, offering no help, till she points in despair to the tin pail, reminding him that at this rate they must starve. He rises then, pushes her aside, and [122] flashing his white teeth at her, seizes the two stones, rubs them just once together, and they instantly ignite (of course this is done by means of a match hidden in his sleeve.) The twigs are soon crackling under the pail. He points his finger disdainfully at the poor squaw, who cannot make a fire. She looks so brow-beaten and discouraged at this, so unlike the spirited Flaxie Frizzle of real life, that the audience laugh. Then the drop-curtain falls.

SECOND SYLLABLE.

The soup has boiled, the chief has dined, and now sits with hands folded, looking good-natured. The pail is empty and lying bottom upward on the grass. Enter his meek wife; takes the empty pail; returns with it full of water, slopping it as she walks. The thirsty chief points to his mouth. [123] She produces a large iron spoon, fills it and gives him to drink, afterwards helping herself. They sit and sip from the spoon alternately, when a "pale face" (Preston) enters, with a jug. The chief starts up with eager delight. Pale Face swings the jug slowly, to show that it is full. The chief, smiling and obsequious, advances to shake hands. The squaw looks alarmed; shakes her head at the jug, and insists on giving Pale Face some water. Pale Face declines it; takes stopper out of jug and presents it to chief's nose with an eloquent gesture, which means, "Now *isn't* that good?"

It is evidently whiskey, for the chief sniffs the stopper, laughs and dances, pointing to his mouth.

Squaw weeps; is evidently a good temperance woman; holds the pail to her husband's lips. He [124] pushes her away, and begs in dumb show for the whiskey.

Faithful squaw shakes her stovepipe hat, wrings her worsted hair, chases Pale Face around and around the stage, trying to make him give up the fatal jug. In vain; chief is allowed to get it; raises it joyfully to his lips.

Faithful squaw, becoming frantic, seizes the pail, and, overdoing her part, pours all the water over Pale Face, drenching him completely.

"Oo! Oo!" he gurgles. "If that isn't just like you, Flaxie Frizzle!"

Blanche hurries down the drop curtain. Scene closes.

"I thought there was no talking in a pantomime," laughed the audience.

[125]

THIRD SCENE.
The Whole Word.

It now appears that the whiskey which Pale Face mischievously brought has wrought its dreadful work. The proud war-plume of the chief dangles ignominiously over his left ear; his copper-colored cheeks and nose are blazing red (painted with Chinese vermilion). He tries to walk; reels like a ship in a storm.

His devoted wife has certainly tried her very best to save him from this degradation; but, like any bad husband, he only hates her for it, and has made up his drunken mind to kill her. Seizing her by the yarn of the head, he is actually scalping her with the lemon-squeezer, when little Kittyleen, who can bear no more, cries out,—

"Stop, stop, you shan't hurt my Flaxie!"

This timely interference does not save the squaw's life, however,—or not entirely. Her head [126] comes off,—or at any rate, the hat and the ounce of worsted. But ere she falls to rise no more, she turns—with remarkable presence of mind for a dying woman—and points to the whiskey-jug, scowling furiously at it, as if to assure the audience that it is the jug and *not* the lemon-squeezer that has caused her death.

Curtain falls.

Before any one had time to say, "Now guess the word," Jack Townsend, known by the campers as "the Electric Light," on account of his red head, exclaimed, "It's *Fire Water*, isn't it? That's the Indian name for whiskey. I guessed it by the waterfall in the second syllable."

"No wonder you did; there was water enough in that syllable to put out all the fire in the first [127] one!" exclaimed Preston, springing for his bicycle, to fly home and change his wet clothes.

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[128]

CHAPTER VIII.
PUDDING AND PIES.

"THERE'S that dreadful little Pancake ringing again. She comes every morning, Preston, and you must stop it," said cousin Lucy, waving away half a dozen flies from the sugar-bowl, with as much

vehemence as she could throw into her napkin.

"Troublesome flies," said Preston, without heeding his cousin's request. "They say a barn-swallow will eat a thousand a day; wish *we* had a barn-swallow."

Lucy went to the door a trifle crossly, bread-knife hard in hand, as if she meant to charge it at the foe.

"And *now* what do you want?" [129]

For it seemed as if the little gipsy must have exhausted all the errands that could possibly be thought of.

"Could I borry a piece o' stovepipe—'bout *so* long—I'll fetch it back to morry."

"A piece of stovepipe!"

Lucy would not have smiled on any account.

"Yes, mammy's sick, and our stovepipe's rusted off. I'll fetch it home to morry."

And before Lucy had time to prevent it, the little try-patience had rushed past her, and effected an entrance into the breakfast room. And, as if her own presence were not unwelcome enough, she was followed by a large, formidable-looking bee.

"Don't you be scared," said Pecielena, as the children all screamed. "I'll catch him and kill him."

"No, no," cried Mary. "I belong to the society for cruelty to animals. I can't let you kill him." [130]

But Pecy had already caught the bee and crushed him against the table-cloth with the broom-handle.

Sadie looked at Lucy, the "lady abbess," to see how long she meant to allow such behavior to go on; but Lucy had become discouraged, and was retreating to the kitchen.

"I must go and pick over the rice for dinner. I suppose *you* don't know, Sadie, whether three pounds will make pudding enough for six people?" said she, putting the rice in the only kettle the house afforded, and pouring over it two quarts of water. No, Sadie did not know.

The unbidden guest, forgetting that her cow had not been milked, stood looking on, as saucy as an English cuckoo in a hedge-sparrow's nest. It would not appear that she intended the least [131] harm; she was simply a little half-starved, wild creature, and the sight of the raisins gave her a hungry longing, which Lucy was unable to comprehend, or she would have admired the poor thing's self-denial in not teasing, and would have given her gladly a handful of the coveted sweets.

Camp Comfort, with its merry, careless child-tenants and abundance of food, seemed an earthly paradise to wretched little Pecy. She had never ventured so boldly into any other house, even the humble Browns and Pecks, as into this one, which had no responsible grown people in it; nobody really old enough to command her to leave.

"Is this here your dog, Lucy?" said she, caressing the pug. "His nose turns up some like yours. I never see such a queer dog."

"And I never saw such a queer girl," said Lucy, reddening. "Are you the protector of this [132] family, Preston Gray? General Townsend told mother he felt easy about us with you here; but if you haven't authority enough to keep tramps away, perhaps we'll have to call on Bert or Jack."

This sarcasm aroused Preston.

"Miss Pancake," said he solemnly, "do you see this gun?" taking it from the corner. "Perhaps you may not know that I am a soldier in the regular army; and when people do not behave well it is my business to shoot them."

Pecielena was a shrewd child, and only laughed.

"You wouldn't *dass* shoot me," said she confidently.

"Ah, you needn't be so sure of that. Wait and see. Now I'm going to ask you six questions; and [133] do you step toward the door every time you answer one. And if you are not out of the door by the time the last one is answered——"

The sentence was left unfinished, but there was an awful gleam of spectacles, a threatening wave of the gun, and Preston's appearance was most military and imposing.

"Do you know how to read, little girl?"

"No."

"Then step."

She slowly obeyed.

"Do you ever go to church?"

"No."

"Do your father and mother ever go to church?"

"No,"—moving forward now of her own accord, with some haste toward the door.

"O you're gone, are you? Well, little girl, you needn't call again. Do you hear?" [134]

"There, that's splendid," said Sadie admiringly. "To think what a little heathen she is! Do you suppose it's safe to live near such people?"

"We shan't have any more trouble from *her*, I'm thinking," returned the "protector of the family," feeling that he had vindicated his character.

But little Mary was not quite satisfied. This behavior was hardly in accordance with the daily precepts and examples of her parents, who had taught her that she ought to pity and try to help the poor, ignorant, and unfortunate.

She pondered on the subject at intervals all the morning, as she sat in the hammock, amusing her devoted little friend, Kittyleen. Pecy looked as if she never had a good time in her life. Was it fair to drive her away? Could she herself do anything for the child? If so, what, and how? [135]

BUTTONS PREPARING TO "COOK A PIE."—PAGE 138.

Fanny and Blanche were off in the meadow making daisy-wreaths as a pretty surprise for to-night's ice-cream party. In the house Sadie arranged pond lilies in a cracked bowl, repeating to Preston the stanza,—

"From the reek of the pond, the lily
Has risen in raiment white,
A spirit of air and water,
A form of incarnate light."

"Sadie is too hifalutin' for anything," thought Lucy, who had the rice pudding on her hands. Ah, that pudding!

Lucy had forgotten, or did not know, that rice has a habit of swelling. Before long it had risen to the top of the kettle and was overflowing it, like an eruption of lava down the sides of a volcano.

"Oh, look, look," cried Sadie, "it's like the genius in the Arabian Nights, that flew out when the bottle was opened, and grew to a great steam giant!" [136]

"Can't stop to talk fairy stories. Get the spider!" cried Lucy.

She filled the spider from the bubbling, dripping kettle.

"The pudding dish! Big platter!"

The white-hot spirit of the mischievous rice was just beginning his frolic.

"The pitcher!"

The steam giant was still rising, growing, dancing ever upward.

"Sugar bowl! Pour out the sugar on the table! All the plates.—O, dear, all the cups and saucers!"

"Don't you want the teaspoons? Here, let's stop this nonsense," said Preston. And coming to the rescue, he swung off the kettle and poured the bewitched contents upon the grass at the back door. [137]

"Oh, you extravagant creature! You've wasted three pounds of rice and half a pound of raisins, and killed the grass!"

Preston gazed in inward consternation at the ruinous white flood; but he was not going to confess his sins to cousin Lucy.

"That's the proper way to serve rice pudding," said he. "Always serve hot, and make it go as far as you can. Now let the children pick out the plums."

“But our pudding’s gone.”

“I’ll cook a pie,” replied he, with alacrity. “I cooked ’em last summer at the lakes fit to set before a king.”

Laughing was the very mainspring of life at Camp Comfort; but the girls had never laughed yet as they did now, to see Buttons in full swing preparing to “cook a pie.” Lucy kindly summoned [138] every member of the family to witness the performance. The taking-off of his coat, the pinning-up of his sleeves, the tying-on of an apron, the swathing of the head in a towel, the cleansing of hands with sand-soap and nail-brush; and Buttons was ready for action.

“Now,” said he, drawing a long breath and looking authoritatively through his spectacles. “Now, bring on the flour and things, and butter some plates.—Lard, butter, knife, spoon.—Where’s your milk? No, water won’t do. I prefer milk. Bring me half a cup.—Where’s your salt?”

He carefully measured out a half-cup of equal parts of butter and lard, and rubbed it into a pint of flour.

“Now, cream tartar and soda.”

The girls brought them with a growing feeling of respect. He stirred two teaspoonfuls of cream [139] tartar into the flour, dissolved half as much soda in the milk, mixed all together rapidly, and rolled the mass on the board.

“I hope ’twill be better than the pie we had yesterday, that was baked in the spider,” said Mary, not heeding Lucy’s frown.

“How tough that was,” said Blanche. “What did Lucy put in to make it so tough?”

“She didn’t put in much of anything,” replied Fanny. “Jack said you could have cut it with a pair of scissors, ’twas so thin.”

“Hush, children, the rest of us couldn’t have done as well,” said Sadie, leaning over the table, watching Preston’s efforts. “What shall you fill it with?”

The question startled him: he had not thought of the inside of the pie.

“Oh, almost anything,” said he, carefully trimming the edges of the lower crust.

“Are there any lemons?”

“No, Jack used a dozen yesterday for one pitcher of lemonade,” said Lucy. [140]

“But we have some very green apples if the children haven’t eaten them all.”

“Fly round then and slice ’em.”

“How impertinent!” cried the whole family. “Take notice, *this* is the way Buttons makes pies.”

But they “flew round,” all five of them, and picked some very green currants off the bushes in the back yard with merry good will.

“Now, behold me fill my pies,” said Preston, slowly sifting a cup of sugar over the bottom crust before he put in the currants.

“May I behold, too?” asked the grocer, who stood at the side door. He had heard the laughing half a mile away.

“Yes, sir, this is my cooking school.”

“Well, go on with your lecture. You make a real pretty picture standing there with that rig on.” [141]

“Ladies and gentlemen, I was about to remark, it’s truly lamentable, the ignorance of girls and women! They put the currants in first and *then* the sugar, and the juice spills out all over the oven.—See, here is the oven ready. What have you been thinking of, girls, to let that fire go out?”

“You see how he acts, Mr. Fowler,” said Sadie, as Lucy put wood in the stove.

“But, as I was saying—sugar first, *then* currants, and the juice stays in. Bring some water to pour in, Flaxie.”

“Can’t I hire you to come and show my women folks how to cook?” said the grocer, laughing at the notion of placing sugar below currants.

But there was reason in the “notion,” as the event proved, for the juice did “stay in,” and the [142] pie would have done Preston great credit, if it had not been trifled with in the oven, like all the Camp Comfort baking. But it was far superior to Lucy’s spider-pie, and a vote was taken on the spot for a change of cooks.

Preston was jubilant, for was not this his second victory for the day?

The weather was sultry, and after dinner everybody would gladly have reclined in the hammocks under the shade, if Lucy had not suddenly remembered that ice-cream always suggests cake. Lemon-cake was made and burned; but the ice-cream party did not come off on account of a heavy shower which rose about six o’clock.

In the midst of it arrived the incorrigible Pecielena Pancake with a new errand. Preston was chagrined. Had he inspired her with no real awe after all?

"Have you got an ambril?" [143]

An umbrella was useless now, for she was thoroughly soaked and dripping with rain.

"I want to take it to the paster," said she, "so's to keep the *milk* dry!"

"Go a-*way!*" exclaimed the campers in concert; and at a signal from Preston they all clapped hands, and pursued the astonished little vagrant to the door. Everybody but Mary. Somehow, as she looked at the poor, wild creature, with the bright, restless, unhappy eyes, a feeling of pity moved her.

"Be ye kindly affectioned one toward another." Did that mean tramps, too? She had been thinking of it all day. She was not sure. Of course, nobody wanted gipsy children coming around to bother, especially after they had been forbidden the house; and Preston was a very, very good boy, every body said so, and not likely to do anything cruel. Still, it could not be denied that Pecy [144] Pancake was a human being, and that it was raining. On the whole, Mary thought she had done well not to help "clap her out."

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[145]

CHAPTER IX.
THE HAILSTORM.

WHAT an evening that was! It had only rained when Pecy came, but soon the rain turned to hail, which the wind drove rattling against the windows. It was a wild storm, and they had sent the poor child forth, perhaps to perish in it, simply because she was disagreeable and wanted to borry "an ambril to keep the milk dry." Probably she had never held an "ambril" in her life, and could not resist the temptation to ask for one when the opportunity offered.

Preston went to the door and called to her, but she had run like a deer, and was already out of sight and hearing.

"It *is* too bad," said Lucy, "just look at those hailstones as big as robins' eggs! Did that child [146] have anything on her head?"

"Yes," replied Mary, pacing the floor excitedly, "an old sunbonnet. But the hailstones will strike right through it. Don't hailstones ever kill people?"

"Oh, don't worry! It didn't hail when we sent her out, or we wouldn't have done it, of course. But she's as tough as a pine-knot; 'twould take more than hailstones to kill *her*," said Preston; and then he whistled to keep his courage up.

"Girls, if there's an 'ambril,' let's have it. I'm going to the 'paster,' wherever it is, to find her."

And go he would and did, in spite of all remonstrances. He was gone a long while, and when he returned, the sky was clear again.

"Yes, I found her. *She's* all right. She had a quantity of ice-cream in her 'milk-bucket' to take [147] home."

"Did she row across the river?"

"Yes, and I stood and watched her safe over. I tell you she's smarter than chain-lightning."

He did not relate that he had found her crying bitterly, and that she had evidently suffered not only from fright but from wounded feeling. She had uttered no word of complaint, but her silent tears had given him a feeling of remorse he would never forget. He rose early next morning to caulk the old boat which lay useless in the barn. "Abbott" had promised to do it, but "Abbott" and the "Electric Light" were both inclined to forgetfulness, and all the hard tasks were sure to fall, sooner or later, on "the old man of the family."

"I believe the concern is seaworthy now, and suppose we row across the river," said he, when [148] breakfast was despatched.

There were six little cries of ecstasy. It was "Dishes, take care of yourselves if you can;" and, as for food, the flies seemed disposed to take care of that.

It was a lovely morning, the atmosphere being particularly bright and clear after last night's storm. Gorgeous red and gold butterflies hovered in the air, a robin in the front yard hopped along five steps, then stopped to look at the campers, and the eastern morning sun threw his shadow before him exactly his own size.

"It's a perfect state of bliss to go rowing this morning," exclaimed Mary, as they entered the boat.

"'Twas all we needed to make us perfectly happy," remarked Sadie Patten, longing to repeat [149] some poetry, but restrained by fear of Lucy.

The river Dee, though remarkably deep, was narrow and soon crossed.

“Let’s call on our Pancake friends before we go any farther. What say?” said Preston, helping the girls out of the boat.

It was just what he had come for; he wished to set his conscience at rest about Pecy; and the girls had understood and sympathized all the while, without a word being said.

“Yes, let’s call,” said they.

The Pancakes lived in a small red cottage. Somebody says, “A red house blushes for the man who painted it;” but this house had more to blush for than that,—dirt and disorder without and within. It was badly weather-stained, and the windows were half glass, half rags. Outside there were two old tubs, a rake with stumpy teeth, and a mop lying across some battered tin pans. The [150] children around the door were as shaggy-headed as their playmate, a lame old dog; and indeed the only graceful object about the premises was the soft blue smoke, which was happy enough to escape from the miserable house through the low chimney.

Here dwelt the family of Pancakes. The father had once been a decent, though “queer” man, living in Kentucky; but his wife died, and her death seemed to turn his brain and make him “queerer” than ever. He married again, a miserable woman, belonging to the sort of people in the South called “Crackers;” and from that time he did not seem to care what became of him. After many wanderings he had settled at last at Old Bluff, declaring he would not move again. His wife could not read, and he had given up books himself, and had no wish to send his children to school [151] or church. Pecy, the eldest, was his first wife’s daughter, and by far the brightest of them all; but the stepmother made her a perfect drudge, and the browbeaten child had scarcely a moment to herself, except in going to and from the “paster.” Her loiterings at Camp Comfort had already caused her several beatings. The family lived chiefly by hunting and fishing, had nothing to do with their neighbors, and of course sank lower and lower, and grew poorer and poorer, though to their credit it must be said that they had never yet been known to steal.

Half a dozen children stood staring at Preston as he knocked at the cottage door. It was opened after some time by Mrs. Pancake, who wore a blue and yellow calico gown, falling in straight lines to her ankles; and though her feet were bare, her head was covered by a monstrous [152] pink sun-bonnet, shaped like a flour-scoop. She had a cup in her hand, and was stirring the contents with a yellow spoon.

“Good morning,” said Preston for his whole party, who were grouped about him in silence.

The woman did not return the greeting, and they all felt that their presence was not welcome.

“We came to inquire for your little girl. We hope she did not take cold last night in the rain; did she?”

“Wal, yes, she done took a fever cold,” replied the woman crossly, pointing to a bunch of straw on the floor, whereon lay a child smelling at a rag rolled in tar. It was Pecy, and she immediately covered her face.

“Can we do anything for her?” asked Lucy; and Lucy’s manner was very sweet when she chose. [153] Pecy had never happened to hear her voice sound like this; and something—perhaps it was surprise—caused her to shake with convulsive sobs.

“I dun know,” replied the woman, stirring vigorously with the spoon. “I’m mixing mandrake and ’lasses. I *’lowed* she’d get wet goin’ to the pastur’ in the rain; but she won’t mind *me*, sevin’ (excepting) I licks her.”

“What a home, and what a mother!” thought the campers.

“Would you like to have us bring her some lemons and sugar?” asked Preston.

There was a quick stirring of the bundle of rags on the floor, and Pecy’s rough head and flushed face appeared for a moment above the surface.

“We are all sorry you are sick, Pecy,” continued Preston; “we didn’t know those hailstones [154] were coming, or we would have kept you at our house.” This was as near a confession as he chose to make; and, closing the subject, “Now we’ll go back and get the lemons and sugar. Good-by, Pecy.”

“Did you ever in all your life!” exclaimed Sadie, when they were safely in the boat again. Words seemed utterly powerless to express the astonishment, pity, and disgust of the whole party. “I’m so glad you thought of the lemons, Preston,” said Lucy.

For there was an unspoken feeling with her and all the rest, of responsibility for the little creature they had thoughtlessly ill-treated. Was there anything more they could do for her? They “wondered she didn’t die and done with it in such a home. Perhaps her mother would kill her with her doses.” Yes; but who had driven her out without mercy into the storm? If she *should* die, [155] would Camp Comfort be free from blame?

They hastened back with ten lemons,—all they had of yesterday’s purchase,—and their entire stock of sugar and flour. Not a word of thanks did they receive or expect; but the look of joy on Pecy’s dusky face was reward enough.

“Oh, *she’s* all right,” said Preston. “A little sore throat, that’s all. And tar won’t hurt her, or mandrake either.—There, now, spread your parasols, for the sun’s coming out. Shall we row up

stream or down?”

The next Saturday evening Mary Gray was sitting at her mother’s feet, looking wistfully in her face. She had come home to stay over Sunday, and had just been repeating in a sweet, clear voice, and with unusual feeling, the “verse” she was to speak at Sabbath School concert:— [156]

“God wants the happy-hearted girls,
The loving girls, the best of girls,
The worst of girls!
He wants to make the girls his pearls,
And so reflect his holy face,
And bring to mind his wondrous grace,
That beautiful the world may be,
And filled with love and purity.
God wants the girls.”

“I think that is just lovely, mamma. Only it doesn’t seem somehow as if He could, you know! Not *the worst of girls!*” Then interrupting herself,—“Mamma, are there any heathen in America?”

“Yes, my daughter, I fear there are. But why do you ask? You can never have seen any?”

“Yes, mamma, I have seen them. They live at Old Bluff. Their name is Pancake. They don’t [157] belong anywhere, and they haven’t been there long. Preston says Queen Victoria ought to take care of them, but I suppose she hasn’t heard of them yet, and they are growing up heathen. Why, mamma, they can’t read, and don’t go to church; they fish Sundays, and dig worms and shoot ducks.”

And Mary went on with a graphic story of Pecy, one of “the worst of girls,” and the bother they had had with her at Camp Comfort. When it came to the adventure in the hailstorm, Mrs. Gray looked pained.

“I knew you wouldn’t like it, mamma, when they clapped her out. She got sick, too, and we all went to see her, and carried lemons and sugar, and she was well in a day or two. But, oh, such a house, and such a mother! Preston says she thinks the earth stands still, and the sun moves round it! Her husband knows more; but what I was going to ask you is,—Well, you remember [158] those Chinese babies——”

Mary found it difficult to proceed.

“Yes, dear, I remember.”

“You said I wanted to please Mrs. Lee, and make her and the girls think I was generous. That was true; I know I did, and it has made me ashamed ever since,” said Mary, a pink blush creeping over her forehead.

Her mother saw it, and wondered if anything in all this naughty world is more innocent than a child’s blush? She was sure there is nothing half so fair.

“Well, dear, go on.”

“So I was thinking——Are these Pancake heathen almost as bad as the Chinese, mamma?”

“Yes, quite as bad, I should say.”

“Well, then, couldn’t I give them all my July pin-money, and not let anybody know it? That [159] would make up for the Chinese babies; and I know I should feel better.”

“Are you in sober earnest, Mary?”

“Yes, mamma, I’ve thought and thought about it. I’m in real earnest this time, and I don’t want to be ‘*seen of men*.’ Do you understand, mamma?”

“Yes, dear, I understand. But you wanted new gloves and new music.”

“I know it, but I don’t care. I can wait. I’ve thought it all over, and I shan’t be sorry this time. Are you willing?”

“Perfectly willing.”

Mrs. Gray considered a moment. “I will consult with Mr. Lee or Miss Pike about this family. They are both very wise in such matters; and if they approve you *shall* give something to the little girl. And I promise you, Mary, nobody shall know who gives it.”

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[160]

CHAPTER X.

MISS PIKE’S STORY.

“Papa, we are starving. Do send us a watermelon!” wrote Mary one day, and sent home the note by little Kittyleen, whose visit was at last over.

Dr. Gray laughed again and again at this pathetic appeal, and chancing to see Mrs. Townsend picking strawberries in her garden, he paused as he went by to tell her how the children were suffering.

"They had plenty day before yesterday," said she, laughing in her turn. "O doctor, have you ever been out to their camp? They are the most disorderly, wasteful creatures: and just think of [161] the grocer's bills they are running up."

"It's an extravagant piece of business," assented the doctor; "but they are having a delightful time, something to remember all their lives. It won't last more than two or three weeks at farthest, and I for one shan't mind the bills if the little souls don't starve and are happy."

"You are just like the general," returned Mrs. Townsend, with a disapproving smile; and then went into the house to make with her own hands a strawberry short-cake for Miss Pike and Julia Gray to take to Camp Comfort in the sunshade carriage with the other goodies.

It was quite the fashion for the parents, aunts, cousins, and other friends to make little donation visits to the quintette, who always hailed both visitors and viands with joy. But to-day [162] the "favorite friend," Miss Pike, sister Julia, and the watermelon, coming all together, were almost too much for Mary.

Miss Pike was the most entertaining of guests, and had brought a story with her, written expressly for the Quintette Club—so she informed them as they all gathered about her in a delighted group after dinner.

"Oh let's have it now, this moment. Oh, Miss Pike, you are a darling."

"Well, you may bring my hand-bag, Mary. And will Julia read aloud while I sew? For I'm rather hurried, you see."

She had already been over to Old Bluff, measured Pecy Pancake with her eye, and found she was about Fanny's size; and now the dear soul began to baste a calico frock for the machine, while Julia read.

[163]

A Family Mystery, *Revealed by a Chimney.*

Here I am, at my last gasp. I've stood it thirty-five years without flinching, but now my time is come. Pleasant sky, you and I must part. Bright sun, good by. Remember I am but a "humble instrument," and forgive me for smoking in your face. Look, iron-hearted men,—see how a hero dies! For I'm dying in a good cause, and it's not I that will cry "Quarter."

Well, what would you do? Here I am alone,—shovel, tongs, cooking-stove, all gone, that made life desirable! Yesterday, sir, you climbed atop of the house, tore off the tin roof, and rolled it up into parcels like so much jelly-cake. I looked on and saw you, but the bitterness was past. The time I could have wept was the day my family had notice to leave. Now they are gone, and what [164] care I what happens? I saw you pull down the walls, till the air was so thick with plaster you could almost cut it with a knife. I saw you rip up the chamber-floor as if it had been a rag carpet. I saw you pull away the door-steps, where *she* used to stand, looking up and down the street.

I saw women and children coming to carry away shingles and clapboards for kindlings. Little by little, crash by crash, down went the house, till there was nothing left standing but the other chimney and me—and this morning *he* was taken. Now I'm sole survivor. I'm red as far down as the chamber fireplace; the rest of the way I'm white. Some of you laughed, seeing me standing up alone, with a white body and red head, and said I looked "like a monument smiling at grief."

Well, yes, and my grief began to come (or rather I began to come to grief) last winter, when I [165] first heard my family say the "city fathers" were going to "improve the street." As we were a frame house, one story with basement kitchen, I feared, and my family feared, our room would be considered better than our company.

"And if they do pull the house down, where shall *we* go?" asked poor Mr. Dean, as they all sat about the sitting-room fireplace. He was always asking his wife "what they should do," and she a sick woman, coughing there in her chair! But Mr. Dean has been a broken-down man ever since that affair of Dick's, which I am about to relate.

There are three Dean children, John, Dick, and Nell. *She*—I mean Nell—has a voice like a harp, and I've heard it remarked that her hair is a trap to catch a sunbeam. Bless her, I always did my [166] best to draw when *she* laid the coal on the grate! Her father never could understand why she had so much better luck than he had in making a fire!

John, the oldest, is married, and living in Boston. He has always paid his father's rent, and the Deans have lived here ever since Dick was born. I *think* they had a life-lease. They could afford to laugh at their neighbors on moving day. Who'll laugh now? I'm getting wheezy—thank you, little boy—put on more shingles, it warms my heart.

Where was I? O, speaking of the trouble. It is the family mystery, twelve months old; and the odd part of it is, that I know more about it than anyone else in the family.

A year ago, when Dick was attending the academy, he came home one night with a diamond

ring on his forefinger.

"How splendid! Whose is it?" said Nell, who was making buttered toast for supper. [167]

"That's telling," says Dick. "What if it's my own?"

"Then it's paste."

"Paste, ma'am? It's a *solitaire*, worth seven hundred dollars."

Nell let the toast burn. She put the ring on her finger and turned it round and round. Knowing it was worth seven hundred dollars, and its owner wouldn't take a thousand, she saw at once it was an elegant affair. After Dick had teased her a while, he told her it belonged to James Van Duster, the wealthiest boy in school.

"And he doesn't know I've got it. I slipped it off his finger while I was helping him out with his Greek. Won't it be a good joke to see his long face to-morrow morning?"

"O Dick, how dared you?" said Nell.

And then I smelt the toast burning again, and heard her scraping it with a knife. [168]

"The ring is too large for you, Dick. Let me take it for safe keeping."

"You, Miss Nell! Why, you'd serve it up in the toast-dip, just as you did the saltspoon last week."

"But think, Dick, if anything should happen to such a splendid jewel!"

"There isn't anything going to happen! Don't fret! If I was in the habit of losing things now ——"

Dick checked himself, and I suspect he blushed. Nell, with all her kindness of heart, couldn't help laughing, for Dick was as harum-scarum as a hurricane.

I felt low-spirited from that moment, and knew I shouldn't breathe freely till the precious ring was fairly out of the house.

In the evening Dick came down into the basement kitchen again to crack some butternuts. He [169] knelt by the brick hearth and began to pound. I could have told him better than that. There was a crack in a corner of the fireplace, and all of a sudden off slipped that ring and rolled into it. *Of course!*

You could have knocked me over with a feather. But, as true as I stand here, that boy went whistling upstairs, and never missed the ring till Nell asked what he had done with it.

You may depend there were a few remarks made then. Dick rushed upstairs and down, and the whole family went to hunting. Next morning a carpenter was sent for to take up the boards under the dining-room table. There was a hole in the carpet there, and Dick was almost sure he must have dropped the ring when he stooped to pick up his knife.

How I longed to be heard! I talked then as plainly as I do now, but they thought it was the wind [170] "sighing down chimney."

Nell suggested that the ring might be around the fireplace.

"You're warm, my dear," whispered I, as they say in games when you come near a right guess.

But, alas, they didn't look deep enough; there was a crack in the mortar under the bricks, and there lies that ring now, at the north-east corner, eight inches from the surface; there it lies to this day!

Well, what's a diamond ring? Nothing but the dust of the earth; no better than Lehigh coal anyway. But James Van Duster didn't think so. And the worst is to tell. He wasn't quite so absent-minded as our Dick took him to be; *he* knew when the ring was drawn off his finger as well as either you or I would have known. And being a high-spirited young fellow, with a narrow mind, [171] and envious of our Dick besides, what should he do that morning but send an officer after Dick. You could have heard Mr. Dean groan across the street. The officer was very polite, and listened respectfully to all the family had to say; but I've no means of knowing whether he believed it or not. All I can state with certainty is that old Mr. Van Duster interfered, and said if Dick could pay James the price of the ring, the matter should be hushed up, and he needn't go to jail.

Seven hundred dollars! Why, old Mr. Dean just earned his salt by tending an oven at a bakery! There was nothing in the house of any value but Mrs. Dean's piano, and that wouldn't bring more than three hundred dollars. Of course it went, though—poor Nelly, how that took the life out of [172] her!—and John made up the rest of the money in the shape of a loan. I did think John was hard-faced, wife or no wife. He might have *given* Dick the money for their mother's sake. It was too bad for such a young fellow as Dick to be saddled with a debt.

After this he couldn't afford his time to go to school; so he got a clerkship. He tried to hold up his head with the best of them till he began to see his mates turning the cold shoulder. The Van Dusters hadn't kept their word. You see, the story had been whispered around that Dick stole a solitaire and sold it to a Jew who had run off with it, and *that* was why James Van Duster was

obliged to stoop to wear a cluster diamond. This was more than Dick could bear. He ran away, and went to work on a farm in New Jersey. He kept writing home that his mother's letters were [173] his greatest comfort. She had perfect faith that the mystery would be cleared up some time, but I think hope deferred was the cause of her illness.

The old gentleman gave up at once, and everything fell upon Nell. She found some employment, embroidering and copying and the like of that, and had most of the housework to do besides. I never knew such a girl. All the amusement she seemed to have was going to the door, standing on the steps, and looking up and down the street.

(More shingles, boys, I'm about out of breath.)

Ah, well, we've been a suffering family; but we have our blessings after all; not the least of which is Nell. We have had some cosy times this winter, too, popping corn over the open fire; but it's all past now. The family went to Thirty-fifth Street yesterday. I don't know how I could have [174] borne it, but I'm sustained by this reflection; I am dying; dying, too, for the good of the family.

Yes, when *I* fall the ring will be revealed! To whom? Aye, there's the rub! Not to you noisy, rollicking boys, I hope and trust! I keep looking out for Nell. I heard her tell her mother day before yesterday "she should watch that kitchen chimney when it went."

Bravo! There she stands! That's Nell! That modest girl in the blue dress, with the bird on her hat. Bravo, Nell! I'm reeling, dear. I've got my death-blow, I've only been waiting for you!

Hammer away, ye iron-hearted men! Make an end of me now. I'm dying in a good cause, sirs, in a good cause, *yes!*

Farewell, sweet Nell, *North-East corner; eight inches down!* Farewell, N-e-l-l! [175]

Allow me to add that our friend, the late Chimney, did not die with a lie in his mouth. There *was* a ring. Nell found it.

Imagine the delight of the Dean family! The newspapers made it appear that the Honorable Van Duster was very magnanimous, for he gave Dick the price of the ring—seven hundred dollars. Why not, indeed? Hadn't Mr. Van Duster received payment in full? But he also gave back the boy's good name, which was worth a thousand diamond rings.

"But he can't make up to my Dick for the two dreadful years he has borne. That suffering can *never* be made up," said old Mr. Dean, shaking the ashes out of his pipe.

I can't agree with him. Hasn't the suffering been made up to Dick in patience and [176] thoughtfulness and charity for others? If you knew him you would think so, I know. It was a hard experience; but Dick is wondrously improved. He is the staff of the family now, and his loving mother says:—

"The sorrows of his youthful days
Have made him wise for coming years."

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[177]

CHAPTER XI.
DINING OUT.

Miss Pike had "a kind of a *way* with her," as Mary expressed it, which was charming alike to old and young and rich and poor. In the three days she spent at Camp Comfort she won the hearts of the Pecks, who lived half a mile at the left; also the hearts of the Browns, who lived half a mile at the right. And across the river, in that benighted red cottage, her presence was felt like a full beam of sunshine.

She was interested at once in poor, wretched, overworked little Pecielena, who, she saw, was far superior to her vagabond brothers and sisters. She told the Quintette she would like to [178] become better acquainted with the child, and suggested asking her over to the camp to dinner. Pecielena had never even knocked at their door since the night of the hailstorm; but Mary espied her at a distance with her milk-pail, and ran up to her, saying, with beaming good will,—

"Pecy, we'll let you come to our house to dinner to-morrow if you want to!"

Some people might not have considered this a very cordial invitation, but Pecy was more than satisfied with it, and, as her mother had been won by Miss Pike, there was no objection made to her going.

"What, eat dinner at *that* house! Would the girls let her sit down with them at the table?" she wondered, feeling as if a star had dropped at her feet.

Meanwhile Dr. and Mrs. Gray had arrived, their carriage fairly loaded with eatables, a huge [179] plum pudding riding between them, to make room for which little Ethel had to be perched at their feet on a cricket. It was Dr. Gray's first vacation, and he would have preferred a day at the seaside; but when he heard that the Quintette would "break camp" in another week, he decided

to visit Old Bluff and make Mary happy.

"How good you are, papa, and how I love you!" said she, springing into his arms, while the girls rolled the dainties out of the carriage like peas out of a pod.

"Oh, mamma!" said she, when she had her mother to herself at last in her own hammock, "we are going to have that heathen I told you of to dinner. And I haven't said one word to Miss Pike about my giving her my pin-money, not one word. There are three poor families,—Jack calls them a 'peck of brown pancakes;' he means the Pecks, and Browns, and Pancakes, you know. And the [180] girls want to do something for all of them, and I suppose they think I'm cold-hearted and stingy."

"Well, you don't like them to think that, do you?"

"Yes, I do, mamma; it's no more than fair," said Mary stoutly.

Mrs. Gray had never in her life felt so well pleased with her young daughter as at this moment. It was very clear now that Mary had been honestly disgusted with her own conduct, and had chosen this way to punish herself for her false charity and love of display.

"And I'll not spoil it all by praising her," thought the discreet mother.

When she went into the house with Mary the girls began to talk about Pecielena. They were [181] rather "in fancy" with her since Miss Pike had taken her up.

"You don't know how she has improved, auntie, since we came here," said Lucy. "She used to be saucy; but somehow she's afraid of us now, and we never see her unless we meet her, or go where she is."

"And she doesn't look the same in the new calico dress, does she, Miss Pike?" said Sadie. "She isn't handsome, but she has soft, graceful ways like a kitten, and like a swan, and like a gazelle; and you ought to see her row a boat! If mother's willing, I'm going to give her my dark green ladies-cloth dress to make over."

"I'm going to show her how to bang her hair," said Fanny. "And I have a Kate Greenaway dress she may have."

This, with a side-glance at Mary. "I'd as lief let her have my handbag as not," remarked Blanche Jones.

"Shan't *you* do anything, Flaxie? You have so much money of your own." [182]

Mrs. Gray could scarcely restrain an amused smile as Mary replied in a low voice,

"Perhaps I'll do something—I'll see"—and then had to steal out of the room for fear she might add,—

"Yes, indeed I'm going to do more than all the rest of you put together. And if mamma's willing, I shall teach Pecy her letters too!"

The young lady under discussion was now seen approaching the house.

"Why, this can't be the little savage you've said so much about," exclaimed Mrs. Gray, looking out of the rainbow-window. "But what a thin, old looking face!"

Pecy was in holiday attire. Miss Pike's calico dress fitted her well, and it seems she did possess a pair of whole shoes, and had borrowed her mother's pink sun-bonnet. To say she was modest [183] and well-behaved would be incorrect; but Mrs. Gray did not find her as bold and impudent as had been at first represented.

Though twelve years old, she had never dined at a really civilized table; so now, when she found herself seated before an array of brown linen tablecloth, clean dishes, and tolerably bright silver, she was obviously quite bewildered. In her eyes, Dr. Gray was a wonderful man, while his wife and daughters were no less than queen and princesses. As for Miss Pike, she would probably have classed her among angels, if she had ever heard of such beings, which is hardly likely.

She could not manage a fork, and in attempting it, often dropped her food upon the tablecloth. But it was worst of all when the pie was served. Lucy, annoyed by her shocking manners, [184] refrained from looking at her, as she said with cool politeness,—

"Pecielena, will you have a piece of pie?"

Now Miss Pancake, painfully aware of her awkwardness, was resolved for once to show her quickness and dexterity. Never stopping to see that Lucy was about to put the pie into a little plate, she held out her *hand* for a piece! You can hardly believe it, but that was the fashion at home. She *always* held out her hand when she wanted a piece of pie, and her mother flung it into her outstretched palm. How should she know that this was not the custom that prevailed in polite society? But when Lucy passed her a little plate with freezing dignity, she understood her mistake in a moment. She saw, too, that Mary and Fanny were exchanging glances of surprise and amusement. They would have laughed aloud if they had dared.

All this was too much for poor little Pecy, who had tried to behave so well. She sprang up [185] suddenly, overturned her chair, and, never stopping for her pink sun-bonnet, ran for dear life out of the house. She did not cease running till she reached the bank; and then she sat down upon

some stones and cried. It was an immense relief to get away from such overstrained gentility. Pie in little plates indeed! As if her own hand were not clean enough to hold a piece of pie!

She looked up at dear Old Bluff, and thought what a grand thing it is to be a mountain and not be expected to know anything about the fashions. She was sure she should never wish to see anything more of polite society.

But here was the strangest part of it; she had a secret longing for this very thing! She had already begun to wash her face every day, and, as far as possible, to comb her tangled hair. She [186] was ashamed of her uncouth language, which she now perceived was quite unlike that of the young people at Camp Comfort. Oh, if she could talk like them! If she could read, as they did, out of books! Above all, if she only knew how to "behave!" There was a skill in carrying a fork to one's mouth with food on it, that passed her comprehension. How could people do it? It seemed vastly harder to her than walking a tight-rope, which she had seen done at a circus!

Oh dear, to think they had invited her to a grand dinner, and she couldn't "behave," and they had laughed at her! There was something *in* this little girl, or she would not have been capable of so much shame. She had naturally a shrewd, bright mind, which, of course, had been running to waste. She had seen cities and villages whizzing by her from car-windows in travelling, but her [187] little life had all been spent in backwoods places, and Camp Comfort was really almost her first near view of civilized life. Now she was waking to a new world. If she could only get to it, if she could only live in it! She had as many eyes, ears, and fingers as anybody else: Why couldn't she be a nice, proper, polite little girl,—say, for instance, like that pretty Flaxie Frizzle, who had treated her so kindly and offered to take her with her to church?

Flaxie's mother was so nice! Perhaps she had cows, and needed a little girl to milk them? But, oh dear, she wouldn't hire anybody that couldn't "behave!"

After this, Pecielena hovered about Camp Comfort longingly, but would have got no farther than the door-stone, if Flaxie had not come out and urged her to enter.

"Oh yes, come in, Pecy, come in, and have some raisins." [188]

It had been a bright day for Pecy when the Quintette came to Camp Comfort, a brighter day than she knew. Miss Pike had a "plan" for her. She meant to win the child away from her "queer" father and all her miserable surroundings, and have her reared carefully in a good Christian family. But Miss Pike did not speak of this at present. She never talked much about her plans till they were well matured.

Pecielena nearly cried her eyes out on the day the Quintette "broke camp." They were obliged to go, for the Hunnicuts of Rosewood wanted the house. There was a farewell dirge on the cornet and harmonica, a touching farewell to Old Bluff and the River Dee, the big barn, the front door-yard, the white rose-bush, the spreading elms, the "broad-breasted old oak tree" in the corner; [189] and the Quintette and the Trio retired again to private life.

"Pecy," said Mary, as the little waif stood at the gate with her milk pail, looking mournfully at the grass, "Pecy, my mamma said I might ask you to go to my house at Laurel Grove. Would you like to go?"

"O may I?" almost screamed Pecy. "But I hain't got no gown and bunnit to wear."

"Don't think about your clothes, dear; you look well enough; and when you get to my house, I'll make you have a good time; now see if I don't."

Thus Pecy's tears were happily dried. In a few weeks the "camping out" had become "old times;" a dear and fragrant memory, which the young people loved to recall. It had been a delight to the whole eight while it lasted; but what it had been to the poor families about Old Bluff,—the [190] Pecks, Browns, and Pancakes,—who shall say?

And one day it occurred to busy Miss Pike that she hadn't quite enough to do, for she was only teaching school, studying French and German, and getting up Christmas festivals for Laurel Grove and Rosewood children; but she must try to manage a Christmas Tree for the little outcasts of Old Bluff. There would be no leisure for it on Christmas Eve, the twenty fourth; neither on the twenty-fifth; but the twenty-sixth would answer every purpose.

And where could the tree be put? Where else but in the parlor of Camp Comfort itself? The Hunnicuts were willing at once. They had but one child, James, and he was ready to help. So were the Quintette and the Trio of course, and so were all their relatives and friends.

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[191]

CHAPTER XII.

CHRISTMAS AT OLD BLUFF.

One of the handsomest evergreens in the Townsend woods was chopped off close by the roots, and dragged to Camp Comfort by Preston Gray and James Hunnicut. The Old Bluff children had thought and dreamed of nothing else for three weeks but that mysterious Christmas Tree. If it were to be placed in a church they would have shrunk from approaching it, for they were afraid of churches, and none of the Pancakes, except Pecielena, and none of the Pecks, except Charlie, had as yet been drawn inside a Sunday school. Or if the Tree were to be in some elegant house at

Laurel Grove, in a cold parlor with high walls and solemn marble fireplaces, where rich children congregate, what would these little savages have cared for it then? [192]

But this Tree, *their* Tree, was to be at Camp Comfort, a place they knew all about; and the doorkeeper, Mr. Hunnicut, was to let in every child big enough to walk. As for the grown people, they would be let in also, but merely that they might take care of the children; for that is all that is wanted of grown people at Christmas time!

Mary Gray, Ethel, Blanche Jones, and Fanny Townsend watched the clouds for the whole three weeks. At one time it rained, and there were fears of "a green Christmas;" then it grew cold, and the first snow came; but before there was much time to be glad of the snow, the wind hastened along and heaped it into drifts.

"It isn't likely they'll have a Tree if it keeps on drifting like this," said Dora, who was apt to grow melancholy when she baked for "two days running;" and surely the turkeys, pies, puddings, and cakes that had gone through her hands were enough to drag her spirits very low. Mary did not know then of her own new piano that was to be given her on Christmas, and Dora's prediction seemed to spoil all her holiday joy; but her father reassured her. [193]

"Why, my child, we'll have the Tree if the drifts are as high as your head."

Ethel said there were to be "three Christmases this year; one at Laurel Grove, one at Rosewood, and one at Old Bluff." Yes, and the wind held its breath, and the sun and moon shone for every one of the three!

When the night came for "Old Bluff Christmas," a rose-blue sky bent above the white splendor of the world. The Pecks, Browns, and Pancakes arrived in wild haste at Camp Comfort before Mr. Hunnicut was ready to let them in. They would have thought him very unfeeling if they had known that he was finishing his turkey supper while they waited in the entry. [194]

But they did not wait long. There was a loud jingling of sleigh-bells, the blowing of a cornet, and the eight campers and lame Sadie Stockwell appeared in a boat-sleigh drawn by two horses adorned with about twenty strings of bells. Behind this imposing equipage glided the modest sleighs containing meek parents and friends.

Then the warm, cheerful parlor was thrown open at last, with its dozen lamps, blazing and twinkling as if they knew it was Christmas; and the beautiful tree was seen shining like all the stars in the sky. Aloft, on the topmost part, stood a little waxen image called the Christ-child; and if it had been alive it could hardly have smiled more benignly. [195]

Dr. Gray, stepping forward, told the delighted little guests to look up at it and think of it as the image of the little child Jesus, the good Lord, who loved little children while on earth, and who loves them still in heaven.

Then Mr. Lee made a short prayer, so very simple that the youngest ones could understand; but they scarcely listened for looking at the Tree.

Ah, you that have seen Trees ever since you can remember, they are an old story to you; but if you were a poor little child, and this were your first vision of one, can you fancy what it would be to you then?

Pecielena Pancake, with hair neatly braided and falling down the back of her new frock, stood gazing at it in amazement. To her it was a beautiful marvel. Her mother would not come, but had sent all the children, and they were dragging and tugging at her skirts. [196]

Mrs. Peck and Mrs. Brown were there, women who could not "behave" much better than Pecy, but they were quiet and smiling, and they and all the poor rough little children stood looking at the shining Tree with lips far apart and very wide eyes.

Some of the children were trembling between smiles and tears, so eagerly hoping they had presents coming, so sadly afraid they hadn't!

The Quintette and the Trio looked around benevolently. Mary Gray felt little thrills of joy at seeing the children so happy now, and knowing they would be happier still when the presents were given out. She was glad Sadie Stockwell was there and enjoying it; but it had not occurred to her to be proud because she herself was the one who had thought of inviting Sadie. Neither was Mary conscious this evening of her own looks and appearance. Her tresses "of crisped gold" floated unheeded, and she never once looked down at her new dress to admire the color. Her thoughts were not of herself but of others. [197]

"Dr. Gray," said Miss Pike in a low tone, "don't you agree with me that this last year has been the best year of Mary's life? I believe she will grow up to be a thoughtful, unselfish woman."

"*Flaxie Growing Up!*" said Dr. Gray, blinking and rubbing his eyes.

"Why, Doctor, she is thirteen," laughed Miss Pike. "But, there, they are beginning to sing, and we must go over and join them."

After the Christmas songs, Dr. Gray and General Townsend took off the presents. [198]

There was a joyous scream from Pecy Pancake when she received her new cloak of gray beaver cloth, with buttons to match, and a collar that would turn down or up. The name of the giver was

not mentioned, and the studied look of innocence on Mary's face was edifying to behold.

Preston's expression was equally innocent when Charlie Peck bounded forward and seized his brave sled, "Clipper," and when little Bobby Brown shouted over his first pair of skates.

And every time a present was taken off the Tree, the little candles on the branches seemed to twinkle more gayly, and the Christ-child to smile more benevolently than ever.

"Susy Peck," called Dr. Gray from the right, and a wee girl stepped forward with fingers in her [199]
mouth, and snatched—snatched is the word—the pretty doll which Julia Gray had dressed in a scarlet frock, with fashionable hood, fur tippet, and muff. Like most of the others, Susy forgot to say "Thank you;" but I suppose it was the proudest moment of her life.

"Baby Peck," called out General Townsend from the left; and another wee girl toddled up, holding on by her mother's finger, and got a handsome box so full of sugarplums that the cover would hardly stay on. And then the overjoyed baby had to be taken in her mother's arm, lest, in running about to show the box, she should get under everybody's feet.

"Johnny Brown," called Dr. Gray. And Johnny's chin dropped on his little ragged necktie with
delight at receiving a pretty jacket with linen collar and cuffs, while the "Electric Light" was [200]
suddenly extinguished behind the parlor door.

But why enumerate the presents which fell like ripe fruit from that bountiful Tree? The pretty dresses, the modest needle-books, the painted drums, beautiful books and pictures, and all manner of gay toys?

And why describe the long table which the ladies had spread with every dainty that these children had ever sighed for; real turkey with genuine "stuffing;" cakes of all sorts and sizes, with fruit and without; some as yellow as gold, and some buried under snow-drifts of frosting; and best of all, perhaps, to them, large mounds of candy, oranges, nuts, and raisins!

"Worth while, isn't it?" said the "Electric Light," nodding his head, which was nearly as bright as a Christmas candle.

"Our coming out to Camp Comfort was a great thing for the neighbors," remarked Bert Abbott [201]
to James Hunnicut, who wished *he* had been one of the immortal three!

And Preston took off his spectacles and wiped them, remarking that the glass was apt to grow dim in a warm room.

"Now strike up your cornet, Jack; take your harmonica, Sadie, and let's have another Christmas song."

"Merry, merry Christmas everywhere!
Cheerily it ringeth through the air;
Christmas bells, Christmas trees,
Christmas odors on the breeze;
Merry, merry Christmas everywhere!
Cheerily it ringeth through the air.
Deeds of Faith and Charity;
These our offerings be,
Leading every soul to sing,
Christ was born for me!"

The poor, little, happy, wondering children listened in delight, as the music seemed to hover
and float on wings over the heads of the people, losing itself at last in the upper air. [202]

And, all the while, the beautiful Christmas Tree stood glittering with its little candles, its green branches stripped of everything but their straight pine needles.

Miss Pike looked up from the children's happy faces to the Christmas Tree, and her soul was stirred with awe. For the Christ-child on the topmost bough seemed alive; and behold how large he grew, how grand and beautiful! It was as if the heaven of heavens could not contain him: yet he was there in that very room, and she beheld him! His arms were extended in blessing, his lips moved, and in a still, small voice, as if it fell from the sky, she heard him say once more: "*Suffer little children to come unto me, and forbid them not; for of such is the kingdom of heaven.*"

PRUDY KEEPING HOUSE.
"'Oh, what a fascinating creature,' said the Man in the Moon, making an eye-glass with his thumb and fore-finger, and gazing at the lady boarder. 'Are you a widow, mam?'"

——————

SPECIMEN CUT TO "LITTLE PRUDY'S FLYAWAY SERIES"

LITTLE GRANDMOTHER.

"Grandmother Parlen when a little girl is the subject. Of course that was ever so long ago, when there were no lucifer matches, and steel and tinder were used to light fires; when soda and saleratus had never been heard of, but people made their pearl ash by soaking burnt crackers in water; when the dressmaker and the tailor and the shoemaker went from house to house twice a year to make the dresses and coats of the family."—*Transcript.*

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"The story of Grandfather Parlen's little boy life, of the days of knee breeches and cocked hats, full of odd incidents, queer and quaint sayings, and the customs of 'ye olden time.' These stories of Sophie May's are so charmingly written that older folks may well amuse themselves by reading them. The same warm sympathy with childhood, the earnest naturalness, the novel charm of the preceding volumes will be found in this."—*Christian Messenger.*

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LITTLE GRANDMOTHER.
“She played in the old garret, with
Dr. Moses to attend her dolls
when they were sick.”
————
ILLUSTRATION TO “LITTLE PRUDY’S FLYAWAY SERIES”

SOPHIE MAY’S “LITTLE-FOLK’S” BOOKS.

[206]

FLAXIE FRIZZLE.
DOCTOR PAPA.
LITTLE PITCHERS.
TWIN COUSINS.
FLAXIE’S KITTYLEEN.
FLAXIE GROWING UP.

Transcriber’s Note: Obvious punctuation errors repaired.

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