TOYLAND

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BY

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OLD GUTTY.

I.

OLD GUTTY.

WE often, you know, cry and laugh, and nobody knows why; nay, more, the reasons for our sorrow or mirth, if we condescended to give them, would only mystify the inquirer more; we should not have enlightened his understanding, but have darkened it, and sent him away wondering how such a trifle could have excited either our tears or our laughter. Perhaps we might as little sympathize with the secret of his emotions, so we will not be too severe.

It is a lovely morning, a spring morning, and there is a sense of new young life in everything. The

flowers, too, are very childish, and not of the sort to be worn in ladies' hair, and go to great parties, and live—or rather not live—in the poisonous atmosphere of gas; perhaps the things they see and hear kill them as much as the heated air, because what they hear in a ball-room, where there is often a great deal of envy, hatred, malice, and all uncharitableness, must be so different from what the birds have sung to them, or the fresh breezes whispered.

On this particular morning everything and everybody seemed happy and well, except one person, and that person was young Mrs. Fraser; and when I tell you that Mrs. Fraser was not only young but lovely, so lovely that everybody was in love with her, down to the servants, who would, I believe, have served her for nothing—that she lived in a beautiful house at the West End—that she wore exquisite dresses and ornaments—moreover, that she might stop up as late at night as she pleased (this as a child I considered the greatest privilege of grown-up womanhood), you will wonder what a lady who

possessed all these good things could have to cry about. You can't guess: perhaps she has lost some of her diamonds; but she need not cry about that loss, since money can replace it: perhaps her husband went away without saying good-bye to her; but I don't think it can be that, for since their marriage, eight years ago, he had never omitted the customary farewell. It does not seem to be a lost treasure so much as a discovered one that causes all these bitter tears to flow and almost make you forget the sunshine outside. You will wonder very much what this affecting souvenir could be, and you might make a hundred guesses, and puzzle your little minds all in vain. It did not look romantic, it was not beautiful; on the contrary, it was ugly, so very ugly that you might be disposed to account for Mrs. Fraser's emotion on the ground of fright. That supposition, however, could not be right, for, hideous as the object was, Mrs. Fraser clasped it to her heart with an affection many human beings deserve, but never receive. Well, the object so unconscious of all

this devotion was, or rather had been (since there were only traces left of its original form), a doll! Not a pretty wax doll, such as you know and love, with pretty real hair, and nails, and beautiful wax limbs, that have such an alarming trick of knocking against each other, that one anxious mother I knew, to prevent the collision, bandaged up one leg, so that it always looked like the result of the catastrophe, instead of the precaution against it. No; this doll's limbs, or rather limb, for only one remained, presented a very deplorable appearance. Its skin seemed to be made of very common calico, and here and there the sawdust that flowed in its veins oozed out. Whether it was owing to any peculiar gymnastic feat, or whether it was a natural malformation or not, is doubtful; but certainly, contrary to the use of nature, this one leg had got completely twisted round in a way that eclipsed the most unnatural achievement of the greatest celebrity of the ballet. It seems strange to have gone so far in description, and not yet have mentioned her face:

my explanation for this omission is, that her face was just that part of her that was least susceptible of description, for the all-sufficing reason, that if she ever had a face it was in a previous state of existence, for in the present one there was not even a trace of it. There was something that might once have been a head, but it had lost much of its resemblance to that appendage; it was beaten in at every point, in some places it appeared to have melted away; indeed, to judge from her present condition, Dolly seemed to have been much given to the melting mood. A shroud-like sort of garment enveloped her original form, and, considering how little of this survived, it must have been the most appropriate one. Looking at her now, you would be inclined, if you did not know her history, to think what a hard life hers must have been. She was only a year old, I believe, but as one year of a toy's life is equivalent to ten of a human being's, perhaps one year of a doll's, to judge from the rapidity with which I have seen some of them age, must average

much more. What was, I suppose, her last resting-place on earth, looked a very happy one. She was lying, when Mrs. Fraser became so much affected by the sight of her, on a little child's blue frock; a pretty little sky-blue frock that had evidently been worn a good deal, for it had that individual look about it that clothes get after a time, and one could imagine the little form that filled it. There were tiny blue shoes in which, no doubt, tiny feet made a most musical sound to a mother's ear; they, too, seemed to have trudged about a good deal; and rosettes, both on shoes and frock, had got torn, and wanted that stitch that was, no doubt, just going to be put in, when——. There were blue beads, and white beads, that must have looked so pretty on a little soft, white neck. There were little out-of-door things, a hat, with a blue forget-me-not wreath, a muff and collerette, a little pile of dolls' things, and it is amongst these treasured relics that this nightmare of a doll is preserved.

Putting her back with tenderest care on her blue pillow, Mrs. Fraser closed the drawer with a sob.

You will naturally wonder why a mere doll, especially such a hideous one, should excite so much emotion. I should not have known had not I made the acquaintance of a very nice doll living in Mrs. Fraser's house, and who had evidently been the greatest friend and confidant of the poor doll whose remains we have just described. She told me the whole story which I am now going to tell to you.

Nobody could quite well say where the poor thing was born, or rather where her place of composition was, but I am told that her first recollection of life was of finding herself hanging up on a nail in a dress something like a ball dress, for it was made of blue tarletan, and had a great deal of white lace about it. She did not seem to have had any childish remembrances, but to have been born grown-up. Of course the scene she looked down upon, she thought, was the entire world; and well she might think so, for in this space everything in life had its

prototype. She was, I believe, a doll of a reflective character, and would have preferred not living quite so much in society; but her disposition was so exceedingly sweet, that her large black eyes were never known to close a moment, or appear one bit less interested in what they had grown so weary of. During this period of her existence, which, when she recalled it, always seemed the longest and dreariest, she made several acquaintances; strange to say, she renewed acquaintance with one of these early friends afterwards, the one, in fact, who has favoured me with this history. They hung close together, perhaps because they both belonged to the Gutta Percha family, and had a sympathy with each other on the merits and demerits of their race. From what I can gather, though it was very delicately thrown out, my narrator had great personal advantages over her friend. My heroine in the prime of her youth and beauty never attracted much attention. She had too great a stare, and the expression of unvarying amiability on her round, coarse red cheeks rather

repelled than pleased. It certainly was wonderful that she should retain this amiable characteristic, for the comments passed upon her by beholders were anything but flattering. Life was growing, to her, very weary, flat, stale, and unprofitable, while to her more favoured companion it promised great change and excitement. She would soon be left without a doll to speak to, it was nothing but parting with friends; and the changes in their destiny came so suddenly there was scarcely time to exchange the most ordinary farewells; which was, perhaps, a good thing; as farewells are so sad, the less time there is for them the better.

Poor Gutta Percha's life was at once dull and noisy. She had no real rest all day, yet she was never doing anything except getting down for inspection, and being hoisted up again with feelings of deep humiliation. Self-praise is, I suppose, no praise, else Gutta Percha's own announcement, worn on her chest, stating her price with notes of admiration after, would not have failed to impress people

with the modest estimation in which she held herself.

Saturday was a dreadful day to Gutta Percha, for she had to sit up so much longer, or rather hang up so much longer, and always to no purpose. She might, as a rule, have been in bed hours and hours ago, but her present proprietors were much too busy to make any exception in her favour. I am told that on this particular Saturday the bustle and confusion were even greater than ever, for it was not only Saturday, but it was Christmas Eve. More tambourines were going, more and bigger drums were being beaten; expert players on these instruments were showing them off, while tiny hands were making experiments with others. Omnibuses, musical and otherwise, were being driven at furious paces, donkeys were hee-hawing, cats were mewing, dolls were crying, which was no wonder, as pinching caused the emotion. Exciting scenes seemed to be going on at theatres; there were all sorts of zoological sounds. The people who sold were

screaming, the people who bought were screaming, and very often the toys purchased shared this accomplishment. There was so much light, so much crowding together, that it was no wonder Gutta Percha yearned to be taken into the bosom of some quiet family where rational hours would be kept, and where she could sometimes sit down. Perhaps you have already guessed that the world in which Gutta Percha could never sit down was called the Lowther Arcade; you know what an over-populated world that is, so you will not be surprised to hear that no one ever could rest in it. On this Christmas Eve, Gutta Percha was just beginning to think how glad she was the next day was Sunday, when she found she was the subject of conversation; the speakers were evidently servants—nurse and housemaid.

"Lor'," said one, "ain't that gutta percha doll cheap!" This was nurse.

"Well it may be," replied the housemaid; "it's the ugliest thing I ever clapped eyes on."

"I don't think so," indignantly answered nurse.

"Well, you ain't going to buy it, I suppose?"

"Yes, I am."

"Who for—one of your brother's children?"

"No, for a child much dearer to me than any of those—for Miss Daisy, pretty heart; she do so love a doll, and I don't think any one's going to give her one."

"I shouldn't think she'd love that one much, then!"

"Oh yes, she will, she'll like all the colour about her; anyhow, she'll like it if *I* give it to her," triumphantly concluded nurse, with a vague feeling that the value of a gift might sometimes depend a little upon the giver.

This was evidently an argument beyond the power of the housemaid either to confirm or refute. So Gutta Percha was brought down, enveloped in a beautiful piece of silver paper, a kind of *sortie de bal*, and handed over, without even the formality of an adieu, by her old master to her new proprietor. I do not know whether Gutta Percha experienced any

emotion on leaving her old life and friends, but as she was a doll of deep feeling, I think it is highly probable that she did. Nurse carried her very tenderly; it was long since Gutta Percha had been in the open air, but her constitution was so good that, notwithstanding the severity of the weather, and the slightness of her protection against it, she did not catch cold; indeed, she was too busy with speculations to be sensible of any atmospheric effect. She was wondering very much what sort of person Miss Daisy, to whose permanent care she was going to be confided, would be like. She could remember dolls with whom change of air and scene had not agreed at all, for it had so invalided and generally affected them, that they had been obliged to return to their native air for the restoration of a limb. Some, indeed, entirely lost their heads, but the climate of the Lowther Arcade had such remedial properties that they never failed to regain them after a short sojourn in it. Gutta Percha hoped this would not be her case, for though she had one or two tender

associations with her past life, she had no desire to return to it. At one time she had cherished a rather sentimental attachment for a pretty young soldier-doll who hung close beside her; but one morning he went off quite suddenly, no doubt to a war, in which he was probably killed or wounded, for nobody ever knew what became of him. This early and only romance of Gutta Percha's life, and the one friendship I have mentioned, were the only tender memories of the Lowther Arcade that she carried away with her.

The house to which she was going seemed a long way off, and, in spite of her excitement, Gutta Percha was very nearly asleep when they at length reached it. She couldn't very well tell what it looked like outside at that hour of night, but the inside impressed her very much. The first thing that had a rather solemnising effect upon her was the footman, of whom she caught a glimpse when the door was opened, carrying up tea on a silver tray; she at first thought, from the grandeur of his

costume and demeanour, that he must be the master, but from conversation she learned otherwise.

Gutta Percha greatly appreciated the luxury of space and quiet. There was a beautiful fire in the hall, which was decorated with holly and misletoe; there was a delicious sense of warmth and comfort and no noise; this was a blessing poor Gutta Percha fully realised; to have all the sense and privilege of festivity, and none of its penalties was an undreamed-of good.

Though the house seemed to be very large and accommodating, a great discussion ensued as to where Gutta Percha should sleep, such a discussion as generally arises between landlady and chambermaids when one arrives at an hotel in the height of the season. It did not seem, however, so much a question as to *where* Gutta Percha should pass the night, but with whom;—should she sleep in Nurse's room, or in Mrs. Fraser's. Gutta Percha did not like the latter suggestion at all, for she was very sleepy, and the idea of an introduction and subse-

quent examination at such an hour was dreadful. She was accordingly delighted to find that as Mrs. Fraser had company it would be better to defer the ceremony till the following morning.

Miss Daisy was asleep and could not be disturbed. Gutta Percha was very glad to hear this, as she hoped it meant that Miss Daisy, whose hours would probably be hers, kept early ones. Finally it was arranged that Gutta Percha should sleep with Nurse, and as she felt quite intimate with that person now, not the least shy, she rejoiced in the decision.

Nurse's room seemed to be up a good many flights of stairs, but that didn't matter, for, once it was gained, there would be perfect peace. Nurse was very kind to her, passed her hand over her very affectionately, laid a nice little piece of cotton wool over her face for fear, no doubt, that change of air might give her the face-ache, wrapped her up in a silk handkerchief, and laid her in a nice roomy drawer, which she had nearly all to herself. The next morning when she awoke she felt refreshed, but

very strange, and rather alarmed at all the impending introductions. She wondered what the people would be like: all she had ever known had been more or less rough; even the children who came to the Lowther Arcade had been violent, and pulled the toys about, which was quite against the rules.

Gutta Percha was very glad to think it was Sunday, as it would give her an opportunity of becoming acquainted with the manners and customs of the family in which she had so suddenly become a member. She was very glad to find that they went to church, she had been brought up to believe that if people only went to church they must be good, no matter what wicked things they did during the week. Accordingly, with this principle strongly instilled into her, Gutta Percha felt, as far as the morals of the family went, quite safe and happy. Miss Daisy, however, she heard was not going to church. Gutta Percha might have been shocked had she not heard that a bad cold alone prevented her from accompanying the rest of the family. She had

heard Nurse say that it would never do for a delicate child like that to increase her cold. Then Gutta Percha wondered if she had been called Daisy on account of this delicacy, for though she had never been in a field, or seen a daisy, she knew it was a small, delicate flower, and she could not associate a daisy with anything that grew up: this speculation, on the part of Gutta Percha, showed that she had a soul for poetry, if she had no beauty to make her the subject of it.

It was very gratifying to Gutta Percha to find that everybody seemed so fond of Miss Daisy; she liked to think she would belong to such an important and popular person. Everybody was wishing everybody a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year.

Nurse was exceedingly kind and attentive to Gutta Percha, and seemed anxious to see if she had passed a good night. She put her hand very affectionately over her stiff curls, which were all stuck together, and to her head, so they never required brushing or combing; a style of coiffure

which, if less becoming, certainly saved a great deal of trouble.. This caress was the only preparation that could be made, and, after it, Nurse left the room, and during her absence Gutta Percha felt very nervous. At the end of about ten minutes, she returned, but not alone—she was leading by the hand a small being, the effect of whom upon Gutta Percha was so great, that had she possessed ordinary human powers of emotion she would certainly have screamed or have fainted, so it is perhaps as well she did not, but took things as dolls always do—very quietly. It was Gutta Percha's first sight of living beauty. She had admired and adored lovely wax dolls of exquisite hair and complexion, and she had often thought how almost overpoweringly beautiful they would have been, had they only been living, and now something far surpassing the beauty of an animated doll stood before her. A something with a complexion as fair as that of any doll's, with a colour that changed very often, being sometimes that of a rose, sometimes that of a lily; and these flowers

always had a light upon them, sometimes that of a bright sun, oftentimes one softer and quieter, more like that of the moon; then there was hair—such hair! full of fair little billows of gold; a little band of blue crossed them triumphantly, but did not restrain them. There were two eyes, large blue eyes; ready to cry or laugh at a moment's notice, and out of which a very sensitive little soul looked at you. I am afraid the little nose, if one must particularise such an unromantic feature, was not formed on any classic model, for it had a slightly elevated tendency; but then it was this tendency that gave such character and humour to the face otherwise so perfect. There was a delicious little mouth always fluttering, as a flower does when there is a tiny breeze. On the white, soft neck was a blue string of beads, and little white shoulders just showed above a dress that looked as if it was made out of a bit of the blue sky; there was a soft wool shawl, like a white cloud, to put round her, if the blue sky was not sufficiently warm. Nurse led this

fairy-like being to Gutta Percha's side; this was a very anxious moment for poor Gutta Percha.

"Who's that for, I wonder?" asked Nurse.

"Me don't know," replied a tiny voice, while the flowers in the child's face became very rosy ones.

"It's for me then," replied Nurse.

"'Tid not," most indignantly exclaimed the tiny voice.

"Who for then?"

Here Daisy became very much embarrassed; she laughed, then she threw her arms tightly round Nurse's neck, and burst into tears. This emotion rather alarmed Gutta Percha, as she feared her ugliness had caused it. Having relieved herself of her tears, Daisy again laughed, this time in an audacious manner, and then she took Gutta Percha up in her arms.

"I like that, running off with my doll!" said Nurse.

"'Tid not your doll, 'tid mine."

"Do you like her, darling?"

"She *id* pretty!" enthusiastically passing her little fingers over the shining black pupils of her newly acquired treasure's eyes. Now I cannot describe to you the feelings of Gutta Percha on hearing this criticism. She had been composed with a keen sense of the beautiful, and her own lack of beauty had caused her many a pang; but as she was a brave doll, and never sentimental about herself, she bore this grievance with a smile, just as if it had been a blessing. To have been considered even good-looking by the most ordinary person would have been a great relief and delight to her, but to be thought not only not ugly, but positively pretty by such a lovely creature, would but for her aforementioned fortitude have affected her to tears. She did not care now who thought her ugly, but she did not suppose anybody would dare to dispute the opinion of such an authority on the subject, and I think she was more right than she was aware of; for, child as Daisy was, delicate and fragile as the flower whose name she bore, she it was who really

ruled that great house. Her rule was that of absolute monarchy. Papa was her loving and loyal subject no less than mamma; so were all the servants—they conformed to all her laws. It was a wonderfully well regulated kingdom; for though Queen Daisy was very regal, and did not allow liberties to be taken with her; and though her tiny foot could stamp with royal displeasure, she had a very loving and sensitive heart, and was always sorry the moment afterwards, and would often apologize for her little impetuosities, which was one of her most queenly characteristics, I think. Whether, however, she was pleased or grieved, she was so fascinating both in peace and war that nobody ever could love her one bit the less, or think her anything but the most bewitching little creature that ever lived. It was no wonder then that poor Gutta Percha, who had always been snubbed, should scarcely be able to realise happiness so sudden and so great.

"I am glad, darling, that you do like it," said Nurse, kneeling down and kissing the cheeks of her

sovereign with a loving familiarity that showed how this queen did not stand upon strict etiquette with her subjects, and that she preferred the spirit to the form.

"Me 'ike her very much; me think she's a dear."

Nurse could not help feeling rather surprised at the success of her gift, and wondering what the child could see to admire so much in a doll with a great fixed stare and gaudy cheeks.

"She id dot a pretty laughing face," observed Daisy, holding the doll admiringly a little distance from her.

"What shall you call her? her name now is Gutta Percha."

"Me shan't call her that ugly name then; me shall call her Gutty, darling pet Gutty."

Can you imagine poor Gutta Percha's rapture on hearing her name mentioned with such loving prefixes? I really wonder she did not go mad; perhaps, but for the strength of her character, she would have done so.

Being Sunday, everything was very quiet. Miss Daisy sat in a beautiful, big room, before a big fire, in a very small basket sort of chair, evidently her throne, for it was quite certain that nobody else in the house ever did, or even could, sit in it. This apartment had a very familiar look to Gutty; for in it she recognised so many objects known to her in a previous state of existence.

There was a Noah's Ark; a pretty, woolly, little dog that had wonderful powers of barking by mechanical assistance. It was very quiet now, perhaps because it was Sunday. There were little dinner and tea services; one fear Gutty had, and that fear revealed to her a trait in her character hitherto unknown to her, and this was jealousy. Already her coal-black eyes were straining themselves in order to see if there were any signs of a rival; but there were none—there was not a head or portion of a limb to be seen anywhere. Gutty was evidently alone in her glory. It was very nice to have time for all these reflections; also to find that she was

going to have regular meals. She would actually begin to live, in the real sense of the word.

The morning and afternoon passed very quietly, but Gutty was rather alarmed to find that she was invited down to dessert with Daisy. She would have liked to remonstrate, only as the invitation was evidently thought a great honour, and to refuse it might pain her dear young mistress, Gutty determined to say nothing, but smile as brightly as ever. Nurse came up in the evening to dress Daisy, and when Gutty saw that a change of toilette was necessary for the occasion, she began to have misgivings about her own, and to think with something like shame of her wardrobe. Little Daisy had on a white muslin frock, with pink ruches, so that she looked like one of the daisies with pink rims. You can easily believe how Gutta Percha's heart beat when she was carried down the lighted stairs, at the foot of which was a large room that looked like fairy-land, it was so full of flowers, fruit, and light, and beautiful perfumes. The lady who sat at one end of the table was very

lovely, she had the same beautiful eyes and coloured hair as Daisy; there was just the difference between her and Daisy that there is between a bud and a full-grown flower. At the other end sat a gentleman, young and very handsome; almost as handsome, Gutty thought, as the soldier doll who had stolen her youthful affections. They both smiled at her very kindly, and the lady, to whom Daisy ran, at once said, "Well, my darling, and who is this?"

"Gutty, dear little Gutty!" replied Daisy, hugging her treasure.

"Gutty, hullo!" exclaimed papa; "that's a good name, it's so descriptive. Let me look at dear little Gutty."

So Daisy brought Gutty round for inspection; but Mr. Fraser's somewhat too jocular manner on so short an acquaintance embarrassed Gutta Percha, and angered her royal mistress.

"Don't laugh," she said, very angrily, and getting very red.

"Oh dear, is little Gutty so sensitive? Can't she understand a joke?"

"She doesn't like to be laughed at, papa," observed mamma, who healed all little wounds. "I dare say she would like some orange and cake with Daisy." Gutty felt very grateful to Mrs. Fraser for this kind diversion; and she enjoyed the orange and cake very much, though, owing to her peculiar formation, she was unable to sit up properly, and had to take her meals in a partly recumbent position.

"She's very dark," remarked papa; "what is her native country—India?"

"She tome from the Lowder Arcade," majestically answered Daisy.

Of course papa felt very much snubbed, and mamma offered more cake and fruit. "Ah, that's a much better place to come from," said papa; "for people who come from those hot places generally have something wrong with their liver or heart. They are always sleepy too; now I should think,

from Miss Gutty's very wide-open eyes, that she never went to sleep at all."

"She does to sleep when me do," indignantly responded Daisy.

"Oh, well, if she does everything you do, she'll be a model doll," laughed Mr. Fraser.

"Me'll just go now," said Daisy, literally as well as figuratively rising in her wrath, "and me'll take Gutty too."

"That is unkind!" observed Mr. Fraser.

"Souldn't laugh then," replied Daisy, instinctively feeling the severity of the punishment as well as the justice of it.

"I will try and be good for the future," said papa. "I will try and remember that laughing is quite forbidden in Miss Gutta Percha's presence."

"You san't tiss her!" exclaimed Daisy, holding up her own little face for the customary good-night kiss, and defiantly keeping Gutty behind her back.

"Very well then, you shall have Gutty's share;"

and, in spite of their difference, papa gave his little daughter a great many kisses; but then, no doubt, a good many of them belonged to Gutty. As for Mrs. Fraser, she went up-stairs, as she always did, with Daisy. Nobody else ever closed for the night the eyes of that little flower, but mamma; and mamma had such wonderful powers of entering into the feelings of everybody that she could easily understand how papa's fun had been misunderstood by Daisy. She was very careful, therefore, to notice and dwell upon all Gutta Percha's charms.

"She looks so healthy, has such a nice colour, I wish you had half as much, my treasure!" observed Mrs. Fraser, as she laid the little golden head on the pillow, in the curls of which nestled Gutty's black one.

"Me love 'ou too," replied Daisy, fearing lest her mother should think this new claim upon her affection might interfere with her old ones.

"I know you do, darling."

"Gutty must come to the party, mustn't she?" eagerly questioned Daisy.

"Of course she shall, my pet! and she will be very much admired, I am sure, and enjoy herself too!"

Gutty was well covered up, and, with two loving arms round her, you may be sure she soon went to sleep, and had very delightful dreams. The idea of going to sleep in one's ball dress is not a very comfortable one, but as Gutty had done it all her life, and as habit is second nature, the circumstance did not interfere with her repose, even if it did with the fresh appearance of her dress.

Of course, as Christmas-day this year fell upon a Sunday, the celebration of it in the shape of a dance and Christmas-tree was put off till the following day, which is called Boxing-day, a name for it that greatly puzzled Gutta Percha, and she was still more puzzled to find herself spoken of as a Christmas-box; but as she was naturally very intelligent, she soon ceased to wonder at anything she heard. To those

who have led a joyless life, it is very pleasant to be awoke by a kiss, such a one as that which brought Gutty back from the happy land of dreams to that one of reality now quite as happy. Gutty's morning toilette did not take up more time than her evening one, for the same reason. So she sat up very quietly in a chair by the fire, while Nurse washed and dressed Miss Daisy. You can imagine how pleasant it was to Nurse to find how admirably Gutty and her young mistress got on. Daisy informed her Gutty was going to make her début in society that night. Nurse was rather sorry to hear this, for she knew that other dolls were to be of the party. One especially beautiful creature who would certainly take the shine out of almost any doll, and who would therefore she feared make Gutty look very ugly, and perhaps put Miss Daisy out of conceit with her.

"You know, dear," she said, while she arranged the little golden waves, "Miss Laura is sure to bring Fairy."

"Well, me don't care if she does," haughtily replied Daisy.

Gutty was delighted at this answer, but she wished all the same that Miss Laura would not bring Fairy.

"Gutty shall have a frock just like Fairy's," triumphantly observed Daisy after a pause, in which she had recalled a celebrated dress worn by that belle in dolls' society.

Nurse laughed, not so much at the prospect of Gutty's having a dress like Fairy's, but at the true maternal pride and instinct which would not allow her child to be eclipsed by anybody else's. "Gutty shall have everything that Fairy has," said Daisy.

"Well, as fine feathers make fine birds, fine clothes will make Gutty a very fine doll, I suppose."

This was evidently a very grand day, though the earlier part of it was very quiet, because Miss Daisy was still coughing, and seemed disposed to be feverish. Mrs. Fraser came up often to see her, and she was very particular in her inquiries after Gutty

and very sweet and attentive to her, and did not laugh when she heard how Gutty's wardrobe was to rival that of Fairy's, but received the announcement with the gravity befitting its importance; moreover, she promised to search for pieces of very rare silk which she had hidden away somewhere, and that had evidently only been waiting for so worthy an occasion to be discovered.

Daisy was very grateful, she put her arms round her mother, and called her her dear, pet mamma, and assured her of her love. Mamma also brought up little feasts occasionally; such as pieces of orange and cake and figs, and a little lemonade in a silver mug that had a beautiful daisy in silver upon it, and there was the same little flower on an exquisite little fork and spoon with which she ate her fruit. Papa also came up, and, mindful of his offence last night, he took care not to repeat it; and in recognition of this amendment in his conduct, he was allowed to nurse Gutty, while he told stories both to her and to Daisy.

This was a very nice way of passing an afternoon, and when papa was not annoying anybody by his chaff, he could be a very delightful companion, and Gutty was beginning to think him almost as charming as her soldier lover; for, if the latter had the advantage in dress, wearing a scarlet coat beautifully fitting, and covered with flat gold buttons, and trimmed with gold lace, he certainly was not conversational, and never beguiled the time telling stories as Mr. Fraser did.

"Well, my little pet," said Mr. Fraser when he got up to go, "I hope you will have a very happy evening, and that Gutty will dance every dance."

"She'll always dance with me."

"Ah, then she will," observed papa; "therefore, with such fatigues before you, you had better, I think, try and take a nap now."

So Daisy was made to lie down, the room was darkened like night, and a pretty card with "asleep" embossed upon it was hung outside the door that they might not be disturbed. As it was contrary to

Gutty's custom to rest during the day, she could not sleep, but she was very careful not to make any movement that could disturb Miss Daisy—so, though she lay with her large black eyes as wide open as ever, she was perfectly still, but her mind was active. She was rather alarmed at the prospect of her first dissipation; especially as she was to be a performer in the scene as well as a spectator. She was quite sure she couldn't dance—she couldn't remember any of her acquaintances who could either. She had a dim recollection of a doll belonging to the race of paper dolls, who, by means of a string which somebody pulled, did cut one or two wonderful capers, but this was the only opportunity she had ever had of witnessing the accomplishment. It would be a fearful thing if she should disgrace Miss Daisy by her ignorance, and no doubt dancing was one of the most important things in the world. Then Fairy would no doubt dance a great deal, and Miss Laura would be so pleased with her, and so proud of her, while she should cause Miss Daisy

nothing but shame. She only wished she hadn't such a high colour: if she only looked pale Miss Daisy might think she was ill, and would no doubt have excused her appearance; but, as wishing will not make people pale, poor Gutta Percha had to submit to her fate.

It was a very great excitement to her to see Miss Daisy dressed; never had she conceived that anything so beautiful could be. She had on the whitest and cleanest of white frocks, that looked as if human hands had never touched it; and then it was looped up here and there with little daisies and blue forget-me-nots, and bunches of these flowers seemed to grow out of her little shoulders. She had on such tiny white gloves and shoes; but notwithstanding the exceeding beauty of her dress, she appeared more interested in paying attention to Gutty's. She smoothed it out with her hands where it was crumpled, tying various little pieces of lace round her shoulders, and with something like a lace cape on, I really think Gutty's appearance was improved;

so, when this addition to her toilette was made, they descended together.

Gutty's black eyes were quite dazzled by the beauty of the scene. The room was lighted not by glaring gas, but by numbers of wax candles that gave a soft mellow light, and every candle had round it a decoration of holly; and on the walls, which were white and gold, and round the pictures also and the mirrors which every way you looked were reflecting the same scene, there were wreaths of the same berry. And then the carpet was so soft that no footstep ever echoed upon it; and in the centre of the room stood Mrs. Fraser; she wore a white dress trimmed with gold, and but for the trimming she would have looked just like a beautiful statue; and Gutty thought what two lovely beings they were, and what a pity that anybody else should come when they were so happy alone.

Mamma quite shared Gutty's opinion as to the beauty of Daisy. She thought to-night she had never seen anything so lovely as her little daughter,

and she felt so frightened lest she should catch more cold by getting overheated. She gave Gutta Percha a very kind welcome, and complimented her upon her appearance. The quiet which Gutty was so much enjoying was soon disturbed; there came a loud ring and then a loud knock, followed by a great commotion in the hall; then the door was thrown open very wide, as if some very large and important person was coming in, and the footman called out in a very loud voice "Master and Miss Shaw,"—and Master and Miss Shaw came in. They looked as if a great deal of pains, money, and time had been expended on their "get up," their faces had a highly polished look, and the little boy had on a very pretty velvet knickerbocker suit, that fitted him so perfectly he looked like one of those little wax boys in a tailor's window; they were pretty children, but in their dress they were faultily faultless. The little girl's curls suggested a previous night passed in curl-papers, with a recent application of irons; of course, the curls were as they were intended to be, very

strong, very smooth, and very even, but there was no graceful impulse about them as there was in Daisy's; this little girl looked as if she dare not move her head, and as if she felt the fearful weight and importance of every curl; while little Daisy was perpetually tossing her golden hair about, and at every turn it fell into a newer and prettier set.

There is generally a little stiffness about the first comers at an evening party; they have not got over the consciousness of their dress, and are afraid to sit down or move much about. These children were suffering fearfully from this consciousness now, and the parting injunction of mamma and nurse not to spoil their dresses, or eat anything that could spoil them; so they sat down with very obvious care on a rout seat, and they crossed their little white-gloved hands in a very devotional manner; then they blushed, partly from shyness, partly from pleasure, and stared straight before them. In Daisy's presence, however, people could not be stiff long, and, of course, Daisy had Gutty to introduce; feeling

still rather shy, they both said together she was nice, but, as the shy fit wore off, they grew more truthful, and modified their original criticism, less directly than by implication and descriptions of other dolls of their acquaintance—this, however, I am happy to say, had no effect whatever upon Daisy's affection for her new treasure.

Gutty was very much rejoiced to find that Fairy was not of the party yet, and of course the longer her coming was delayed, the longer she, Gutty, would have the field to herself. She did not, however, rejoice long in this knowledge, for, after one or two unimportant arrivals, Gutty's jealous eye detected through the open door a very pretty gypsy-like looking little girl, holding in her arms the loveliest and sweetest-looking doll ever seen, and from whom her mistress was never parted. Daisy and this little girl seemed great friends, and the first thing they both did was to introduce their respective dolls. As Laura was a child of tact and feeling, and, moreover, very fond of her friend, she made no invidious

comparisons, but warmly congratulated her upon having a doll to love, as if she had found hers the one consolation of a forlorn existence. It was of course kindly meant that the two dolls should be left to become familiar without the restraint of espionage; but, conscious as Gutty was of this privilege, she was also conscious that she must be looking to great disadvantage beside so distinguished a beauty. However, next to the blessing of not having the presence of a rival at all, is that of being able to keep one's eye upon her, and know that she cannot be doing anything behind one's back.

Of course, Gutty envied Fairy her beauty, her long golden curls, her delicately pink cheeks, her blue eyes and black lashes, but she also envied her her power of sitting gracefully—for Fairy's limbs were so supple she could move them as easily as a human being. The dolls, though they evidently took note of each other, did not talk much; no doubt they were too much interested in the exciting scene they witnessed for conversation.

When the room was quite full of little people, the music began to play and the company began to dance—not with the languid ease of grown-up people, but with the spirit of real enjoyment. One little boy—who, though he was a very handsome and merry little fellow, was also I fear a very mischievous and teasing one—suddenly announced his intention of dancing with Gutty.

"I must have a turn with Gutta Percha," he said; "she's such a beauty; Laura's doll's nothing beside her; I like Fairy, but Gutty's such a brunette, and I like dark people. Doesn't she look though as if she had a temper, with those black eyes and flaming cheeks!"

"If you say any more, you shan't dance with her at all," responded Daisy.

"Then I won't," observed the young boy penitently.

Poor Gutty! what did she feel when this smart boy—young man he seemed to her—came up and said, not "Miss—Miss Gutta Percha, may I have the

pleasure, &c.," but simply, "Come along, Gutty;" and, before poor Gutty could explain that dancing was a portion of her education that had been sadly neglected, she found herself lifted down, seized by two hands, and whirled round at a rapidity that left her no time to deplore her ignorance of the step; I think she must have danced by inspiration, and very lightly, for I believe her feet scarcely touched the ground, and once she got off there seemed to be no awkwardness at all. I grieve to add, that, though the incessant movement did not affect her feet, her arms, when her partner took her back to her seat, instead of being nice and stiff and sticking out, hung down in a sad limp way, which clearly showed there was delicacy in that quarter. It was a very fortunate thing that Daisy did not discover this fact just then, for it would have spoilt her pleasure; and as Gutty's face showed no different emotion, nobody could tell.

Fairy was very much admired and petted, and Gutty had continually to hear such remarks as "What a lovely creature!" "Are you not afraid to

bring her out?" All this was very gratifying to Laura, who could not help rejoicing in the triumph of her pet. As she did not allow her to dance, however, Gutty was spared the pain of seeing her rival's superiority in that accomplishment.

After these little people had danced, and become rather warm and tired, the folding-doors were opened, and disclosed *such* a Tree; all the children shouted with delight, and thought it far the nicest kind of tree they had ever seen, and that if all trees only bore such fruit, how delicious it would be to live in a forest. Of course, Gutty was not forgotten; she was Daisy's first consideration, and being held up very high in her arms she had a very good view. It was such a large tree, and so brilliantly lighted, and beautiful things of every description hung from its boughs. Once Gutty's heart beat violently, for she almost thought she saw suspended from one of them the figure of her first, last, and only love, but it was only a fancied resemblance, and, on a nearer view, she saw at once,

soldier-doll though it was, that it had not *his* own peculiarly fascinating expression.

Mamma had a great deal to do, calling out tickets and allotting prizes; every child seemed highly delighted with what it got, every feeling of shyness had disappeared, and they were loud in their expressions of enjoyment and in their comparisons. It was nothing but, "Oh, look at what I've got!" "I will—but look at mine!" When their excitement had subsided a little, they had some supper, and I am very much afraid, from the way in which they ate mince-pies, and jellies, and other nice things, that they had quite forgotten the caution about their dresses. They danced a little more, and then no end of nurses appeared, to whom the children rushed out wildly, holding up their treasures, and expatiating upon them while they were being wrapped up, and not heeding a bit the command to "stand still." Daisy also rushed out with Gutty to see that she had her share of attention, and I am sorry that she did so, for her little face was very

much flushed, and I am afraid she stood in a draft, for she certainly increased her cold; but she never thought about herself, and, just when her mother's eye was not on her, she slipped out.

Gutty enjoyed her first dissipation very much, though she could not help thinking, that, if every party injured her as seriously as this one had done, the less going out for her the better; and she hoped Daisy would not insist upon her accompanying her to every party, for she was evidently not strong enough for that kind of thing. Dear little Daisy was also, I fear, not strong enough for that kind of thing, for she coughed a good deal when she was being put to bed, and though the injury to her was different from that produced upon Gutty, it was, I am afraid, quite as serious;—more serious, indeed, for the poor little queen could not get up the next day; and Gutty could have done so but did not, because she preferred to remain with her sweet young mistress, though after all the dancing she had had the previous night, she did not altogether object to the rest. As

Daisy could not for some days go out, and as she had many invitations which she could not, of course, accept, she was allowed to have a few friends often up in her nursery by way of compensation. Daisy had remarked the extreme weakness of Gutty's arms, and she had puzzled herself very much as to the cause; perhaps it was weakness—perhaps rheumatism; so she rubbed them very long and tenderly, but without any satisfactory result.

It is always sad to come to the tragic part of a story, especially when the tragedy happens at the most festive season of the year; but as truth cannot be shirked, I may as well tell it to you without any disguise; it is, then, that poor Gutta Percha, so far from having a strong constitution, had a very bad one, and the little home gaieties ruined it. Whether her first experience of dancing, like the first taste of blood to the wild beast, was too much for her, and she indulged too freely in the delight, I don't know; but I do know that after one of her dissipations a leg came completely off; this was, of course, a very

serious loss, and put an end to further capers, unless she intended to distinguish herself like the one-legged dancer, Donato. As every joy, however, has its alloy, so I suppose every sorrow has its consolation; for Daisy seemed prouder and fonder of Gutty than ever since her bereavement, and still thought she had a pretty, "laughing" face, and for a doll to have such a face after such an affliction shows so true a heroism of disposition it is no wonder Daisy loved her and made more fuss over her than ever. She was her inseparable companion, all day long, all night long; and it was very touching to see this little white Daisy wrapped up in a shawl, sitting by the nursery fire, always cuddling this doll, and addressing it in the most affectionate manner.

I have no doubt whatever, that seeing her beloved young mistress so ill affected Gutty's mind very much. One day, when she had been sitting on Daisy's lap a long time by the fire, something suspiciously like tears ran down her cheeks. I have told you she was a doll of very strong feelings as

well as of great moral strength, but if once she gave way to her emotions the consequences would be dreadful, and so they were. Daisy was quite unaware (for which Gutty was very thankful) of the grief of her dear doll till the little boy, who by his violent hold dislocated her arms, coming in with his sister to pay Daisy a visit, exclaimed, "Oh my, Daisy, Gutta Percha's crying!"

"She id *not*," answered Daisy, with as much indignation as before, though, alas! not in as strong a voice.

"Yes, she is," repeated the boy; "why, she's quite cried her eyes out and half her nose away, and all her colour's gone; she's all dented in, she looks as if she had got the small-pox."

"Gutty's not got the small-pox," replied Daisy; but this dreadful suggestion must have affected her very much, for she burst into tears, and Mrs. Fraser, coming into the room, sent the objectionable boy off, and told him he was very unkind to tease Daisy when she was so ill; but, though she reproved the

boy, she could not help seeing how good his description was.

"Me hate that boy," observed Daisy, when the offender had gone; and then she kissed Gutty, and called her dear darling Gutty—which must have consoled Gutty even if she had the complaint mentioned.

Notwithstanding all the care bestowed upon her, poor Gutty's calamities increased: no doubt her illness was in a great degree mental, for her head was becoming very much affected; I think she literally had softening of the brain, as that portion of her became very soft, and went in at a touch; she also seemed in actual danger of losing it, for any sudden movement caused it to fall either backwards or forwards. This symptom so alarmed little Daisy, that she cried for a long time about it, and made herself so ill by fretting, that Nurse, after Daisy had retired, took Gutty up, and by means of glue or gum, managed to stick it on again; this was, of course, a very delightful surprise for poor Daisy; for Gutty, sad though it all was, it would have been

worse had it made any difference in the feeling of the one being she adored. However, if she had lost her head, she had not lost her heart; that was quite intact. She was not a vain doll, and as she knew she could never succeed on the strength of beauty, she had gradually ceased to care or think about it. One day, however, before Daisy was awake, and while the nurse and housemaid were doing the room, she overheard a conversation that filled her with horror.

"Poor dear," said the Nurse, looking at Daisy; "she won't be long for this world."

"Lor', what a turn you do give one!" replied the housemaid; "I don't see as much ails the child."

"Your eyes ain't very sharp then," she observed; "it's quite plain the doctor don't think much of her, and she do so remind me of one of my brother's children, who was took with a mere cold one Sunday and buried by the next."

"If master and missis was to hear you talk, they'd go mad."

"I'm not going to tell them, but I know what I know. Just look at that doll in her arms, I do wonder she can abear the sight of such a' ugly thing. I'm going to buy her another doll."

"What, of the same sort?"

"Yes; she seems to take to them Gutta Percha ones. I don't believe she'd care for a doll she couldn't call Gutty."

Poor Gutty! this was terrible hearing for her; her own personal losses she could bear, but that she should suffer like this for them! No doubt she had grown hideous, and no doubt Miss Daisy would soon be of that opinion, especially when a new doll was brought to her. Then to have a successor—to live in the very presence of a rival; not to be able to go away to a distant country and try to forget, but most likely to be lying at the bottom of a cupboard in that very room, hearing the same loving expressions addressed to the new Gutty that she had looked forward all her life to the monopoly of! And then to hear that such an awful possibility as that of Miss

Daisy's dying was contemplated nearly drove her mad. Nor could she live without her; she had ceased to care about her own lack of beauty, now she ceased to care about her life; she rather wished her head would entirely come off—she didn't suppose she could live without one at all. She hoped she might die before Miss Daisy, if Miss Daisy was going to die; but she could not live an hour without her. She wished she could hasten her end; she had little opportunity, however, for doing personal violence to herself, as she was never out of Miss Daisy's sight.

I am very much afraid this little Daisy was really fading. She had a great oppression on her chest, and began to cough a good deal; moreover—and that is such a sad sign—she liked being quiet, though at times she was very restless; but she never wanted to run about the room, and never expressed a desire to go out—seemed quite satisfied with this inactive state. The only beings she ever wanted were mamma and Gutty, and she bestowed her caresses on them with the strictest impartiality; and though Gutty's

features were quite obliterated, and there was not an identifying one left, Daisy still maintained that Gutty had a pretty, "laughing" face. She must have seen the pretty, "laughing" face with the eyes of her loving imagination, I think. Poor Gutty's appearance now was very sad; the ball dress, in consequence of all the festivities, had got worn out, and it was replaced by one that, not having been made for her, fitted her very ill, and the one leg dangling below looked very melancholy; and she had a sort of nightcap on her head, which came down like a shawl, and was pinned across her chest: it was this head-gear that really kept head and body together.

People were fond of making offers for Gutty; some bid largely, but always to no purpose. Daisy's invariable answer was, "Me touldn't sell her for all the world—not for pounds and pounds!" Any attempt to take Gutty up filled her with suspicion and uneasiness, and she was never happy till she had recovered her treasure.

One evening, just before bed-time, nurse came in

with a parcel very similar to that which she had brought home on Christmas-eve.

"What's that, I wonder?" she asked Daisy.

"Me don't know," replied the child.

"Why, a nice new Gutty—a new Gutty in a pretty pink frock—a much prettier Gutty than the old one!"

"'Et's see," said Daisy with polite interest, but no enthusiasm.

So the rival was produced, and imagination may conceive, though words cannot describe it, the effect upon Gutty's mind when, even with her failing eyesight, she detected in this new rival her old familiar friend of the Lowther Arcade. Poor Gutty was not recognisable; but when the new Gutty recalled the circumstances of the old one's departure, she took it as a matter of faith that this dilapidated creature was her friend; and as she was a very loyal doll, and not nearly as selfish as many human beings are, she hoped no such fuss would be made over her as should grieve her friend's jealous nature.

"Yes, she id pretty!" replied Daisy languidly, and instantly feeling for her first love that some one had put aside.

"Don't you like this pretty doll?" asked Nurse in a disappointed tone.

"Yes; but me like old Gutty best, of course," responded the child; then examining the frock of the new doll, she said with animation, "Gutty can wear this frock—she wanted a new one."

"Lor! did one ever hear the likes of that? the child must be bewitched to prefer a thing that's ugly enough to give you a bad dream, to one pretty enough to give you a pleasant one;" but Mrs. Fraser, coming in, objected to this view, and said she much preferred that Daisy should stick to old Gutty. Constancy, even to a toy, was not to be laughed at, and she quite approved that old Gutty's remains should be set off to the best advantage by adventitious means. Nurse was disappointed at this reception of her gift; fidelity to an object, as long as it was attractive, she could

understand, but not when once it had ceased to be so.

New Gutty it was who had to find a bed where she could, while what remained of the old one slept on a soft pillow under soft clothes.

Early in the morning, before Daisy or any of the household were awake, old and new Gutty had a conversation: the new one deplored the feeble condition of her old friend; but old Gutty assured her she was very happy, much more so than she had been in the days of her youth and vigour. She then told the new Gutty, in a very pathetic manner, how beautiful Miss Daisy's conduct had been; what a lovely, pure, and refined life she had led; though a short one, it had, she said, been such a complete one, and it had made her understand things that years in the Lowther Arcade could not have revealed to her. Then she asked some questions about her old friends and life, and was told that everything had gone on just as usual, and that the military hero had not turned up. This conversation was evidently trying

for Gutty in her present weak state, for an unconscious movement on the part of Daisy nearly knocked her head off; but Mrs. Fraser came in and stuck it on again, which was a great blessing, for nothing made little Daisy so unhappy as to see her beloved doll losing her head. It is a very beautiful thing, I think, when one's best impression of life is one's last, even when that impression is only a doll's. I have told you that Gutta Percha had a very thoughtful nature, and though her head and feet were rather traditions than realities, she quite saw how happy it was for her that these calamities should have befallen her while living with such a sympathetic being as Daisy. Some people might have thrown her away at her first misfortune, and not have found in all her personal losses an additional claim upon their affection. There are many people older than Daisy—big, grown-up people—who resent the illnesses of others as personal injuries. The book in which illness is supposed to be a crime—a punishable one, too—is not so much a fancy as a fact;

but Daisy, small as she was, had a large heart. A beautiful, warm heart it was, in which affection, like a fountain, was always playing; it was a garden—a garden full of innocent young flowers; sweet thoughts, like violets and crocuses, were in full blow there. Would it not have been sad had a rude foot trodden down one of those flowers, crushing all the sweetness out of it? and was it not well, seeing how cold is the air of this world, often how scorching its sun, that these spring blossoms should be transplanted to the land where

"—everlasting spring abides"?

I think so. We know what Daisy would have been had she grown up—how loyal, how loving, how proud, and how sensitive; and how many people are there who could have understood and sympathized with such a nature?

I do not want to dwell upon a sad scene. Day by day Daisy grew weaker; there was a great deal of inflammation, but apparently not much pain. Poor

old Gutty, of course, perceived this, and her only consolation was, that her own strength was failing quite as rapidly. Daisy was scarcely able to speak to her, but her little thin arm was always round her. Children do not, as a rule, know when they are dying, so they cannot leave messages, or say whether life has been to them the realisation of a hope or a fear. Little Daisy, up to the very last, when she was breathing fast, and papa and mamma and nurse were sobbing dreadfully each side of the bed, still held on to old Gutty; but at the very last, by some mechanical movement, old Gutty's head came quite off; so it really seemed as if the two had died together.

After this, Gutty was, of course, unable to express her feelings any more. The new one has told me what a difference in that big house the absence of that little life made. The house was full of rooms, but they all seemed empty; people passed up and down the long staircases, still they seemed forsaken; people talked, but their voices seemed out

of tune. The pictures in the library were as gorgeous as ever, but to Mr. and Mrs. Fraser they were colourless and lifeless. Everything seemed dead; that which gave soul to every life and every art seemed to have taken wing, and followed the small child; volumes of poetry covered the tables, but to Mr. and Mrs. Fraser they were the dreariest prose. The only thing, new Gutty told me, that ever seemed to revive a spirit of poetry and romance was the sight of what remained of old Gutty. Happy old Gutty, not to have outlived such an affection as that she had inspired; happy young Daisy, only to have known life's early spring; happy Mrs. Fraser, to have had such a child, and to feel that when, like that sorrowing mother of old, she asked of the angels if it was well with the child, like hers would be the answer—"It is well!"

THE STORY OF NOAH'S ARK.

II.

THE STORY OF NOAH'S ARK.

THE Noah's Ark had travelled about for a very long time in search of Mount Ararat, as it was well known to everybody, down to the youngest person in the ark, that, once arrived there, the long journey would be at an end, and they would all be able to go out and walk about, and lead quite a different sort of life. In truth, some of them began to be rather tired of remaining in that roomy and comfortable, but still, at times, dull travelling house of theirs; they had long ago explored all its chambers, and passages, and funny nooks and places, and all the nice dens and stables of the

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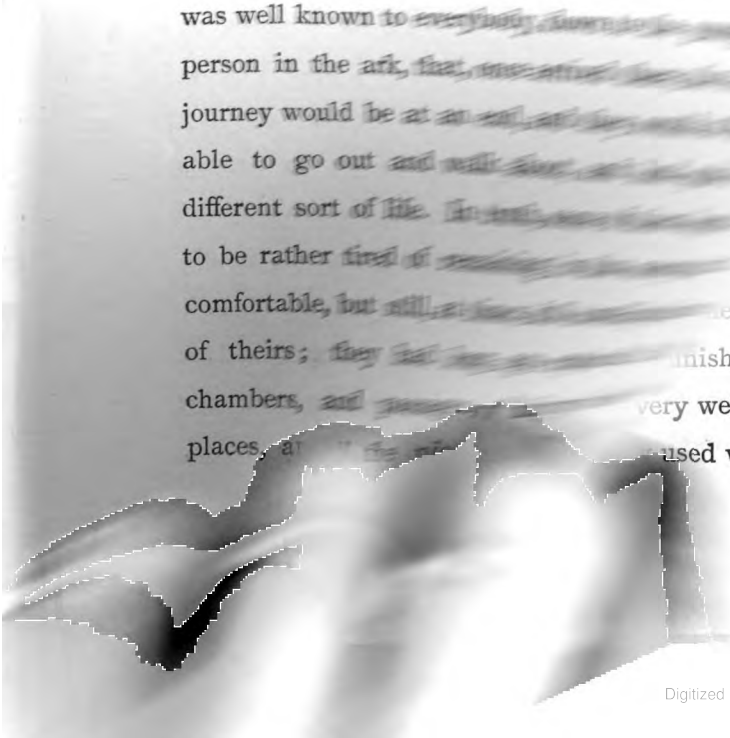

animals; this, indeed, had been an inexhaustible source of amusement, while it lasted. I should not have said inexhaustible, because, in fact, it came to an end; but it really had, and naturally might have seemed inexhaustible,—only, what could be inexhaustible when one has to remain in a place several thousands of years? They were, it is true, very uncertain as to how long it was in reality; some said it was one hundred thousand quadrillions of millions of years, and were fond of trying to cut as many notches in the ark, as that seemed to be by way of illustrating their theory and bringing it home to people who did not understand it. They, however, were well rebuked by Grandpapa Noah, who very wisely said, that if they were to go on cutting all those notches, they would soon have cut up all the chairs and tables, and, finally, the ark itself; and he said that their theory was perfectly absurd, because the ark itself could not be nearly as old as he was, and he could quite remember the old house and all the things in it, and Judea (they would,

indeed, have to make new maps when they got out, everything would be so changed), and so could Grandmama Noah, too. This was, of course, conclusive, and they were obliged to give in; only they thought he (that is, Noah) must be very, very old indeed. Then there were a great many who could form no opinion on the subject, for the good reason, that they had been born in the ark, and had never, consequently, seen Judea. And then there was little Jepphy, the youngest child, who used to say that it was two years, when she was asked, thinking they were asking how old she was, for that was just her age.

Well, they were all there, young and old together, and lions, and tigers, and elephants, and giraffes, and plenty of pussies—all together. And there was no biting or scratching amongst them, because the biggest lion knew that if he were to bite anybody he would be severely punished; and, of course, they all knew each other very well, having been together so long. And so they used very often

to have a grand romp, from end to end, and from top to bottom of the ark, and enjoy it very finely, and forget all about how long they had been there, until Grandpapa Noah said he was quite sure that some day they would dance the floor through, and that really the elephant must either be less boisterous or tread more delicately for the future; which he promised to do. The noise used to be just as if you had taken up the ark and shaken it about with all of them in it.

Now there was a prophecy—there had always been a prophecy. Nobody knew why, and how should they? or whom were they to ask? and why should they trouble their heads about it? as there really was a prophecy—and there *was* a prophecy—that, as soon as the ark came to Mount Ararat, it would be bought, not before then; and that, as soon as it was bought, it would be a sign that it was on Mount Ararat. Perhaps everything was bought on Mount Ararat—no one could say; but it did not much matter, for they were not bought; neither were they on

Mount Ararat, for they could not be the one without the other; that is to say, that being on Mount Ararat and being bought are precisely the same thing—to a Noah's Ark and its inhabitants.

Well, they used to look out of the windows of the ark to try and see Mount Ararat, or anything that might seem like it, or anything else; and they saw a great many things, and were very much amused; for in the course of their travels, they came to a great many places, and as they never failed to think each place was Mount Ararat, they were often disappointed, because, not being bought, they found that it could not have been so. (Of course there were people in the ark who kept strict accounts of all the places they came to, and made discoveries, and were always putting down things on maps, and making new questions, and answering them themselves.) Then they went on to another place; but the worst of it was, that in some of the places they stayed such a very long while, things getting duller and duller, they thought they would never go on again, and

that, in any case, they would all get too old to be bought at all. The very worst place was the top shelf in Mrs. Woodhatch's toy-shop, where they remained, alas! one hundred thousand long, weary years (so they calculated). They could, at first, see a lot of curious and funny things around and beneath them, nothing above—they were up so very high, and had plenty to laugh at; but one morning, when they got up, they found that a quantity of large monkeys had placed themselves, or been placed, just in front of them, and their ugly faces were seen looking in at every window in the ark, which was most annoying to its respectable inhabitants, for they were all horribly ugly, and grinned in a way that was not allowed at all in the ark; and, moreover, they were dressed in a style that would not have been allowed either—such coloured jackets as were never seen! For fifty thousand years everything in the ark made grimaces incessantly, relieving one another after each grimace at these grimacing monkeys outside the windows, thinking to frighten them away. But the

monkeys conquered, for they never changed their grimace once. At length, in the ark, they found that these were not real monkeys; no, they were worse than real monkeys, for they could not move or do anything, unless some one pulled their strings, or moved their two sticks about. So for the other fifty thousand years the people in the ark took no notice of them. But they had other calamities to make them sad, for, horrible to tell, they observed that the windows were getting dirtier and dirtier on the outside, and that it was consequently getting darker and darker inside, and would soon be so dark that they would only be able to see to say their prayers. And no amount of cleaning the windows on the inside would make them a bit cleaner on the outside, and, of course, no one could get outside to clean them. And then, still more horrible, they saw several spiders come down from the ceiling, and look in at them through the windows, and they knew for certain that these were real spiders and not, like the monkeys, made of wood and painted.

However, at last they got on their voyage again. It was quite delicious to feel the ark moving unmistakably once more, and to hear and know that there were great waves under it, wafting it on swiftly and buoyantly to some unknown region, which might be the much-desired bourne of their very long journey, or where, at any rate, something new must surely happen to them. This time their disappointments were to be over, their uncertainty about how and when the prophecy would be fulfilled set at rest, once and for all. Suddenly the ark seemed to land somewhere—evidently in a new country—and it had no sooner got firmly and safely on dry land, than it appeared to be surrounded by people—of course, the people of the country—and faces were seen peeping in at every window. This time they were very pretty faces, indeed; all smiling and laughing, as if the people in the ark had been old friends, just come back from abroad. And they had beautiful golden hair, thrown over their shoulders, or curled, and exceedingly pretty dresses on, and pretty boots, and

pretty hats and gloves, and were very clean; altogether very charming, respectable people, such as old Grandpa Noah approved of, and his daughters and grandchildren would be very glad to know. And what was their surprise, their delight, their enthusiasm, when they heard English spoken again so glibly; for they in the ark spoke nothing but English, Grandpa Noah having long ago made up his own and Grandma's mind that English was much the best language in the world, and that all the children should be brought up as English, and learn the catechism, and be thoroughly genteel. And as to what his own original language might have been, nobody knew, or thought, now, not even himself, or else he had long ceased to be proud of it; perhaps he had quite forgotten it.

Well, they heard their own dear English again, and what is more, they felt that they were *bought.* It was a strange but unmistakable feeling; they had never been bought before, yet every one and every thing in the ark, and even the ark itself,

knew at once that they were bought; they had so long looked forward to it, and said, "Oh, how nice to be bought!" And now they felt that it really was most nice, that peculiar feeling of being bought.

As they were all coming out of the shop, little Jepphy looked back and saw that it was a very handsome shop, and she felt glad they had been bought in such a handsome shop, and somewhere over the shop she saw, distinctly written up, Mount Ararat, or something like that; very like that, as she always declared afterwards. She was the only person who had seen anything like that; but no doubt she was right, as Grandpa said that prophecies were always fulfilled some way or other; and, after all, it is a good thing to stick to one's opinions, as some of them at least are sure to be right. Well, now began the new much-looked-forward-to existence.

That evening—a few hours had been necessary to arrange everything, to get out the clothes, the new dresses, to say their prayers properly, and to

arrange the procession—that evening they all came out of the ark. It was a grand procession—probably the grandest that the world ever saw up to that time, with the exception of the going into the ark, which was, of course, too hurried to be very beautiful, or since that time until the Shah of Persia, who claims to be a relation of Mr. Noah's, came to visit Queen Victoria.

The fact is that it ought to have been a very grand procession, for they had been talking it over all the years they had been in the ark, and though by this time every one should certainly have known where he or she had to walk, the last few hours had been fertile in disagreements upon that point, also upon the question as to what he or she should wear. Grandpa Noah had long ago written out complete directions for the whole affair, which all the little Noahs had learned by heart and repeated in class; but at the last moment, although it had always been determined that he should be the first person to leave the ark, the whole plan was

altered; and it was suddenly agreed that the animals should all go out first, and the people after. This, in fact, gave the latter more time to try their things on and get ready. In general terms, it may be stated that all having tried on the costumes prescribed for the occasion ended by taking them off again and wearing not so much what they were told to wear, as what they chose to wear themselves. Still it was a noble procession, and all went wonderfully well. The animals had ranged themselves two by two all along the passages and up all the staircases inside the ark, and received each a parting admonition to be quiet, orderly and dignified in their bearing, at least on that occasion, whatever they might be for the rest of their lives; this admonition was heightened by something which Noah whispered in the ear of each animal just as people are said to whisper in the ears of horses to keep them quiet. This time it is impossible to say what was whispered, but it was probably a prophecy, for it had

a marvellous effect upon each animal, rendering it quiet at once, perhaps from knowing what would happen to it if it were not quiet. It would be always better (some people think) to know what is likely to be done to us if we determine that we won't be good, instead of the result coming down so unexpectedly as it generally does.

All, at length, being ready, the door of the ark was opened, and the two elephants stepped forth most majestically; this position had been agreed upon for the elephants on account of their size and generally impressive appearance, combined with their habitual gravity of demeanour; they had been, in fact, the very best behaved animals in the ark, and if they took up rather too much room, still they could not help being so big, and now their size was a great advantage to the whole procession, as it looked very well to see something so grand and large coming out of the ark. Well, they went on, raising and brandishing their trunks about in the air as they walked, and looking very

noble; and as the first place had been assigned to them on account of their superior size, the second was, of course, awarded to the two apes, in consideration of their likeness to man. These two riotous but not unamiable animals really conducted themselves very well; they were evidently greatly impressed with what had been said to them at starting, and walked along hand in hand with their eyes bent on the ground for fear of seeing something too irresistibly funny, and with a pensive expression on their features. The two lions came next, trying, of course, to look as much like the king of beasts as possible; and the tigers, the panthers, with their stripes and spots well cleaned up for the occasion, the lynxes with tips to their ears, and a great many other very lynx-like creatures with their teeth showing, and their tails sticking out straight behind, followed in pairs. Then came the two black bears shuffling along and growling; then the two brown bears and the two white bears. Then appeared two camels with

their strange heads and black faces raised above the other animals, and looking about from side to side. Somewhere in the middle of the order of march, the two giraffes reared their lofty necks, and came along with the strangest sort of gait between a trot and a dance (very much like people practising their steps), and an expression of great composure upon their faces. Not far behind were a pair of most tremendous rhinoceroses, followed by a couple of hippopotamuses, and two great wild boars scarcely inferior in size, with their white tusks showing on each side of their mouths in a most forbidding manner, but all very appropriate to the occasion, on which they knew it was the duty of every animal to look quite his best, and that Noah was watching them all most particularly from the top window in the ark, taking note how they all behaved. They were still coming out of the ark in a long stream that did not seem likely to end for some time; the two little red foxes when they issued forth looked very sly indeed, and their tails were

unusually bushy. Oh, there were such a number of small animals like foxes which it would have been very difficult to say the names of, though, of course, they all had names and knew them very well themselves, because Adam named every animal as soon as he saw it in the garden of Eden, and the animal always knew and acknowledged that it was its right name, and would have been very much offended and have bitten any one who called it by any other name. Then there came a great number of animals who carried their tails turned up over their backs; they were of all sizes and sorts and colours, and nobody knew the names of them but Adam and themselves, but they were all in pairs, and had their tails curled up as above stated. Amongst them the two squirrels were, however, very easy to recognise because they were red and were cracking nuts; they were the only animals allowed to eat during the procession, but they held the nuts so ceremoniously between their two fore paws and their chin, that it was easy to

see that they were rather nervous, and were thinking more of appearing to eat gracefully than of enjoying themselves over what they were eating. Of course there came, all in their turn, two wolves and two hyenas, who certainly looked as if nothing but having been well frightened could have kept them in order, and they were very wisely made to go before, and not after, the two horses and mules and donkeys, who led the way for the two stags, and the reindeer, and the antelopes, and the two goats with very large horns, followed by two woolly sheep, very white and fat, with stiff and straight ears and ribbons round their necks. It was not difficult to recognise the two badgers as they came running out, nor the otters which followed; nor the weasels and ermines and polecats that all ran after them, apparently in a great hurry to get to some water or find holes and catch something, yet keeping pretty well in pairs. At last the birds began to come out, and you might at first, perhaps, be surprised that they did

not all fly out in a body with no order at all, but you will not be so when you reflect that in the ark for so long they had never been able to fly excepting from one perch to another; for, of course, Noah would never let one of them get outside the windows, excepting the raven and the turtle-dove, which were both very peculiar birds, and the latter was still perched on the roof of the ark with the leaf in its mouth, just over Noah's window. Thus they were not particularly anxious to fly just then, and it was well, for it is much more becoming to walk in a procession. So the two vultures took the lead, looking very queer indeed, as if they did not feel at all well, and the two eagles with crowns on their heads, showing easily that if the lion was the king of beasts, they were the kings of the feathered race. They walked slowly and sedately, as if they were at the funeral of cock robin, or at their own coronation; setting a very good example to the ostriches, and emus, and cassowarys, and ducks, and guinea fowl, and turkeys, and par-

tridges, who came on in stately manner behind them. Many of the birds, especially the smaller ones, had a most original way of walking on their two feet and supporting themselves upon their tail behind, which, no doubt, was one of the things they learned in the ark, and was probably more ceremonious at a procession than any other style of walking, and certainly quite as good. There were really very beautiful birds amongst them; birds of paradise, and canaries, and goldfinches, and black birds with yellow beaks, and jays, and all kinds of coloured parrots, and two splendid peacocks, who spread their tails out and strutted as if they themselves were the whole of the procession. Then we must not forget to mention that there were crocodiles and alligators, and frogs, and even some curious insects, all in pairs.

This mighty procession of animals continually issuing from the ark, and going along two and two in the most orderly manner, could not fail to produce a great effect upon the people in the earth, if there

were already many people in the earth again; and it was evident that there were plenty of English, at least, by what had lately occurred. Therefore, as a procession is, after all, of very little use, unless it produces some effect, or attracts the attention of one or two people, the animals went on a great way, always led by the two sagacious elephants, winding about through the country. At last they came to a river, and there was a very high bridge over it. The animals thought they would all have to stop at the river, because they had often learned in the ark that most rivers are the boundaries of different countries, and they were not at all sure whether it would be right to go over some one else's bridge, at least without asking Grandpa Noah first; however, as they had no very distinct opinions of their own, they would follow their leaders. And the two elephants, when they saw the bridge, came to a standstill, and thought a minute, balancing themselves backwards and forwards upon three legs, in order to think better and quicker—which is the same thing as resting

one's head on one's hand, or covering one's face with a book, or touching one's chin in a meditative manner. And all the animals thought they were going to turn back now, or, at least, going no further; and, that as the elephants were sometimes a long time thinking, they might as well sit down, which they began to do. But, lo and behold, they had scarcely done so, when they had to jump up again in a hurry, for the two elephants, having had a few minutes' conversation, nodded their heads at each other, and suddenly, with a toss of the trunk that looked very much like "don't care, it's only once a year," started forward again, and went boldly up the bridge on one side, and down on the other; and the whole procession followed, looking very fine indeed as it went over the bridge. No doubt the elephants knew very well what they were about. So the line of animals was seen for a very long time going over the bridge, and bending about in the country on the other side of the river; and people must have admired them from a long way off.

Well, as soon as all the animals, with the exception of the numerous cats, which had each his separate owner, had left the ark, the family were ready to do so too. It is not easy to say who came out first; probably a few small people of no importance had been coming out and going in all the time; but as soon as the serious, grown-up people came out —why they were delightfully received by the nice English people. All the genteel ladies and gentlemen, and little girls, came up to them, and shook them by the hand, as if they really were very old friends, and you could hear on all sides—

"How do you do, Mrs. Noah; how are you and all the children?

"Oh, Mrs. Shem, really I am so glad to see you!

"Ah, my dear Mrs. Ham, I sincerely hope you are quite well? Pray allow me to introduce to you——

"Most happy to make your acquaintance, Mr. Japhet," &c., &c.; for the introductions lasted a long time, because so many people had been born and christened in the ark, that it was impossible to

imagine who they all were at first. And no sooner had old Mr. Noah himself made his appearance, than a very distinguished, nice-looking old gentleman with white hair, but not at all old in his manner, whom Mr. Noah (no one knew why) immediately recognised as Sir Edward, went straight up and shook him warmly by the hand, and said, "How are you, old boy?" And they seemed to like each other amazingly, for they went away talking about land, that is to say what is called "landed" property, and left the rest of the two families to enjoy themselves together.

Dear me, it was so delicious, being in England after travelling about such a long time; and everybody on either side chattered away, without once stopping, the whole of that evening, and could not get out one quarter of what there was to say. Then they had a very good supper: and while they were all sitting at supper, Sir Edward talked a great deal to Mr. Noah, and said he should like to take a glass of port wine with him, which Mr. Noah was very happy

to do, drinking several times out of the glass that was nearest to him, and bowing to Sir Edward in a way that showed that he thoroughly understood good old English customs. After that they went to bed, taking leave of everybody. And that night they all slept in beautiful beds and cots, very different from those they had been accustomed to in the ark; there were nice downy pillows, and their heads looked very funny resting on them, with the counterpane round under their chins, and they seemed to be so sleepy that they could not keep long in that position, but were constantly sliding down under the bed-clothes, and having to be pulled up again for fear of being suffocated; and, indeed, one of them must have been very nearly killed, for he could not be found anywhere, and, at last, it was discovered that he had got under the mattrass, which was enough to kill anybody. But, one could tell by his face that he had fortunately been asleep all the time, and so he had not felt it.

Well, the next day was Sunday. They were all aroused by the joyous ringing and chiming of church

bells, and the sun shining into the bedrooms, through the beautiful chintz curtains; and having slept so well, they were quite ready to get up. Mr. Noah was always very serious on Sunday morning, and had quite a different expression on his countenance, and did not look as if it would be very safe to talk much to him until after morning service. But all the others were lively enough, laughing and talking, and seeming quite at home. They were all put into the bath, and the faces of some of them rubbed so much that they began to get very pale; so they were taken out again. But they were quite well immediately, and very happy indeed.

One of the Noah children asked one of the other children what they always did on Sunday: to which the other replied,

"Oh, we put on clean clothes, we go to church, and eat nice things," which was exactly what they used to do in the ark; for, of course, there was a regular church in the ark, with pews, and Mr. Noah read the service and preached himself.

Well, after breakfast, the party divided into two. One set was to go to church in the ark, and the others were to go with the family to the church whose bells they had heard chiming in the morning; where, of course, Sir Edward had a very large pew—large enough to hold them all. Nothing had been said about this arrangement, but it was, no doubt, well understood, for it came about in the most natural way—of itself, as such things generally do.

Mrs. Noah, and one or two of the other ladies, had on red or yellow gowns with very high bodices, and going straight down to the feet—very straight indeed—with, evidently, nothing at all stiff underneath, which looked rather funny to go to church in; but nobody, of course, would think of making any remark about grown-up people's style of dress, and the gowns were evidently made of the best materials; and though they might look a little odd, still they were unmistakably very handsome, and the ladies looked thoroughly distinguished and respectable. They went to church in a most delightful warm and cosy

carriage, which was nothing else than the inside of Sophy's fur muff.

Every one in Sir Edward's pew, and, indeed, in the whole church, was always well behaved during the service; and the Ark people who had come were most exemplary, sitting quite still with the same expression on their faces the whole time, and making no noise at all. And in fact, so good and quiet were they, that, although some of the congregation may have turned round and looked at them as the family was coming in, or occasionally cast a glance towards the pew from a feeling of natural curiosity at seeing such new and original-looking people in it, most of the neighbours took no notice of them at all; and the other members of the family in the pew were so absorbed in their devotions, that they did not seem to know they were there. There was only one slight hitch, when Mrs. Noah, who had been standing up and sitting down at the right place with everybody else all through the service, remained longer with her head bent down on the desk than all the

other people, and had to be reminded to get up, which she did, however, before any one of importance had seen her.

When church was over, the Ark people found themselves once more comfortably nestled in the same warm and silken-lined carriage which had brought them; and as they were going home they felt the full luxury of living again quietly in a Christian country, where everybody was respectable and genteel. However, they were not the sort of people to forget the ark; nay, they were feeling quite anxious to see it again, as it seemed a tremendous time since they left it the evening before, and they loved it very much indeed; being, in fact, so accustomed to it, that, in spite of all their nice new friends and associations, they would—thus they all agreed—have gone back to the ark, and pushed off on their travels again without a moment's hesitation, if they had been forced to make choice either of that or of entirely giving up their beloved vessel and home.

So, for the afternoon, it was agreed that they

should all go in a party to revisit the ark, and look into every room in it, and see whether all the things were in good order. And it was universally decided also, that Sophy and Willy, their new friends, who much desired it, should accompany them—and, perhaps, they would be able to have tea in the ark. That must depend, however, upon whether Mother Noah could find her teakettle, which she was sadly afraid she would not be able to do, as she had delayed everybody at the moment of leaving the ark, the day before, with vainly searching for it. This plan seemed a very pleasant one indeed; and they were anxious to know what had become of the animals since last night, and where they had slept, or whether they had all gone away. Especially it would be necessary to find and to feed all the pussies, and to see that they were quite well, and give them a great deal of milk after such a long fast.

Now of course I need not tell you that neither Sophy nor Willy were usually in the habit of playing with their toys on Sunday, and nothing would

have induced them to look at any of their other things; but Noah's Ark is rather different from other toys—for you know all about Noah, and what a good man he was—and as they had only just got it, and were always so good about Sunday, they were allowed to have it out on this afternoon.

Well, so they made a very motley little party, being dressed as I have described already, and with very high-crowned hats on, as they walked all together along the beautiful smooth dinner-table, which had the cloth removed as usual for the occasion. And the ark was there in the middle, just where they had left it the previous evening. Very pretty it looked, and so bright, and its nice new paint smelt more delicious, if possible, than before; and when they got near they soon began to hear noises in it, and to see that it was certainly not deserted, and as they approached yet closer, they heard distinctly the mewing of the pussy-cats; but what was their satisfaction when they entered the ark to find that all the animals had come back to it,

and slept there last night, as they could not find any lodging they liked so well, and they were now all in their places, with the exception, perhaps, of one or two wicked jackals and hyenas, whom no one was after all so very sorry to miss, as they were always wanting to bite people and fighting with the pussies.

There was really a great deal to do that afternoon, almost more than could be done well in one visit to the ark, because they would have to get back in time to take tea properly with Sir Edward, which everybody did on Sunday; and Noah would not have been late for the world, because he was really very anxious now to buy the land which Sir Edward had spoken to him about; and, in fact, after such a long tossing and tumbling about on sea, it must be particularly nice to possess at last a piece of dry land of your own. Moreover, there was a suggestion that the ark might, with a few alterations, be turned into a good house like those in the Square—and all this needed great consideration.

Sophy and Willy, however, did thoroughly explore

the ark, and a very beautiful place it was, and quite clean. It was quite wonderful to see what a number of windows there were in each side of it, all in rows, and then ever so many at each end; and lots of other small windows in all sorts of odd places, and one never *could* get tired of looking out of all these windows. Then there was the big boat which formed the bottom of the ark, because all the rest was as much like a great house as possible, and the boat part of the ark was very curious indeed, just like the hull of an immense ship that goes out to India. And there was a place where people could just walk all round it, but rather dangerous, and two great broad places at each end where one could sit out and enjoy oneself in sunny weather while the ark was going along. Then Sophy and Willy made more particular acquaintance with each of the animals, and liked some of them, and did not like others so much; and each found their own favourite to take to bed with them, along with all the other people who were nice. They also found out the names of

many of the animals, which they did not know at first; and when they had asked different people what an animal was, and nobody knew, or everybody was too busy looking for the teapot to answer, they used to ask the animal itself, and the animal generally told them if he knew, which he usually did not.

Well, Sophy and Willy were quite enchanted with the ark, and got more and more delighted the longer they examined; and they thought it must, indeed, be a splendid place to live in altogether. And as every person in the ark had been hunting about all the time for the teapot and tea-things, just at last tea was ready, and they all were invited to take a little early tea with Mother Noah, before starting to go home again. This was perfectly delicious; such exquisite cups and saucers were never seen anywhere but in the ark; they were not much bigger than thimbles, and did not hold a great quantity at once; but as they could be filled any number of times, before all was over each person had taken as much as he

wanted; very pretty plates also there were with beautiful coloured fruits on them, the fruit would not come off the plate it is true, but it looked much better on, and there were plenty of other things to eat.

While they were all sitting at tea, and hearing such curious stories about things that had happened in the ark; how very wicked the jackals and hyenas ordinarily were, and how clever the foxes were, and how very wise the elephants, and how kind most of the other animals were, while they sat talking and listening to all this, they were suddenly interrupted, and there was a great disturbance, with a little crying, for a leg of one of the animals had come off in a remote part of the ark, and everybody was in a great state asking questions about how it happened, which no one was in a position to answer just then; and everybody was exceedingly sorry because it was a kind animal, and never wanted to bite people, and liked being stroked. Well, so its leg was off, and no one could put it on again, although they all tried for half an hour. So it had

to be taken home with Sophy and Willy, and told that it should be put to bed with them at night, to keep it quiet, which had the desired effect.

They then went home, rather in a hurry, and had to hasten to the real tea with all the serious grown-up people, at which they were not able to eat or drink as much as usual, but they all took care not to say that they had already had so good a tea in the ark.

The rest of that evening was passed in attending to the poor sick animal, and giving it things to make it better and strong enough to keep its leg on of itself when once it was properly fastened again, for it was several times stuck on with the very firmest glue that could be found, and each time, as soon as the animal tried to walk, it came off, and the animal fell down; it was evidently too weak to keep its leg on, and no gum or glue would be of much use. So it was arranged that the poor thing should go to bed now, and be very cosy, and that it should die comfortably to-morrow, and be very nicely buried. But

the saddest thing about this poor little animal was that no one knew its name, and the animal itself could furnish no information; nor could any one guess what country it originally came from, and this was particularly touching, because, of course, it might have liked to see its native country again; and now the other animals—which must be its relations if they were exactly like it—could never be told of its death. It was a white animal, with a great yellow spot on its back, and a great yellow spot on each of its sides; and, as to its shape, it had a body and a head and legs and ears and a tail and nothing else. It may be stated also that it did not look a very clever animal, but rather stupider than otherwise, which, no doubt, accounted for its not knowing its name nor where it was born. Suddenly a very bright thought occurred to some one, viz., to find out the other animal like it in the ark, and ask these questions which no doubt would then be answered immediately. This was accordingly done, and the other animal exactly similar, with the yellow patches,

was found and brought out and asked; but, alas! he looked stupider than his friend, for he stood still and said nothing, not seeming to know what was being asked of him—and there was really no excuse for this one, because it had all its four legs, and was not in any pain. So every one told it to be ashamed of being so stupid, and they hoped it would be sorry for the death of its friend, and be able to cry at the funeral.

Now I shall not describe the funeral to you, as such things are too sad to think about. Suffice it to say, that it took place sure enough the next day, with great pomp and ceremony, not a thing being omitted which could make it worthy of being remembered by the side of that of Cock Robin, or of Dog Tray, or of the poor little canary in the garden.

Well, the few next days were passed in a variety of ways. There was a great deal of talk on the part of the Noah family amongst themselves, and it was evident that something important was being arranged. At last the result of their conversation

transpired, and every one was told that instead of buying the piece of dry land, and altering and turning the ark into a house just now, they were all determined to set off on a nice little journey round the world, and come back again, which of course they would do by going always straight on, the world being round, as they had already learned in the ark. They had several reasons for this: first of all, by going to every country in the world they would be sure to come to the country of the poor white animal with yellow spots, who did not know his name, where they hoped to see others like it and be able to give the news of its death; secondly, they thought it would be nice for all the animals to see their native countries, as, perhaps, some of them might like to stay there, but were too polite to say so now; and there were, of course, plenty of other reasons—change of air, and the great desire of everybody to learn things and know geography very well, and find places on the map and have a good long game besides.

Sophy and Willy were of course quite resolved to go with them, and the people of the ark told them it would be very pleasant, and not such a long journey as they thought—nothing to the voyages the ark had always made before. So they took leave of everybody on shore and promised to come back again, and the ark started.

The ark went along for a very great way, getting soon quite out of sight of land and into the middle of the sea, where there was nothing but the blue or green waves and the bright sky overhead. Very charming was it to sit out on the open part at one end of the ark and see the sun shining upon the water and feel it quite warm—for the day was a calm summer-day, very fit for starting upon a voyage. They were wondering of course what country they would come to first, and no one knew, excepting Noah, who knew everything but did not like to be asked.

However, they expected to go on for a very long time first without coming to any place. When

they had been just the right length of time without coming to any place, they came to one. They were sure it must be somewhere in Africa. There were great sandy plains as far as you could see, and consequently, no doubt, much farther; the sand was very dry and small, much smaller than the sand on the sea-shore, and it was always rising in great clouds and blinding people, and if you trode in it, your feet left no mark, because, though each step sank down into it a great way, so far that your shoes were full of it, still the moment you went on, other sand fell into the place and filled it up. They were told that this place was Timbuctoo, and it was really dreadfully hot. There was nothing to be seen there, and they wondered what was the use of coming to such an uninteresting place, as not one of the animals seemed to recognise it, and no one could possibly care to stay there. Suddenly, when they were thinking of going away, they saw a great cloud of dust in the distance, but rapidly coming nearer. It was as if a great wind were blowing towards them,

and bringing all the sand along; but there was no wind, it was too hot for there to be any wind. So it came nearer and nearer, and at last they saw what caused that great cloud of sand. They could plainly see a man running at full speed towards them, and he was evidently pursued at full speed by another creature, and both were kicking up the dust behind them in a frightful manner. The man was soon recognised as a missionary by his hat and his coat, and more especially by his hymn-book, which he held straight out before him in his hand. Then they were of course very glad they had stayed there a little, as no doubt they had been brought there to save the good missionary. But the creature was coming on very fast behind him, and they soon saw that it was a cassowary; and in a few minutes it caught the poor man and ate him all up before them while they were looking on, and then picked up his hymn-book and ate that separately, and seemed to like it even better than the good man himself.

And Mr. Noah said that prophecies were always fulfilled. They were much horrified, and thought how dreadful it was to see animals so savage as that, and how glad they were that all those just like them in the ark were quite good and tame, and would not hurt anybody. Then they went and asked the cassowary in the ark whether he would like to go and live with all the other cassowaries in his own native land, and he said: No, he would much rather remain in the ark.

So the ark went on again. Of course, you need not to be told that it was now a very long while indeed since the Flood, and that consequently the world had had plenty of time to get full of people and animals, and to send out missionaries, and to become very much what it is at present. Well, it was still beautiful weather, and the sea was delightful to look at. Soon it became quite full of beautiful seaweeds that made it all green, and clung round the keel of the ark so heavily that sometimes it was almost difficult to push on. However, they succeeded, and

got into clear water again—so clear that they could see all the fishes swimming about in it. Beautiful, bright-coloured, red, yellow, and blue fishes they were; and as the people in the ark looked down through the waves, they beheld also all the splendid coral caves and houses that the fishes lived in, and could see quite like another country down there, full of brilliant flowers and wonderful, indescribable things that sparkled like diamonds.

Soon afterwards they came to a coral island. There was a great ring of pink and white coral all round the island, which was itself made of coral, although earth had come upon it and trees had grown there since the Flood. Directly they arrived and had got under the branches of the beautiful palm-trees which stretched right over their heads like the roof of a house, they were astonished and almost frightened to hear a tremendous noise above them—a vast chattering and shrieking and fluttering of wings—and when they looked up they saw that all the parrots and monkeys had come out in a state of

great excitement to see and recognise their relations in the ark: so those in the ark were asked if they would like to join their friends aloft in the palm trees, and resume their former mode of life in the beautiful coral island; but they all at once replied—No they would rather not; for they knew well that the other monkeys and parrots had been fearfully jealous of them all the time they were in the ark, and now only wanted to bite them and pull them to pieces; so they would not go up there for the world: and they soon had evidence that they were right; for the others, finding these did not come away from the ark, getting in a rage, sent down such a volley of nuts, principally large hard cocoa-nuts, that a few people were nearly killed.

Well, the party, having once started, determined to go on and see a few more things in the island before leaving. So they forced their way through the thick forest, clambering and tumbling over the fallen trees and the strong creeping plants, and pushing the close trunks of trees aside, and cutting some of them when

they would not yield. And at last they came to a very pretty spot indeed. There was a large space cleared of trees, and quantities of flowers in it: in fact, part of it was a garden, with, however, plenty of fine vegetables also: and there were several animals moving about peaceably—a couple of kids were tied by two long strings to a post not far off, and a tame parrot was sunning himself upon a perch, and there was a dog and two or three cats. In the midst of all this, though almost concealed by the flowering plants which grew above, was a little house—a very curious little house, such as many people in the ark thought the very likeness of the little house they would like to live in, but others said it was not handsome enough, and since they had seen Sir Edward's house they would not have anything smaller.

However, this was a very interesting place, for who should come out of it just at the moment but Robinson Crusoe himself, apparently going to take a walk, with his gun in his hand, no doubt for fear

country of the animals they were in search of, and if they did not stop now they would have to go all round the world and come back to that spot before they found it again. So they got out and went to explore the island. And they had not gone far before they saw savages; and hiding themselves behind trees they stopped to look at them. But they had scarcely been looking at the savages a minute before the savages were looking at them, and thinking what they should do with them. They were real savages, fearful black men with very big heads, and hair sticking out straight, and carrying immense clubs. They were all round the Noah's Ark people in a few moments, yelling and dancing their war-dance, throwing their clubs up in the air and catching them again, until the poor folks expected to be all killed together in a few minutes. However, to their very great surprise and pleasure this did not happen. They soon perceived issuing from a neighbouring very black and uncomfortable-looking house, the most extraordinary

his master and be put into the story. So they all said good-bye to the famous old man and to Friday, and set off on their travels again.

This time they were not so fortunate, for they got into a terrible mess; but it was very exciting, and of course they had never expected to go all round the world without being in a scrape now and then.

They went on over the beautiful smooth sea a great way, and thought it would be always fine weather; but no sooner had they thought so, than there came on a terrific storm, and it got very dark, and the ark was tossed about so violently on the top of the waves that they feared it would be broken to pieces, and all went down-stairs into the cabin, and determined to enjoy themselves at home the rest of the day, as much as possible. They very soon, however, felt a violent shock, and on looking out found that the ark had landed of itself on another island, and that as the sea was still very rough they had better take refuge there a little while. Perhaps, too, it might be the

Having come to her throne she made him sit down by her side, and all her subjects sat down in a very large circle around them. Then a most terrible-looking savage came up and made a long speech, in which he told Noah that her Majesty, who was no less than the queen of the cannibal islands, had decided to marry him, and they were now about to have a grand feast in honour of the event, and that from that moment he might consider all the cannibal folk as his own subjects. This speech did not please Noah at all; but it was in vain that he told them he was already married, and in vain that he protested, and in vain that he got in a great rage; they thought he was only the more delighted the more he said about it, and so he was obliged to sit still and see what would happen. The man who had made the speech then went and fetched a very large basin, and placed it in the middle, and then everybody got a quantity of pieces of hard wood, and chewed till they became soft enough to look like something

to eat, and threw them all together into the basin; after which they put a fire under the latter, and boiled the contents. They then ladled out and offered some of this delicious soup to her Majesty, who drained the whole portion at one mouthful, and afterwards to Noah, who felt very much enraged and disgusted, but was obliged to pretend to take some of it for fear of offending them; he, however, contrived very cleverly to throw the whole of it over his shoulder, and they, of course, thought he had swallowed it all, and were well pleased. But Noah was not to be so easily conquered as these savages supposed. He had travelled about the world a great deal too much for that, and so he had soon formed a very nice little plan both for saving himself and all his people, and also for punishing the savages for trying to marry him at his age to so hideous an old woman, and for offering him such disgusting soup to drink. He informed her Majesty that having partaken of her regal hospitality he would like to be allowed the

opportunity of making her and her nation taste some very fine soup of his own making. To this her Majesty most graciously consented, giving orders that her slaves should attend to all directions respecting the wonderful soup which he was about to make. Noah then began, and having thrown into the pot some of the wood which had been previously prepared, for, to his thinking, there were few things nastier than that, he added successively the contents of his snuff-box, his tobacco-pipe, an old shoe, a dried fish, a quantity of gunpowder, seasoning the whole finally with tobacco, and boiling it eventually in sea-water;* and the result was such a soup as had never yet been tasted in the whole of the cannibal dominions. Having pretended to taste this beverage first himself, and rubbed his stomach which he had observed was what the savages did when they thought something they had eaten very nice, he offered a large plateful to the queen, who

* After a recipe by the late ingenious and lamented Edoard Ourliac.

swallowed it immediately, and rubbed herself after it almost before she had time to think whether she liked it or not. Her royal example was of course at once followed by the whole nation, and in a very few minutes all of them were taken so ill that they could not prevent Mr. Noah and his party from going where they chose.

It may easily be imagined that they were not anxious to see any more of the cannibals, although, having got so safely out of their clutches, they were now not at all displeased at having once encountered them, because they might now be quite sure that such people really existed, and were not only in the story of Robinson Crusoe, and they could tell every one when they got home that all those wonderful and exciting adventures were quite true. So they lost no time in putting to sea again, and very quickly came to another island. Having consulted the best map of the world which the ark possessed, they arrived at the conclusion that this island was not down in the map, and that, therefore,

something strange was sure to happen to them. Nor were they disappointed, for the people who inhabited this island were the Dwarfs, and the moment they landed the little party was surrounded by this strange nation, talking and vociferating furiously in a language which was totally unknown to them, and which they consequently set down as gibberish. They were rather inclined to be frightened at these people, and not at all sure whether they were going to be eaten or not; however, they were all hurried away, none of them knew whither, and all they could do was to run on through forests and over plains and across tiny rivers with tiny bridges over them, which they were obliged to walk on for fear of offending the dwarfs, although they could easily have stepped right across from shore to shore. At last they were somewhat relieved to come to a church where the whole crowd stopped, and the dwarfs made all the Ark people enter, and sit down in very tiny pews. Still no one knew what was to happen, and

as they had no prayer-books with them, and, moreover, were very uncertain what religion the dwarf nation professed, they were afraid they would get on very badly during service, and not be able to find the hymns even if anybody lent them hymn-books. What was their surprise and still greater relief then, to see entering the dwarf church a little group of very old friends. General Tom Thumb, with Commodore Nutt and little Minnie Warren, to whom the General was about to be married. In passing up the aisle the illustrious party of course recognised Sophy and Willy, but naturally did not speak; but after the ceremony was over they came straight to their pew, and shook them by the hand, and invited them and all their friends to the breakfast. This, however, Noah said he was obliged to decline as he had to go all round the world before the bell rang for dinner, and had got only about half way yet. So the Tom Thumb party presented everybody in Noah's Ark with the last photographs of themselves and all their friends, with such libe-

rality that the Ark became very heavy, and could only move quite slowly when it set out again. As soon as they had got out of sight of the island, Noah said that if their vessel did not manage to go much faster now instead of slower than before, they would never be in time; so he had out his telescope, and looked to see if the last dwarf who had been descried for a long time, still waving his handkerchief, and throwing his cap up in the air, was well out of sight, and then at once ordered all the photographs to be thrown overboard.

Mr. Noah then informed the people in the ark that the world had changed very much indeed since the Flood, and that every place was different from the places he came to when he made that journey before. And having begun to tell them so much, he went on, and confessed that he could not find any of the countries they touched at in the map; therefore they must be all new countries, and he had not the slightest idea where they had got to; but, of course, it would all come right, because the world was

round, and if they went on they must naturally arrive at the place that they started from. His only anxiety, however, was that they would never be able to get round the rest of the world before dinner; but, after all, there was no cause for fear, because if they were lost, as soon as the dinner-bell rang, nothing would be easier than to steer towards the direction whence the sound came. This, every one agreed, would be very easy; and after what Noah had said, as to their position, they might well expect extraordinary, ungeographical things to happen now, and were very pleased at the prospect. At length, they landed once more in a very beautiful country, and walked on and on a great way, until they came to a valley which attracted them by the pleasant shade they found under the strange-looking trees with which the valley was full. They all lay down on the grass here, under the trees, and, having refreshed themselves from a clear running brook close by, began to look about for some fruit to eat, thinking, naturally enough, such a valley as that

must have plenty. So they looked up at the trees, and what was their surprise and astonishment to perceive that they were loaded with the most splendid and extraordinary fruits ever seen. But no sooner had they made this discovery, than they saw nothing more; for sudden darkness came over the entire valley. In the midst of the darkness, they heard the most tremendous rushing sound, accompanied by the shaking and fluttering of feathers, that they had ever heard. This lasted for some time, and then the darkness gradually cleared off, and looking up they beheld an enormous bird flying higher and higher into the sky; and the valley became lighter the higher he went, for it was his outstretched wings which had covered the valley, and made it dark. While they were in amazement, and still gazing upwards, some one called out to them, and asked why they stood there wasting so much time instead of picking up the diamonds, and becoming rich in a few minutes. They all immediately looked round, and saw Sinbad the Sailor. Then they knew, of

course, that the large bird was the Roc, and were no longer surprised. So everybody began picking up the sparkling fruits which had fallen from the trees, and which all turned out to be diamonds, and, of course, became enormously rich in a few minutes. When each person had his pockets full, and was rather tired, and did not care to have any more, they began talking to Sinbad. And Sinbad asked them where they wanted to go. So they told him how anxious they were to find the country of the poor little animal who did not know his name. Sinbad asked them to describe the animal, as he had seen most animals in the course of his travels. They, therefore, described it to him as I described it a few pages back; whereupon Sinbad said that he knew the animal perfectly well; though he could not, for the life of him, think of its name just then; and he also knew the country which it must have originally come from, where there were plenty of other animals exactly like it. The good people of the ark were delighted,

and asked whether, if Sinbad had no very important journey to make just then, and no particular appointment to keep with the Roc, he would be so very kind as to show them the way to that country.

Dear old Sinbad immediately replied, that nothing would give him greater pleasure, and not only would he show them the way, but would go with them and steer the ark himself. This was charming! to be steered by a real sailor, and that sailor Sinbad himself, the prince of sailors!

And honest Sinbad was true to his word; for he steered the ark, and brought them to a country where they at once saw a number of white animals with a yellow patch on the back, and one on each side, and a body and legs, and a head and ears, and a tail and nothing else—the image of the one still living in the ark. The animals stood and looked at them for a minute, and everybody at once asked them their names; but whether everybody speaking at the same time offended or frightened them, or whether they did not know, or otherwise, the

animals all ran away like one animal, and were not seen any more. However, of course, there was no doubt as to this being the country of the animal that had lost its mate; and, of course, here were plenty of new mates for it, and it would be able to tell the others all about their poor deceased friend at leisure, and in their own proper language, which they alone knew. So the animal was brought up and asked if it would like to go on shore, and live with all its friends, where it would soon be very happy, as no doubt it was now quite lonely in the ark. The animal looked, it must be confessed, not much cleverer than it did on a former occasion; but some one said that it answered "Yes" very distinctly, as if it was saying one of the responses at church, and looked much pleased. It was then brought to land, and walked contentedly from the ark on to the shore, and remained there contentedly for some time. Seeing which, the ark was well satisfied, and moved off to continue the voyage However, to the great surprise of all, they soon

heard the animal they had just left beginning to bleat and bleat most emphatically; and there was now no doubt that it could never have answered "Yes," or did not know what it was about—or that, at any rate, it did not at all care to remain behind. This was rather vexatious; they had no choice but to turn back and take it on board again, which involved a slight loss of time. However, as this was the first decided expression either of a like or a dislike on the part of the animal, they thought that it was well worth their while to have taken the journey to find out what the animal really did like, which was now evidently remaining in the ark where it had been at first.

Well, the chief object of their voyage being now accomplished, Noah looked at the clock; and as there was very little time left, and as they had on board a pilot who knew all about the world since the Flood much better than Noah himself did, the latter begged Sinbad to show them a very short cut home, so that they might arrive in good time—which

that obliging sailor at once did; and just as he was taking leave of them all, the dinner-bell began to ring, and just as it ceased ringing they suddenly got back to England again.

Well, now having followed Noah's Ark throughout one journey round the world, it will not be necessary for us to do so with respect to the many subsequent voyages of a similarly comprehensive kind which the ark took during many successive weeks. Suffice it to say that there were always plenty of adventures, and strange things happened on all the islands and continents and promontories where it touched.

The only thing which it is really important to mention, is the fact that the poor white animal which lost its leg and died, and was buried in consequence, though the first, was not by any means the last to whom that unfortunate circumstance occurred; far otherwise. Whenever the animals went in or came out of the ark, there was generally one that managed, of course unintentionally, to get its leg shut in with the door, just as the latter was brought

to, on which occasions everybody became much concerned, and there was a great stir; but as they always set to pulling hard at the animal and trying to drag it out, instead of going and opening the door for it—why, the leg was usually left in the ark, though the animal was really dragged out. But this was not the only way in which such casualties came about; there were all sorts of other ways. It is not easy to say what they all were. The animals had an obstinate habit of getting under people's feet when people were not in a good temper—as if they did it on purpose, it really looked sometimes; and, indeed, things began to be rather serious. This losing of legs seemed to have become a sort of epidemic in the ark; the animals were often seen actually throwing their legs away in the most abandoned fashion, or leaving one quite absently behind them, trotting on conveniently and philosophically on three. This, however, did not materially alter the good-humour of the inhabitants of the ark, nor in any way hinder its operations from going on as usual. There were always plenty

of wooden legs, and pins and crutches, easily fitted on with sealing-wax, and it looked more than probable that something of this sort was deemed better than an ordinary natural leg, and had become an object of ambition and rivalry among the animals.

There was, however, one event which did cause a slight change in the fortunes of the ark, and this I am about to relate.

It was now a good long time since Sophy and Willy first became acquainted with the nice new ark and its inmates; and at first, and of course for a long while, as the ark belonged to both of them alike, they used to agree together perfectly about all the ark affairs, ever being of the same mind as to where the ark should go and when it should start, and what things should occur to it in the different places. And as for Sophy, she never could get tired of travelling round the world, and coming to new countries, &c. &c.

But with Willy it was rather different. After some few weeks he began to find it dull, travelling round

the world every day. Yet he was of a most adventurous nature, and would have thoroughly enjoyed starting on a real voyage of any length at once—and in any ship, too, that was ready to start. But a ship and the ark are two such very different things; and it occasionally occurred to Willy that they ought sometimes to try and conquer some of the strange countries they came to, and plant the flag of England in the soil, as Captain Cook used, and shoot a few of the natives, bringing the rest home as prisoners—and that the Noah's Ark people were a little bit slow to travel with. For all the inmates of Noah's Ark were so very peaceable, that nothing could have induced one of them to take a gun in hand; nor would it have been likely to frighten savages at all, had they done so, because any savage could see that they did not know how to use it, and their decidedly unwarlike expression of countenance would be greatly against them in a battle.

Now Willy was undoubtedly of a military nature; the taste for war and tactics and camps was evidently

growing upon him every day, and it was in vain that sometimes he tried to urge on the simple denizens of the ark and to inspire them with a desire for glory. He could see that they did not like it; so he began to despise them a little in his heart in consequence; and it was not surprising that, one day, when his papa presented him with a complete camp of tin soldiers, he should wholly relinquish Noah's Ark and its doings, and hand it over entirely to Sophy.

Sophy was very glad of this. But Noah's Ark could not help feeling a little hurt—wounded is the proper word; and the general feeling was one of jealousy towards the soldiers, and that the right thing would be to do something effective by way of demonstration. This they did manage to accomplish; for they all turned out and went in single file, one following the other exactly—over the table, and along the wainscot all round the room, and along all the window-sills and on the mantelpiece, and in fact along every thing and every part of the room where there was a little narrow space to walk

upon, even to the backs of some of the chairs. This was most successful; it really looked quite appalling, and reminded one of the plagues in Egypt.

Well, this was highly satisfactory for the moment, and they all went to bed feeling victorious and defiant. But jealousy is a very incurable thing.

What happened the next morning? Why, one of the young women going out of the ark to get the milk as usual for breakfast, and the extra milk for the pussy-cats, she came back in a great state of mind, having seen a horrid tin soldier!

She described how detestable he looked, a great hat with a feather in it on his head, and a green coat on, and his gun up to his shoulder, when there was really nobody to shoot but herself. And there he was walking about in such an important manner on the dinner-table, where only the nice Noah's Ark people had walked before, and it was impossible to say what he would do next. Everybody felt very much insulted, and truly enraged, though why they should, they only knew.

But their disgust was destined to go on increasing. For, in a short time, that is after breakfast, they in the ark heard distinctly a great and horrible noise, proceeding evidently from the quarter of the soldiers; in fact, a regularly rub-a-dub-dub noise, such as is always made in barracks in the morning, nobody knows how. Noah said he was seriously disturbed in his reading and meditations, and Mrs. Noah threw herself down on the ground with rage and turned green, as she said it was most disreputable living so near the barracks.

They were very nice new barracks with officers' quarters, and could be seen quite plainly at the other end of the table. And whenever any one stirred out of the ark they were sure to see somebody coming out of the barracks or up at the windows. Mrs. Noah declared such conduct was highly impertinent, and told every one not to look through the windows at all, and to go out of the ark as little as possible. They continued to keep a good look-out, however, and to tell her how

very impertinent the soldiers still were, which they could not help seeing. It was a pity they chose to look, for what was their fury when in a little while they actually saw Sir Edward himself, Noah's own particular friend, talking and shaking hands good-humouredly with the General. They could scarcely believe their eyes (—yet why should he not?), and so they looked again and again, until they heard Sir Edward tell the General that he must now hurry away, as he had an appointment to keep, and though his society was very charming, still he must not break his appointment. Then a great many more people in the ark turned green, and were taken very poorly, or fell down, and the animals took to throwing away their legs with rage. Then one of the animals ran out of the ark and bit one of the soldiers, and came back again. The good people agreed that it was very wrong to go and bite him, as we may hate or rather dislike persons because they are impertinent, and altogether nasty and wicked, but we must not go so far as

to bite them; still they also agreed that it was very brave and clever of the animal to go all alone to bite the soldier and come back again. And as for the animal, he thought that it was much better to go and bite and get it over than to talk so long, and enrage oneself and get green and ill.

Well, though this was rather serious, still it might have been arranged amicably between the two parties; but from various untoward circumstances this was not destined to come about.

It so happened that the general of the army was a very ambitious man, something like Napoleon Bonaparte, and that there were a number of war-like young colonels, and majors and captains and lieutenants, and especially fiery cornets and ensigns in his army, all eagerly aspiring for martial glory, and for the opportunity of showing what great soldiers they were, and of becoming emperors as soon as possible. So there was a great rub-a-dub-dub amongst them, and they soon concocted a fine message and sent it to the ark, ordering

them all to come out instantly and make ample apologies, lying down flat on their faces on the ground, or else the soldiers would soon make war upon the ark. This was a horrible idea for the ark, which had always been such a peaceable place; however, its inhabitants were a great deal too proud to make apologies, and their courage rose directly, even the monkeys went up to every window and made hideous faces at the soldiers, while all the other animals came out in a line in front and gnashed their teeth, and made savage noises.

So before much longer there was a still greater rub-a-dub-dub in the barracks, caused by the unmistakable beating and rolling of big drums and kettle-drums, of which they seemed to have more than enough for the occasion, but were probably anxious to use them all.

Then there sallied forth whole regiments of tin soldiers in splendid order with their officers marching alongside, and the two trumpeters with golden trumpets going first, leading them on to glory. First

came the infantry, long disciplined columns of grenadiers, very much like those who were so grand at the battle of Waterloo, and rank and file of every description with ever so many light companies of green-coated sharpshooters with their muskets always ready, and every regiment had its own music. There was the great grenadier band of brass, with many loud bass instruments, and there were white-coated men playing the drum and fife in a very high key, and Scotch regiments droning away at the bagpipes, and there were separate trumpeters making calls in every direction. Soon the cavalry began to follow, and then the field really looked very beautiful, for the whole company of lancers came prancing forth with their glittering spears, and the hussars followed, and then the life-guards came charging out of the barracks with gleaming helmets and unsheathed swords. All these different regiments marched on into the middle of the great field of battle, and then they brought and pitched their tents and dragged up their cannon until there

was a magnificent camp regularly set out. So the soldiers took up nearly the whole of the large table, while the ark occupied only one corner of it. It must be confessed that nothing half so fine had ever been seen from the windows of the ark, and that some of the inhabitants could not help admiring it; but they were not the least afraid; and stood gnashing their teeth and looking on. Truth to tell, when the battle really began, they had not by any means the worst of it; for all the discipline of the soldiers could not stand against the charge of the elephants which broke entirely through the grenadier squares that had been so successful at Waterloo; and, perhaps, if there had been elephants at Waterloo, the fate of the day might have turned out different. All the other animals fought splendidly, each in his own way which he knew best, and no one had taught him but himself—jumping on to the soldiers and biting and scratching them, or hugging them to death; and the eagles and vultures came down in a great cloud upon their heads, flapping great

wings against their faces, and pecking their eyes out. Mr. Japhet also distinguished himself grandly in the battle, and found that his tight jacket was very convenient for fighting in. When the battle was over, both parties had won, and the soldiers went back gloriously to their camp, and the animals no less gloriously to the ark. The war thus begun, lasted a long while. Every day hostilities were renewed in some form or another; either there was a great battle, or there were a variety of little skirmishes. The sharpshooters were always coming out and standing behind trees and shooting an animal or a bird that had strayed too far from the ark, and when this happened it was very harrowing for those in the ark to see their fat white pet duck or goose being killed on an altar in the middle of the camp, with his red feet straight up in the air. But in revenge sometimes an animal used to crawl along the ground till he got near a soldier, and then spring upon him and bring him home to be properly eaten up near the ark, not within it, for that was not

allowed. The lions also used to go out at night and walk boldly about in the enemy's camp, eating up the people as they found them then and there.

However, what with fits of jealousy, and so much fighting with soldiers, to which they were not accustomed, and also the stupidity of some of the animals in getting under people's feet, it cannot be denied that the animals in the ark were no longer in so flourishing a condition as at first. If pins and artificial legs were the honourable exception at one time, it was by no means so now, but quite the reverse. The larger number, alas, were in a mauled and maimed condition, though the elephants and the giraffes were still all right.

Latterly, moreover, the attacks of the enemy had become unmistakably severer and more difficult to endure for long together, showing undoubted progress in the art of war. There had been regular cannonading, and missiles were frequently felt to come with a great noise against the ark, nearly crashing through the roof of it.

It was, in fact, no ordinary army—that of Master Willy. All the officers in it were bent on conquering everything they came across, until they were all emperors; and what lay greatly in their favour was, that their army received reinforcements nearly every day, so that it was an immense army, and always growing bigger.

Of course it undertook a variety of other campaigns, very different from that we have described. It frequently besieged great cities as big as Nineveh and Babylon, built with double and treble walls, which the cannon balls and bomb shells used to pierce through and through, and reduce to a confused heap. It became very celebrated in time, and its doings are, of course, so well known in history, and so easily to be acquired by all who care to learn history, that I need not narrate them, at least here.

But the Noah's Ark people really were beginning to feel very tired. So much fighting in their old age was not to their taste, and was more than they had ever bargained for. They did not mind the excite-

ment of a little occasionally, provided everything else went well; but after such long voyages to be knocked about like that in their declining days, when they wanted rest and respect, was a great deal too bad. Besides, such a number of the animals were good for nothing now; and the whitest and most succulent of the birds had all been killed and eaten a great many times.

So the grown-up people, too, especially the old folk, had taken lately to disappearing, finding the ark anything but quiet enough for them; and they used to be lost for days and days together, and then found fast asleep in some corner of the room underneath something. And I suppose that even then they would rather not have been found, for they always disappeared afterwards for a much longer time, evidently into securer retreats, whence they very seldom turned up. And at last they ceased turning up altogether, and were never seen any more. No doubt they are quite happy in some very snug hiding-place, where they intend to remain in peace for ever.

So this is the story of the Noah's Ark, at least of that one which was bought at Mrs. Woodhatch's. And yet, to complete it, there is something left to add. The elephants and giraffes, and several other wild animals survived their misfortunes, and ended their days comfortably and gloriously in Zoological Gardens; and many of the tamer animals that remained, were drafted off into various sheepfolds and farmyards. And there was also one human member of the ark family who had other fortunes. This was little Jepphy. She never ran away, and was a great favourite of Sophy's for long afterwards. She finally, it is believed, married one of the tin soldiers, and lived in a nice house in Our Village.

"OUR THEATRE."

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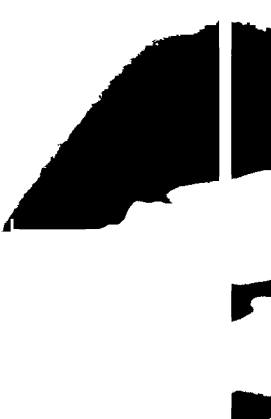
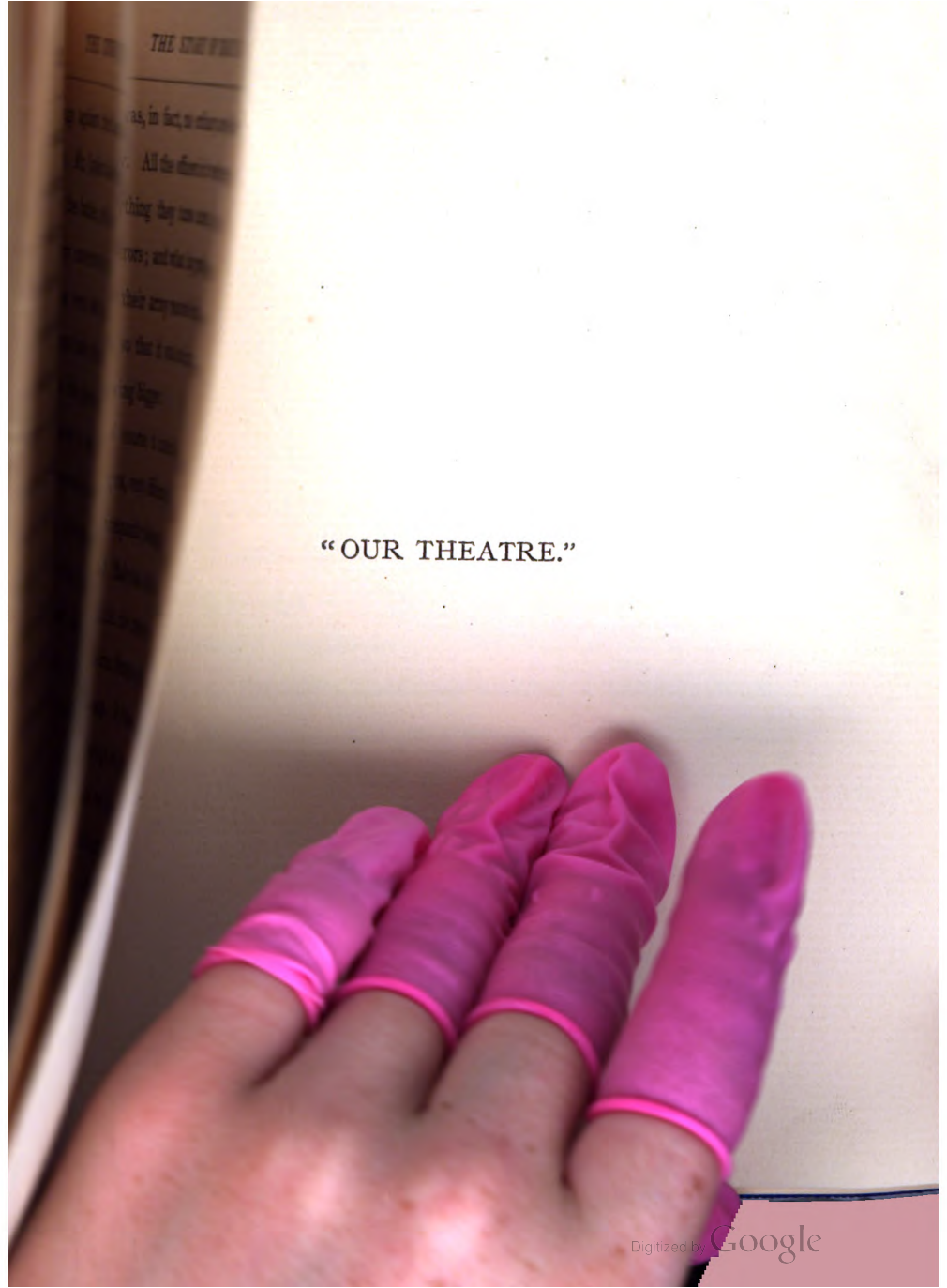


"OUR THEATRE."



III.

"OUR THEATRE."

"OUR Theatre"—Royal, of course—had in its situation a strong advantage over other theatres. All its patrons and supporters lived in its immediate neighbourhood; so easy of access was it that in the most inclement weather a carriage to or from the theatre was unnecessary. In the first place, could one be guilty of the extravagant folly of hiring a conveyance on such an occasion, the route, though simple enough for the pedestrian, was quite impracticable for those who preferred a more luxurious method of travelling. How much travelling is facilitated in these days we know. Tunnels are

made through mountains. Balloons are announced to cross the Atlantic in as many days as ships took weeks before (only they don't start); but, notwithstanding all these experiments, nobody ever thought of driving a carriage and pair, or, indeed, a carriage with a single horse, up the stairs of a private house. It was an easy and pleasant ascent up to the hill on which the theatre stood, and the site of it was called the Nursery; and though this theatre of which I speak was established long ago, it entirely anticipated all modern improvements, for there were no fees to the box-keeper, no charges, and, what was more wonderful still, refreshments were a graceful, generous courtesy on the part of the managers, and not a fearful extortion as they now are elsewhere; indeed, the managers would have been seriously offended had you refused the little cake or orange wine handed round during the intervals of the performance; in fact, I have heard they were so susceptible that on the few occasions when these had been declined they cried, and instantly shut up the theatre. So

when the consequences of rejection were known to be so fearful, nobody ever dared to decline anything for the future.

The lessees of this theatre were Annie and Philip Johnson. When they undertook the management of "Our Theatre," they had no previous theatrical experience, which was all the better, perhaps; and they had nothing but their love of the drama itself to justify such a responsibility, and they, no doubt, are the only managers who ever opened a theatre from such a motive; their enthusiasm for their vocation was, perhaps, the best guarantee one could have of their success in it. I was much older in years than these lessees, whose respective ages were ten and twelve, but I was much less experienced than they in theatrical matters; so, when under promise to be very secret as to all I saw and heard, they admitted me behind the scenes, I felt very proud and happy, and duly considered the condition on which the privilege was accorded. I knew them at the very outset of their dramatic career; I was

with them the very day they expected their theatre; and I shall not forget their impatience for its arrival, and their appeals to me for sympathy on account of its delay. I was not really the aunt of this young manager and manageress, but my affection for their father and mother gave an air of relationship to my intimacy that suggested the title. No aunt, I may say, could have had a greater affection for her natural nephew and niece than that I bore for these extraneous ones.

"Do you think our theatre will come, auntie?" they asked in despairing tones, when it was scarcely five minutes beyond the time they considered it due.

"Certainly, dears," I replied, reassuringly; inwardly praying that after-joys might be as little behindhand.

"Papa, you know, is your agent; he wishes to make a good bargain for you—you would not like him to make a rash one."

Like all young people, however, they could not appreciate this philosophical comfort, and would

rather papa had made a bad bargain than spent time in considering a wise one.

Of course it was Christmas-time—a time when new theatres are opened, and old ones try new ventures, by which to secure a continuance of the patronage they have so long enjoyed, and by way of recognising past favours, for which they return such hearty thanks, although, *entre nous*, they have often only received what their own managerial liberality in the shape of orders has rendered inevitable.

"You shall write some of our plays, auntie," said little Annie, clasping her hands on my knee. This offer was a bribe, I suppose, to say the theatre *must* be in sight.

"Before auntie accepts such an offer," laughed mamma, a pretty, fair-haired woman of about thirty, sitting at work by the other side of the fire, "she must know what it's worth—whether it's only fame she is to get by it, or something more substantial as well."

"As for that," said Philip, loftily, "I should think we could write our own plays."

"Well done, Phil," remarked mamma; "author, manager, and actor—nothing like enterprise."

"An economical system, at all events," I observed; "it's a great thing to have no author to pay, and be able to pocket all the profits."

"Well, you won't be able to play the music," exclaimed Annie, rather resenting the way in which her brother was assuming the position of sole and responsible lessee. "Mamma must do that."

"So I am to be the orchestra," replied mamma; "it seems to me, auntie, that we have a good deal of work cut out for us, and no mention of salary."

"Well, you see," said Philip, after looking puzzled for a minute, "we shall give you lots of orders, and we shall let you bring friends sometimes."

"Ah, that will be more than equivalent to any salary," smiled mamma; "I suppose we must be content to give our services in consideration of these privileges. There doesn't seem to be any

occupation for papa: I am afraid he will be jealous."

"Oh, he can open the doors, and show the people in," said Philip; "and he must clap a great deal."

"If that is to be papa's duty, then," said I, "I hope it will be a pleasant one—one that he will be able to discharge conscientiously; it wouldn't do to applaud bad pieces."

"Everybody does applaud at a theatre, though," triumphantly exclaimed Philip; "and often when I've heard pa say the piece was rubbish."

"Yes," answered mamma, "but you are going to manage on a better principle than that; only things that deserve success are going to succeed, and bad things are going to fail."

"We shan't have bad things," impatiently rejoined the self-confident young manager.

"I don't think you know how to write plays," said Annie, mistrustfully.

She had no wonderful opinion of her brother's powers as a dramatic author, and she instinctively

questioned the success of a season that depended entirely upon him for its intellectual attractions.

"Oh, it's very easy to write plays," replied Philip: "just get a story, and make one out of that; people won't find out if it isn't yours. *You* couldn't, I dare say," he added contemptuously; "girls never write plays—only men."

"Ah, but you aren't a man; only a little boy," retorted Annie.

The assertion of this unanswerable fact might have led to a quarrel, had not a loud ring at the street-door bell diverted their attention; and, in their mutual anxiety to learn what it was, they forgot and forgave their respective offences.

It was papa, and I don't suppose Mr. Johnson had ever met with such a warm reception before. He was "dear papa, papa darling."

"Stop a bit," said papa darling, making his way up-stairs as he best could, with a theatre on his shoulders, and the loving children testifying their grateful affection by impeding his progress. "Stop

a bit. I have been so much excited over this arrangement, and I've fallen in love with so many of the company, that I am very much disposed to enter into management myself."

Mr. Johnson's character was, I am afraid, too well known, for this idea to be credited for a moment.

"You shall come every night if you like, dear papa," they said in chorus; and stretching filial affection to its utmost limit, they added, "and if you should want *very much*, pa, to write a play, we would bring it out for you."

"I'll content myself, then," laughed papa, "with a remote prospect of authorship. Meanwhile, mamma and auntie would, no doubt, like, in one sense, to see the opening of the theatre." Mamma and auntie (who had overheard the conversation on the stairs) awaited the event with impatient interest.

"Here we are," announced papa, pushing open the drawing-room door—"theatre, actors, manager, and author."

To be introduced to so many people connected

with the drama was a great excitement. Does anything, as a child, ever convey such a sense of anticipation and delight as the sight of the brown paper that envelopes our heart's desire? That paper always has a peculiar smell, that no wrapping up of parcels of apparently greater value ever possesses.

"Gently," said papa, as he perceived the young impatient fingers about to unwrap and untie.

"Then do make haste, papa," implored the children, reluctantly resigning the envied task to him.

We cleared a space for the ceremony on the drawing-room table, and, after a series of little tantalising delays on the part of Mr. Johnson, the paper was removed, and "Our Theatre" presented in a most loving form to its lessees.

It certainly was a very bright-looking little house: the proscenium was red and gold, and there was a pretty little drop-scene.

"Now, Philip," said papa, "revive the drama, raise the stage. May you have long and profitable

seasons, and both of you always agree as to your plans."

Papa was well thanked in words and kisses; also mamma, whose gift it was equally.

The company were then introduced; the introduction took place upon the stage, as if to give their managers an impression of their histrionic power rather than of their courtesy. They each stood in an attitude, and affected oblivion of the merely social intention of the interview. One gentleman, who had evidently cast himself for the heavy villain, stood with defiantly folded arms, while two black, fierce-looking eyes glared over his shoulder at his amiable and youthful employers.

The unalterable determination of this position struck Annie, and she felt the awkwardness of engaging a gentleman who had made up his mind to be wicked all through his career, and who would not, when occasion required, assume a virtue if he had it not: pieces could not be always written to suit the unchristian idiosyncrasy of this man. Neither did

she approve of the young lady in pale pink, who was ever on the point of fainting, and who evidently, like Mrs. Dombey, could not be prevailed upon to make an effort.

"We should always need to have the same kind of play," she said, in disappointed tones, to her brother; "then, if we make them move, our hands will be seen, and that won't look natural."

"I'm going to write a play in which it will all look natural," answered Philip.

"It won't look natural, though, if they don't move about," indignantly, and with lively recollection of her brother's own conduct under the influence of rage.

"You are so stupid, Annie," said Philip, impatiently; "can't you pretend that they move about?"

Annie, however, did not share her brother's opinion as to the extent to which the public might be deluded. She was for dismissing the present company, and engaging one of more accommodating, if less imposing, appearances. High words might

have risen had not mamma emphatically stated, that a unity of opinion between the co-lessees was the condition of their remaining in management.

We grown-up people, I think, little imagined how much the theatrical occupation of the children was to interfere with our own. If, however, it was embarrassing to find one's work, a handsome piece of wool-work destined for a present, suddenly converted into stage property, it was interesting and edifying to see how this little theatre and its necessities developed the imagination of Philip and Annie; but there were one or two incidents connected with their dramatic career that I shall tell you by way of warning. The more tragical one I shall reserve till later. With woman-like tact, Annie forbore to remonstrate further with her brother, upon the inconvenience of every member of the company going in for one-character parts; but she did not cease to think about it, or secretly to put her thought into action.

Mamma and I were perpetually being asked of

pennies, and sometimes such large sums as six-pences, with an earnest request, at the same time, that we would not question the motive; this promise given on condition, of course, that we should know at some future time, greatly excited our curiosity, and we were much amused at the way in which, for the time, Philip seemed to have entire control of the whole thing. This delusion, however, did not last long. One morning, Annie, with a flush of triumph on her face, burst into the room with a large white box in her hands. Of course, we could not guess its contents, although we were implored to do so. Property of some kind or other for the stage of course it was, but what we could not imagine. Patience was at length rewarded: the lid was removed, and we beheld a beautiful new company, one that could *act*, that could give more than one of the many varying emotions of humanity. My remarks, at least, apply more particularly to the feminine members of that race, as the gorgeousness of the ladies' dresses quite eclipsed the less showy ones

of the gentlemen—*such* a company, and purchased at so little expense; minus her dress, each lady had originally cost the sum of one farthing. A few pennyworth of company had quite set up the theatre. From this fact you will easily guess that these ladies were of Dutch extraction. I dare say you are acquainted with many of them, and know what black shining hair, sticking close to their heads, they have; what large blue eyes, generally, they have; what rosy cheeks. Their noses and mouths are seldom prominent, and they have not much figure. These defects of nature little Annie had, however, to a great extent remedied. The first person she introduced me to was a bride; she wore what looked like a beautiful white silk, covered with white net; and as her feet would have prevented her from standing, her dress was made so very long and stiff that it literally stood alone, giving great height and importance to a figure that would otherwise have seemed small and insignificant, and rendering legs and feet unnecessary liberality on the part of nature.

A wreath of pearls, by the assistance of gum, encircled the smooth, black head, on the very centre of which, also with the assistance of gum, was fastened very securely a long piece of horsehair; so that, by means of this piece of hair, invisible at a distance, the bride moved with a stately grace all her own. There were bridesmaids, too, whose dresses were made on the same pattern, only differing in colour. There were ladies in every variety of costume, morning dress, afternoon dress, dinner dress, riding habit, &c.; and if, for any special piece, a special actress was required, she could easily be found.

So much for the ladies; they had every prospect of making a hit in their profession. Now I come to the gentlemen, and I regret to say that their chances of success were certainly less considerable. Owing to their style of dress, those limbs were most essential to them, which the ladies had been able to discard the most easily. The lamentable consequence of this was, that all the heroes of the piece were greatly dwarfed by the heroines, who towered above them

all in a truly scornful and majestic manner; sometimes, indeed, literally trampling on their admirers; but, no doubt, Annie, being a woman, thought this a more conceivable thing than that people should do nothing. However, the gentlemen, if small, were very nicely dressed, and looked like gentlemen.

Mrs. Johnson and I were really much struck by the ingenuity of the child; and even Philip, considering the invention was not his own, condescended to approve of it.

"That's very jolly, Annie," he said; "but these women, with their awfully swell dresses, won't they take up all the stage?"

"I don't think so," replied Annie; "besides we haven't got much furniture in the room, and they can't knock the set scenes at the side down."

"I have it!" exclaimed Philip suddenly. "We'll enlarge the stage. We'll do splendid things. We'll have a grand first night."

"I hope your improvements will be as good as Annie's," said mamma, "and as harmless."

"You'll see," laughed Philip, nodding his head confidently.

We not unnaturally felt a little alarmed when Philip conceived a project; it generally meant destruction, and loss of many things valued on their own account by us, by him only as much as they assisted his scheme.

In a most systematic and business-like manner these young people set to work. The theatre was not going to be regularly opened until everything was in perfect working order. All the mornings, for these were holiday times, rehearsals were going on. Often when the curtain was up I saw the bride surrounded by the bridesmaids; that scene was evidently to be a great one, it was rehearsed so often, and altercations used to be overheard behind the scenes as to the deportment of the bridal party. I often wonder the poor bride did not refuse to stand there so patiently every morning, especially as she never left the stage married. However, perhaps the thought of a good Review reconciled her to the

repetition of this wearying experience. There was some talk of a grand burlesque being got up; pearl beads, pieces of coloured gauze, gold paper, remnants of cracker-papers, strewed the floor and tables. There was a special little round table, containing many drawers, at which Mrs. Johnson and I were fond of working, as it could be so easily moved about: in the summer, we sat by it in the window; not that there was much to see from it, for we lived in Portland Place, where the sun never seemed to shine, and where everything looked cold and grey. It was a blow to us one morning, when, in the interests of the drama, we were asked to give up our pet table. "What for?" asked mamma.

"We must enlarge the theatre," replied Philip, not heeding our dismay.

"How can my work-table enlarge it, child?—you can't put it upon the stage."

"Oh, never mind," said Philip, "you'll see."

"That's just what we want Philip," I observed; "so explain it to us."

"Oh, you must wait until you come to the theatre; you mustn't inquire how everything is done—people never do."

"People are not in the habit of enlarging theatres by means of fancy tables," remarked Mrs. Johnson.

"Oh, it does not matter what other people do," answered Philip; "but," he added importantly, "our theatre *must* be made larger, and we want the table."

"I see: the end justifies the means," observed Mrs. Johnson. "Is there anything else you would like? The Dresden china clock, the little china figures—couldn't they contribute to the enlargement of the theatre?"

"I don't think we shall want those," said Philip, in a meditative tone, which implied that it was not beyond possibility that he might, in which case he would have them; and that he was, on the whole, obliged to her for the suggestion.

"Is the piece going to be very great, that the theatre, as it is, can't produce it?"

"Oh, we shall do two or three pieces in a night, of course—a farce, a tragedy, and a burlesque."

"And is my table to be part of the theatre always?" said mamma. "And remember, Philip, with all these attractions, the theatre must be closed by eight, else it will be pulled down."

"That's very early for a theatre to close," remonstrated Philip.

"I appoint the time," quietly answered Mrs. Johnson; and as her will was law, the young manager dared not say any more, especially as mamma had consented to allow her table to be removed up-stairs into the nursery, before she had had an opportunity of seeing and being struck by the result of her son's experiment. After the first surprise and delight were over, however, our table was to be restored to us, and something less necessary to our comfort substituted for it.

Not on any account were we to go near the nursery, or take mean advantages of absence during the time of preparation—a time as anxious to us

as to the managers; for they were so indefatigable in their exertions, that it was with difficulty we could get them to eat or drink anything, and we were all afraid that on the opening night the ceremony would have to be postponed on account of over-excitement on the part of the lessees. When the day arrived, I really thought both children would lose their heads. I never stirred out of a room without meeting one of these responsible people, who would never let me pass a barricade of arms until I had given a full and satisfactory account of my intentions.

"You are not going near the nursery, are you, aunt?" they asked breathlessly, and with an inward conviction that my impatience to anticipate the event might be natural, but must be controlled.

"I am not, indeed," I answered solemnly.

"You don't think papa and mamma will, do you?" asked Philip.

"I think you may have perfect faith in the honour of your papa and mamma," I said.

"Yes, I dare say," said Philip, a little mistrustfully, but nevertheless with a strong sense that parental honour was being put to a very severe test.

"I wish, auntie," he added, "that you could have kept guard, and seen that no one goes near the nursery."

"Such vigilance would be very flattering to your parents," I laughed, "and quite unnecessary."

The occasion was evidently to be a very grand one, and I rather think we were expected to dress for it; at least, such was implied by the way in which Mr. and Mrs. Johnson and myself were each and separately presented with an order for a private box. If this was a waste of space, it would, at all events, give a fuller appearance to the house.

"You will have plenty of time," remarked Philip, glancing at our dresses.

"Do we constitute the house?" asked papa.

"Yes: before we have a lot of people, we want your advice, papa, just to tell us what is wrong."

"Ah, I see; I shall be there in the capacity of critic. Well, as I am acquainted with so many people connected with this theatre, I dare say I shall let you down easy, especially as it is a sort of rehearsal; but, if you are so generous, I fear the speculation will never pay; next time I must take some places. Have you got a piece?"

"Well, we haven't much of a play," said the boy, hesitatingly—that unimportant item had evidently been forgotten. "You see, we have got some nice scenery, and our actresses move very well."

"That's going too much in the beaten track, my boy. I thought you were going to strike out a new line—going to be more independent."

"Well, you see, I can always make up a play in a moment," answered Philip.

"I see; prepared for any emergency."

Between six and seven, in a great state of excitement—an excitement scarcely consistent with managerial dignity—Philip came for us.

"Is it all right, Annie?" he asked, popping his

head in, and keeping us back until he had the satisfactory answer, "all right."

Then the door was opened, and with our minds and eyes dazzled by the splendour of the scene before us we subsided each into our private box: they were all on a level, and exactly fronting the stage—capital position for seeing; the curtain was just raised as we entered. The theatre was at a considerable elevation: the scene represented a very pretty little drawing-room most tastefully arranged, while at the end of the room through an open space appeared a beautiful park, trees at each side and at the back, and behind the trees was a bright light almost like that of the sun, and in these grounds a lady, apparently without human agency, was walking; this scene the house rapturously applauded. From the opposite side of the stage came a gentleman so insignificant in height and bearing, that it led to Mr. Johnson's making the unfortunate remark in a confident tone—

"Ah, I see; mamma and her little boy taking a

stroll." This mistake was rather resented from behind the stage.

"Oh, no; that's the gentleman who wants to marry her."

"A case of extremes meeting," observed Mr. Johnson; "a tall woman in love with a small man."

"Ah, but she doesn't want to marry him," exclaimed Annie.

"So I should imagine from her majestic demeanour; but the play requires a few explanatory comments."

For a first night the performance was wonderfully free from hitches: at one time the front of the theatre threatened to fall forwards; but prompt action on the part of the managers averted the catastrophe, and the action of the play (there was not much dialogue) continued. The new management was conducted on a most liberal scale, for after the entertainment refreshments in the shape of orangeade and sponge-cakes were handed round, and pressed upon us in a way that made resistance impossible. We

all expressed ourselves highly gratified with the performance; and we were taken behind, that we might the better appreciate the alterations and improvements that had taken place. We then saw the use of mamma's work-table, into the open drawers of which the landscape scenery had been stuck, thereby leaving the stage itself always free for interiors, and affording from it a fine vista.

"I consider that I have a great stake in the theatre," said mamma; "but, my children, be careful of my table; here you see is a slit in the lining. I can't contribute to these gorgeous results often. You shall have something quite as useful, and more suitable for the purpose."

"Oh, mamma," pleaded both children, "until it is made, do lend us your table."

"It must be made very soon, then," smiled Mrs. Johnson.

"We want to have a little party, please, mamma —just Flora Macintosh and Jessie Boyd, and their brothers: do let us have it till then."

"The party will come off almost immediately, then. By-the-bye, we are all going to a dinner-party on Thursday; suppose you fix that night for your friends?"

"That will be jolly!" exclaimed Philip, "and we can make as much row as we like."

"Certainly," laughed papa: "take care, though, that that is all you do; don't take advantage of our absence to get into mischief." Then, with many congratulations and best wishes for a prosperous season, we returned home on foot, leaving the young lessees well satisfied with the result of their first theatrical experience. The days preceding the party were also days of great excitement, for a burlesque had to be got up by Thursday, and I was frequently appealed to as to what I could lend for the transformation-scene. The poverty of my resources greatly annoyed the children.

"Dear me, Auntie," they exclaimed impatiently, "haven't you got any brooches that shine?"

"Unfortunately, my dear children," I said, "I

want to shine myself that night; remember I am going out, and anything I have that glitters I must wear."

This was looked upon as a rather selfish resolution on my part, and I have no doubt I was looked upon as a "nasty unamiable old thing."

Mamma was petitioned, however, with no greater success. It was in vain that we represented the beauty of tinfoil, and assured them that in its effect it far surpassed silver. There was to be a city of jewels; and as they were evidently going in for realism, the occasion they considered demanded real jewels. To see us dressed for a party was always a great treat, and now the children had an additional motive for wishing to watch the process, as they might get hints that would be useful. I did not wonder they liked to see their mamma dressed, as her beauty was of that kind that is most set off by dress and jewels. When my own unambitious toilette was completed, I was taken behind

the scenes, that I might have a glimpse of the coming splendour. Certainly the fairies looked very lovely in their gold dresses, with pearl wreaths upon their heads; some of them had wings, and there were little paper boats covered with gold: the whole scene was very pretty, and reflected great credit upon those responsible for it, and to me it seemed quite brilliant enough. The sincerity of this criticism was somewhat questioned I think, or if not they greatly deplored their inability to show me how much more splendid it might have been. They had, however, the unspeakable satisfaction of impressing upon us what we had lost through our own meanness. Our children's party had to-night been fixed for a later hour than usual, as it had been emphatically declared no fun could begin till the grown-up members of the family had departed. Remembering how much the presence of, and dread of parental surveillance had often interfered with the mirth of our own childish festivals, we rather sympathized with, than remonstrated against, the

somewhat unflattering eagerness of Philip and Annie to get rid of us.

We all went into Mrs. Johnson's room to have a good view of the final result of her toilette. We arrived at a most exciting moment: she was standing before the glass with a jewel-case in each hand, evidently hesitating which ornament to wear. In the one case was a star entirely composed of diamonds, that flashed so wonderfully as to make everything in the room appear dark; in the other was a very handsome gold brooch with Mrs. Johnson's monogram in diamonds upon it. There was no doubt of course which brooch would look the more lovely: the effect of the star in a piece of black velvet round her slim white neck was so beautiful that she almost decided to wear it; it had been her husband's wedding present, and I knew how careful she was over it, scarcely ever daring to wear it out of her own house, lest it might be lost, and I don't think she could ever have recovered from such a loss.

"It does look beautiful, doesn't it?" she said;

"but do you know I get more and more foolish about this brooch: I always feel as if it were not quite secure. Apart of course from its great value, I have, as Robert's bridal gift, a superstitious love for it: if I lost it, or anything happened to it, I don't think I should ever get over it."

"I certainly would not undertake the responsibility of advising you to wear it," I laughed; "besides the other brooch is so very handsome, and you can wear it without any nervous fears."

"Yes, I can," she replied, replacing the diamond star in its case, and shutting it up.

Apart from its rival, the gold brooch looked very lovely, and made a great effect in Mrs. Johnson's silk dress.

We had been so long solving the important question, that Mr. Johnson called out to know if we were ready, and to say we must make haste, else we should be late.

Of what followed after our departure I was not, of course, an eye-witness; but, from what I afterwards

learned, the following account is, I think, tolerably correct. Saunders, Mrs. Johnson's old confidential maid, who took as much pride in her mistress's possessions as she did herself, followed us down-stairs, with Mrs. Johnson's opera-cloak on her arm.

"You will be sure to put all my things away at once, please, Saunders," said Mrs. Johnson, as we got into the carriage. "I hope the children will all enjoy themselves; keep an eye upon them when you can."

Then Mrs. Johnson had a word or two to say respecting the juvenile entertainment, so that we detained Saunders some little time, during which the two children were alone in their mamma's room, standing by the dressing-table, where she had kissed them and bade them good-night. They were both very silent; but, no doubt, each was thinking of the same thing.

"Oh dear, Philip!" said little Annie, with a sigh, "don't you wish we had a star just like ma's for our theatre?"

"I say," answered Philip, "wouldn't it make a blaze of light in the transformation-scene; and wouldn't it take Bob Macintosh's breath away, when he saw it? I don't suppose he ever saw anything like it in his life before."

Little Annie's fingers were playing with the case containing this resplendent jewel; almost unconsciouly they touched the spring, and it flew open. There it lay sparkling upon its dark blue velvet pillow. It lit up that large room; what would the effect be, then, in a small theatre?—beautiful, dazzling, beyond description!

"I think ma might have offered to lend it to us," said Philip, in an injured tone.

"Oh, Philip, ma would die if anything happened to that brooch! Why, she's afraid to wear it herself, and, of course, she wouldn't lend it to us children."

"Who was going to hurt it?" answered Philip, crossly. "I have a great mind to, Annie—I have indeed."

"To what, Philip?" anxiously questioned Annie.

"Why just to try the effect—we should just have time to, before we dressed."

"Oh no, Philip, please don't!" pleaded Annie. "Oh, it makes me so frightened to see you touch it!"

"What a silly coward you are!" cried Philip, angrily shaking off the remonstrating hand laid upon his arm; "after all, you put it into my head."

"Oh, Philip!"

"Oh, Philip! oh, Annie!—didn't you say how nice it would be to have one like it?"

"One like it, yes; but not that one," replied poor Annie, heartily repenting of her thoughtlessly expressed wish.

"Well, we aren't going to do it any harm; we shall be ever so careful of it, and we can put it back long before ma comes home." So saying, he took the shining star in his hand, and closed the empty case.

"Here's Saunders coming, Annie," he said. "I haven't got a pocket, so you must put it in yours. There was no time to disobey; so Annie, trembling, held out her little pocket, and this almost priceless gem was dropped into it quickly, carelessly. Had Saunders had time, on her return to the bedroom, to observe anything, she must have been struck by the altered manner and appearance of the two children. Philip was flushed and excitable, Annie pale and subdued; but Saunders was too busy to observe anything, except that the children must come and be dressed at once, if they were going to be. She took the closed jewel-cases in her hand—awful moment for the children!—but she did not open them; merely locked them up in her mistress's dressing-case, pocketed the key, put a few things away very rapidly, and then said—

"Now then, children, don't stand staring there, as if you had neither life nor sense in you, but go on and do what you can till I come. Law Miss Annie! what have you got in your pocket,

that your hand is fidgeting in and out of it every moment?"

"Nothing, Saunders, nothing, I am sure," answered Annie, hastily withdrawing her hand from her pocket, and as hastily replacing it.

"Well, a pocket with nothing in it isn't much use, so I may as well sew it up."

This was not an immediate threat, though to Annie's frightened and guilty conscience it appeared so. Philip gave her a very severe look; then, to divert the attention of Saunders from his indiscreet sister, he struck up a conversation with the former.

"I say, Saunders, we shall give you a private box one night, when we've got a nice new play out; but you mustn't come to-night on any account whatever, because it would make us shy, until we had done it oftener, and knew how it was going to be. So you won't come, will you?"

"Law! bless your heart, child, I am not so fond of going to the play at any time, that I should put myself out to go to a toy thing."

This indifference to the drama on the part of Saunders was to-night a great relief to the children. They were greatly afraid lest the affection which they knew she bore them might be so strong as to induce her to waive her theatrical prejudices; but servant-nature is not, as a rule, given to self-sacrifice. On this occasion a happy fact. Poor Annie! she had a terrible time of it; she could not help feeling that even through her winter dress and its lining the light of the diamonds would shine; what obscurity could be so intense as to conceal their radiance? Then she had another fear, and that was, that even if their treasure escaped observation, in taking off her dress Saunders might feel its pin. This was a sad state of mind for a young hostess to receive her friends in. A little before seven the company and the audience arrived. They were in a great state of excitement, not lessened by the mysterious nods and winks from Philip, and his frequent advice to them "Just to wait and see," which, seeing they had no choice, was what they were going to do,

but with a real and complimentary impatience for the great moment.

There was not much eating and drinking during tea, but there was a great deal of discussion; Master Robert Macintosh stating that if Philip's dramatic speculation turned out a success, he should embark in one himself. Then Philip nodded again, in a very important manner, and assured his friend that he did not know with what dangers and difficulties such an enterprise was fraught—an opinion in which Annie heartily expressed her agreement. She so impressed the feminine portion of the company with a sense of managerial responsibility, that they began to think it must be almost as great a trouble to manage a toy theatre as a big, real one—one like Covent Garden or Drury Lane—and they did not wonder that Annie looked pale and anxious. The children had had tea in the dining-room, and, before that meal was quite concluded, the young host and hostess excused themselves for a few minutes, that they might ascertain if all was ready, and avert

any disappointing contingency. Everything promised to go well. The actors and actresses were all there; the trap-doors moved easily; the curtain came up and down smoothly; the front of the house did not lean; moreover, the effect of the diamond star shining over the heads of the gold and silver fairies was so magically brilliant and beautiful, that little Annie quite forgot what this entrancing effect had cost her, and she felt that even her mother must have excused them, had she seen the result of the temptation to which they had yielded.

"It is lovely, Phil!" she said; "oh, it is lovely!"

"I knew it would be," answered Philip. "Sha'n't we surprise them, eh Annie? Fancy real diamonds on a stage: I don't believe they have them in real theatres."

"I don't believe they have," exclaimed Annie. "Now, Phil, shall I go and bring them up?"

"Yes; but don't let on about the diamonds."

"Oh dear, no."

With a great deal of pomp and ceremony the

audience, consisting of the Masters Boyd and Macintosh, with their sisters, were shown into their places. By way of overture Philip played a few bars on an accordion: this musical attempt had a very exciting and stimulating effect upon the house. There is nothing so beautiful and infectious as enthusiasm; so the warmth of the audience inspired the actors and actresses, who threw themselves heart and soul into their parts. This audience, too, not only applauded with their hands and feet, but gave their delight expression in words. When the curtain went up, disclosing a very emerald isle, with gold ladies in gold boats floating about upon it, they screamed with delight, and expressed their opinion very emphatically, that nothing so splendid had ever been seen on any stage before—an opinion loudly echoed from behind the scenes.

The play represented was really a very pretty little sort of allegory, illustrating the law and reward of progress. All those fairies with gold wings had won them through their own merit; then there were

those of the silver wings who had done well, but not so well; and then came the idlers and evil-doers, with horns instead of wings. There remained, however, still greater reward for those who had fought so well: they were all at the last to turn into a splendid diamond, and, all united, form a star that would shine with dazzling light for ever and ever: they would never do any more duty, only shine and look beautiful, and be worshipped, and attract others to be good likewise, that they also might shine. The transformation-scene was of course the one in which the star composed of so much virtue was to rise, and you can imagine, better than I can describe it, the excitement, the rapture, the screams of the audience when a light brighter than that of the sun, they thought, flashed through a gauzy sky, which in a minute parted, letting the star burst forth in all its resplendent glory. The emotions of the house, too, were greatly assisted by a vocal performance from behind the scenes, in which they soon joined, of "Beautiful

Star." Who would not turn from his evil behaviour, and become good, when to be good was to be so beautiful?

"Beautiful, beautiful, beau-tiful star!" shouted the enraptured children, while the said beautiful star tremblingly hung, like Mahomet's coffin, in mid air.

"I say," exclaimed the children, when want of breath compelled them to stop for a few moments, "where did you get that grand star? We never saw anything half so beautiful in all our lives. I don't believe the Queen has one like it."

"I'm sure she has not," answered Philip, as if he knew only too well the exact number and value of all the royal jewels.

"We must see it nearer," cried the children, rising from their seats in their excitement.

"No, no," protested Philip; but protestations on either side were quite useless: the tide of excitement had risen so high it could not be subdued; courtesy on the part of audience and manager was quite ignored. Philip rushed boldly with outspread arms

in front of the house, to repulse the advancing enemy. There was a Babel of voices, great confusion; and as the attacking party outnumbered the resisting one, the strength was not fairly matched. Philip perceived this, and that a struggle must end in his own defeat; so he abandoned the attempt, and, feigning to retreat, surprised the enemy by suddenly blowing out all the candles. The darkness added of course to the confusion, and in the inevitable strife that followed I grieve to tell you what fearful catastrophe happened. Why, this—that the whole theatre came to grief; the front fell forward, the remainder backwards; and as one fire puts out another, this universal calamity made them for the time forget in what it originated, and they all promised not to tell how it happened. Where, in all the strife, had the beautiful star got to? Nobody had a match with which to relight the candles,—they scarcely dared ask for one; before, however, they had time to take any action, the door opened, and Saunders appeared.

"Good gracious! what have you been up to? I heard noise enough; but why are the candles out?"

"Oh, Saunders!" explained Philip in subdued tone, "our theatre fell down, and then the candles went out, and——"

"Theatre fell down!" echoed Saunders; "it's a wonder the house didn't fall down as well, with all that row; it's a mercy you didn't set fire to yourselves. This comes of leaving children to themselves; but I must go and fetch a light."

When she had gone all the children commenced groping about the floor in the hope of feeling the beautiful star, before it was discovered in the presence of Saunders; but it could not be felt anywhere, and when Saunders entered bearing as they thought the tell-tale light in her hand, the children were all shaking like aspen leaves. As well as the light, however, she carried a tray on which were refreshments; such refreshments, under happier circumstances, would have proved a most attractive feature in the evening's entertainment.

The consciences of the guests, however, were not so guilty as those of the young host and hostess: still they felt uncomfortable, and wished to escape before the loss of the star became publicly known. Much to the relief of the young party, Saunders, after assisting each member of it to cake and fruit, withdrew. The moment she did so down went Philip and Annie's share of the repast, and down upon the floor they both dropped, and tremblingly resumed their search.

"We shall be sure to find it," they continually exclaimed, though each time in less confident tones. They were obliged at last reluctantly to confess it certainly was not on the floor: they well searched the park, which in the calamity found itself suddenly situated in a valley instead of on a commanding height. All that remained of the theatre was the subject of the strictest investigation: the drawers of the work-table, out of which some of the noblest trees had reared their stately heads, were quite empty.

"Oh, dear!" said poor little Annie, beginning to cry, "what shall we do if we can't find it?"

"Perhaps," suggested little Jessie Boyd, "if you were to save up all your pocket-money you might buy your ma another one."

"No," answered Annie despairingly, "we never could have money enough: it cost pounds and pounds."

The impossibility of ever repairing the loss was rather a relief to Master Robert Macintosh, who touched by the grief of his friends, and also a little by the fact that he was not altogether blameless in the tragic result of the night's enjoyment, was about to offer a contribution of his own pocket-money, had that of Philip and Annie been insufficient to replace a diamond brooch.

"Oh, my!" he exclaimed, opening his eyes, "I didn't know it cost such a lot as that. What will your pa and ma say?"

Philip and Annie were very glad when this Job's comforter departed in company with the rest of

the party, and they were alone to condole with each other, and take mutual counsel as to what should be done. They wished their mother knew; but who dared tell her?

"I wish you'd tell ma, Annie," said Philip. He always had a high sense of his sister's delicacy and tact, when bad news had to be broken.

"Oh, dear!" replied Annie, shuddering at the idea. "Oh, dear! why it would kill ma: she said she should never get over it if anything happened to that brooch."

This was an effect of the loss little dreamed of by Philip; and if it should be the true one, why, surely, it would place himself and Annie in the position of murderers, and he could not see a single extenuating circumstance. It was scarcely likely that interest in the drama would be regarded as a sufficient excuse for such a crime. His own misery would kill him, he thought; he almost wished it would. In this despairing state of mind, Annie said to him—

"After all, Philip, it may be found."

"Yes, it may," answered Philip; and he comforted himself with the reflection.

You can easily imagine with what very heavy hearts these little culprits retired to rest—what agony it was to them to see their mother's smiling face the next morning, and not know how soon it might be darkly clouded. Of course Mrs. Johnson was all inquiry as to how the little party had gone off. She hoped the dramatic entertainment had given great delight, and that the effects in the transformation had been appreciated. The replies were not given with the expected enthusiasm: the children looked pale and depressed—the result of over-excitement, their mother said, and that for some time to come they must go to bed early—an announcement in which the objects of it warmly concurred. Such docility was unusual, unnatural, and a little troubled Mrs. Johnson. Did it spring from impending illness, or what? Scarcely that, for they manifested an equally strong and un-

natural desire to return to school. They lost all interest in their theatre, and there was a depressing appearance of failure about them.

Day after day passed to the children in torturing suspense. The brooch was evidently gone for good, and the only thing they could do was to await, as calmly as possible, the awful day on which Mrs. Johnson should again propose to wear her treasured ornament.

"As there seems to be no immediate use for my work-table," Mrs. Johnson said, one morning, "perhaps you will let me have it again."

"Certainly," they replied; they were only too glad to get rid of *anything* that reminded them of their misfortune.

"Is the theatre shut up?" asked papa, one evening, observing the children idling about the drawing-room.

"We haven't played for some days," they answered evasively.

"What a short season! Now that the theatre is to

let, I think I should like to take it for a short term. I have an idea for a little drama. I suppose I can hire the scenery and company."

At the idea of papa turning author and manager, the children laughed almost in their old way. They were all anxiety to know what the play would be like; would it be serious or funny? But papa declined to disclose his plot: he should be ready, he thought, the next evening. The prospect of papa's play was so delightful, that Philip and Annie fervently hoped nothing would happen to spoil it. Mr. Johnson presented us each with a private box, and at the appointed time we were all seated in them. Part of the fun and enjoyment was to see papa, who was a tall man, stooping down to his theatre, and often arranging scenes in an inexperienced way, very mirth-provoking to his own children.

Now I am not going to give any detailed account of this play, which was very real in much of its subject, but very imaginative in the treatment of it. The scene was fairyland, but the in-

habitants of it were not all fairies; amongst them were two little mortals, allowed to dwell there on condition that they subscribed to all the laws of that country, one of which was that they were never to appropriate or even touch anything in it that was not given to them; and the queen, who gave out her own laws, told them that if ever they did so, the object thus obtained would turn into a bitter sorrow, and they would no longer be in fairyland, but in a world of sin and temptation, and they would know the misery of an evil secret. The little mortals listened and promised to obey; but one day, when the queen had a fête, she wore a jewel of dazzling beauty; the children were so overcome by a desire to examine its beauty nearer, that I grieve to say, one day when the queen was holding a serious consultation with her subjects, the children finding out where the jewel was—for in fairyland nobody locks up anything, because fairy honour is always to be relied on—it need, I fear, scarcely be stated how the temptation to hold it in their own hands was too

great to be resisted, and that just as they had attained this pleasure they heard the queen's footsteps, so were obliged to run away with the jewel in their hands, and that in their fright and hurry as they ran they dropped it, but could not find it. For days the knowledge of their ill conduct made them very ill and sad; however, the queen, who knew all about it, thinking that if they had sinned they had suffered, told them she knew; and as it was their first act of disobedience, on condition it should be their last, forgave them, and promised not to send them away from fairyland.

"And now," said papa, "I am going to show you the jewel the queen wore, and which caused so much misery."

Then, slowly rising from the depth of a trap-door like the sun rising out of the sea, shone mamma's beautiful and dearly prized diamond star. I cannot describe to you the effect of this scene upon the house. Philip betrayed great excitement and agitation: a flush of surprise, shame, and relief spread

over his face. Little Annie burst into a wild fit of hysterical weeping, and, rising from her seat, flung her arms round her mother's neck.

"Hush, darling!" whispered Mrs. Johnson soothingly, "this is not very complimentary to papa."

"My play is not altogether tragic, you see," said kind papa, coming forward and stroking his little daughter's hair. "I thought you would be pleased with my surprise at the end; and we know," he added still kindly, but more gravely, "that you think the children did very wrong; and you also know, as we feel sure, that they will never do such a thing again."

"*Never, never,*" replied Philip, and sobbed Annie.

Then the author, manager, and audience all warmly embraced.

The only question that remains to be solved, is —Where was the star found? The day on which Mrs. Johnson got back her table, she went to mend the silk, which had got various slits in it; in one something pricked her, and on examination she found it to be her diamond brooch. Her first feelings were

those of horror; the second, gratitude and delight that she had discovered it in time. Coupling this discovery with the altered manners of her children, she saw plainly now the reason of the change. She waited a day or two to see if they would confess their sin; but they did not, and, observing how much it weighed upon them, she and Mr. Johnson arranged this little scheme for letting the children know their sad secret was discovered, and of putting them out of suspense.

Sometimes when little disputes arose, and the dramatic partnership seemed likely to dissolve, papa would offer to perform a little play, which, without (like his first one) hitting home directly, always had a moral, and was always enjoyed; and I know no theatre that had, or has, since the days when papa wrote for the stage, such an elevating influence over its public as had " Our Theatre."

OUR VILLAGE.

IV.

"OUR VILLAGE."

VILLAGES, towns, cities, capitals, metropolises—there is an immense number of them in the world at the present day. People began building so quickly after the Flood, and have gone on building ever since; so that now it really seems as if the world were almost covered by houses, and that one town begins a short distance from where another leaves off. That, however, is only because we go everywhere by express trains now; but if we were to go up in balloons, we should see that the towns and cities and villages, thickly clustered together as they are in places, look very small when one comes to

know how great the world is, and are enormous distances off from other towns, cities, and villages; and, consequently, that there is a very great part of the world not yet built over—that is to say, remaining to be built upon, which, of course, is a most fortunate thing. Well, and, indeed, the great capitals were once only small towns, and the towns were all at first only villages, and the villages, myriads as they are at present, were once at the very first only one village—a very funny, quaint, extraordinary, eccentric, aboriginal old village too, if we could just see it at this moment; well, and it is not at all about that village that I am going to tell a story now.

I have a story to tell about a village very different from that village, and also very different indeed from every other one. It is my village, or "Our Village," for we were two then. I lived a long time in that village, many years, and all sorts of things happened while I dwelt there, which I think I shall be able to tell now as well as I could on the day that they occurred; but it is a long while ago, for I left that

village one day, and have never been able to go back to it again. This is one of the things in which it is so different from others. I have travelled about the world a great deal since that day, and dwelt in many, many towns and villages, and passed many others on railroads, and looked down dreamily into them, but none of my journeys has ever brought me back to that one again; and, dwelling in or looking down into the others, I only see more and more how unlike they all are to that village which I left one day a long while ago, and which I shall never see again, except in memory.

In memory, however, I see it quite plainly now, and you shall see it also as I tell you about it. And, indeed, if you, to whom I speak, happen to recognise the village I am describing, and even chance to be dwelling there yourselves at this moment—as truly may be the case—my advice to you is not to be in any hurry to leave that village; the day is sure to come, and, like me, you will never get back to it again; for you may have observed, perhaps, that

nobody is ever really unhappy in the village to which I refer, and I have had plenty of time to remark, as you will do later, that such is not the case, but far otherwise, in any of the others that one comes to afterwards in travelling about the world.

Well, there is the village as I saw it first so long ago; we are two again (in memory), and are very happy, because we have only just begun, or, rather, determined to live in that happy place and call it "Our Village."

My little companion is about the same age as myself—very nearly so; therefore we are both quite little; and we agree exactly in praising that line of quaint, very white and new, red-tiled houses, which, with our own hands, we have just erected on the smooth, wide dinner-table which was the usual arena of our childish imaginations.

Those houses have been taken out of a rather small also very white wooden oval box, wherein they were artfully packed with various papers and shavings, which seem, to our great delight, still to

conceal certain other objects no doubt as important in the general effect as the houses themselves.

We have now drawn forth these mysterious pieces also, and they are immediately proclaimed to be trees—partly because it is stated that trees are the usual accompaniment of a village, and partly because these objects are green. On examining them they are found to have a very broad, flat base, or root, on which they stand—capitally; and then the stem tapers upward very much like the trunk of some trees, and is also the right colour; but it is the bright green pointed top, which is regularly curled all round, that puzzles us more than anything, as if the thing is a tree, of course here would be the foliage, and there are only these stiff green curls; until some one suggests a poplar, as being of somewhat the same shape; and we immediately remember the line of thin-looking, tall trees which stand by the side of the horsepond, and are satisfied that these are poplars. So there must surely be a horsepond in our village, and three of the trees are placed

a little outside the line of houses, as they would be if there were a pond there, and we can very well imagine that there is a horsepond.

But now evidently a most important edifice belonging to the village still remains in the box, ingeniously hidden by the paper and shavings. This turns out to be a church—a regular village church—with tall steeple and a number of narrow windows along each side, and a door at each end; and with such a church, placed at the head of the small street, "Our Village" already assumes a most imposing appearance.

And that is not all. There is the village: the houses are all placed—built, as we prefer saying—together; they form what is undeniably a street; and the church is there also, with the other three green trees shading its windows, and its tapering steeple rising above them just as in all real villages. But there is a great deal more in our village, as might, in fact, be expected. Firstly, the people. Here is a very fine and respectable lady—the lady of the

manor, much grander than all the other people in the place—the lady who sits in the big square pew at church, and to whom the clergyman seems always to be particularly addressing the sermon. She has on dark and evidently handsome garments, with a rather old-fashioned but, undoubtedly, imposing-looking hat on her head; and in her hand a long walking-stick or rod, for no purpose whatever, that one can imagine, unless it be to keep the naughty boys in the street in order as she walks through on her way to church. No doubt it is for that; and very right too, for nobody ought to be naughty in our village; and, in fact, the wicked boys in question do not belong to us, but all come from other villages on purpose to throw stones at good people. Then the second person of importance is also a respectable woman—not a lady of the manor, but a female upon whom much depends, even the dinner of the said lady. This is no other than Mrs. Gosling, the woman who keeps a shop, and sells everything to eat in the village. She does not wear a hat or bonnet, gene-

rally a cap of some kind when she is not too busy; she is rather stout and ruddy, and has a yellow dress or gown on, which seems to be her favourite or only dress. No doubt we shall soon see Mrs. Gosling again, so we will let her go her way down the street for the present, and we will go and speak to the third personage, who has just appeared upon the scene. This is our friend Mr. Jones, a very amiable middle-aged gentleman, about whom there is little to say at present, excepting that he is very properly dressed, in a coat with buttons, with a tall hat and a walking-stick, and that he takes walks and always stops and talks to people when he meets them, and is certainly a very important person; yet even he also depends entirely on Mrs. Gosling for his dinner. But there is still another person, also a man, but somewhat different from Mr. Jones; he is altogether dark and serious looking, and keeps his hands straight down to his sides, and is without a walking-stick. He does not appear talkative either; but there cannot be the least doubt that he is an exceedingly important

man, one not to be trifled with; and as we look with interest, not unmingled with awe, at this mysterious individual, we become more and more convinced that he is the policeman, as, in fact, he is. Those are all the people at present to be seen in "Our Village." But those are not all the things which the box contains. Oh dear, no! here is a very respectable pig; here is a splendid red market-horse; here is a magnificent black and white watch-dog, with his tail curled over his back; and here are a very meek-looking cow, a large, young, and very intelligent-looking goose, and one or two other birds whose species is as yet undetermined. These characters at present complete the inhabitants of the village, and we are so contented with one and all of them that we are determined to lose no time in improving our acquaintance with such an interesting community. I have said at the outset that people were never really unhappy in "Our Village." That is, indeed, true. Looking back to it at this distance of time, and with one's present experience of other villages,

one is able to say that with certainty; but you will not be surprised at any little enlivening episode which may take place in our village life, in which people may chance to find it necessary to raise their voices, or even to use their sticks, as such things must always take place in any stirring little village, and do not mean that anybody is seriously unhappy, but only that they are in a great hurry, or that the dinner is late, or has been forgotten to be cooked, or that a naughty boy from another village has thrown a stone successfully and broken a window, and then refused to be taken up properly, but wanted to get back to the other village, which, of course, is not the place where he threw the stone.

Now the first things that I remember as happening in "Our Village" are that everybody was choosing the house in which they would live; and not only that, but the place where the house should stand afterwards was a matter of serious uncertainty and excessive discussion. It was quite wonderful to see how the fine, solid-built, many-roomed houses

were shifted about from one end of the village to the other, before all subsided into apparent order, though as every one seemed to have tried nearly all the houses in turn, before fixing finally upon one of them to dwell in, it was for a short time difficult to say which were the houses really appertaining to each person; and this was necessary because we were naturally disposed to make early calls upon them all. It would of course never do to go to call upon the lady of the manor at Mrs. Gosling's, and then to make matters worse by going and asking for Mrs. Gosling at the lady's own house. However, we were saved these mistakes, for there happened to be a very large house with a perfectly dreadful number of windows on all sides and all over it, as they appeared to be, and we had not the slightest doubt that this was the manor-house. Moreover, we had reason to think that, after a good deal of fuss, Mrs. Gosling had gone much farther down the village, near to the horsepond, which was a great convenience to

her, and, in fact, quite necessary to keep her ducks and geese in, otherwise she would have had to run the whole length of the street to catch them out of the water whenever anybody wanted one for dinner. And as, of course, Mrs. Gosling knew perfectly well the advantages of the pond, and always meant to live down there near it from the very first—why, the truth is she might have gone there quietly at once instead of making such a great to-do, and fussing about in so many other houses first. But she evidently preferred having her house with a great fuss to having it without one, and so she had her way. Well, so we went and called upon the lady at the great many-windowed house, where we found her. Of course we asked her if she was "quite well," and of course she said she was "quite well, I thank you." Then we asked her who Mr. Jones was, and she said Mr. Jones was a very worthy man, and she respected him very much. Then we did not know what to say, and so we asked her what she was going to

have for dinner to-morrow, as it was after dinner on that day. And at this question the lady became very communicative, and began to blame Mrs. Gosling tremendously: she had indeed ordered a very nice duck for to-morrow; but, if it were not better than the chicken she had just had, it would really be no joke, and besides Mrs. Gosling had forgotten all about the chicken, until several hours after the time it was ordered for dinner; and all, said the lady, because Mrs. Gosling was a regular gossiping woman, ready to mind everybody's business; and for her part she would long ago have left her, had it not been that she really supplied better ducks and fowls than anybody else, when she chose to do her best. We thought we had maintained a pleasant conversation, and also an unusually long one; so we took leave of the lady for that afternoon, and said we would go and scold Mrs. Gosling about the chicken, and have a look at the duck for to-morrow's dinner. As this seemed rather a nice and exciting thing to do, we

determined to do so at once, and set off down the village for that purpose. When we got to Mrs. Gosling's we saw that she had a great number of ducks and geese, and fowls of all kinds, hanging up in her shop, and also spread out on a counter in front of it, placed just at the edge, with their legs sticking straight up, and their heads hanging down. And then whom did we meet, but Mr. Jones inspecting them, one after another, in order to choose for his dinner also. Everybody was poking and pinching the birds about, and we joined and began doing the same. Mrs. Gosling took up one fowl after another, and said it was the finest chick that she ever clapped eyes on, and then she poked it in various places with her finger to show how fat it was, and then Mr. Jones pinched it with his two fingers in order to show how thin it was, and then they went on to another. So we took an important part in the examination, and strongly advised Mr. Jones not to be persuaded to take such a fowl as Mrs. Gosling had just sent

to the lady of the manor, for it was quite evident that she had both bad and good; also she asked a great deal too much for them, the price of many of them being twopence, whereas it was very unusual to give more than a penny for anything in "Our Village," and that was really a very good price for a fowl. Mrs. Gosling told us to hold our tongues and go about our business; but as soon as Mr. Jones had heard the exorbitant terms proposed for the poultry, he appeared astonished, and immediately ceased fingering the fowls altogether, declaring that Mrs. Gosling was an unprincipled woman, and did not deserve custom; whereupon the latter was greatly incensed, and considering that we were the cause of it all, she vociferated violently against us, and said she would give us in charge for spoiling her trade; and she did indeed call the policeman, who turned out to be the person we had supposed was one, but as soon as he heard who we were he said he could not take us up, and only advised Mrs. Gosling to

sell better fowls in future, to the great rage of the latter. The fact was that we knew all about the ducks and the fowls which Mrs. Gosling was selling, and that they were not the real village poultry at all, but old Noah's Ark birds which she had found or picked up for almost nothing, and they could not fail to be very tough indeed; there was in reality only one nice young tender-looking bird in the village, and that was the goose I have already mentioned, and nothing would have induced the sly dame to kill and sell that one. Oh dear, no, it was too good an advertisement; on the contrary, she was always passing off the dried-up Noah's Ark geese for it, and after her customers thought that they had really got and paid for the nice young fat bird, they had the mortification of seeing it waddling about the street, and if possible looking nicer and fatter than ever.

We soon, however, found that it would be desirable to keep on tolerably good terms with Mrs. Gosling, as we had really resolved to take up our abode

in the village, and as the only cow at present to be seen anywhere was certainly hers, and we should certainly at least want butter and milk, even if we could do without ducks and fowls to eat. So we took an early opportunity of conciliating her, and all things began to go very smoothly. We had made up our minds to reside in a certain very newly painted house, which to judge from the array of windows must have an almost infinite number of rooms. It looked very large, and also seemed bright and cheerful enough; the only thing against it from the outside was that, although it had such an imposing appearance in front, if you went round a little it seemed to be rather too narrow, excruciatingly so in fact,—that is to say, that the back wall and the front wall did not seem to be sufficiently far apart to admit of our being in between them, without being squashed flat. But observing the other houses in the village we found that they were all constructed on the same principle, evidently intended for broad persons, but also flat persons;

and as every one else managed to get on very well in them, no doubt we should do the same. But it may be as well to state that this peculiar shape of the houses was one of the points in which "Our Village" differed from those which I have seen since. How quickly the smallest village does increase to be sure! Things had been going on swimmingly for a little time, when the first important alteration occurred, which I am bound to relate, as it had the effect of a decided improvement on some of the village affairs. One of us—we were already, as may be supposed, regarded as rather extensive proprietors in the village—came suddenly into possession of a very handsome farm with all its belongings—a fine farmhouse, all sorts of outbuildings, a barn, with a capital farmer and his wife and servants on the premises, and large flocks and herds into the bargain. Now this fine property was immediately tacked on to the village, being removed just about a pleasant walk from it, and of course became a very great convenience to the

inhabitants, as now there would be plentiful supplies of all things close at hand, and this immediately removed Mrs. Gosling's difficulty about getting good fresh poultry to sell, and also equally removed all excuse for her passing off old Noah's Ark fowls and ducks for the future. It besides gave the policeman a little more to do, as if anything wrong were to happen up at the farm, he must be there also to take somebody up at once, at the precise moment that he might have to be performing the same task down in the village. He grew still straighter and more serious looking, if possible, in consequence; but seemed quite ready to undertake his increased responsibilities.

The neighbourhood of the farm also gave Mr. Jones a nice little walk every day, as he soon got into the habit of strolling over there in the morning. It was really quite delightful to see the farmyard sometimes, when all the animals were standing in their proper pens and stables, and the ducks and geese were walking about in the enclosure. And

then the great farmhouse itself was such a splendid place. It was quite different from the village houses; for it was a long rather low building with a door in front that was always open, and comparatively so roomy inside, that if you succeeded in stooping sufficiently to get in at the door, you could lie down your full length quite comfortably within. Now I must not forget to tell you that, although Mrs. Gosling had for the future plenty of geese and ducks to kill always at hand, she did not, for this reason, go and slay the little village goose which she had slyly kept so long. Not at all; she said now she would not kill it certainly, but would keep it for luck; which prudent resolve raised her considerably in everybody's estimation. And, in fact, one of the first inhabitants of the village that began to find the way over to the farm was this brave and adventurous little goosie-gander, who had long since become quite persuaded that he was not born to be slaughtered as ordinary ducks and geese were, and used to waddle about with a

most confident little swagger. And, strange to relate, it was not long before he struck up a great friendship with a young and equally skittish little cock in the farmyard, and now the two were always to be seen going about the village together, and taking a peep at everything, and turning up wherever anything was going on, so that they became in some respects the most notable of its inhabitants.

But sure enough, on the very day that the farm became part of the village, a naughty boy, who no doubt knew all that had been taking place, came over from another village, and loitered about in the street as if he did not mean to do anything, until the good lady of the manor was coming along the street with her prayer-book in her hand going to church, and then he gave a yell of joy, and threw a stone so cleverly that it came down just on the top of the lady's hat. The lady immediately showed signs of being very much enraged. And where was the policeman indeed, yes where—where!

Why he was up at the farm very busy taking up a naughty girl who had done a variety of naughty things all in one morning, and when she was asked persisted in saying she would do them again. But as soon as the policeman was sent for by the lady in the village, he at once left off taking up the naughty girl, like a good and prompt policeman, and hastened down to the village. But when he arrived there the boy had already got home to his own village, and when he went back to the farm to finish taking up the naughty girl, the latter had actually had time to be naughty several times over, and become quite good again, so that it would have been absurd to take her up then.

The same sort of thing happened again very soon; the boy, flushed with success, making frequent subsequent visits to the village, and the girl always requiring the attentions of the police at that particular moment. And it was not long, of course, before the boy and the girl came to hear of one another, and admired each other very much; and as

longings are not to be repressed, no doubt they then managed to see each other on the subject, for thenceforward they kept it up splendidly for a long time. The good lady became more and more incensed, because the attacks of the naughty boy seemed always more or less particularly directed against herself or her premises; and there was a great to-do in the village, for her ladyship declared that she would go away altogether rather than submit to a continuance of such brutal outrages. Mr. Jones bestirred himself very much in the matter, always running off to fetch the policeman, and seeming greatly concerned that so respectable a lady should be subjected to such treatment in a respectable village, and saying that it was deeply to be deplored that the police were so insufficient to the occasion. And you may be quite sure that the latter had rather a hardish time of it too. But now, if they had only thought of consulting little goosie and his companion, they would have saved themselves a great deal of trouble and annoyance; for these two little busy-

bodies knew all that was going on, and could have told them exactly when the naughty boy was likely to come, and how the naughty girl had promised to keep the constable out of the way just at the right time. Yet, of course, no one ever did think of consulting the two clever little fowls, and so they continued to trudge about, peeping at everything in their usual way, and being intensely amused at what was going forward.

However, things grew to such a pitch, that all heads being put together, it was agreed that the police alone were unable to cope with the difficulty, and that it was highly desirable that there should be some of the military in the village.

Now as it so happened that there was a large camp of soldiers at not a very great distance, this was not after all a difficult thing to obtain. And it was universally agreed that a red coat and a grenadier's cap were in themselves so thoroughly imposing, that one sentry, placed somewhere in the village, would surely be quite sufficient to strike with awe all

persons disposed to get up a disturbance for ever afterwards. So the general of the neighbouring army was communicated with, and he happened to be Master Willy, who most courteously complied with the request. And, sure enough, one fine day, when people went out for their morning's stroll, there was a sentry-box at one end of the village, just where the path turned off to go to the farm; and, in the box, a tall, dreadful, splendid, motionless soldier, with an awful grenadier's cap, and a bayonet on his shoulder. Many people were afraid to pass; but my lady of the manor said it was quite charming, and that the military gave a most distinguished air to the place. And certainly the naughty boy discontinued his outrages at once; and, up at the farm, the naughty girl was taken very ill as soon as she had heard of the great soldier and his bayonet. So there was no more stone-throwing; but numbers of boys used to come, apparently, for the most part, to look at the soldier; and as they were all naturally naughty boys from other villages, as soon as they had done looking

at him as much as they dared, not being brave enough to throw stones under such circumstances, they did other naughty things which were very irritating, but which were not such as one could be taken up for. For instance, they used to get together in great numbers, and begin shouting—one or two at first, and then one and all in grand chorus—

Ba ba boo,
Ba ba boo,
Ba ba boo,
Ba ba boo,

until everybody came out of the houses, and looked up to see the balloon, when there was really no balloon at all; the only thing they could see was her ladyship coming down the street with perhaps a very large umbrella over her head, apparently for nothing whatever.

However, *we* were not at all afraid of the soldier. I have said that we were now living in one of the houses in the village, and, therefore, we used to be always walking about the streets, and taking part in all the

events like any of the other village people. Of course we were not afraid of the soldier. We had once or twice spoken to a real soldier, who was always standing in his sentry-box, just like this one, at the gate of the gardens where we used to go to play with our hoops every morning; and what is more, he had really answered us, at which we ran away on the first occasion; but agreeing that it was very nice to talk to dreadful-looking soldiers, we determined to try again the next morning. So the next morning we said, "How do you do, soldier?" both of us together; and as this time we did not run away, he not only answered us as before, but shifted his bayonet from one hand to the other, and shook hands with us. After that, of course, we ran away, for when he moved his bayonet we thought he was really going to shoot us this time; but afterwards we thought it was splendid, and felt very proud of it. So, of course, we went up to the grenadier at the end of "Our Village," and spoke to him, and he behaved exactly like the real soldier at the gate of the

gardens. But we were not the only people who thought it would be nice to talk to the soldier. The fact was that little goosie and his equally little friend, chanticleer, had been tremendously impressed by the sentinel from the very first; and though for a long time they were dreadfully frightened, and trembled all over when they passed him, still they could not help always going that way and looking at him, at first very shyly indeed. But by degrees, as they saw that he very seldom moved his bayonet at all, and then never lowered and pointed it as if he were going to kill anybody, they became more courageous, and used to stop there a little, and sit down upon their tails and look at him for a long time together. And, really, at last, as they saw that we used to go often, and talk to the soldier without being killed, they determined to do so too. And before they managed it, they felt exactly as we ourselves had felt before we succeeded in addressing our real sentinel. But, at length, one morning they went straight up and looked at him as usual, and said, both together—

Pretty little soldier,
Speak a little to
Goosie goosie-gander
And cock-a-doodle-doo.

When they had said it they thought that there was going to be a great earthquake, and that the end of the world would soon follow; but before five hundred and twenty seconds had passed the dreadful-looking soldier smiled, and seemed pleased, and then asked them how they did; to which they replied, "Quite well, I thank you," and hopped away as fast as ever they could, feeling immensely astonished at having heard the soldier speak in the voice of an ordinary man, but also, like ourselves, agreeing that it was very nice to speak to soldiers.

Now a great many more things happened in "Our Village" than I can pretend to tell you. Not only did so many occurrences take place there, which I have never witnessed in other villages since; but almost everything which we wanted very much to take place elsewhere on a larger scale, and which we could not bring about, at least, without more or less

difficulty, used to happen there quite easily and naturally. For instance, whenever we wanted to catch a bird, it was very easy to do so in our village, for the bird always wanted to be caught at the same moment, and waited until we had put a pinch of salt on its tail, sufficient to catch it; whereas when we were out for our walks elsewhere, we often wished very much to catch a bird, but only occasionally got near enough to put any salt on its tail, and consequently wasted a great deal of salt, and had very few birds to show for it.

But there never passed a day in which some little thing of interest did not occur; so I shall not attempt to dwell upon all the passing excitements which in turn occupied us in those early times in "Our Village," more especially as I have to narrate further events of much greater importance which are intimately associated with the history of "Our Village," and caused great changes therein. Now, as all history is divided into ancient and modern, and as I have at this point a very good opportunity for making a similar division

in this history, I will here state that I have now briefly sketched what may be considered the ancient times in "Our Village," and that the more modern ones are about to commence. Such changes, nevertheless, do not come about suddenly, as they are put down in books, but very gradually. One hears of various events that may seem for long doubtful, or only probable, or even improbable; and then, moreover, when they do happen, one is not aware what very great alterations they are likely to bring after them; but slowly and surely things go on, and all becomes changed.

Now for some time we had heard rumours of a very grand family of people, mostly ladies and little girls, who had some idea of coming to live in the village. And the more we heard about them, the more we began to desire that they should do this. There could be no doubt whatever that they were a much more fashionable and, so to speak, grander family than any of the people ever yet belonging to that village of ours, and they would introduce many new wants

and excitements into the place. First of all, they dressed, we were told, in a manner totally unknown to our primitive villagers. Now the great lady of the manor was really a very grand dame in her way, and her style of dress was quite becoming to her, and had long been the object of admiration and comment on the part of everybody there, especially of Mrs. Gosling, who would much have liked to imitate it, but was unfortunately restricted to the one yellow gown I have mentioned. Mr. Jones and the policeman also were very neat and respectable looking; but it was true that the fashions then in use in "Our Village" were still those which had been invented in the Ark a long time ago, and so far they had not undergone any change whatever, from the day that the people came out of the ark. But these grand persons whom we heard of, wore a great variety of silks and satins, and scarfs, and boots and stockings, and quantities of petticoats and frills, and underclothing of all kinds; and what was the more remarkable, all these things could be taken on and off, and, in fact, were often

changed for others. Now these were customs that had never existed in the Ark, nor had they ever occurred to any one in "Our Village." But still, more than all this, the people in question lived in a very great house, and could not have been accommodated in any one of the ordinary village houses; and for a considerable time it was doubted whether so big a house as they required would do at all to have by the side of such comparatively very small ones, and whether the family would not do better to live in a great city of grand, high houses, like their own. However, if they chose to live amongst us, no one could seriously object.

One day, therefore, all things having been arranged, there was an immense red-bricked mansion at one end of the village; and it was so much higher than anything in the latter, including the trees and even the church-steeple, that it made the other houses appear like little huts, and the people who belonged to them like pigmies. All this was, nevertheless, very exciting. There was a handsome brass

knocker on the door, which would have been very tempting to the naughty boys; but these were, for the present, much too overawed and afraid of what might come out of so big a mansion to form any organized scheme of attack. There were real glass window-panes to all the rooms, and people, who managed to peep in to them, said that the rooms were all most exquisitely furnished inside, and that the beautiful ladies in silks and satins, and little girls in lovely frocks, were sitting on chairs, or reclining on sofas, or taking tea out of real tea-things, on real mahogany tables, or even playing the piano. All this was very wonderful. It also became known in the village that the name of the entire family was the Dolls. But, of course, every separate member of the family had another name, and no little curiosity was aroused as to these names. A few people had already heard one or two of them; and indeed it seemed that each of these very grand ladies possessed a great many names; those which had been heard were very beautiful and high-

sounding. There was Clementina Theresa Maria—all the name of one beautiful lady; then there was Mary Elizabeth Amelia Judith—all belonging to another. No one in the village possessed such names as those certainly.

Well, the curiosity of simple Mr. Jones and Mrs. Gosling, and the other village folk, was not kept very long before it was gratified by a first sight of some of the new arrivals; for, in the afternoon of the very day on which they came to the village, two of the ladies—it being quite fine and dry underfoot—came out to take a little walk. One of them was a most lovely, tall girl of eighteen, and the other was evidently her mamma. They were both superbly dressed, and in a way becoming to their different ages. The dress of the elderly lady was very stiff indeed, and so grand that it stuck out almost to the other side of the street as they walked along. But this was not so very surprising; because, of course, the streets in villages are often rather narrow, and ours had not yet been widened

to keep pace with the latest modern improvements. But the rustling that the two ladies made as they came along was something truly wonderful. Mrs. Gosling was lost in admiration, and said, "O my! one would think it was the royal family!" and no wonder, poor soul! for her yellow gown was so limp that it would not make any rustle if she tried ever so hard.

The two ladies walked in a very lady-like manner in the street, holding each other's hands; and they did not speak to any one, but looked into a few shop-windows, and then went home again. But the next day the same two ladies went out and drove about in a very beautiful carriage, which was the wonder of everybody, and this time they had on quite different dresses from those of the day before. The carriage was so grand and large that it could scarcely get through the street, and knocked down a great many things, and obliged Mr. Jones, and everybody who was walking, to stand up close against the wall, in order to allow it to pass. The

lady and her daughter seemed very much disgusted at the narrowness of the street, which was perhaps natural, as they had no doubt been accustomed to drive in streets about twice or three times as wide as ours. Still it was really rather hard upon poor Mr. Jones that during his walk he should be obliged to make himself flat against the wall, or to go back all the way down the street, whenever the carriage was coming. But Mr. Jones was a very good-natured man. However, he was a very simple one also, and as he, of course, knew all his neighbours in the village, and had always been in the habit of speaking to everybody he met in his walks, why, the first time that he happened to meet the Lady Clementina Theresa Maria and her lovely daughter, the tall girl of eighteen, he went up and spoke to them, saying, "How do you do, mum? It's a very fine day, mum. Hope you're all well at home, mum!"—and he was very much astonished when the two grand ladies sailed and swept by, raising their heads very high in a most fashionable manner, without appearing

to notice him at all, and, consequently, not saying a word in reply. And before he could recover from his astonishment, he found himself lying flat on the ground; for the flounces of the elder lady, as she passed, had taken him up and carried him along a little way, and then the lady had shaken her dress, and Mr. Jones had, of course, tumbled down. However, he soon picked himself up; and as he thought there must have been some mistake, he went and called at the house the next day, and was shown into the drawing-room by a very splendid man-servant all in livery. After some time, Lady Clementina herself came in; and when he said that he was really Mr. Jones, the lady declared that she was very glad to see him; and after they had talked about the weather for a little time, she expressed herself very much pleased with Mr. Jones's conversation, and said that he might call as often as he liked, only that he must not ask to marry her daughter, because she was already engaged. This Mr. Jones promised not to do.

Now, it was to an officer in the army that the tall girl of eighteen was engaged to be married. The officer belonged to the camp of soldiers not a long way off, and he used to come through the village every day in a very grand uniform, with a sword and a cocked hat, to pay a visit to his future bride.

But it was evident that the family of the Dolls, who lived in the very big house, were rather proud, and in many respects different from all the inhabitants of the village. So few of the latter attempted to visit them, and they contented themselves with hearing Mr. Jones's accounts of the house and its occupants; for the latter continued to call every now and then. He used to tell them how there were real chandeliers, full of wax candles, in the drawing-room, and how there was a beautiful soft carpet, and a bright hearthrug, and such a shining new fender, and real fire-irons in front of the grate, where there was always a great red coal fire burning.

However, for a very long time nothing was talked

of in the village but the grand wedding which was to take place. The day was not actually fixed, but preparations were going on at a very great rate. All the shops in the place had been completely ransacked of almost everything they possessed, and many of the tradespeople had been obliged to get an entirely new stock of goods several times over. And yet this was not nearly enough; for great cartloads of things were arriving by every train and parcels' delivery all day long; so people felt quite sure that there would be a wedding such as had never been seen in "Our Village" church before.

But, although you may naturally feel interested in hearing of the great bustle and excitement caused by the approach of so grand a ceremony, it is to be hoped that you have not forgotten some of the things which I related as having occurred during the earlier periods of the history of "Our Village." What had become of all the naughty boys, and especially of the naughty boy *par excellence?* Had he completely discontinued his visits now that things had grown

so much grander in the place? O dear, no! not at all. He not only still came nearly every day into the village, but he was more particularly assiduous at the farm, which now indeed, with the new demands upon its resources in the village, was, if possible, more prosperous than ever. This naughty boy had left off, it seemed, throwing stones; in fact, in spite of the unusual dexterity he had acquired, it had probably occurred to him that he was now getting a little too old for that accomplishment, and there might be others in the world equally worthy of the attention of so promising a lad. So, although he used to walk through the street every day, no one appeared to take any special notice of him; and, in spite of his still frequently meeting the lady of the manor and Mr. Jones also in their walks, these good people probably no longer remembered their old enemy.

But, naturally, one great reason why he was totally forgotten by the village at large, was that all thoughts, tongues, and eyes were entirely taken up about the grand wedding.

However, I must not forget to relate how one day, as he was walking his usual road through the village, our young friend of naughty memory saw coming along the lovely young lady who was going to be married to the officer, about whom he had heard so much; and he determined to have a look at her, as he had long wanted to see what she was like. He thought her appearance was most imposing, —in fact, quite extraordinary; and he was not sure that he altogether admired it. Still he made up his mind to observe a little more before forming his opinion. Her dress was very grand—of that there was no doubt. He had never seen any dress stick out so much in all his life. As she came down the street, he saw that she could scarcely get along without knocking over the houses on each side with her dress. So he thought there was a good opportunity to be polite, and at the same time satisfy his curiosity a little further by learning what she was like when she spoke. When he, therefore, observed that one of the houses, where the street got very

narrow, was beginning to totter, and must eventually fall down—knowing at the same time that he was a very strong boy—he asked the young lady if he should move the house much farther back, so as to make room for her to pass. The young lady did not answer him, and he thought she could not have heard; so he repeated what he had said. Whereupon the young lady pursed up her lips, and raised her head very high, and said, "Little boy, you have no right to speak to me. Mamma does not allow me to speak to vulgar little boys in the street."

At this, he of the naughty memory felt very much enraged, and consequently naughty again, and said, "Ha, ha! little boy, indeed!—who are you?"

Then the young lady drew herself still higher, and, looking down upon him, disdainfully replied, "Horrid little boy! I am Miss Mary Elizabeth Amelia Judith, the tall girl of eighteen, who is engaged to be married; and you're little Grubby Snooks."

Grubby Snooks did not answer before the fair

one had sailed off most majestically, overturning many houses; but his backwardness on this occasion was not due to his being in want of an answer, for he had plenty of all kinds always ready, but merely because he was for the moment stupified with astonishment, and did not exactly know whether it was the houses or himself that were standing or had fallen down. When he recovered, however, he thought of all the things he might have said by way of reply; but seeing plainly that the chance was gone, he contented himself with reflecting, "Going to be married, indeed! he would be very sorry to marry such a grand lady, for his part;" and then he continued his way to the farm, where he was now always treated with great respect, and called Master Snooks.

Well, at last the very day for the grand wedding arrived, and there was, as had been expected, a tremendous excitement in the village. The carriages and the dresses were truly wonderful, and numbers of soldiers came over from the camp to see their

comrade married. And I should really now have to describe a ceremony which I fear would tax my powers too much, but for one unforeseen and troublesome occurrence.

When the party got down to the church, it was found, to their dismay, that, with the grand dresses they had on, it was quite impossible for them to enter it, as, of course, "Our Village" church-door was rather narrow. They tried every way, and were obliged to give up. And one and all agreed that it would never do to change those splendid dresses for other ones which would have enabled them to pass. So it was resolved to put off the ceremony, and that in the meantime the church-door was to be enlarged to suit them, and so be in keeping with modern improvements.

This, of course, took several weeks; and in the meantime I have something else to relate.

I have said that, in days gone by, the naughty girl and the naughty boy had conceived a mutual admiration. Well, the truth is, that lately, though

nobody knew of it, Master Snooks had actually asked the latter to marry him, and that he went up to the farm every day to get her answer; because she had replied that she would think about it, though she had really thought all about it already, and quite determined to do so. But, when she heard how the grand wedding of Miss Mary Elizabeth Amelia Judith had been put off, it occurred to her how fine it would be to get married herself first; and so she immediately said "Yes" to Master Snooks, and told him to set about it at once, as the sooner the better; and she promised him she would not go to the church in a dress which stuck out too much to allow her to pass through the door. So, to the surprise and great interest of everybody, there was another, real wedding, which actually came off in the village church, and which may almost be said to have been a grand wedding; for, although there were no wonderfully grand dresses, there was nevertheless a great concourse of people. All the naughty boys from all the other villages were there, behaving very

well. And there also were Mr. Jones and even the good old lady of the manor herself; and, bless your heart and soul, Mrs. Gosling also, and the policeman himself, and even the soldier from the end of the village himself. And I was there myself also. And, therefore, in spite of the ill-natured remarks of the Dolls, who said it was "very vulgar indeed," I am able to state that they were very nicely married, and that everything went off splendidly. And also, although Mr. and Mrs. Snooks had been looked upon as a naughty boy and a naughty girl before they were married, I am in a position to assert, from personal knowledge since, that they were good ever afterwards.

For the rest, I am sorry to say that I cannot describe to you the "grand" wedding—that of the tall girl of eighteen, which was to have taken place some weeks later. The reason is that, just at that time, some one came in a great hurry, to fetch me away to another village, where they said people were waiting to see me at once, as something very

important to me would happen.. So, as I had no time to lose, I said good-bye hastily to all the people in "Our Village" whom I chanced to meet at that moment, and started off, intending, of course, to be back in plenty of time for the wedding.

But when I got to the other village I found that what happened to me there was really more important than I had imagined, and that there were, moreover, further matters which would necessitate my extending my journey to yet another village farther off. And the truth is that it has been much the same ever since, and that I have never yet been able to get back, as I told you at first.

But, after all, you who, I have no doubt, have long ago recognised the village I have been describing, for the simple reason that you are yourself now dwelling in one of those very roomy, many-windowed, red-tiled houses,—why you yourself probably know much better than I can tell you whether that wedding really did take place, and, if so, all the circumstances connected with it—whether the church-

door was enlarged sufficiently, and, in fact, whether many other modern improvements which I used to hear much talked of also came about in good time. If such were the case, I cannot but think that "Our Village" must be so much altered that I should scarcely recognise it now if I were one day to return there. But should things be otherwise—that is to say, not so very much changed—should, in fact, the lady of the manor be still living there, and Mrs. Gosling still selling ducks and geese there, and honest Mr. Jones walking about and talking to people as usual,—and the birds still so obliging as to wait for the salt to be put on their tails,—should also our old friends, goosie-gander and cock-a-doodle-doo, be, as usual, hopping here, there, and every-where,—and the same gentle little soldier standing in the sentry-box, and the same policeman, both his hands straight down to his sides, with the same serious expression of countenance,—why, I would most sincerely ask you to give my best love to them all, and to tell them that I am really very, very

sorry that I have been so exceedingly busy ever since leaving them as never to have gone back again; and that, in truth, it has not been my fault, for I have often desired it, and have in fact never been so contented and happy in any village, town, or big city, that I have lived in, as I was a long while ago in "Our Village."

THE END.

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