STRANGE ADVENTURES OF LITTLE SNOWDROP


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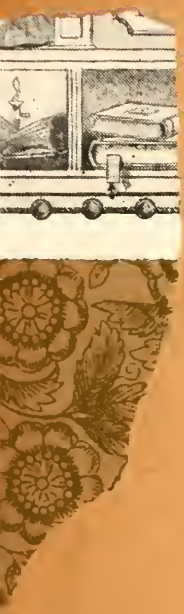
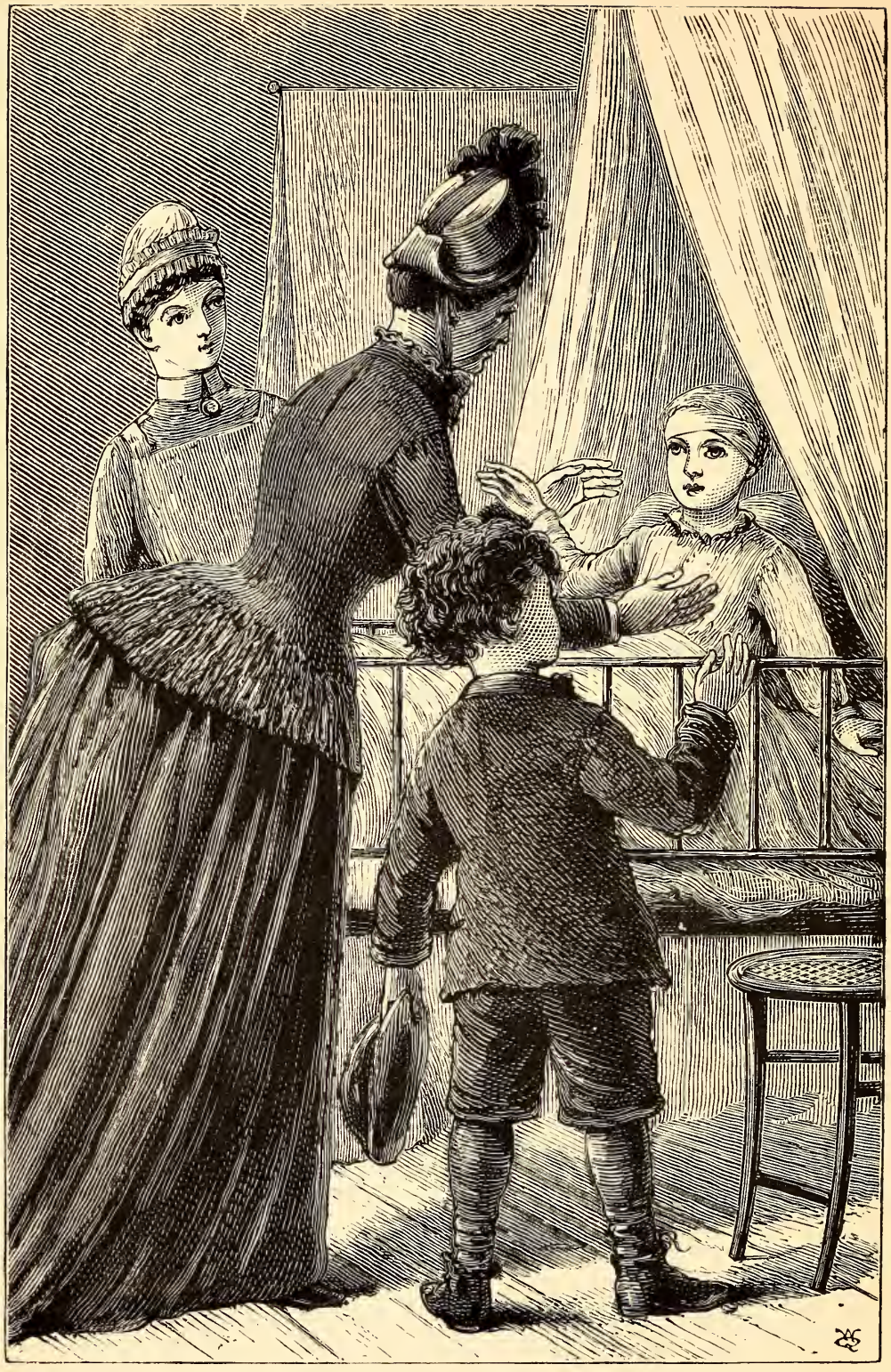




Snowdrop's delight at seeing her mother and Dermot.
Frontispiece, see page 143.

THE STRANGE ADVENTURES

OF

LITTLE SNOWDROP.

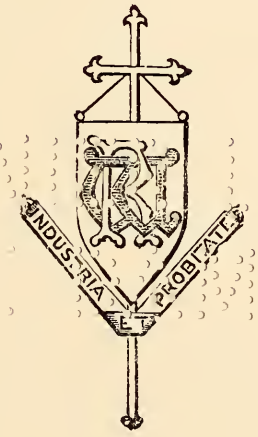
AND OTHER TALES.

BY

CLARA MULHOLLAND,

AUTHOR OF 'THE MISER OF KINGSCOURT,' 'PERCY'S REVENGE,' 'NAUGHTY MISS BUNNY,' ETC., ETC.

WITH FOUR FULL-PAGE ORIGINAL ILLUSTRATIONS.



R. WASHBOURNE,
18 PATERNOSTER ROW, LONDON.
1889.

To

MY THREE LITTLE NIECES,

LILIAN, MARGARET, AND ALICE.

CONTENTS.

THE STRANGE ADVENTURES OF LITTLE SNOWDROP.

CHAPTER I.

A BIRTHDAY PARTY.

WHEN the cold winter was changing into spring, and the primroses and violets were appearing in the fields and hedges, May Elton was born.

'What a tiny thing she is!' said her father, gazing at her in delight; 'my first little darling, my sweet spring snowdrop.'

And as May grew older she was so fair and delicate that she kept the name her father had given her, and was known to her friends as little Snowdrop.

Snowdrop was an only child, and was surrounded from her birth with every luxury that money could procure. But still she was often lonely, and pined for a brother or sister to share her games and pleasures.

Mrs. Elton loved her child, and did what she could to make her happy. It pleased her to hear her laugh and chatter, and so she tried to gather little companions about her as much as possible.

So when Snowdrop's sixth birthday came round, invitations were sent out in all directions, and children from two to eight years old were bidden to an afternoon party.

On the morning of the great day boxes and parcels arrived from cousins and aunts, and Snowdrop was deluged with presents. But in spite of all these kindly attentions the little girl was not happy; one thing was wanting that nothing could make up for, and that was her dear papa. He was absent on business, and could not return for his darling's birthday.

As Snowdrop sat surrounded by parcels, scarcely deigning to notice them, once she had seen what they contained, the nursemaid entered, carrying a cardboard box and a letter.

'Here's a poor battered-looking old thing, Miss Snowdrop; it's a present, I suppose,' she said scornfully; 'but I don't think it's worth much. The letter is from your papa.'

'From papa? Oh, give it to me, Polly. Dear, darling papa!' and seizing the letter, the child covered it with kisses.

'Shall I read it for you, dear?' said Polly.

'Please do; but isn't it a pity I cannot read it for myself?'

'Yes, it is a pity; but I'll read you every word, never fear. Listen:

'"Manchester, 27th February.

'"MY LITTLE DARLING,

'"I wish you a very happy birthday. I cannot tell you how sorry I am that I am unable to come home for your party. But I must stay up here a little longer to earn more bread and butter for my pet.

'"What an old girl you are getting, Snow. Why, you will soon be able to help mamma in the housekeeping, and pour out my tea in the mornings. I send you a box of snowdrops, your little namesakes, and hope you will like them. I am too busy to go out to look for toys, but I am sure you will get plenty.

'"God bless you, darling!

'"Your loving father,

'"GEORGE ELTON."'

'Dear kind papa,' cried Snowdrop, taking the letter from Polly, and kissing it again. 'I would rather have this letter than all the presents; but, oh! I wish he had come home. There is lots of bread and butter downstairs, and cakes and all sorts of good things; I wish he wouldn't get any more. Mamma says she hates business; so do I, when it takes my dear papa away.'

'That's very fine,' said Polly, laughing; 'but when folks like grand houses and smart frocks, someone must find money to pay for them. You know you like your papa and mamma to give you rich presents, Miss Snowdrop.'

'No, I don't,' said the little girl, opening the battered box, and laying the white blossoms against

her lips. 'I love these flowers more than any present I've had to-day.'

'Well, you've funny taste, then,' cried Polly; 'for they're poor peeky things. Why, there's flowers in the drawing-room ten times as nice—flowers that cost heaps of money.'

'I don't care; I love my snowdrops best of all.'

So, when four o'clock came round, and the little girl tripped downstairs to welcome her guests, a bunch of her father's flowers was pinned in front of her dainty frock.

But in truth, as Polly had said, there were many flowers to put them in the shade, for rare plants and exotics stood on every side. No trouble had been spared in making preparations for the party, and the beautiful drawing-rooms were decorated as though for a ball.

Snowdrop took her place by her mother's side, and as her friends appeared, received them with smiles, and thanked them for their presents and good wishes.

The last arrival was a rosy-cheeked, dark-eyed girl of eight, arrayed in crimson plush and old point lace. Towards her Snowdrop flew in delight, and clasped her arms round her neck.

'How late you are, Effie!' she cried, 'and I wanted to show you all my presents before the party began.'

'I could not come any earlier, darling,' said Effie, returning the child's kisses with warmth. 'Mother wanted to bring me herself, and as she had some friends to luncheon she could not get away any sooner.'

'Look, aren't my flowers pretty?' said Snowdrop,

fingering her treasures tenderly. 'Papa sent me these all the way from Manchester.'

'Did he?—they are very nice,' said Effie carelessly, as she glanced round the room. 'But what a strange present! I should have fancied he would give you something handsome. Papa says he's very rich.'

'I suppose he is; but I love my snowdrops, Effie, and I don't care about handsome things.'

'Well, you're a goose then. I like things that look good and that last; snowdrops wither up and die.'

'Yes; so they do, poor wee things.'

'This is what my papa gave me,' said Effie, twisting a gold bangle about on her arm; 'this is something you can keep.'

'Yes, so it is; but, Effie, I like my snowdrops best.'

'What a funny child!'

'Yes, so I am,' cried Snowdrop, laughing merrily; 'nurse says I am "uncanny," whatever that may mean.'

'Oh, it means queer, funny; so it suits you very well,' cried Effie.

'So it does. But come along, dear, and let us take our seats; the conjurer is going to begin, and I am longing to see what he will do.'

'What wonderful friends those children are!' said Effie's mamma to Mrs. Elton. 'I hope they will remain so all their lives.'

'Yes,' said Mrs. Elton, smiling. 'Snowdrop loves Effie, and has great faith in her opinions. But your daughter is more fortunate in having brothers and sisters to make her home happy; my little one is sometimes very lonely.'

'Yes, I dare say. But being one of a large family

has its disagreeable sides also. Effie will not have so many of the good things of this world as Miss Snowdrop, I can tell you.'

'That will not harm her,' said Mrs. Elton; 'children are happier when they do not get everything they want.'

But here the conjurer began his entertainment, and ladies and children ceased all conversation and became absorbed in watching him.

For some time all eyes were fixed upon him: sharp little minds fancied they could detect the way he did his tricks, and followed closely his every movement. But he was a clever man, and managed to puzzle them completely.

Balls and pennies were picked from behind unsuspecting ears, and from amongst crops of curly hair; handkerchiefs were torn to pieces and mended again; glasses of water were pushed down throats and taken out of backs amidst shrieks of laughter, and then the performance was brought to an end by a plentiful distribution of crackers from a hat.

'Now for the bran-pie!' cried Snowdrop, springing to her feet, as the last cracker flew across the room. 'Now for the bran-pie! Follow me to the nursery.'

Like a flock of birds the children rose, and ran joyfully up the stairs.

Snowdrop and Effie were well to the front, and as they entered the day nursery they found Polly keeping watch over the precious bran-pie.

'What a funny thing,' cried Effie, as the company trooped in and ranged themselves in a ring round the room. 'Why, it is a big bath full of bran. How very strange!'

'Oh, but there is something in the bran,' cried a little girl, laughing. 'Don't you remember the pie we had, Snowdrop?'

'Yes, I remember it,' said Snowdrop gaily. 'When the things were taken out, the boys said they would plant me, as I was a flower, to see if I would grow. Oh, it was great fun! They put me in, and covered me up with bran; it was jumping out of my sash the whole evening afterwards.'

'So it was. And mamma said she thought it would never get swept out of the carpets again.'

'Oh, it was fun!' said Snowdrop. 'May we begin, Polly dear?'

'Yes, you may begin; but the little ones must come first,' and Polly drew three fat babies out of the ring.

'I tant find nuffing,' cried a sprite of two; 'dere's nuffing but ban in dis pie.'

'Dive deep, deep, Trotty,' called a merry-looking boy; 'the toys are sure to be a good way down.'

So Trotty and her friends plunged their little arms far into the bran, and with Polly's help brought out some substantial parcels, with which they retired in delight.

Then all the children came in turn, and after that there was nothing but noisy, hopeless confusion. Such laughing and chatting, such opening of packets, such fun and merriment never was heard; and when at last the pie was emptied of all its treasures, the nursery strewn with papers and covered with bran, the young people gathered up their toys and returned to the drawing-room.

And what a charming picture they made, midst the flowers and lights, as they flew over the parquet floor to the sound of a gay waltz!

Snowdrop and Effie were the life of the evening. They danced and romped, coaxed the shy ones to do the same, and made the babies happy by drawing them into all the games and fun.

And when supper was over and the last little guest had departed, Snowdrop hung round her mother, kissing her and thanking her for the pleasure she had given her.

'I was so happy, mamma,' she said. 'You were a good mamma to give me such a nice party.'

'I am glad my darling was happy. My little Snowdrop looked so sad this morning when papa did not appear.'

'Yes; but then his letter and his dear little flowers made me feel quite glad; but, oh, mamma, they are quite withered and dead.'

'Yes, darling, so they are,' said her mother, taking the child on her knee; 'put them in water and they will revive again. But what was that, Snow? I thought I heard a cab stop at the door. Wouldn't it be nice if it were papa, after all?'

'Oh, so nice!' cried the child eagerly. 'But I don't think there was a cab; I——'

But as she spoke the door opened, and Mr. Elton, looking pale and anxious, entered the room.

'Papa, papa!' cried Snowdrop, and she sprang into his arms.

'My darling, my little Snowdrop,' he said fondly. 'Have you been happy to-day?'

'Oh yes, papa; but I longed for you to come home. And see, I wore your flowers at my party; they looked so pretty.'

'That is right, dear. And now my little girl must go to bed; I have something to say to mamma.'

'Let me hear it, papa; don't have any secrets from your little Snow!'

'My darling, it will not be a secret long. Eleanor,' he said, approaching his wife and taking her hand, 'I have bad news for you.'

'Bad news, George?' she said quickly. 'What is it? Do not fear; I am ready to share your troubles. I have felt something was wrong for a long time; but I am quite ready to help you.'

'That is my own brave wife. And it may not be so bad as I think; but we must not live as we have been doing. I have lost a great deal of money, and we must retrench. For the present, anyway, I am very poor.'

'My poor George!' she said, putting her arm round his neck. 'But do not fret for me; I can never be poor so long as I have you and my little Snowdrop.'

'Papa,' said the child, creeping up and pushing something into her father's hand, 'there is my little plush purse. You can have it and all the money that's in it. Here are two whole shillings; that will help you till you find your money again.'

'My little pet,' cried her father, kissing her lovingly, 'it will help me greatly; God bless you, darling, you and your brave-hearted mother. But you must go to bed; I cannot allow my Snowdrop to grow pale; so now for a ride on my back up the stairs.'

'That will be nice, that will be nice!' cried the little girl, springing from the sofa to his back. 'Good-night, mamma, good-night; wasn't it lucky I didn't buy a stupid toy with my two shillings? then I couldn't have helped my dear papa;' and, laughing merrily, Snowdrop went off in triumph to the nursery.

CHAPTER II.

AUNT JULIA'S LETTER.

BUT although Snowdrop had given her two shillings, and her father had seemed so pleased to receive them, things did not appear to come right again.

Mrs. Elton was sad, and went about the house looking mournful and depressed. She made lists of all her valuables, and gazed tearfully at things that she had loved, not because they were worth much money, but because they were precious, for the sake of those who had given them to her. For all had to to be sold: house, furniture, jewels and pictures. Mr. Elton had failed in business, and could not pay his debts.

Of this Snowdrop understood but little. She had liked living in the big house in the square, but she now thought it would be perfectly charming to go into lodgings with her father and mother, just three, all by themselves.

'And, oh, mother dear,' she said, clasping her hands in an ecstasy of delight, 'am I to have no

nurse? Are you really going to wash and dress me yourself?'

'Yes, darling,' said her mother with a sigh; 'and my little Snowdrop must be very good.'

'I shall be an angel of goodness; for, oh! mother dear, I shall be so happy.'

But if the thought of leaving her beautiful home was a pleasant one to Snowdrop, it was anything but that to Mrs. Elton. For her own part she was ready to bear any hardships, suffer any privations, so long as she was beside her husband to cheer and comfort him; but for her little daughter's sake she dreaded the change in their lives. Snowdrop was frail and delicate, and to take her into a lodging in a dingy London street would, the mother feared, be highly dangerous.

And so, as Mrs. Elton went about the sad work of packing, and preparing the house for the sale, her heart was very sore; but her greatest sorrow was that in the future her darling child would not have the fresh air and healthy dwelling-place that were so necessary for her.

One morning, as Snowdrop ran merrily up and down the hall, peeping about at all the trunks and boxes that stood there, ready for removal, the bell rang sharply, and a letter was dropped into the letter-box.

The little girl sprang to the door, and taking it out, turned it over curiously. 'It is from Aunt Julia,' she cried joyfully; 'for it has an Irish post-mark and the O'Connor crest. Mamma, mamma, here is a letter from auntie; I wonder what she says?' and she flew into the library to her mother.

'Yes, it is from your Aunt Julia, Snow,' said her mother, looking up with a smile; 'what a clever sprite you are to guess that! Dear Julia, I am sure she is grieved to hear of our troubles.'

'Yes, I am sure she is; but, oh, mamma, do read her letter and tell me what she says.'

'What an impatient puss you are! I will tell you the news in a minute,' and, opening the letter, Mrs. Elton began to read. 'My dear little Snow,' she said presently, taking the child on her knee, 'your aunt sends you all kinds of messages and love and kisses. She wants me,' and here her eyes filled with tears, 'to send you over to Kilteen Castle to her for awhile.'

'Oh, how delightful!' cried Snowdrop eagerly; 'but wouldn't you come too, mamma?'

'No, darling, I couldn't go; I must stay and take care of papa.'

'And so must I,' said the little girl decidedly. 'What would he do without his little Snowdrop?'

'But still you would like to go, my darling? You would like to see all your cousins and your Aunt Julia, and——'

'Yes, I would just love to go if——'

'If what, Snowdrop?'

'If you and papa came with me. But I want to stay and help to comfort you and him, mother dear.'

'Yes, dearest, I am sure you would. But if you knew that your going away would comfort us more than your staying?'

'Oh, mamma,' and the blue eyes filled with tears, 'could you be happy without your little daughter?'

'Yes, darling;' but the mother's lip trembled as

she spoke, 'I could be happy if I knew that going away from me would be for my daughter's good; if I knew she would be well taken care of, and that the separation was only to be a short one.'

'Oh, but, mamma dear——'

'Oh, but, Snowdrop. Listen, pet. Since our troubles have come upon us and we knew that we must leave this house, your papa and I have been fretting about you more than anything. You are delicate, darling, and we could not bear to think of your being shut up in a close lodging. We trembled for what it might lead to. This invitation from your Aunt Julia is the first gleam of brightness I have known since I heard the sad news of your papa's misfortunes.'

'But I would love to go into lodgings, mamma; I think it would be great fun.'

'Not half so much fun as going to Kilteen Castle, Snow. It is a lovely place. There are dear little cousins there for you to play with; there is fresh air to make you strong; and donkeys and ponies for you to ride.'

'Oh, mamma, how lovely! But'— and Snowdrop laid her cheek against her mother's—'you would not be there; so how could I be happy?'

'But if my little daughter thought she was helping her mother—would not that make her happy?'

'Yes, it would,' answered the child slowly. 'But how could I help you by being away? That is very strange.'

'Yes, dear, so it must seem to you; but I will explain what I mean. I shall miss you terribly and constantly

Snow ; and yet knowing that you are with your aunt, in her beautiful country home, will comfort and make me happy.'

'But you will be so lonely, mother.'

'Yes, dear, very lonely. But I hope to be very busy, Snow, for I intend to work hard and earn some money.'

'Earn money, mother? Oh, I wish I could earn some too!'

'My little girl will have to grow big and strong first. She must learn her lessons well, and then she may earn some, perhaps, some day.'

'Yes, mamma. But I didn't know people got money for learning lessons: Effie doesn't, and she learns history, and geography, and all kinds of things.'

'You old goose! People never get paid for learning lessons,' said Mrs. Elton, laughing. 'I did not mean that. But if we study hard when we are young, Snow, and learn a great many things, then when we grow up, that knowledge will help us to earn money if we require to do so. Do you understand?'

'Yes, mamma. And you know lots of hard things. You can read all those big books in the drawing-room, and play lovely tunes on the piano. Effie says her mamma thinks you very clever.'

'That is very kind of Effie's mamma,' said Mrs. Elton, smiling. 'But I am not going to earn money by playing lovely tunes on the piano, or reading hard books, Snow. I am going to earn it, I hope, by writing easy books for little people like you.'

'That will be nice,' cried Snowdrop ; 'and please

put plenty of pictures in them—plenty of green and red pictures ; they look so pretty.'

'Well, dear, I shall have nothing to do with that ; but I hope they will be nice books, and that you and your little cousins may like them.'

'I'm sure we shall ; but please let me stay and see you write them, mamma. It will be ever so long before you can send them to Ireland.'

'You foolish child ! it would be dry work watching me write. No, no, dear ; if the books are to be written, my little girl must go to the country. I could not sit quietly at my writing if I thought you were not getting proper air and exercise.'

'But I could go out and walk up and down the street by myself ; indeed I could. I would look awfully well for cabs and carriages before I crossed to the other side, mamma.'

'Yes, I dare say you would, for you are a wise old lady ; but that would not help me with my work, Snow ; I should be too anxious about you. If my darling really wants to help her papa and mamma, she must go off cheerfully to Aunt Julia and her cousins ; I am sure she will do so to please us.'

'Yes, mamma, I will, I will,' cried Snowdrop, throwing her arms round her mother's neck, and covering her face with kisses. 'I will go if you like ; but, oh ! I do wish you were coming with me.'

'Well, dear, I shall go over in the summer. When the books are written and papa's affairs set right, then we shall take a holiday and go over to Kilteen Castle to see our darling.'

'And mind and bring all the books with you,

mamma, for I shall just be longing to see what they are like.'

'All the books? Why, Snow, you talk as if I were going to write books by the million. If I get two written and accepted, I shall be very happy.'

'Two! Oh! that's very few. You won't earn much money with two,' said Snowdrop in a disappointed tone; 'you might write more than that.'

'I am afraid I could not manage any more in the time, Snow; and they will not be published till about Christmas—if ever.'

'Oh, dear, what a long time!' cried Snow; 'but, mamma, are the Kilteen cousins nice?'

'Yes, dear, I think so; I never saw any of them except Dermot, and I only saw him when he was a baby.'

'Is he a kind boy?'

'I am sure he is. Aunt Julia says he is wild and full of spirits, but very good-natured with his little sisters.'

'Well, I hope he will be kind to me,' said Snowdrop, with a sigh. 'Effie says boys are dreadful torments, and get into fearful mischief.'

'But my little Snow must be wise and keep him in order. If he does mischievous things, you must allow him to do so alone; tell him he is wrong, and then leave him.'

'Yes, mamma; but do you think he will be nice? Will he lend me his pony?'

'I am sure he will. Your aunt says he is making all kinds of plans for your amusement. I think he must be a fine little chap. And now run off, darling; I have a great deal to do before dinner. When I

have finished this list of books, I must go and look over your clothes.'

'Very well, mamma,' said Snowdrop, with a kiss. 'I will go up now and tell Polly the news.'

CHAPTER III.

A HEARTY WELCOME.

THE little station of Ballybrack is in commotion. The seven o'clock train from Kingstown is almost due, and people are crowding in on all sides; some to take the train to Bray, where a military band is playing, others to meet friends who may have come from town, or crossed over in the packet from England.

Amongst the most anxious watchers are a little boy of seven, and a tall, pleasant-looking gentleman.

'There is the train, just leaving Dalkey; it will soon be here,' cried the child. 'But, papa, papa, shall we know Snowdrop when we see her? Wouldn't it be terrible if we took a strange little girl by mistake?'

'Very terrible, Dermot,' said his father, laughing; 'but not at all probable. I am not uneasy, dear boy. I have not seen her for two years, but still I am sure I shall have no difficulty in knowing her.'

'How do you do, Mr. O'Connor?' said a gentleman who came into the station in great haste. 'I thought I was late. How excited Master Dermot looks. Are you taking him to the band?'

'No; we are looking out for my little niece, who

is coming over from England to stay with us for awhile.'

'Ah, poor Elton's child?'

'Yes; Dermot has taken a sudden panic lest I should pick up the wrong child.'

'That would be awkward, certainly,' said the gentleman, smiling. 'But here comes the train.'

At this moment the great engine came steaming into the station, and Mr. O'Connor looked closely into every carriage as it whizzed past him.

'There she is. That fair-faced little creature must be Snowdrop. Certainly the name suits her well,' he cried, and, taking Dermot by the hand, he walked up the platform in search of the traveller.

A young woman lifted a little girl from a first-class carriage, and peered anxiously into every face.

'Are you Snowdrop Elton?' asked Mr. O'Connor, putting his arm round the child; 'I am sure you are.'

'Yes, I am Snowdrop; and this is Polly Green, my nurse.'

'That is right,' said Mr. O'Connor, kissing her; 'I am very glad to see you, Snowdrop. One introduction deserves another: I am your uncle Jim, and this,' drawing Dermot forward, 'is your cousin, Master Dermot O'Connor. Come, my man, give the little one a kiss.'

But Dermot hung back with crimson cheeks. He had longed for his cousin to appear;—counted the days, hours, and minutes till she should arrive, and now, when he found her before him, he had not a word to say.

'Well, you are a little goose!' said his father; 'you ought to be ashamed of yourself!'

'He is shy, Uncle Jim,' said Snowdrop, looking up with a smile: 'boys always are.'

'Indeed, is that your opinion?' said her uncle, laughing. 'He is shy at present, but I promise you it will not last long. Come, Dermot, be a man; give your cousin your hand, and take her out to the car, whilst I give directions about the luggage. How many trunks have you, Polly?'

'Two, sir,' answered the nurse.

'Well, come along and show them to me; the children will be quite safe together.' And Mr. O'Connor turned and walked across to where the luggage labelled 'Ballybrack' had been tumbled out of the train.

As his father disappeared, Dermot put out his hand, and, blushing deeply, said: 'Come, and I will show you my donkey-carriage.'

Snowdrop took his hand with a merry laugh, and, peeping up at the blushing boy, whispered coaxingly: 'Don't be shy to me; I am only a little thing, and I want you to be glad to see me.'

'I am glad to see you, and I am not one bit shy,' and, turning away his head, he ran quickly out of the station.

An outside car stood at the door; but a little way in front was a funny little carriage of yellow wood and cushions covered with light-coloured cloth. This small conveyance stood about three feet from the ground, and into it was harnessed a quiet-looking donkey, who at this moment was enjoying a peaceful meal of grass by the roadside.

'What a dear little carriage!' cried Snowdrop. 'Oh, Dermot, is that yours?'

'Yes, it is mine,' said Dermot, smiling; 'papa gave it to me for my last birthday. Would you like to go up to the castle in it, or on the car with papa?'

'Oh, I would rather go in the carriage; but would Uncle Jim allow me?'

'Yes, of course he would. Jump in. I drive myself, you know; but we must wait till papa is ready.'

'Can you really drive yourself? Well, you are a clever boy!'

'Oh, that's nothing,' cried Dermot, his shyness fast disappearing; 'I can do far cleverer things than that. But isn't it nice and comfortable?'

'It's lovely,' said Snowdrop, seating herself, and patting the donkey's back; 'but, oh! I hope he would never run away.'

'Of course not. Why, I would hold him in if he tried to run; but he wouldn't.'

'Well, I am glad he wouldn't. I don't think you could hold him in; you are only a little boy, and your arms are not strong enough.'

'But I am not so very little; I'm past seven, and my arms are fine and strong, I can tell you. Uncle Tom says I have splendid muscle for my size.'

'Ho, ho! so you've got over your shyness, Master Dermot,' said Mr. O'Connor. 'And now, Snowdrop, will you trust this young shaver to drive you up the hill? I will walk behind, so you need have no fear.'

'I am not afraid, uncle. Dermot says he's a very good driver.'

'I dare say he thinks so; but I would not trust him far out of my sight. Dermot, I would not boast so much, if I were you; it looks conceited, my boy.'

'No, papa, I did not mean to be that.'

'I hope not; but that is your rock ahead, my little man, so you must take care to avoid it.'

'Yes, papa.'

'What is a rock ahead, uncle?' asked Snowdrop; 'the road is very hilly—but I don't see any rock.'

'Don't you, my dear? But I did not mean a rock on the road, Snowdrop; I meant a big fault in Dermot's character over which he must take care not to stumble. He is apt to think he can do everything well, and so he often comes to grief; eh, my boy?'

'Yes, papa, so I do.'

'Well, now, away you ago. Polly will follow on the car with her parcels, and the trunks can go up on the cart. I shall walk behind you, just to see that Neddy and his master play no tricks. Do not go too fast, Dermot, as I cannot go quickly up the hill.'

'No, papa; I shall go at a snail's pace,' said the boy, laughing, and, gathering up his reins, he started off.

'Look, Snowdrop, that is our home,' he said, as the donkey plodded slowly up the road; 'does it not look lovely from here?'

'Yes, indeed it does; and, oh dear, how high it is! How shall we ever get there?'

'Oh, easily enough; Neddy is accustomed to the hill, and will soon carry us up.'

Kilteen Castle stood high above the road, and had a charming view of sea and mountains. The walls were

of solid granite, that sparkled in the sunlight, and its gardens sloped in terraces and walks along the side of the hill.

'It looks like a fairy palace, up there in the sun,' said Snowdrop; 'I never saw such a beautiful house.'

'No more did I,' said Dermot, well pleased at the little girl's praise of his home; 'it's far away the nicest about here, anyway.'

'Yes, I'm sure it is; and how pretty that ivy looks all along that big wall!'

'So it does. But the part of the castle I like best is the tower, there, at the other end; it is awfully high, and there's such a splendid view of the hills and sea from it. But I dare say you like shops and houses and things better; London people always do.'

'Indeed they don't!' cried the little girl indignantly. 'I just love the country; you are so much shut up in London.'

'Well, I'm glad you like the country. But, Snowdrop——?'

'Yes; what is it?'

'Are there many girls in London?'

'Of course there are—heaps and heaps.'

'Dear, dear, I am sorry,' said Dermot, flipping the donkey with his whip; 'I thought it might be different over there.'

'Different from what? There are plenty of girls everywhere.'

'Yes, that's just it; there are too many over here. We have four: Nora, the twins, and Baba. Mrs. Mulvane has six, the Bruces five, and ever so many people have some that I cannot think of now.'

'Well, but that's very nice,' said Snowdrop, leaning back comfortably in her seat; 'I like girls; my greatest friend in London is a girl.'

'Oh, it's very well for you,' said Dermot mournfully; 'but I like boys. I used to think that over in England there must be plenty, and yet the first cousin that comes over to us is a girl.'

'Oh, but there are a great many boys too. There was Jack, and Harry, and Joe. Oh, lots of boys, and——'

'Boys like me—not big tall chaps?'

'Yes, like you,' examining him critically; 'some were fatter, some thinner. Jack was a little taller and Harry not quite so big, but——'

'I wish you had brought one or two of those chaps with you, then; we should have had fine fun together.'

'But are there no boys in Ireland?' asked Snowdrop, wondering much at such a strange state of things.

'Of course there are. But the only fellows I know about here are the O'Briens. They are big chaps of twelve or fourteen, and rather wild. Mother thinks it would make me rough to go with them much.'

'That would be a pity,' said Snow wisely; 'rough boys are so disag*reeble*.'

'That's very fine; but boys ought to be rough—at least, so the O'Briens say. They call me "Miss Molly," and that makes me so angry.'

'Well, that is very unkind; but, oh, Dermot, how lovely the sea looks from here!'

'Yes, not bad,' said Dermot carelessly; 'but it is

much nicer to be out on it in a boat, catching shoals of fish.'

'How nice! and can you really catch fish?'

'I should just think so! but I don't often get the chance. Those O'Brien chaps have a boat of their own, and they would like to take me out sometimes; but, then, my mother is too frightened to let me go.'

'Now, Dermot, you may go a little faster,' said Mr. O'Connor, from behind; 'Neddy seems in a lazy humour to-day.'

'Oh no, uncle,' cried Snowdrop; 'he is a dear old donkey. Dermot and I have been having such a nice talk that we forgot to make him go on. But is that Kilteen Castle?'

'Yes, that is Kilteen Castle, and there is Aunt Julia at the hall-door; and, dear me, there is the whole nursery turning out to meet you. Goodness! what a hurry the young ladies are in!'

As he spoke, four little girls, the eldest a golden-haired trot of five, the youngest a ball of two, came one after the other down the road.

'Gently, my children, or you will surely fall,' called their father, and, smiling at their eagerness, he caught the baby in his arms. 'Here is a party of pickles, Snowdrop,' he said; 'I hope you will not be too much shocked at their country manners.'

'No, uncle, I am sure I shall not,' said Snowdrop, kissing her cousins as they clambered up the side of the carriage.

'I am Nora, Snowdrop,' cried one; 'I am the biggest; I am five, so, remember, you must be my friend.'

'Yes, I'm sure I shall,' answered Snowdrop gaily.

'Ah, but you must be my friend, too,' exclaimed Topsy, a wild-looking child, with merry, dark eyes. 'Nora always wants to keep everybody to herself. Doesn't she, Lesbia?'

'Yes,' said Lesbia, 'so she does; but Snowdrop will be our friend just as much. Topsy and me is two twins, so you must love us just the very same.'

'And I hope you will all love me,' said Snowdrop in a low voice. 'Mamma told me you would all be my friends.'

'Me fen, too,' cried Baba, from her father's arms, 'me fen, too.'

'What a great big friend Mistress Baba will be!' cried Mr. O'Connor, hoisting her up on his shoulder. 'But now, Dermot, start off again; don't keep your mother waiting.'

'Get down, you kids,' said Dermot; 'we must take Neddy up in great style to the gate.'

The little girls dropped from their perches on the side of the carriage; Dermot cracked his whip, and the donkey trotted briskly forward.

'Now, Nora—now for a race,' cried Mr. O'Connor, and shouting and cheering, the baby on his shoulder, his three small daughters at his heels, he ran gaily up the road.

'Here is Snowdrop! here is our London cousin!' cried the little girls as they flew along.

'Here we are at last, mother,' said Dermot; and in an instant Snowdrop was in Aunt Julia's arms.

'Welcome to Kilteen Castle, darling!' said Mrs. O'Connor, clasping the child to her heart, and kissing

her lovingly ; 'welcome a hundred times ! I do hope you may be happy here.'

'Yes,' said Snowdrop, looking up into her face, 'I know I shall, for everyone is so kind ; and, oh, Aunt Julia, you are so like my own dear mother !'

CHAPTER IV.

COUNTRY COUSINS.

BEFORE many weeks had elapsed, Snowdrop felt quite at home at Kilteen Castle. The little girl was so gay, and at the same time so gentle and obliging, that she won all hearts, and was soon a great favourite with her Irish cousins. And the free country life and fresh air suited her well, and before very long she grew fat and rosy.

'We shall have to change your name, Mistress Snowdrop,' said her uncle one day ; 'you are getting so plump and sunburnt that it does not describe you any longer. I think we must begin to call you May.'

'Oh no, please don't, uncle,' cried the child earnestly. 'My own dear papa gave me that name when I was a baby ; he called me Snowdrop always, so please let me keep it.'

'Very well,' he answered, laughing ; 'I shall not attempt to make a change if you love the name so much. But you are more like a rosy-cheeked apple than a snowdrop.'

'Yes, I know I am,' she said gaily; 'that is because the air is so good, and Aunt Julia takes such care of me.'

'And you are happy over here, little woman?' he said, smoothing the long fair hair as he spoke, 'quite happy and fond of your cousins?'

'Oh yes, Uncle Jim, so happy. My cousins are so nice, and then in a few more weeks mamma and papa will be here.'

'So they will; but we must try to make them stay for a long time. We shall be sorry to part with you, darling.'

And when this conversation was written over to Mrs. Elton in her lonely lodgings, her heart was filled with joy.

'Thank God! I did what was right for my child,' she said; 'it was a hard trial to be obliged to send her away; but since it has been for her good, and she is happy, I can bear the separation.' And comforted by this thought, she threw herself into her work with renewed vigour.

And Snowdrop did love all her cousins dearly. But her greatest favourite was Dermot; from the first moment they met, they were fast friends. To him she told her secrets; to him she talked of her dear mother and the books she was writing; to him she grieved over her father's troubles, and told all her plans for their future life. And Dermot returned her affection in full. He was interested in her little thoughts, and did what he could to make her happy at Kilteen. He was a high-spirited, generous fellow, and although he had longed for a boy cousin as

companion, still he devoted himself to the girl, when she happened to come in his place.

Dermot was kind and lovable, but I am sorry to say he had some dangerous faults—faults that my little readers will do well to guard against. He was, as I have said, a high-spirited boy, but, alas! he was boastful and conceited. He thought, or pretended he thought, that he could do everything well—at least, everything he cared to do. And yet he was no cleverer than a hundred other children of seven. But he had been a great deal with grown-up persons, had a sharp little way of repeating things he had heard said by his elders, and so had acquired a reputation for talent that was not at all good for him. 'What a bright fellow little Dermot is!' he heard people say frequently; 'I declare he is wonderfully clever and sharp.' And so the young man began to think himself a genius, and fancied he knew how to do many things of which in reality he was very ignorant.

Had Snowdrop been a boy somewhat older than himself, it would have been fortunate for Dermot. A lad of eight or nine would have lowered his pride a little, and shown him that he was not quite so clever as he imagined. But being a simple little girl, Snowdrop only encouraged his faults by looking up to him with admiration and respect. And so when she had been at Kilteen about a month Dermot was more conceited than ever. His greatest wish, from the hour she arrived, was to show off and make her think him a wonderful fellow.

One evening, the three little girls and Dermot sat round a table in Mrs. O'Connor's boudoir. They

were all occupied with pencils and paint-boxes, drawing men and women, very much to their own edification and delight.

'Mine is a splendid fellow,' cried Topsy gaily; 'I think he's like Uncle Tom in his uniform; isn't he?'

'Yes, I declare he is,' said Lesbia; 'but his arms are too thin.'

'Oh, that doesn't matter one bit,' replied Topsy; 'we'll *pe*tend they're fat. But look at him's eye; isn't it fine and big?'

'Snow draws better than any of us,' said Nora. 'I say, Dermot, you couldn't draw half such a good woman; why, it's just like mother when she's got on her fur cloak: isn't it good?'

'Not bad,' said Dermot condescendingly. 'But I could do just as good—better if I tried.'

'Then why don't you try?' questioned Nora.

'Oh, because I don't choose to; but I can draw splendidly when I like.'

'Dermot,' said his mother, looking up from her work, 'I don't like that tone; you should always try to do everything as well as you can, dear.'

'But I don't feel inclined to, mother. But there, I shan't draw any more men and women; they are stupid things; they never will come right. I'll draw a sky, and paint it blue, and then put in the stars and moon; won't that be nice, Snowdrop?'

'Yes, very nice,' answered his cousin, laughing; 'but the sky is not blue like that when the stars are out; that would be a fine day sky.'

'Much you know about it,' he cried, covering his

paper with brilliant colour. I suppose you would like a nice yellow sky, like your London ones when there is a horrid fog.'

'Oh no, that would not do, either; but I don't think it should be blue like that.'

'I don't care what you think; my sky shall be blue. Here goes the moon; oh, I must make her yellow. Then, here goes the stars. You see, Snowdrop, I know more about these things than you do, for Uncle Tom showed me the sky and told me the names of the stars.'

'Did he? That must have been nice. But we are always in bed when the stars are out.'

'Yes, generally. But one night Uncle Tom kept me up with him; and after dinner he took me out on the top of the big tower and showed me the stars and told me their names. It was fine fun.'

'Yes, I'm sure it was; I would love to go.'

'Oh, but it didn't do you much good,' cried Nora, 'for you forgot all the names before morning. Papa said Uncle Tom was a queer teacher, for he didn't know much about ass, ass, something (I can't remember the word) himself.'

'Astronomy you mean, I suppose,' said Dermot scornfully. 'But papa was wrong, Miss Nora, and you are wrong too; Uncle Tom knows lots about it, and I haven't forgotten the names. Look here, Snowdrop,' placing his blue sky before his cousin, 'that's Jupiter, and that's Mars, and that's'—making a third big dot—'that's, oh, bother! I don't remember that fellow's name, but I'm sure I'd know him in the real sky.'

'Oh, Dermot,' cried Snowdrop, laughing, 'I'm sure you wouldn't.'

'Just you wait,' he answered confidently. 'I have a splendid memory; I'll get the key of the tower, and then, if you come up, I'll soon show you.'

'But you'll never get to the tower,' said Nora, nodding her head and looking very wise; 'papa keeps the key of the tower himself, and I know you won't be able to find it.'

'Shan't I, indeed?' said Dermot, gazing admiringly at his lovely sky: 'you'll just see.'

'Bubby Dermy, tea 'edy,' called Baba, toddling into the room; 'Nana say 'oo bess be tit.'

'Oh, we'll be quick, never fear,' said Dermot, jumping off his chair. 'I am starving with hunger; I have worked awfully hard at my sky, but I must say I have done it very well.'

'You are conceited,' said Nora; 'you think you do everything beautifully.'

'And so I do; it would be a good thing for you if you were half as clever;' and off he went to his tea.

'You dear little darling,' cried Snowdrop, throwing her arms round Baba, 'come along, and we shall go into the nursery together.'

'Mine dive mudder a tiss,' said Ba, and trotting across the room she flung herself into her mother's lap.

'Why, Baba, how did you come here?' said Mrs. O'Connor, kissing her. '*Mine* ought to be with nurse.'

'Nana send Mine say tea 'edy. Mine do now, Tousin So,' and she put her hand in Snowdrop's and marched her off.

'Mother,' cried Lesbia tearfully, 'Topsy is putting my paints in her box, and it isn't fair.'

'No, I'm not,' replied Topsy; 'they're my own paints, and I will have them.'

'Children, children, I cannot allow you to quarrel so much. Come now, be good little girls; put your paints away carefully and go to tea. Look how good and gentle your cousin from London is; my darlings will try and be the same, I hope.'

'Yes, mother,' said Topsy, hanging her head.

'We shall put them all together, Top; that will be best,' said Lesbia gently.

'Very well, whatever you like.'

Then, having packed away their boxes, the little girls kissed their mother, and went off hand-in-hand to the nursery.

CHAPTER V.

DERMOT REFRESHES HIS MEMORY.

WHEN tea was over Dermot wandered away from the other children. The little girls had pushed aside the nursery-table, and were having a good game of 'blindman's-buff,' in which Baba joined with chuckles of delight. But Dermot was not in a humour for such romps, and walked away into the hall by himself. That he had something on his mind was evident, and he strutted up and down in deep thought, his hands thrust into his pockets. He had seen his father do so when anything troubled him,

and his only regret was that the sailor suit he wore prevented him looking quite like a man.

'I only wish I could find that key,' he muttered; 'for if I had it I could take Snowdrop up to the tower. I would just love to let her see that I haven't forgotten Uncle Tom's lessons. I wonder where it is? In papa's room, I'm quite sure; but where? Oh, if I could find it! I think I'll go and look.'

And off he went, up the winding-stair, to his father's dressing-room. He knocked gently, then waited to make sure that no one was within. But all was still; and, opening the door cautiously, he peeped about. The room was empty, however; so, entering boldly, he began to seek for the key. He opened drawers, peered into cupboards, shook out the coats that hung in the wardrobe, but no key was to be found.

'He must have it in his pocket,' he cried. 'I wonder if I could coax him to give it to me. But that will be such a long time to wait. I must and will show Snowdrop the stars to-night. But it's no use looking any more, for it isn't here.'

And having made up his mind to this fact, Dermot was about to leave the room, when his eyes suddenly wandered to a distant corner, and on the floor he saw a small basket full of keys.

'Ah, it will be amongst these, I'm sure. What a lucky thing I spied them!' and he seized the basket and tumbled its contents out on the floor.

The keys were all labelled, and had the names of the doors to which they belonged printed in full upon little white tablets. There was 'stable,' 'garden,'

'tool-house,' and 'cellar.' But none of these were what Dermot wanted, and he tossed them into the basket again, with a grunt of dissatisfaction. At last he came upon a large rusty key, with a piece of tape sewn through the ring, and on this tape was a capital *T* marked in red cotton.

'Ha, this is it!' he cried in delight; 'that big T is for "tower," I know,' and putting the key into his pocket, he restored the basket to its corner and hurried from the room.

As he closed the door he heard footsteps coming up the stairs, and in an instant his father appeared at the end of the corridor.

'Halloa, youngster! what are you doing in my room?' cried Mr. O'Connor.

'I was—looking for—something,' said Dermot, flushing.

'Well, I was just looking for you,' said his father, laughing, and not remarking the boy's confusion in the dim evening light. 'I am going down to see Mr. O'Brien; would you like to come?'

'Yes, papa, indeed I would,' he answered joyfully; 'I love an evening walk.'

'Then run and put on your coat; for it is rather chilly. I shall be down in the hall in a very short time; so be quick and get ready.'

'I shall be ready, never fear;' and away he flew to get his coat. And when Mr. O'Connor came down, some five minutes later, his little son was waiting in the hall, and danced gaily out of the door before him.

It had been a beautiful April day, and, although

the evening was cold, it was bright and clear, and gave promise of a fine night.

'I am sure it will be lovely for stars,' said Dermot to himself, as he ran along the road by his father's side. 'If it is dark when I come back, and Snow is not in bed, we'll just slip up to the tower and have a peep at the sky. But, oh! I do wish I could remember the name of that third star; he's a big fellow, I know. Snow will laugh at me if I don't remember him; and I just hate to be laughed at.'

Dermot and Mr. O'Connor strolled quietly down the hill from the Castle, and as they reached the level road the train rushed past them into the station.

'Let us hurry a little, and we may see someone we know, Dermot,' said his father, and, taking the boy's hand, he walked briskly forward.

As they reached the station, a tall, dark man came out, and a cheery voice bade them 'Good-evening.'

'Why, it's Uncle Tom,' cried Dermot. 'Oh, Uncle Tom, I am so glad to see you!'

'That's right, little man,' said Uncle Tom, patting the boy on the head. 'I have come down without notice, Jim; but I suppose I can get a bed at the Castle?'

'Of course, my dear fellow,' said Mr. O'Connor heartily. 'You are always welcome, Tom, as you know, no matter when you appear; but coming without letting us know has lost you your dinner: my wife and I dined early to-day.'

'Well, that is unfortunate; but a little supper will do me just as well. My regiment is ordered to Dover

in a fortnight or so, and I thought I should like a few days out here before I start. But where were you strolling to ?'

'I was going to have a chat with O'Brien, and brought Dermot with me for company,' said Mr. O'Connor. 'But we had better return to the Castle, and give orders about your supper; Julia will be sorry to hear you are going to march.'

'Yes, I dare say she will. But don't mind going back to the Castle on my account; I will go with you to see O'Brien; I quite enjoy talking with him. And how are his two scamps of sons ?'

'Just the same as ever,' said Mr. O'Connor, laughing: 'good-natured rascals, but the terror of my poor wife's life.'

'But she's easily frightened. She wants Dermot to grow up like a girl. A little knocking about would do him no harm. Look what a solemn party he's growing. Holloa, Dermot, a penny for your thoughts, old boy ?'

'I was thinking, Uncle Tom.'

'And what business have you to think ? Run, jump, laugh, and shout; but at seven years old you must not think.'

'My dear Tom,' cried Mr. O'Connor, 'what a dreadful doctrine! Do you want to do away with all the good of my lectures ? Dermot does not think half enough; he is giddy and thoughtless.'

'Yes, Uncle Tom, so I am,' said Dermot, slipping his hand into his uncle's; 'but I have been thinking about astronomy.'

'What ? Good gracious! this is too much;' and

Uncle Tom stopped suddenly and pulled out his watch. 'Have I time to catch the train back to Dublin? Such a child! Why, you quite frighten me, Dermot, by such a speech. Thinking about astronomy! Ha, ha! that is good!' and his loud, hearty laugh rang out through the still evening air.

'Oh, but, Uncle Tom,' said Dermot, not at all pleased at this merriment, 'you know you gave me lessons about the stars the last time you were here.'

'So I did; but of course you have forgotten all about them?'

'No, indeed, I haven't,' said Dermot proudly. 'I was painting a sky to-day, and I put in the moon and Jupiter: I remember him, because you say, "By Jupiter!" sometimes, although mamma says you shouldn't.'

'Holloa, young 'un, are you going to lecture Uncle Tom? Well, that is good.'

'Oh no, I wouldn't do that,' said Dermot roguishly. 'Well, then I put in Mars—into my sky—and that was all I could remember. There is another fellow I know, but I have quite forgotten his name.'

'I guess there are several other "fellows," as you call them, my young astronomer, but the one I mentioned was Saturn.'

'Yes, that was the very one. Saturn—Saturn,' repeated the boy. 'I must take care not to forget it again.' Then he whispered to himself: 'Now I can tell Snow about the third star, and she will not laugh at me any more. Oh, papa, there are Dick and Harry O'Brien;' and forgetting his thirst for knowledge, Dermot darted off down the road.

'What a lucky chance!' cried Uncle Tom; 'that boy is wonderfully sharp, Jim, and his questions are apt to bother a rusty scholar like myself.'

'Why did you soar so high, then?' said Mr. O'Connor, laughing. 'At Dermot's age a knowledge of the stars is unnecessary.'

'Quite! I will avoid the subject for the future. Here he comes with his friends. Well, my boys, is your father at home?'

'No, Captain Mason,' answered Dick O'Brien, a tall lad of fourteen; 'he has gone to dine at Kingstown, and won't come back till the last train.'

'Then we may turn, and see about your supper, Tom,' said Mr. O'Connor. 'Can you two fellows walk up the hill with Dermot?'

'Yes,' said Harry, the second boy. 'We were going for a row; but it doesn't matter, does it, Dick?'

'Not a bit. Come along, youngster; I want to hear what you have been about lately,' and he caught Dermot's arm, and dragged him on in front. 'Well, have you been having any larks?'

'Larks? Oh no! Mother doesn't allow me to have any birds; she says I might forget to feed them.'

'Birds! Dear, but you are green!' laughed Harry. 'I say, Dick, the kid thinks "larks" are birds.'

'Yes, and so they are,' said Dermot stoutly. 'Little birds that sing away up in the sky.'

'You *are* green, Dermot,' cried Dick. 'It's well seen you live with a parcel of girls. You are growing into a regular "Miss Molly."'

'I'm not.'

'Of course you are,' said Harry, laughing, and kicking a stone up the road before him; 'what else could you be? Why, I hear you have actually got another girl up there,' nodding his head in the direction of the Castle; 'but for your sake I hope it's not true.'

'Yes, it's quite true,' said Dermot hotly. 'And Snowdrop's a dear little thing—a gentle, kind girl.'

'Snow, Snowball. My word, what a name!' cried Dick. 'I say, Harry, we'll have a game with this Snowball in April; that will be prime.'

'I tell you her name is Snowdrop, not Snowball, Dick. I wish you wouldn't be so tormenting.'

'Now then, Dick, you shut up,' cried Harry; 'don't tease the poor boy, he's not used to it. Leave him alone.'

'No, he's not used to it; more's the pity! If I were a month up in the Castle with him he'd know how to take a bit of chaff. The fellow's being ruined for want of a boy to knock him about.'

'Well, let him go home to his girls; they won't torment him, poor dear,' said Harry, mimicking Dermot's voice. 'He's too much of a baby for us to talk to.'

'All right, my man, off we go; it's going to be a lovely moonlight night, and will be jolly for a row. Why, I declare the kid's crying.'

'I'm not crying,' said Dermot, turning away his head; 'and I wish you would leave me alone.'

'Oh, we'll leave you alone, Miss Molly, never fear;' and, taking off their hats, the boys made a low bow; then, with a loud laugh, they turned and ran down a narrow passage that led to the sea.

Mr. O'Connor and Uncle Tom were some way behind; and as Dermot did not wish to let them see how much the O'Briens had annoyed him, he plodded up the hill by himself.

'I'd rather have Snowdrop than half a dozen chaps like that,' he said, choking back his tears; 'and I'm not a "Miss Molly," for all they're so sharp.'

'What! have those young scamps made off?' said Mr. O'Connor, as he found Dermot standing at the hall-door alone; 'I was going to ask them in to supper.'

'They have gone some time, papa; they left me to go out for a row before I got to the first big gate.'

'And you came up that lonely road all by yourself?' said Uncle Tom. 'Well, you are a brave little man for your years!'

'I didn't mind that one bit; I wasn't at all lonely,' cried Dermot gaily. Then he murmured to himself: 'There, Uncle Tom's a man, and he thinks me brave; so I shan't mind those fellows calling me "Miss Molly;" I can't be that if I'm brave, and Uncle Tom says I am.'

And, comforted by this thought, Dermot said 'Good-night' to his father and uncle, and ran upstairs to bed.

CHAPTER VI.

TWO ON A TOWER.

DERMOT had a little room all to himself, and when nurse went in, about half an hour later, to cover him up and see that his candle was out, she found him fast asleep.

'Poor lamb! He must have been tired, to have dropped off so soon,' she said, as she gazed at the sleeping boy. 'The master forgets how young he is when he takes him off for such long walks at the end of the day, when he's worn out trudging about since mornin'.'

And Dermot was tired after his run up and down the hill, and slept for some time very soundly.

But about half-past eleven he awoke with a start and sat up in bed. The window-blind had not been pulled down, and the moonlight was streaming in over the floor.

'What a lovely night! What a beautiful sky!' he cried, 'and how twinkly the stars look! I wonder which is Jupiter? I am sure I should know if I were up in the tower. I forgot all about going up there when I came in, and never asked Snow to come. I wonder if she would come now? I'm sure she would. It would be such jolly fun! I'll just go and ask her. If she's asleep perhaps I'd better not wake her. But if she's awake we could go up to the tower together; for it's just like daylight, and not one bit cold. I remember the name of the third fellow now —Saturn—so I can tell Snow lots of things she

doesn't know. What a lucky thing I found the key! We can run up to the tower, and no one will know anything about us; for I am sure they are all fast asleep in bed.'

As he chattered in this way to himself, Dermot pulled on his socks and shoes, buttoned his jacket over his night-shirt, and taking the big key in his hand, slipped out of his room into the nursery.

The night-nursery was a large, airy apartment, with windows all round. But, as the thick linen blinds were drawn down, not a ray of light could find its way in, and Dermot had to grope about in the dark.

At last he managed to reach a window, and, pulling up the blind, allowed the moonlight to shine in upon the room and its occupants. One large bed and four small cribs were ranged at intervals round the walls, and in one of the latter slept Snowdrop.

'There she is,' he thought; 'I know her by the long fair curls;' and, stealing across the floor, he knelt down by the crib and whispered: 'Snowdrop.'

'Yes,' said the little girl, starting up; 'who called me?'

'It is I, Snow. It is Dermot. Don't be frightened, and don't speak loud, as you may waken Nana;' and he glanced uneasily at the big bed, where nurse slumbered tranquilly. 'I want you to come up to the tower and see the stars.'

'Oh, but I'm so sleepy, Dermot,' said the little girl, dropping back on her pillow and closing her eyes. 'I'll—go—to-morrow—I—I——'

'Nonsense. To-morrow there'll be no moon, and no stars. Wake up, Snow; you'll love it when you

are there. It is an exquisite night. There, take your dressing-gown and put it on; then your slippers —and now we are ready.'

Scarcely knowing what she did, Snowdrop rose from her bed, allowed Dermot to button on her dressing-gown, and pushing her feet into her shoes, followed him from the room.

'This is splendid,' whispered Dermot. 'It's like something in a story-book. I feel a regular swell going off to look at the stars. Don't you, Snow?'

'I don't know,' replied the child drowsily. 'I was very comfortable in bed, and I don't think I care much about the stars.'

'Oh, well, you'll soon care. Just wait till you see them, and I tell you all their names; then you'll be glad you came. But mind where you are going;—this is the way;' and he guided the trembling feet up the narrow winding-stair that led to the tower.

When they reached the door he pulled out his key and thrust it gaily into the lock. But it would not turn, and although he tried with all his strength he could not get the lock to work.

'What a nuisance!' he cried angrily. 'The old thing must be covered with rust.'

'Oh, never mind it, Dermot,' pleaded Snowdrop. 'I'd far rather go back to bed;' and she leaned wearily against the wall.

'That's just like girls,' he cried indignantly. 'The minute a thing isn't nice they want to turn back.'

'Oh no, Dermot, no! I didn't want to come; and when you can't open the door, isn't it much better to go back to our beds?'

'No, it isn't; I wouldn't go back for anything, just when I've managed it all so well. Ah, there goes the key at last! Now we are all right. There must be a knack in opening this door; but I thought I'd find it.'

'Oh dear, how cold it is!' cried Snowdrop, shivering. 'Please let me go back, Dermot.'

'Well, I call that very unkind. To think of going on like that when I have taken so much trouble to amuse you! You can't think how hard it was to find the key, and then all the work I've had to open this old door. But do come on up to the top of the tower, Snow. It will only be for a minute; so come along.'

'Very well,' said the child meekly. 'I don't like to be unkind. But, oh, Dermot, I wish you had not taken so much trouble for me; I do indeed.'

'Oh, never mind that, old girl. If we see the stars and you look pleased I shan't mind the trouble. Come along.'

'But, Dermot, suppose you shut the door fast and could not open it again? Think how terrible that would be! Oh, I am afraid!'

'Well, there! I shan't shut it at all. I'll just leave it standing wide open, like that; so you need have no fear.'

'But don't keep me long, Dermot, for I'm so cold,' said Snowdrop, in an imploring voice. 'Take me up quick, and let me come down again in a minute;' and giving her hand to her cousin she let him lead her where he chose.

'That's right,' he cried, with a laugh; 'I thought you wouldn't turn coward at last;' and he drew her out through the little doorway.

The stairs leading up to the top of the tower were narrow, winding, and very dark, for it was overshadowed by the walls and chimney-pots of the Castle. Snowdrop did not answer, but clung to her cousin as they went up and up, shivering and coughing, through the cold night air. And at last, after much stumbling and many falls, they found themselves at the top of the wonderful tower, over which a glorious moon was shedding her brilliant light. They were now at a tremendous height from the ground, and as Snowdrop looked over the battlements she felt faint and giddy.

'Oh, Dermot,' she cried, 'I feel so frightened! I feel just as if I *must* fall over; I do indeed.'

'But that's silly, Snowdrop. I think it is very jolly up here. Those fellows, Dick and Harry, love to come up, I can tell you; only we shan't let them come any more. Just guess what they did one day?'

'Oh, I couldn't, I couldn't! cried Snowdrop, drawing away from the low wall and clinging to Dermot's arm. 'I couldn't guess anything, I feel so frightened up here.'

'Oh, you'd never guess, anyway, for it was such a queer thing. They actually lighted a fire here on the roof. It was awfully dangerous, and spoiled all the lead, and might have burnt the whole tower, and——'

'Oh, I wish they had, for then we could never have come up to perish with cold. Dermot, Dermot, do come down!'

'Well, you are a goose; I wish you would cheer up a little. Just look at these big holes along the wall; wouldn't it be fine sport if there was a battle

going on down there, and you and I were firing the cannons?'

'Oh, no, no! I think that would be dreadful.'

'That's because you are a girl. Uncle Tom loves battles, and so do I. He is a soldier, you know, and wears such a lovely uniform, all gold braid and things, when he is with his army. He can tell lots of stories about castles being besieged, and men fighting, cannons roaring—shoot!—bang!—fire! Oh, they are splendid stories, and just make me long to see a battle.'

Growing excited as he spoke, Dermot jumped about, and went so dangerously near the big holes, that Snowdrop was filled with terror.

'Dermot,' she cried passionately, 'why did you bring me here? I will stay here no longer; I hate this place,' and she stamped her little foot. 'I am sure auntie would not like us to be here; I am going down this very minute.'

'Oh, but, Snowdrop, I never showed you the stars, and I remember all their names now.'

'I shan't look at them; I don't care what their names are, and I shan't stay;' and, turning her back upon her cousin, she groped her way down the narrow stair.

'You may go by yourself, then,' shouted Dermot. 'I have come up here to look at the stars and think of their names, and I can do so without you. Babies of your age aren't one bit of good;' and he marched off indignantly to the other side of the tower. 'It was very stupid of her not to stay, after all,' he grumbled to himself. 'I shall go down presently,

Snowdrop finds the tower door locked —*Page* 53.

just when I think she has had time to get into the nursery again. I don't seem to care about the stars, now that there's no one to tell their names to. I wonder if she's gone down yet.'

But at this moment a wild shriek startled him, and he ran back to the top of the staircase.

'What is the matter? Did you hurt yourself?' he cried, as Snowdrop came stumbling up to him, her lips trembling, her face wild and white in the moonlight.

'Dermot,' she gasped, 'the door—the door——'

'Well, what about the door? isn't it standing wide open for you?'

'No, no, no! It is—shut—fast! Locked—fast locked, I'm sure!'

'Nonsense!' he cried, pushing past her; 'it has got blown back by the wind. I'll open it in a second. You're such a muff, Snow, that the least thing frightens you. I'm sure the door is just as I left it.'

But the little girl was right, the door was shut and locked by someone in the house.

Dermot looked at his cousin in blank despair. What should they do? It was growing colder and colder every instant, and, between cold and fright, Snowdrop looked as though she would die.

'Knock hard—shout, Dermot,' she whispered. 'I can't speak loud, for I am trembling so much;' and she laid her head against the wall and wept.

'I dare not call, Snowdrop, for then everybody would know what I had done, and I would get such a punishment. Papa often told me not to come up here, even in daylight; and now—oh dear! what shall I do?' and Dermot also began to cry.

'Oh, how naughty it was to come up here, then! God doesn't love disobedient children, I know; mother always told me so.'

'No; I'm afraid He doesn't. But, oh! I did so long to see the stars.'

'And I did not care to see them at all. Oh, Dermot, it was wicked to bring me up here; and I was very silly to come. I am afraid God is angry with us, and will punish us. I feel so—so strange, so queer,' and the little girl sank down upon the cold stones.

'I must get you in, I must get you in,' cried Dermot, looking at his cousin in alarm. 'I must get you in, or you will die. Oh, Snowdrop dear, try to keep well till the door is opened.'

'Yes, I will try. Let us ask God to help us;' and, struggling to her knees, the child clasped her hands, and raised her streaming eyes to the clear, starlit sky.

'Open the door! open the door! Please, please let us in. Uncle Tom! papa, papa!' shouted Dermot, hammering on the door with all his strength.

But no answer came to his cry for aid. All seemed silent within and without the house, and, terrified beyond measure, he at last gave up in despair, and, falling on his knees beside Snowdrop, he implored God to help and deliver them.

CHAPTER VII.

UNCLE TOM TO THE RESCUE.

WHEN Captain Mason had finished his supper, he and Mr. O'Connor sat on at the table, smoking and talking. They had not seen each other for some weeks, and had so many things to talk about that the time passed over very quickly.

At ten o'clock Mrs. O'Connor hurried away to give some directions to the servants, and, feeling tired and sleepy, did not return to the dining-room. She visited Dermot in his bed, kissed him, and blessed him, and then went on to look after her little girls. They were all fast asleep, looking rosy and well as they lay upon their pillows, and she retired to rest feeling thankful and happy.

Meanwhile the gentlemen continued their conversation and cigars.

'Have you anything particular to do to-morrow, Jim?' asked Captain Mason, 'or shall I have the pleasure of your company for a ride?'

'I am sorry to say you must go alone,' replied Mr. O'Connor. 'I am obliged to go off early to Dublin; I have particular business there to-morrow.'

'Oh, that is a pity. But I suppose I must console myself with Dermot. I think I'll take the youngster for a day's fishing.'

'Very well; but take care you do not upset the boat.'

'Not likely; I'm too sure a hand for that.'

'I hope so. The young man will be as happy as a prince at the prospect of such a treat. But I think I must say "Good-night," Tom; I have to be up early in the morning, so I'll go to bed.'

'So shall I. Why, I declare it's on the stroke of twelve. What a wonderful hour for the inmates of Kilteen! The servants will be giving you notice.'

'Oh, I sent them to bed long ago. We are early birds about here, Tom, and firmly believe in the old saying:

'"Early to bed, and early to rise
Makes a man healthy, wealthy, and wise."'

'Yes, you are very simple in all your ways. Shall I put out this lamp?'

'If you please.'

And having lighted their bedroom candles, the two gentlemen went softly up the stairs.

'Dear, dear! What a strange thing! Someone must have left the tower door open,' cried Mr. O'Connor, as he felt the sharp air blowing down through the house. 'It is really astonishing how careless servants are. I gave that key to the gardener to-day, as he wanted to see about something on the roof; he promised faithfully to put it back in my basket, and this is the way he keeps his promise.'

'I will shut it for you,' cried Captain Mason, and springing up the stair, he shut the door, and putting the key in his pocket, ran down to his brother-in-law, who stood waiting for him below.

'It is a lovely night,' he remarked; 'I felt tempted to go up the tower and have a look out over the

country. But I shall postpone my visit there till to-morrow ; meanwhile I shall keep the key.'

'It is rather cold just at present for midnight visits to the tower,' said Mr. O'Connor, shivering. 'The wind is piercing still. But be sure you do not let that key lie about. Master Dermot has a great fancy for the tower, and I live in terror of his going up there alone. I have often thought of sealing up the door.'

'That would be a pity. Surely Dermot would not go up if you forbade him.'

'I hope not. But just think what a temptation it would have been for him to-night if he had found the door open. He is but a child, remember, and children are not always obedient, I am sorry to say.'

'No, unfortunately not. But don't be uneasy. I shan't give the young rascal a chance of finding the key ; you may safely trust it to me.'

'Yes, I am quite sure of that. Good-night, Tom.'

'Good-night, Jim,' replied Captain Mason, and then the gentlemen entered their rooms and all was still and silent.

Now it so happened that Captain Mason was not fond of early hours, and liked to sit up late at night and read or write according as he felt inclined.

And knowing her brother's weakness, Mrs. O'Connor had ordered a fire to be lighted in his room. It looked bright and cheerful as he went in, candle in hand; so drawing over a cosy chair, he settled down to enjoy himself in his usual manner.

As he sat alone in the stillness of the night a strange sound fell upon his ear and he started to his feet in astonishment.

'I thought I heard Dermot's voice,' he murmured; 'surely I must have been dreaming? No; there it is again;' and throwing his book aside, he rushed out of the room. But in the corridor all was silent, and, laughing at himself for his fears, he was about to return to his fire, when another wild cry came ringing through the house.

'It's the boy; it must be—and yet, surely he's asleep;' and running down the passage he entered Dermot's room and looked anxiously about. But the bed was empty, and the child was nowhere to be seen.

Up the corridor he went again, and knocking at the nursery door, he opened it a little and called out: 'Nurse, nurse! where is Master Dermot?'

'In bed, sir, in his own little room. He doesn't sleep here this long time back.'

'But he is not in his bed.'

'Not in his bed? Good gracious, sir, where can he be?' cried nurse, sitting up in bewildered surprise.

Then as the moonlight streamed in over the floor it fell upon Snowdrop's crib, and showed her that it was empty.

'Oh, Captain Mason, Miss Snowdrop's gone too. Oh dear, oh dear! what can have happened to them?' she cried, and springing out of bed she began to dress.

'Miss Snowdrop gone too? Where can they have gone to?' repeated Captain Mason. 'Ah, I know now; the open door—the—yes, surely they have gone up the tower;' and away he sped down the passage and up the winding-stair.

And all this time the unhappy children lay huddled

up together upon the cold stone stair. They had prayed long and fervently, but at last their knees gave way, and they sank down upon the steps, weary and despairing.

'O Snow, I'm so sorry—I am so sorry!' whispered Dermot. 'Don't die of cold, darling—don't—die—of—cold. I didn't mean to do you any harm, for I love you so dearly.'

'I know, Dermy, I know. But pray again, dear, if you can. Mother said we should always ask God for anything we want very badly; and I do so want to get back to bed! Say a prayer, and—I will try—to say it with you.'

'Yes, Snowdrop, I will,' and clasping his hands, Dermot prayed aloud: 'My God, our heavenly Father, do not let us die. Help us out of the tower, please—please do. I am sorry I was disobedient. O God, do not be angry with me—with little Snowdrop! Save us—save us!'

'Dermot, listen! I hear someone coming. Our prayer is heard—someone is coming,' cried the little girl; and with a sigh of relief she fell fainting at her cousin's feet.

'She's dead!—she's dead!' cried Dermot wildly; and raising his voice he sent forth an agonized shriek for help and deliverance.

At this moment the key was thrust into the lock, the door was flung open, and Captain Mason's tall figure appeared on the threshold.

'Now, then, young man,' he cried, 'what do you mean by such conduct? Your screams are enough to wake the dead.'

'Hush, Uncle Tom!' said Dermot, forgetting himself in his terror at the sight of Snowdrop's still white figure; 'my little cousin is dead. Oh, pray, carry her down!'

'My goodness! the poor child has fainted! but I'll soon bring her round;' and taking her up in his arms, he carried her off, and laid her on the floor before the fire in his room.

By this time the whole house was awake and stirring. Mrs. O'Connor and nurse came hurrying in to see after the unconscious child, and Captain Mason hastened away to the village to look for the doctor.

Dermot sat in a little huddled-up lump on the floor, neither moving nor speaking. He kept his eyes fixed on Snowdrop's face, as though he could not bear to lose sight of her for an instant. But presently, to his surprise and delight, the white lids trembled, the lips moved slightly, and at last the little girl opened her eyes and looked round the room. 'Dermot,' she whispered, 'where are we, dear?'

'In Uncle Tom's room,' he answered softly. 'Quite safe—quite safe.'

'Then I did not fall off the tower? I wasn't killed?'

'No, dear, no. Uncle Tom found us and brought us down.'

'I am glad—I am glad! Dear, good Uncle Tom; I always loved him—always;' and then with a smile Snowdrop fell asleep.

'Now she'll do,' said nurse; 'an' there'll be no doctor wanted to-night. Get off to your bed, Master Dermot, and don't sit there waitin' for a cold;' and she

walked away to the nursery, bearing the sleeping child in her arms.

'Yes, Dermot,' said his mother, 'you must go back to bed. Come along, and I will tuck you up.'

'Very well, mother;' and the boy went off to his room without another word.

But as his mother stooped to cover him in his crib, he raised himself, and flinging his arms round her neck, sobbed and wept as though his little heart would break.

'Hush, dear,' she whispered; 'you must not cry like that.'

'Oh, mother, mother, I am so sorry I was disobedient. Forgive me, mother; say you forgive me!'

'I do forgive you, darling, for I see you are truly sorry. Good-night, my boy, good-night! Tell God you are sorry, Dermot, and ask Him to forgive you. Say your prayers, dear, and go to sleep;' and putting her arms round him she kissed his little tear-stained face.

'I will never disobey you or father any more, never any more,' he cried; 'and I'll never go up that old tower to look at the stars again.'

'I hope not, dear; but you must ask God to help you, Dermot, or you will surely sin again. But go to sleep now; we shall talk it all over to-morrow. God bless you, my boy;' and kissing him once more, his mother drew down the blind and left him for the night.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE FRUITS OF DISOBEDIENCE.

CONTRARY to all expectations, the children suffered but little from their midnight visit to the tower. Slight colds kept them prisoners to the house for some days, and then they were both as well as ever again. For Snowdrop this was a pleasant time, and she and her little cousins amused themselves from morning till night with their dolls; but for Dermot it was truly a week of penance. The weather was bright and pleasant, and Captain Mason went off every day upon some excursion, in which the boy would have dearly loved to join.

'What lucky fellows those O'Briens are, mother,' he said mournfully; 'Uncle Tom takes them about everywhere. It must be awfully jolly! This cold of mine is such a nuisance! It is too bad that it should have come just when I want to amuse myself, and go out with my uncle.'

'It is a great punishment for you, I know, dear,' said his mother gently; 'but my little boy must not forget that he brought it on himself. It is only the fruits of disobedience, Dermot, remember. Had you been obedient and stayed in bed instead of dragging your cousin up the cold tower, you would now be sailing about with Uncle Tom; but if children disobey their parents they must expect to be punished.'

'But you forgave me, mother?'

'Yes, dear, certainly, and so did your father. We have not thought it necessary to give you any punish-

ment, because we considered that this cold was far greater than any we could have inflicted. But you must be brave over it, Dermot, and bear it cheerfully; it was God Himself who punished you for your sin.'

'Yes, mother, I know. And, oh, I am so glad that Snowdrop did not die, or get very ill, as you feared she might; for it would have been my fault.'

'So it would; and you ought to thank God frequently, dear, that you both escaped so well.'

'Yes, mother, so I do, often.'

'Very well, then, you must bear your little punishment bravely, Dermot, and be very good during these long days in the house. If God sees you thus He will be pleased, and forgive you.'

'Yes, mamma, I know; and I promise not to grumble any more;' and, kissing his mother, the boy returned to his book.

From this hour Dermot was cheerful and uncomplaining. The cold grew rapidly well; but, alas! when he was able to go out the pleasant excursions were at an end; for Uncle Tom's leave was up, and he was obliged to bid them all good-bye, and go off to England with his regiment.

But Mrs. O'Connor was delighted with her little boy's gentleness during this time of trial, and resolved to give him a treat whenever an opportunity presented itself.

One day, towards the end of May, she and her husband were invited to go over to Howth to lunch and dine with some friends. The children were in despair at the thoughts of a whole day without their

mother, and hung about her all the morning, as if they imagined she would never return to them.

'Well, you are a nice set of babies,' she said, laughing, as they crowded round her. 'One would think I was going away for a year. And just remember the long days I sit in the drawing-room there, and you hardly come near me.'

'Yes, mother, but then we know you are there,' cried Dermot, and we can take a peep at you when we like.'

'Well, that is certainly a very nice way of putting it, young man; but look at my little daughters and Mistress Snowdrop: because I am going for a holiday they must wear long faces, and pretend they are sorry to lose me.'

'Oh, mamma, we don't petend!' cried Topsy, kissing her mother's hand; 'but we shall be so lonely!'

'No, indeed, we don't pretend,' said Nora. 'We shall miss you dreadfully; but I am very glad you are going to have a holiday—aren't you, Snowdrop?'

'Yes, indeed I am. And I hope auntie will enjoy herself very much.'

'So do I,' said Lesbia, nestling up to her mother's side; 'and, oh, mamma! I hope Howth is a pretty place.'

'Very pretty, dear, but not half so pretty as dear old Kilteen. But I am glad to go to see my friends there occasionally.'

'Mine dad, too,' cried Baba, toddling up. 'Mudder, bing Mine pity sells.'

'Oh, you beggar!' cried Lesbia.

'Mine not a beddar—Mine dood durl—'ou beddar, Esba.'

And then they all laughed merrily, for no one ever contradicted little Ba.

'Well, now, my dears,' said Mrs. O'Connor, taking the small child on her knee, 'mother never likes to think of her little people feeling lonely, and so she has arranged a treat for them. Guess what it is.'

'To have the Mulvanys to tea?' cried Dermot. 'But, oh, mother dear, they are such torments, and we have girls enough. Let us have the O'Briens.'

'My dear Dermot, you are quite wrong. But do you think I could enjoy my day if I thought those scamps were with you?'

'I know what the treat is, mother,' said Nora gaily. 'It's to go to Kingstown and see grandmamma.'

'Wrong, too, Nora,' said her mother, laughing; 'quite wrong.'

'I guess it's to go for a nice long drive through the country,' cried Snowdrop joyfully. 'Am I not right, auntie? Oh, I see by your face I am.'

'Yes, dear, you are right—but you have not guessed all. I have told cook to pack up a big hamper of good things, and you are to start off and spend a long day on Bray Head.'

'Oh, how nice! Dear, good, kind mamma!' they cried in a chorus. 'That will be most delightful.'

'But are we all to go?' asked Dermot. 'Baba and all?'

'Of course! Why shouldn't she?' said his mother, in surprise.

'Oh, she'll be such a bother! And then there will be such a lot of kids.'

'Kids, indeed!' said Mrs. O'Connor indignantly.

'Now, I tell you what, Master Dermot, you had better not take on so many airs. If you do, you and I shall not be friends. It is very unkind of you not to want poor Baba to go, for I am sure she would enjoy it very much.'

'Oh, mother, I know—I didn't mean——' and Dermot grew red, and turned away without finishing his sentence.

'You did not mean to be unkind, I hope,' said his mother, drawing him towards her and kissing his burning cheek; 'but my little man must not think that because he is seven he is to turn up his nose at his sisters, because they are smaller than he is. It is only foolish, silly boys that would do such a thing.'

'Yes, mother, I know, and I won't do it any more; indeed I won't.'

'Very well, dear, mind you don't; and now away you go and get ready for your drive.'

At twelve o'clock, the outside car and Dermot's small carriage came round to the door, and Mr. O'Connor lifted the little people into their places, tucking them up comfortably and securely, in case of wind or rain.

Nurse, Baba, and Lesbia, were on one side of the car, Nora, Topsy, and one of the housemaids to look after them on the other, whilst Dermot and Snowdrop took their seats in the donkey-carriage.

'Jane must go in with you, Dermot,' said Mr. O'Connor, as the nursemaid appeared with a bundle of cloaks under her arm. 'And be sure you give her the reins going down the hills. You might let Neddy fall.'

'Oh, no I wouldn't. Do let Jane go on the car. I hate to have a nurse stuck up beside me, as if I was a baby,' cried the boy. 'There is plenty of room between Baba and Lesbia!'

'My dear Dermot, you can stay at home if you wish; but I will not allow you to drive Snowdrop without some person to keep you and Neddy in order. Do as I tell you. Let Jane hold him up going down steep hills; and do not go too fast. Take it quietly. You have plenty of time.'

'All right, papa. I shan't forget,' said Dermot cheerfully, and making room for Jane and her bundle; 'but it all depends upon John there. If he drives the car fast Ned is sure to follow; if he goes slowly, Ned will do the same.'

'Yes; I dare say that's true; so mind you go very quietly, John.'

'Sure I'll go as aisy as possible, yer honour,' said John; and, cracking his whip, he drove out of the gate.

'Hurrah! hurrah! for a jolly long day,' sang Dermot, kissing hands gaily to his mother. The other children took up his song, and, cheering noisily, they went off down the road to Bray.

'I say, Jane, I hope the hamper has not been forgotten,' cried Dermot, as Neddy trotted briskly after the car.

'Why, you must be blind, boy!' said Snowdrop gaily. 'Don't you see it there, swinging about under the car?'

'Of course! Well, I am a stupid! But I say, Snowdrop, isn't it jolly driving along this way? Did you ever have anything half so nice in London?'

'Well, I don't know. We had very nice things there : not exactly like this, but still fun.'

'I think it must be stupid in towns. There is nothing to do all day, and you feel so cooped up and stuffy. I just hate when mother takes us into Dublin. I am always longing to get back into Kilteen again.'

'Oh, but you are such a wild fellow,' said his cousin, laughing. 'You like to be allowed to run about where you please, and——'

'Yes ; so I do. But I'm not allowed to do it, for all that. I hate nurses, and I hate lessons. I would love to run about from morning till night without opening a book or without being hauled up every half-hour to have my face and hands washed. It's all very well for girls and babies, but——'

'Now, Dermot, that's what auntie calls your silly talk,' cried Snowdrop, shaking her head. 'Forget all about these things and talk nicely. Tell me something funny.'

'Very well, Miss Wisehead, so I will. But what are we to talk about ?'

'Oh, I don't know. Something nice.'

'Well, let us guess what good things there are in the hamper.'

'But that sounds greedy. Is there nothing nicer than that ?'

'No, not when a chap's hungry,' answered Dermot, laughing. 'But I say, here comes something to amuse you. Look at the trouble that old lady is having with those animals.'

At this moment an old woman came down the road driving a number of pigs, that would insist on running

here and there and everywhere but the way she wanted them to go.

'What ugly creatures!' cried Snowdrop, laughing. 'Oh, Dermot, drive on fast and get away from them.'

'Well, dear friend, you wanted something nice to talk about. Behold, there is a charming subject of conversation,' and he cracked his whip, and sent the poor pigs grunting and squeaking in all directions.

The children on the car were highly amused at this performance, and shouted back many witty remarks to their friends in the donkey-carriage.

After this they were all very lively. Jokes flew about on every side, and the time passed so pleasantly that they were all quite surprised when they found themselves at the entrance to Bray Head.

'Will you walk up, Master Dermot, or drive along the avenue till you find a nice place to lay the dinner?' asked nurse, as they waited to get the gates opened.

'Oh, I'll walk,' he answered, jumping out of the carriage. 'What will you do, Snowdrop?'

'I think I shall walk too,' she replied. 'That road in there looks lovely and shady.'

'Yes, so it is; but it is a good pull up the hill,' he said. 'Jane, you can take care of Ned.'

'Let me come with you, Dermot!' said Nora; 'I am tired sitting here.'

'All right. Down you get, old lady,' he answered pleasantly, and he stretched out his hands to help her off the car.

But at this moment a high trap drove past, and Dermot saw his two friends, Dick and Harry O'Brien, sitting up behind the driver.

'Halloa!' cried Dick. 'There's the Kilteen nursery out for the day.'

'Yes,' said Harry, with a laugh; 'and there's the head baby, Master Dermot, well to the front. My word! he's a fine boy to be tied to a nurse's apron-string; but I suppose he hasn't cut his back teeth, yet, poor dear!' and shouting and cheering they disappeared from view.

As their ill-natured words fell upon Dermot's ears he grew crimson, and turning away to escape from their sight, he forgot about poor Nora, who would have fallen to the ground had not Jane darted forward to save her.

'For shame, Master Dermot,' cried the nursemaid. 'Why did you tempt the child off the car if you didn't mean to help her? I'll just tell your mamma, if you don't take care.'

'Tell who you like!' he answered angrily, and he strode away up the avenue by himself.

But as he went he heard a step behind him; a little hand was pushed into his, and a sweet little voice whispered into his ear:

'Come along, Dermot. Let us have a good race.'

'You'll soon get tired, and out of breath,' he answered, smiling; 'but come and let me see what sort of a runner you are;' and, taking Snowdrop's hand, he ran lightly up the hill.

CHAPTER IX.

A MERRY PARTY.

THE nurses and small children followed slowly up the road, looking about for a comfortable place on which to spread the cloth. At last they came upon a charming nook, a little way up the hill, a mossy bank with ferns and bracken growing thick on every side, and here they resolved to rest and dine.

'This is pretty!' cried Nora, climbing up on the trunk of a fallen tree and looking about her. 'Snowdrop, Snowdrop, you love the sea. Just come and look at it now.'

'Yes, isn't it delicious?' said her cousin, jumping up beside her; 'and we have had such a run, Dermot and I; it has made me dreadfully hungry.'

'Well, you'll soon get your dinners,' said Jane, who was busy laying the cloth. 'It would be a good thing if some of you would carry over a few plates and glasses for me.'

'I will—I will!' cried the children in a chorus, and away they flew to do her bidding.

'Mine win too,' said Baba; and off she toddled to lend her aid.

'Many hands make light work,' and in a wonderfully short time the dinner was laid, and the merry party sat down on the grass to enjoy the good things that had been provided for them.

'I wonder people ever eat their dinner in the house in summer,' cried Dermot. 'It's twice as jolly out in the air.'

'Yes, indeed it is,' said Snowdrop, 'only isn't it rather difficult to know what to do with your legs? If you put them out straight they go on the cloth, and kneeling is so tiresome.'

'Sit on them,' cried Dermot, his mouth full of chicken. 'Look at me; I am awfully comfortable. This is the way tailors sit.'

'A very good way too, I think,' and, laughing merrily, Snowdrop tucked her little black legs under her white skirts.

'Of course it is. It's well seen you are a London girl, Snowdrop, or you'd have known what to do at once.'

'You shouldn't speak with your mouth full, Dermot,' said Nora; 'it's very rude. Isn't it, nurse?'

'Indeed it is, Miss Nora, but Master Dermot seems to think that because he's dining on the grass he may behave as he likes.'

'Oh, but we're gipsies,' said Dermot, laughing. They always speak with their mouths full.'

'Oh, Dermy, do they, really?' cried Topsy, with round eyes. 'What very rude people!'

'That's not much harm, Topsy, old girl,' he continued recklessly. 'But they do far worse than that. They steal chickens and hens, and little boys and girls, and all sorts of things,' and, delighted at the child's look of horror, he chuckled maliciously, and made a dive at a gooseberry tart.

'Now, Master Dermot, we want none of your gipsy tricks here,' said nurse reprovingly; and removing the pie out of his reach, she helped all the children largely, leaving him till the very last.

'Nurses are stupid things at picnics,' he whispered in Snowdrop's ear; 'they spoil all the fun. I would rather see a big gipsy woman sitting up there than nurse. She would let me do what I liked: eat with my fingers, and do all kinds of funny things.'

'Oh, Dermot, you must not speak like that; it's naughty,' cried Snowdrop, horrified at such a speech.

'I'll tell,' said Nora, 'and you'll get such a scolding when you go home.'

'Who cares? Tell if you like,' he cried. 'You're only a baby.'

'I'm not a baby,' answered five-year-old Nora indignantly. 'Sure I'm not, Snowdrop?'

'No, dear, you're not. Dermot is only making fun.'

'No, I'm not making fun; I'm speaking in downright earnest,' cried Dermot, and having finished his repast, he lay back on the grass; then, kicking up his heels, he began to shout and sing at the top of his voice.

'Dear, dear, Master Dermot, but you're the trial!' said nurse crossly; 'for goodness' sake, go off out of that, or sit quiet, and let a body get her dinner in peace.'

'But a body is such a time,' said the imp; 'I have done my dinner ages ago, so I thought I would give you a little music,' and he shouted louder than ever.

'Master Dermot, dear,' said Jane coaxingly, 'there's a beautiful tree up there covered with red berries. Go along, and gather a lot of them; your mamma will be so pleased to get them.'

'You're a brick, Jane; it's much better to tell a chap something he can do, than to go on howling at

him the way nurse does. Ta-ta, as Uncle Tom says. I shan't come near you again for long enough; and I'm sure you won't weep. Snowdrop, come, and leave the babies and nurses to enjoy an afternoon nap; we don't care to keep so quiet.'

'Yes, I'll come,' said Snowdrop, springing up from her seat on the grass. 'I would just love some of those berries. But, oh dear! my foot is asleep.'

'Stamp him about; run as fast as you can; that will wake him up. Off I go; catch me if you can, my little wo-man,' and, shouting and singing, Dermot dashed away up the side of the hill.

'Wait for me; oh, please wait,' called Snowdrop, and, limping as fast as she could with her sleeping foot, she clambered after her cousin.

They found the tree with the pretty berries, and when Dermot had gathered all those that were within his reach, they sat down to tie them into bunches. They stuck them in their buttonholes and in front of their hats, and then began to string them into necklaces to hang round their necks.

'We'll take a necklace back to Nora, and that will console her for being called a baby; by Jove! she was angry.'

'Oh, Dermot, you must not say that; auntie would be so much displeased.'

'Well, but Uncle Tom says it.'

'Yes, but that is different; he is a man.'

'Well, and I want to be a man; so why shouldn't I say it?'

'But you are not a man; you are only a little boy; and men say things little boys shouldn't say.'

'Well, that's not fair; they oughtn't to say them. But, Snowdrop——'

'Well?'

'It is disagreeable to be called a baby.'

'Then you shouldn't have called Nora one.'

'But she's nearly one; she shouldn't mind much. But its sets me wild when those O'Brien chaps call me "baby;" and I felt so ashamed to be out with all the nurses and children. Did you hear them to-day?'

'Yes, indeed I did; they are rude fellows.'

'That's just what they are; but they think themselves great chaps. Look here, I'm tired of these old berries; come and we'll take a good climb up that part of the Head.'

'But it looks so rocky.'

'Oh, that's nothing. It's fine fun climbing; and if we should meet the O'Briens again they'll see I'm not quite such a baby as they think. We can stay away from the nurses till it's just time to go home. Come along.'

So off they went, higher and higher, climbing over rocks and scrambling through heather, till at last, hot and exhausted, they sank down to rest.

'We have come a jolly long way,' said Dermot; 'look how small the nurses and babies appear now.'

Snowdrop turned round, and away far down among the trees she saw a glimmer of white frocks and nurse's red shawl.

'The little ones look like rabbits skipping about among the ferns,' said Dermot gaily. 'But come along up higher; I want to look at the sea from the top.'

'But that's awfully high, Dermot.'

'Oh no, it isn't. Do you know, mamma is teaching me a piece of poetry, and the story of it is this: A fellow wanted to go up a very high mountain, oh, miles and miles higher than this, and all covered with snow. In his hand he carried a flag with '*Excelsior*' printed on it, and mother says that means 'Higher.' Well, people tried to stop him for all sorts of reasons, but he wouldn't stop, and on, on he went as hard as ever he could.'

'And did he get right up?'

'Oh yes, he did! and died in the snow.'

'Poor fellow! how sad!'

'Yes, it is, rather. But I'll tell you what we'll do. I'll be the fellow going up, and this will be my flag,' and Dermot tied his pocket-handkerchief to a stick and held it over his head. 'There was a girl in it, for I saw her in the picture; she asked him to stay with her, but he wouldn't, and off he went. Now, you can be the girl, only when I won't stop you must run after me.'

'Yes; but I don't like the dying part. Oh, Dermot, don't pretend to die; that would frighten me.'

'Well, you are a silly little girl; but don't be afraid, I shan't die. You see there is no snow here, so we shall change the whole end, and make the fellow get right up to the top, and have fine fun there. So now off we go.'

Then away they scampered, Dermot waving his handkerchief in the air, Snowdrop following as fast as her little short legs would allow her, imploring him to stay, to remain where he was. But, laughing merrily

and looking up to the sky, the boy shook his flag, calling 'Excelsior! Excelsior!' On, on they went, till at last, reaching the highest point, they both lay down breathless and tired out.

'Oh dear, what fun!' cried Dermot; 'that was a splendid race.'

'Yes; but I don't know how I shall get down again,' said Snowdrop. 'I don't think I ever walked so much in my whole life.'

'Oh, you'll get down easily enough, dear. Going down is nothing. You have just to let yourself go, and off you trundle to the bottom of the hill.'

'But you might hurt yourself that way.'

'So you might, if you were a duffer. But look at that yacht away far, Snowdrop; doesn't she look lovely with all her sails shining out in the sun?'

'Yes, indeed, so she does. And doesn't the sea look wide, wide from here?'

'Yes; and can't you see a lot of places from this?' cried Dermot, pointing with his finger. 'Look, there is Kilteen Castle away, away among the trees; then a little farther is Dalkey, then Kingstown, and over at the other side is Delgany. Oh, the top of Bray Head is splendid for a view!'

'Yes; but, Dermot, I can't see the nurses and children,' said Snowdrop uneasily. 'Supposing they should go home without us.'

'Nonsense, child,' cried Dermot, sitting up and looking towards the little glen where they had dined. The trees hide them; but they are there, safe enough,' and he lay back amongst the heather.

But this did not satisfy Snowdrop, and she gazed down anxiously through the trees.

'I really think we ought to go back, Dermot; they might go off without us. Just fancy how terrible that would be!'

'Well, you are a foolish child! Imagine nurse going home, when the sun is shining like this; why, she won't go for hours yet.'

'But then it will take us a long time to walk back again. Do let us start, Dermot.'

'Very well, then, since you are in such a hurry, let us go. But you will only have to sit there for ever so long, and listen to nurse talking, or let the babies pull you about. It's twice as nice lying here. However, here goes,' and, springing to his feet, he began to scramble over the rocks and roughest places he could find.

'Oh, pray don't go so fast,' cried Snowdrop; 'I feel too tired to run like that.'

'Well, you are a funny one! A minute ago you wanted to go awfully fast, now you want me to crawl like a tortoise.'

'No, I don't; I only want you to walk gently because I'm tired. And you might give me your hand, Dermot, just to help me.'

'Very well, dear, here you are. I'll tell you what we'll do; we'll link arms like a lady and gentleman. Won't that be capital?'

'Yes, indeed; and it will help me along so well,' and, laughing merrily, Snowdrop put her arm in Dermot's, and they walked sedately down the hill.

CHAPTER X.

DERMOT TAKES A SHORT CUT.

'BUT this is not the way we came,' cried Snowdrop, when they had been walking for some time; 'I do not remember this part at all.'

'No; we did not come along here,' said Dermot jauntily. 'This is a new road, Snow. I'm taking you back by a short cut.'

'Oh, that is nice; then we shall get back in plenty of time,' and, quite reassured, the little girl began to gather the pretty wild-flowers that grew along the way.

But suddenly Dermot stopped short, and, looking wildly about, clutched his cousin by the arm.

'I must have made a mistake, Snow; this is not the road at all. We shall have to go right back again.'

'Oh, Dermot!'

'Well, I can't help it. I thought I was bringing you a short cut that Uncle Tom told me about; but I must have got wrong some way.'

'Oh dear! oh dear!' cried Snowdrop, letting her flowers fall to the ground; 'and I am so tired, I could never walk back.'

'But you must, unless you want to sleep up here all night. No one is likely to come up to look for us; they would never imagine where we have gone to.'

'I wish I had never come! I wish I had never come!' moaned the little girl, sinking down upon the

grass. 'Oh, Dermot, why did you take me away from nurse and the children?'

'But you know very well you wanted to come yourself. You needn't put all the blame on me. I wouldn't have gone so far only those chaps laughing at me made me long to get away from nurse. I was silly to mind them, and now I can't think what to do;' and feeling greatly puzzled, Dermot walked up and down with his hands stuck deep into his pockets.

The children had now reached a lonely, rugged road that cut along about half-way down the Head, and seemed to stretch away for miles before them. On one side stood the hill, high and steep, covered with heather, jutting rocks, and clumps of small trees; on the other was a grassy bank; and what lay beyond they could not guess.

'I must see what's over there,' cried Dermot presently, and catching on by the long grass, he clambered up, hand-over-hand, till he reached the top, where he perched himself comfortably, and began to sing.

'It's very unkind of you to be so merry when we have lost ourselves,' cried Snowdrop indignantly. 'Perhaps—perhaps we may never get home again.'

'My dear Snowdrop, come up here,' he answered gaily; 'and when you have seen what I see, you will not think that likely.'

'I couldn't get up there. I can't climb like a boy.'

'No, I know that; but if you will give me your hand I will help you up.'

'But what is the good? Going up there won't take us home.'

'Yes, but it will, though. At the other side of this bank is a large field; at the foot of that field is the wide road that leads to Bray and Ballybrack.'

'Well?' said Snowdrop.

'Well, don't you see that if we were on that road we might see the others going home, and get picked up? So come along, Snow, and I'll help you to climb a bit. It's as easy as anything.'

'Very well; I'll try to climb up to you. But, oh, Dermot, I hope you know the way this time?'

'Of course I do, dear. Why, I know all the roads about here like one o'clock.'

'Like what?'

'Oh, that's only Dick O'Brien's way of saying he knows a thing jolly well. But heave ahoy! little cousin; give me your paw.'

'It isn't a paw; it's a hand, Dermot. I wish you wouldn't be so silly. I'm not a dog!'

'Of course you're not,' he said, laughing. 'But don't get cross. Give me your hand and I'll pull you up in a jiffy.'

So at last Snowdrop resigned herself to her fate, stuck her toes firmly into the side of the bank, and, stretching out her hand to Dermot, struggled bravely up over the slippery grass.

And after many minutes of hard work, puffing and panting, slipping and catching, she was at length safely landed on the top of the bank. Below waved a field of corn, and through this Dermot declared they must walk in order to reach the road.

'But we shall spoil it if we do that,' said Snowdrop.

'We should have to tramp right through it, and that would be a pity.'

'Oh, we can creep round by the edge, and that won't do much harm,' said Dermot. 'Now for a good slide over the grass. One, two, three, and away!' and off they went down the side of the bank into the corn-field.

'That was easily done,' cried Snowdrop, laughing. 'I wish we could slide home all the way to Kilteen like that.'

'I wish we could, indeed. But come, we must be quick, dear. It's getting late, and we may miss the children and nurse.'

'Oh dear, that would be dreadful! Let us run, Dermot, as fast as we can.'

But it was hard work running, for the ground was rough and uneven, and the little girl slipped and fell several times in her efforts to keep up with her cousin.

'Oh dear, I have hurt my foot; I can't go another step!' cried Snowdrop, and sitting down on the grass, she began to cry.

'Well, you are a silly!' said Dermot, running back. 'Give me your hand, and I'll help you along.'

'I must rest, Dermy, I'm so tired. Oh dear! oh dear! what shall we do?'

'Go down to the end of this field as fast as we can, climb the gate there, and sit on the roadside till nurse and the children drive past; then call to them to stop, jump into my little trap, and then gee up Neddy to Kilteen Castle, where we'll eat a tea that will astonish them all.'

'I cannot think how you can be so gay,' the little girl said plaintively. 'I feel miserable; I feel as if I should never see Kilteen, or auntie, or uncle, or anybody again.'

'Oh, I say, don't be so unhappy, Snow dear,' said Dermot, kissing her affectionately. 'Of course we shall see them again, and jolly soon, too. Holloa! here comes a big man. I wonder if he could help us?'

As Dermot spoke, a rough-looking countryman, with a pipe in his mouth, came sauntering round the field. He was strong and broadly made, but had a good-humoured, smiling face, and so the children did not feel frightened at his approach.

'Arrah, thin, my little gintleman, and what do you mean by trespassin' on Mr. Hanlon's corn-field? Sure my orders is to foine anyone I find walkin' down this way.'

'Oh, please,' said Dermot, 'I didn't know; but if you go up to Kilteen Castle, my father will pay the fine. My cousin and I lost our way on the Head, and had to come through the field to get to the road.'

'And we never walked on a bit of the corn,' cried Snowdrop; 'so please don't be angry with us.'

'Angry, is it, missy? Sure there's no one, much less Pat Mulligan, could be angry wid such a darlin' as you,' and the man put his pipe in his pocket and touched his hat to the little lady. 'It's some way on to the gate, an' maybe you'd let me carry ye a bit of the road, for ye look fairly done out and tired from your walk. I'll be afther lettin' ye off wid the foine this time, Masther Dermot.'

'How did you know his name was Dermot?' asked Snowdrop in surprise.

'Sure a little bird whispered it to me, missy, as I came round the field,' Pat said, with a smile. 'Ah, darlin,' sure we all know Mr. O'Connor of Kilteen Castle, and his brave wee son, Masther Dermot. But come along now, an' just let me carry ye for a while. It's getting very late, an' it's a good step back to the Castle.'

'Thank you; you are very good,' and feeling rather nervous, yet not daring to refuse his kind offer, the child allowed the big man to take her in his arms and carry her down to the gate.

'Now, we'll have plenty of time to catch nurse and the children,' cried Dermot gaily, as he ran along by Pat's side. 'After all, it was good fun coming back by the short cut.'

'Well, Masther Dermot, if I was you I would take no more o' thim short cuts. The longest way is the way you don't know, an' you've tired this poor little lady entirely.'

'Oh, she'll be all right when we get her into the donkey-carriage,' said Dermot, going back to his boastful tone, now that he felt safe. 'I'm very quick at finding my way, Pat, I know this part of the country so well.'

'Do ye, thin?' said Pat dryly. 'That's the raison ye came so cliverly down by the corn-field instead of goin' back to Lord Sheath's entrance-gate. Arrah, you're a bright lad; but ye see too far before ye, I'm thinkin',' and, smiling pleasantly, he opened the gate and let the children out on the road. 'Now, take my

advice, Masther Dermot, an' just sit here till the nurse goes past. If ye go stravagin' about ye may lose yourselves again.'

'I shall not move from here till nurse and the children come up,' said Snowdrop, sinking down on the roadside. 'I'm so tired I can hardly move.'

'I hope to goodness we have not missed them,' remarked Dermot, looking uneasily up and down the lonely road. 'If we have, I don't know what we should do. How could we get home, Pat?'

'Sorra one o' me knows, sir, unless ye were to go by train. The station isn't far from here.'

'But we have no money.'

'No more have I, sir,' said Pat sadly. 'It's mighty seldom I've a penny to spare. But what time were ye to be home at the Castle?'

'About five o'clock,' replied Dermot; 'that's the time we have our tea.'

'Bedad an' it's more than that now,' said Pat. 'I'm just sure ye've missed the nurses. Come along to the station, and I'll see what I can do with the station-masther. He must know your father's name, an' he'll take your word for the money, I'm certain sure.'

'Oh no; I couldn't walk, and I could never climb that big hill to the Castle,' cried Snowdrop. 'But listen!—I'm sure I hear the sound of wheels. Here they are!—here they are!'

'Yes, I hear something like the sound of wheels,' said Dermot; 'but I'm afraid it must only be a cart, for it is coming very slowly, and seems heavy, and——'

'Ye've got sharp ears, Masther Dermot,' said Pat, 'for sure enough it's both heavy and slow. Look!

that's what ye heard—that big gipsies' van there coming down the hill.'

'Yes, so it is,' said the boy, sighing. 'I'm afraid nurse has gone home.'

As he spoke, the gipsies' van came slowly towards them. It was drawn by a stout-looking horse, and was covered all over with baskets, chairs, tables, and all kinds of articles made of wicker-work.

A big woman in a scarlet petticoat, a bright-coloured handkerchief thrown over her head and knotted carelessly under her chin, walked along beside the van, and kept up a screaming conversation with someone inside.

As the lumbering vehicle, which was a kind of house upon wheels, approached the children, they became greatly excited.

'We must ask that woman if she has seen nurse and the little ones,' they cried, and, springing from Pat's side, they ran up the road to meet the gipsy.

'Did you—oh, please did you—see a car and donkey-carriage and three little girls and a baby and two nurses going along?' cried Dermot breathlessly.

'Yes, I saw them,' said the woman, smiling.

'Oh, where—where? Pray, tell us where?' cried Snowdrop, clinging to the stranger's arm.

'Where? Why, on the road, driving as fast as they could go towards Dublin.'

'Oh no, only to Ballybrack,' said Dermot.

'Then they must be there by now,' replied the woman. 'It is a good hour since I saw them; but we come so slow, and I stopped on the road to pick up a friend who is going over to England to-night.'

'Oh, what shall we do? what shall we do?' said Snowdrop, weeping. 'We have no money, and we are too tired to walk all the way home. Oh, we're lost—we're lost!'

'What way are you goin', ma'am?' asked Pat.

'On straight to Dublin,' she answered. 'I came down this road because I had to leave a chair with a lady that lives a little way on. But after that I must hurry, as my sister Sally is wantin' to catch the boat; so I'll have to get her up to the North Wall by half-past seven.'

'Then ye might give these children a lift,' said Pat. 'They live at Kilteen Castle, an' sure you'll be passin' the very gates.'

'To be sure, I'll take them with the greatest of pleasure,' she answered briskly. 'Jump in, my dears. It's a slow kind of carriage for the likes of you; but it will get you home without tiring you out.'

'Oh, thank you,' said Dermot; 'you are very good. My father, Mr. O'Connor, will pay you anything you may ask.'

'Would he, indeed?' said the woman, smiling. 'But I won't ask him to pay me anything. Jump in, missy; you look very tired.'

'I am tired,' said Snowdrop. 'And, oh! it is good of you to take us home.'

'Not a bit good, dearie; but I'm glad I happened to come by at the right time;' and signing to the driver to stop, she lifted the little girl into the van.

'Good-bye, Pat!' said Snowdrop. 'You've been very kind to us.' And she put her little hand in his.

'Good-bye, Pat!' said Dermot gaily, as he sprang in

after his cousin. 'Don't forget to come to the Castle the next time you come to Ballybrack.'

'Good-bye, little missy; good-bye, Master Dermot! I'm very thankful to see you so well out of your trouble. Good-bye!' And lifting his hat, Pat made a respectful bow as the heavy cart moved on, bearing the children on their homeward journey.

'Come in and rest after your walk, Master O'Connor, and little missy, too,' said the gipsy good-naturedly. 'This part of the van is only our kitchen. I have——'

'Master who, did you say, Nita?' cried a harsh, grating voice; and the children started and clung together, as a wild-looking woman darted forward, and glared at them angrily. 'Who is this boy?'

'Master O'Connor,' said Nita. 'But he's nobody you know, Sally, so don't frighten him. He's just a little lad and his sister that's lost their way upon the hill-side.' And taking them by the hand she led them into a second compartment, and made them sit down in a couple of large, comfortable arm-chairs. 'Don't mind Sally,' she said; 'she's a bit wild at times; but I won't let her come near you. You must be hungry after your long walk. Take this: it will refresh you;' and placing a cup of milk and a piece of brown bread before each child, she went away, closing the door carefully behind her.

'Why did you bring these children here?' cried Sally, the moment Nita appeared. 'Why did you not leave them to die on the roadside? You who know—you who know——'

'I who know what? Sally, are you mad?'

'Mad! It's you that's mad!' shrieked Sally. 'The

gipsies love revenge, and yet you would carry those children back to their father's arms!'

'Of course. Why not, poor little souls? Why should I revenge myself on them? They never did me any harm.'

'Not they, not they,' muttered Sally; 'but their friends—— Listen!'

'Hush! you will frighten them. Wait till I come back.' And opening the door, Nita disappeared into the inner compartment. But in a few minutes she returned, and, seating herself on the floor, said quietly, 'Now you may tell me this wonderful story. But speak low; the children are asleep, and I do not wish you to wake them.'

'How mighty careful you are, to be sure! You are only half a gipsy, I believe, and have none of the feelings of your race; but when you hear who these children are I think you will hardly be so anxious to spare them.'

'Go on! When I know who they are you will see how I feel.'

'Well, then, Nita Geetane,' hissed Sally, 'it was their grandfather, Mr. O'Connor of Kilteen, that sent our father to prison for life. He hated the gipsies, and would never allow one on his estate. After this, would you be kind to his grandchildren, and return them to their father's arms? Long ago I vowed to be revenged; now I have the chance, and——'

'Hush!—say no more,' cried Nita, starting to her feet. 'I am only half a gipsy. Sometimes I think I am not one at all; but I may be gipsy enough to do what you want.'

'That's right!' cried Sally with a discordant laugh. 'It would be strange if my only sister forgot her father's wrongs for the sake of two white-faced children.'

'Well, keep quiet now, Sally. I must take a walk and think it all over. If you make a noise you may wake them, and then they will escape;' and stepping out of the van, Nita left her sister alone.

'At last—at last!' cried Sally. 'Everything comes to those who can wait;' and flinging herself back in her corner, she laughed long and wildly.

CHAPTER XI.

MISSING.

WHEN Nora saw Dermot and her cousin running off together, she felt strongly tempted to follow in their footsteps, but did not dare to do so without asking nurse's permission.

'Indeed, you will do no such a thing, Miss Nora,' was the answer she received. 'Master Dermot is mighty free-and-easy, and does as he pleases, and Miss Snowdrop has always been accustomed to do the same; but you have been brought up different; so just stay where you are, and play with your little sisters.'

'But they are such babies,' said Nora, pouting; 'and Dermot and Snowdrop always have great fun.'

'Babies, indeed! Well, to be sure, what is the

world coming to when a child of five calls her sisters of four babies! That's Master Dermot's talk, I can see; and he gets his notions from those tormenting young scamps, the O'Briens. Tut, tut, Miss Nora, I'm ashamed of you! Just look at these blessed lambs, Topsie and Lesbia, how good they are. Be off now, and help them to get nosegays of wild flowers, like a good girl.'

'Very well. But, oh! I do wish Dermot and Snowdrop would come back,' said Nora tearfully, and casting longing looks after her brother and cousin.

'Oh, Nora dear, there are such heaps and heaps of bluebells growing about here,' cried Topsy joyfully. 'Come and help us to make a great big bunch to take home with us.'

'We can put it in mother's room,' said Lesbia; 'and she will be so pleased! She loves wild-flowers, I know.'

'Yes, so she does,' said Nora. And forgetting her troubles, she fell to work to gather the bluebells and tie them up in bunches.

'It is time we were getting home,' said nurse, after awhile. 'There is John coming back with the car. Have you packed everything up in the hamper again, Jane?'

'Yes, everything.'

'Well, then, help John to tie it on the car, for we must start home soon. I'm just dying for my tea.'

'But what about Master Dermot and Miss Snowdrop? I don't see them anywhere,' said Jane, as the last parcel was stowed away, and the little ones were eager to take their places on the car. 'We can't go without them.'

'Of course not,' snapped nurse. 'You don't suppose I ever thought of doing such a thing? They can't be far off. Run up the hill a bit to call to them to come down.'

'Very well! stop with nurse, Miss Nora,' said Jane; and, starting off at a brisk pace, she soon disappeared amongst the trees.

Nurse sat down on the grass, and, gathering the children round her, tried to keep them amused during this unexpected delay.

But at last she grew uneasy, and going over to the car, began to question John as to the possible dangers of the lonely mountain.

'They're as safe, ma'am, as if they was in their own drawin'-room,' he answered; 'for sure it's quiet and lonesome, an' Master Dermot knows his way about as well as anyone. But I tell you what he might have done: he might just have went on down the other side and gone home by train, for he's a venturesome young gentleman, he is.'

'So he is, indeed. And since ever Miss Snowdrop came from London he thinks of nothing but showing off to her, just to make her think him a great fellow.'

'Well, then, you may take my word for it, that's just what he's been after doin',' said John. 'They're gone home, and ye'll find him grinnin' an' laughin when ye's gets to the door of the castle.'

'I'll soon stop his grinnin', then,' said nurse, as she lifted Topsy and Lesbia on the car; 'and, please goodness, he'll get as good a punishment as ever he got. Well, Jane?'

'Oh, nurse, I've been up and down. I've called and

shouted, but could not get a sight of the children,' answered Jane, with trembling lips. 'I'm afraid the poor dears are lost.'

'Not a bit of them,' cried nurse. 'John, here, says he's sure they've gone home by train.'

'But they couldn't get a train nearer than Bray Station,' said Jane doubtfully. 'That would be a long way for them to walk.'

'Long or short, that's what they've done,' said nurse decidedly; 'so the best thing for us to do is to go off home as fast as we can. Take Miss Nora in the donkey-carriage with you, and let us get away.'

'Oh, nurse, nurse, do let us wait a little longer,' pleaded Nora; 'maybe the poor children are too tired to come back quickly, and are sitting down to rest.'

'Not they! Jane has been shouting and screaming everywhere.'

'But still they might be too far away to hear. They will be so frightened if they find us gone when they come to look for us.'

'Nonsense, Miss Nora; I suppose you think you know better than your elders. They've gone home, I'm sure. Jump in, there, and let us start.'

So, finding that further remonstrance was useless, Nora allowed herself to be lifted into Dermot's carriage, and, sobbing bitterly, she seated herself beside Jane.

At last they were all ready, and the little party that had entered the gates so merrily a few hours before passed through them now looking miserable and unhappy.

'Drive as fast as you can, John,' said nurse, 'for I feel that anxious that I hardly know where I am.'

'Keep up your spirits, ma'am,' said John; 'you'll see your young gentleman and his cousin very soon, never fear. I know the tricks they've been up to.'

'I hope and trust you may be right,' she whispered huskily; and as Baba fell asleep in her arms, she turned to cover her up with a rug.

Her face grew white and anxious as they drove along, but not another word did she utter till they drew up at the castle door. Everything there was still and peaceful: not a sound was to be heard but the soft roll of the waves as they broke gently on the shore below.

It was a glorious evening, and the sea and hills were bathed in a golden sunset that lent a wonderful beauty to the scene.

The castle door stood open, as usual, but not a creature was to be seen either within or without the house.

As the travellers approached, they raised their eyes to the windows, hoping to see a pair of merry faces peeping out at them from above. But no such pleasant sight greeted them, and, white to the lips, nurse entered the castle with Baba in her arm.

John rang the bell, and soon the house woke up to life. Doors banged, dogs barked, and the servants ran out to help the children off the car and hear all the news of the picnic. Captain, the faithful house-dog, bounded from one little friend to the other, and wondered greatly at the small attention he received.

But they had no thoughts for him, and looked eagerly about.

'Where is Dermot? Where is Snowdrop?' they asked at once. And when they learned that they had not returned, that they had not been seen or heard of all day, their grief and terror knew no bounds, and the little sisters began to weep and lament.

'They must be in the house. They are surely hiding from us,' cried nurse, gazing about her in despair. 'Go round the place and look in every hole and corner till you find them.'

The servants flew hither and thither at her bidding, hunting and searching, but all in vain. The children were not to be found, and at last, weary and disheartened, they returned to the hall, where nurse still sat rocking the sleeping baby in her arms, and surrounded by the weeping little ones.

How many hours were passed in this miserable way no one knows. But suddenly footsteps sounded upon the gravel, pleasant voices were heard approaching, and with cries of joy the little girls rushed out to meet their father and mother.

'Mamma! dear mamma!' cried Nora, clinging to Mrs. O'Connor's skirts, 'Dermot and Snowdrop are lost; but now that you and papa have come home we must find them soon. Papa will surely know where to look for them.'

'Dermot—Snowdrop lost? What do you mean, child?' cried Mrs. O'Connor, looking in terror from one tear-stained face to the other. 'Nurse, where are the children?'

'If you please, ma'am,' answered nurse, starting to her feet and trembling in every limb, 'Master—Dermot—and Miss Snowdrop wandered away from us after dinner. I—thought—I was sure—they had come home. But they—are nowhere in the house. We have looked—everywhere—but cannot find them.'

'Good heavens! this is alarming news, nurse,' said Mr. O'Connor, trying to speak as quietly as possible to reassure his wife. 'But we shall soon find them. Jane, take baby up to bed. Wandered from you, did you say? Well, that was naughty. I dare say they are sitting at Bray Station waiting for someone to come to look for them. I am glad we came home earlier than we intended. I must be off by the next train and get them home as fast as possible.'

'Oh, Jim,' cried Mrs. O'Connor, 'how tired the poor darlings must be! And suppose they had really lost their way upon the lonely mountain?' and she sat down sobbing on the nearest chair.

'Hush, dear!' said Mr. O'Connor gently. 'Do not be frightened. I feel sure I shall soon find them. Send these poor scraps to bed, they are so tired; and make yourself quite contented. I shall soon return with the wanderers, never fear. I have just time to catch the train down to Bray. Come, nurse, carry your infants off to the nursery and leave your mistress in peace. Good-bye, dearest!' And kissing his wife and little daughters, Mr. O'Connor put on his hat and hurried away to the station.

Greatly reassured by her master's manner, nurse gathered the little ones together, and when they had kissed and bade their mother good-night, she took

them off to the nursery and put them to bed. The poor children were worn out with fatigue and grief, and, fondly believing that their father would find their brother and cousin, they laid their heads upon their pillows and were soon fast asleep.

But her husband's brave and consoling words had not removed all fear from Mrs. O'Connor's heart. She was anxious and alarmed, and could not but tremble for the absent children. 'What can have happened to them? Where can they have gone?' she cried, as she paced feverishly up and down the drawing-room. 'No one would harm them, no one would touch them, I know—I feel sure. But a night upon the heather, a night in the cold damp air, would kill them, or sow seeds of an illness from which they could never recover! O my God! protect and cherish my darlings!' and, falling upon her knees, she poured forth a long and fervent prayer for mercy. And for many hours the unhappy mother remained alone, praying and weeping.

The glorious sunset had long since died away; the shades of evening crept up over the land, and as night came on myriads of little stars peeped out over the beautiful grounds of Kilteen Castle.

'How lovely, how peaceful it all looks!' sighed Mrs. O'Connor, as she raised her eyes and looked at the landscape. 'How grand and noble is Bray Head, as it stands out against the sky, away, far away, in the distance! But, oh, what a cruel place for my darlings to rest upon this cold night!' and, bowing her head, she sobbed aloud.

'Julia, dearest, do not grieve so much,' said Mr.

O'Connor, entering the room at this moment. 'Do not weep, dearest;' and he put his arm round his unhappy wife.

'The children!' she cried. 'Oh, Jim, the children!'

'I have had news of them,' he answered—'good news; and I have come to tell it to you, lest you should be frightened at my long absence. They were not at the station, but I met Hanlon's game-keeper in Bray; he saw the children and——'

'Yes, but where? Oh! where are they?'

'He saw them some hours ago on the road near his master's gate. They were tired after their walk, for they had lost themselves when they had strayed away from nurse. They had no money to come home by train, and he helped them into a gipsy's van. The woman promised to take them with her and drop them at their own door. But they must have gone on to Dublin by mistake. John is getting ready the car, and I am going to drive along the road and look for them.'

'Gone—in a gipsy's van! Oh, Jim, they have been stolen — they——' and, overcome with terror and anguish, Mrs. O'Connor fell fainting at her husband's feet.

'Poor darling, this is a cruel trial for you,' he whispered. 'God grant it may not last long, and that I may soon find those unhappy children!' Then, raising her in his arms, he laid her on the sofa.

'Please, sir, the car is ready,' said a servant at the door.

'Very well. I must go at once. Come in, Mary, and look after your mistress. Make her go to bed

when she recovers consciousness,' and, pressing his lips to his wife's, he sighed heavily and hurried from the room.

CHAPTER XII.

THE GIPSY'S REVENGE.

DERMOT and Snowdrop slumbered long and peacefully. The poor children were so tired after their rambles over the hillside, so worn-out with anxiety and fear, that when they at last found themselves on the road to the Castle they were only too glad to indulge in a quiet nap.

The big van, with its load of chairs and baskets, rumbled heavily over the stones, jolting up and down in a most unpleasant manner. But the children did not feel this, and slept as calmly as though they were at home in their own little beds. They were perfectly happy in their great arm-chairs, and had nothing to trouble them or keep them awake. Nita had promised that Sally should not go near them, and that she herself would tell them when they arrived at Kilteen. And so, unconscious of all harm, the little ones slumbered on.

But suddenly Snowdrop awoke with a start, to find herself being borne quickly through the air. A pair of strong arms were round her, a hot breath passed over her face, and then she was laid upon a pile of cushions in a strange, unknown place. But Dermot lay asleep beside her, and, quite reassured, she closed her eyes and dropped off to sleep again. After

a little time, however, she looked up once more, wondering greatly where she could be. Something unusual in the whole place seemed to strike her, and, raising herself on her elbow, she looked about.

'Where am I, I wonder? I never saw this room before. What can have happened? Oh, now I remember; Dermot and I got into the big van with the baskets all over it. But this isn't like it one bit. Is this another part of it; or, oh dear! am I dreaming? This feels just like a steamer. It is exactly like the one that Polly and I came over in; only—only, oh, how it rolls! Dermot, Dermot, wake up, and tell me where we are.'

But as Snowdrop turned to wake her cousin, a harsh, angry voice sounded in her ear, and the black eyes that had frightened the children so much when they first entered the van glared at the little girl more wildly than ever.

'Lie down!' hissed Sally, and Snowdrop shrank back in terror at her approach. 'Do not say a word, or—or——' and she shook her fist at the frightened child. 'You are sailing far, far away from those you love. Sally the gipsy has had her revenge. The van was slow, but it was fast enough for me. Nita was soft and tender-hearted, ha, ha! but Sally was clever. I cheated her as she never thought to be cheated, and now, now they may find you who can.' And she laughed aloud.

'How merry that woman seems!' said one of the passengers to a friend; 'she must be a good sailor to laugh in such a way on board ship.'

'Yes, and the poor child is green with fright,'

remarked the friend. 'I suppose she was never on a steamer before, and feels nervous; but it is cruel of the woman to laugh at her.'

'Poor dear, she does look terrified,' said the other kindly.

Then, feeling their eyes upon her, Sally ceased laughing, and muttered something under her breath. 'Go to sleep, dear,' she said aloud; 'go to sleep, and you will feel the journey less.'

Then a handkerchief was thrown over the little girl's face, and with a gasp and a sigh she fell into a deep sleep. And when Snowdrop again woke up, she felt Dermot's arm round her, and heard Dermot's voice uttering wild words of anguish and alarm.

'Where are we, dear?' she asked dreamily, then started in surprise to find that they were in a large station, through which crowds of men and women were rushing in hurry and confusion.

They seemed to be quite alone, for no one spoke to them or noticed them, and Dermot sat on the end of a large trunk, and sobbed and wept as though his heart would break.

'Dermot dear, why are you so unhappy?' she said, putting her little cheek against his. 'What brought us here to this strange place?'

'Oh, Snowdrop dear, Snowdrop dear, we are stolen away. That dreadful gipsy has carried us off in our sleep. We came along in the train, Snow, and we shall never, never get home any more;' and he wept more bitterly than ever.

'But Uncle Jim will soon find us,' said the little girl bravely. 'We'll write and send him our address,

and he'll soon come after us. Where is this place? Are we far from Kilteen?'

'Why, yes, I should just think so,' cried Dermot. 'We came along hours and hours in the train. I was awake, but Sally looked at me so dreadfully that I was afraid to speak; there was no one in the carriage with us, so there was no use. You slept soundly all the way, dear, and I was very glad. This is Euston Station.'

'Euston! Why, then we are in London! That's the very station Polly and I started from when we went to Ireland,' cried Snowdrop joyfully. 'We are not lost at all, dear, for papa and mamma live in London. Let us go off and look for them.'

'Oh, but here is Sally coming back for us; she would not let us go to them. Look how fierce and angry she is. Oh, Snow; she may kill us; she may kill us!'

'Dermy, Dermy, I thought she had left us here! I cannot, I will not go with her!' and the child clung to her cousin, whilst big tears streamed down her cheeks.

'Now, then, youngsters, move off, and let the man take my box,' said Sally, coming up with a porter. 'Dry up your tears and follow me.'

'I can't, I can't!' sobbed Snowdrop, and she tried to hold Dermot back.

'We must go, dear,' he said with a kiss; 'indeed we must.'

'Must we, must we? Oh, Dermy, I am so dreadfully frightened!'

'She shall not touch you, dear,' he said bravely; 'I promise you that.'

'Well, are you coming?' cried Sally; 'or do you want me to drag you along?'

'We are coming,' answered Dermot quickly. 'Let us be brave, dear Snow, and show her we are not afraid.'

'I will try, Dermy; I will try.'

So, choking back their tears and clinging together in silent despair, the children followed the woman out of the station.

The big trunk was hoisted up on the top of a cab, and some parcels and bundles were pushed inside. Then Sally ordered the little ones to enter, and scrambled in after them herself. The porter slammed the door; the woman muttered something in his ear, which he repeated to the driver, and the cab rattled off over the stones.

On they went, down wide streets and narrow lanes, and every turn seemed to increase the children's sorrow, and lessen their chance of escape. Snowdrop wept bitterly at the bottom of the cab, but Dermot did not shed a tear, and tried hard to appear indifferent. But all the while his heart was burning with indignation and grief at being carried away from his home and friends. He was filled with horror and disgust as he looked at the odious woman who had stolen him, and a sudden longing came over him to burst open the door of the cab and escape from her there and then. But Sally had her eyes upon him, and seeing what he was about, she put forth her hand and, catching him by the shoulder, pressed him back into his seat. Her grasp was an iron one, and, screaming with pain, the poor boy shook himself free, and shrank away from her in terror.

Snowdrop looked from one to the other with quivering lips and rising colour, but she did not dare to speak. Great tears ran silently down her face, and, putting her little hand in Dermot's, she nestled up as close to him as possible. Sally gave a grunt of satisfaction and her black eyes flashed wickedly.

At last the weary journey came to an end, and the cab stopped with a sudden jerk that sent the parcels flying about in all directions.

'This is your new home,' said Sally fiercely. 'Take care and don't contradict anything I say.'

Then, without waiting to hear their answer, she jumped out of the cab, and, going up to a shabby-looking old house, rang the bell. Several minutes passed away. The driver got off his seat, lifted down the trunk, and took out all the parcels; but still the house remained silent: no one came to open the door.

'Your friends are asleep, ma'am, I think,' he remarked. 'They must be well-to-do folks to lie so long of a mornin'; not that the 'ouse looks like a place where rich parties would come to live;' and he chuckled quietly as he looked up at the broken windows and dilapidated appearance of the place. 'Come, missie,' he said good-naturedly to Snowdrop, 'jump out an' stretch your legs a bit; an' you, too, little man; you must be pretty stiff after your long journey,' and, putting out his hand, he was about to help the children from the cab when Sally darted forward.

'Don't touch them!' she cried. 'Do you want me to lose them, after all my trouble?'

'No offence, ma'am,' said the man in surprise. 'I'd

be sorry to hear of their bein' lost, for they're as pretty a pair as I've seen this many a day. How you came by them beats my comprehension, so it does.'

'Mind your own business!' she snapped. 'There's the door open at last; carry the box into the hall.'

As she spoke a chain was heard rattling inside the house, a key turned noisily in the lock, and an old woman put out her head, and looked cautiously up and down.

'What are you ringing for?' she asked in a weak, shaky voice. 'There's no one livin' in this 'ouse on'y the caretakers.'

'And it's the caretakers we want,' shouted Sally. 'Where's Sam, that he's not here to take the luggage?'

'Sam, Sam!' shrieked the old woman. 'Why, is it you, Sally, come all the way back from Ireland? I never knew you was comin'. Dear, dear, an' are these your brother's children? Well, they are a pretty pair, but not at all like the family, I'd say!'

'Don't stand there talking nonsense,' said Sally. 'Where's Sam—is he out?'

'No, no. Sam! Sam! The poor boy's havin' a bit of breakfast, an' doesn't hear,' she answered. 'We're upstairs now; we had to go because of the rats below. Sam! Sam!'

'Never mind; I'll look after him,' said Sally.

'Come, you youngsters, come with me,' and, catching hold of Dermot and Snowdrop, she dragged them into the house.

'See to the luggage, Goodie,' she called back to the old woman, then hurried along up several flights of dirty rickety stairs. The higher they went the faster

she ran, and the tired children found it hard to keep up with her.

As they reached the top of the house, a loud, cheery voice was heard singing lustily in one of the rooms:

'I care for nobody, no, not I,
And nobody cares for me, me, me.'

'You are mighty gay, my boy; and your song is a cheerful one,' muttered Sally, stopping for an instant on the landing. 'Gay and idle; but I'll soon change your tune,' and, giving the door a kick, she burst it open and entered the room with a rush.

This apartment was small and stuffy, and the air so close and disagreeable that the children shuddered as they were swept across the threshold. It was also extremely dark, as several window-panes were broken and stuffed with rags: those that remained were so thick with dirt that it was impossible for daylight to enter. There was little furniture, save a few chairs and a broken-down bedstead, and the place was filled with the smell of stale tobacco and freshly-fried bacon. At the farthest end of the room, close to one of the windows, was a table, covered with a grimy cloth and the scattered remains of breakfast.

Up in the corner, with his back to the door, his elbow on the table, sat a boy of about fifteen, with black curly hair and a rough, unkempt appearance. His feet, upon which were a pair of old tattered slippers, were stuck out before him on a chair, whilst in his hand was a short pipe, from which he took a long pull between each verse of his song.

'There was a jolly miller
Lived on the river Dee,'

he shouted, quite unconscious of anyone's presence in the room.

'Sam,' cried Sally; and at the sound of her voice the pipe dropped from his hand, the song died on his lips, and he started quickly to his feet.

'Sally!' he exclaimed; 'I didn't know—I didn't expect——'

'No, I suppose not, you lazy fellow! Eight o'clock, an' there you sit eatin' an' drinkin' as if you was a lord. Get off with you an' earn some money. My journey has cost me so much I haven't a penny for a bit of breakfast or dinner.'

'Goodie has that,' he answered jauntily; 'I gave 'er two bob yesterday. But I thought you were coming back rich; Goodie said your brother had left you a 'eap of money.'

'Goodie knows nothing about it,' she cried angrily; 'and I had these children to pay for.'

'Holloa!' said Sam; 'an' who are the kids?'

'Friends,' she answered shortly. 'Go your way and leave me and the kids alone.'

'You've stole them,' he cried, moving slowly towards the door. 'Oh, Sal, 'ow could yer?—'ow could yer? Poor little dears!'

'Poor little dears, indeed. You're as bad as Nita, with your soft-hearted words,' she cried, laughing. 'Get out and leave me alone.'

'Nita!' he said. 'Did she know yer was goin' to steal them?'

'She did and she didn't,' she replied in evident delight. 'She would have stopped me if she could, but I was too sharp for her; I cheated her finely.'

'Ow, Sally? Yer werry artful. But 'ow did yer cheat Nita?'

'This way,' said Sally, seating herself by the table and beginning to eat up everything she could find. 'When I saw these children and heard their name, I told Nita I wanted to be revenged on their family, and she seemed to agree, and I thought she'd help. "I must think it over," she said, and stepped out of the van. Presently back she comes. "We must leave them at their home," said she; "I'd die rather than hurt them." I felt wild with rage, but I answered very quietly—perhaps she was right—humoured her, in fact. Well, as we jolted along, Nita fell asleep, and then what do you think I did?'

'Couldn't guess,' said Sam.

'I dosed her with chloroform, and then I had it all my own way.'

'Goodness! that was sharp. But where did you get the stuff?'

'It was Nita's own. She'd a toothache, and had got the stuff for it some days before. She slept soundly, and the children slept soundly, and I soon got them lifted into the boat.'

'But the man that was drivin' the van. Wot were he about? Did he know yer wos stealing those poor creatures?'

'Not he. When he was carryin' the trunk into the steamer, I carried in the children, and he never knew anything about them. Ha, ha! it was finely managed.'

'Finely managed, indeed. But it wos a wicked thin' to do, an' you'll suffer for it.'

'Don't speak like that—you that I've taken care of and kept since I found you a lonely child with no one to look after you.'

'So you did, Sally; and I'm grateful for your kindness to me. But I thought yer'd give up yer gipsy ways since yer left the camp out by 'Ampstead. Yer said me an' you wos to grow respectable an' 'onest, an' now you've been wickeder than ever. Why did yer take these children, Sal, an' 'ow's they to be kept?'

'They'll work,' she cried. 'And as to giving up gipsy ways, that's rubbish. A gipsy is a gipsy whether living in camps with the people, or in a house in London. I left the camp to humour you, my boy; but the chance of being revenged on Mr. O'Connor woke up all my gipsy feelings. These poor dears must work, and let's hope they won't be as idle as you.'

'Work!' he shouted; 'those poor things with their fair hair an' white faces? There's nothing o' the gipsy about them either in looks or manners, an' if you let them outside the door they'll be nabbed, as sure as yer name's Sally. The perlice 'll nab 'em an' take 'em 'ome to their par and mar in no time, an' then you'll suffer; oh, you'll suffer.'

'Hair's easily cut off, an' skins can be dyed. We'll make them more like gipsies to-morrow. Go your own way, and mind your own business.'

'Oh, I'll go my way, never fear. But, Lor', it'll be fine fun when the perlice nabs 'em;' and Sam bolted out of the room, nearly upsetting old Goodie, who entered at that moment, carrying a loaf of bread.

'Dear, dear, that boy's gone mad!' squeaked the old creature. 'His spirits is just wonderful. Listen how

he sings,' and she hobbled across the room and put the bread on the table.

'You've been spoilin' him,' said Sally; 'his cheek is somethin' awful. But he must behave himself better if he means to stay with me.'

'Dear, dear! you could never part with Sam. That would be somethin' strange.'

'How do you know whether I could or not?' said Sally. 'Give me some bread.'

'I wonder if Sam is good or wicked,' said Dermot to his cousin. 'He seems a queer sort of chap,' and he smiled as the great rough voice came sounding up the stair.

'Yes. But I'm sure he'll be kind,' said Snowdrop. 'He is going to tell the policeman about us, and then we'll soon get home;' and a gleam of hope entered the child's heart and raised her drooping spirits.

'What are you two mumblin' about?' cried Sally. 'I'll have no whisperin' where I am.'

'Dear, dear, what a pair o' beauties!' said old Goodie kindly. 'I'd no idea your brother would 'ave such fine children; so fair, too, an' he an' 'is wife as black as sloes.'

'Children don't always take after their parents,' growled Sally. 'So don't you make a fool of yourself.'

'No, no; of course not,' said Goodie. 'An' now, my dears, come over an' eat a bit; you must be faintin' with hunger.'

'Yes, we are hungry,' answered Dermot briskly.

The old woman's good-nature and Sam's words

about the police had comforted him immensely; so he took his seat at the table with alacrity.

'''Ere's some nice bread and milk for you, my pretty dears,' said Goodie; 'an' there's a nice little piece o' butter, too.'

'Don't you get spoilin' them,' cried Sally. 'I didn't bring them here to be pampered;' and, darting an angry glance at the children, she flounced out of the room.

'Sam, Sam!' they heard her shouting at the top of her voice; then she ran quickly downstairs and all was silent.

'I am so glad she's gone,' whispered Snowdrop to Dermot. 'So glad, so glad!'

'So am I; but I wish it was for ever. She'll soon come back.'

Then catching the old woman's eyes fixed upon them, they relapsed into silence, and applied themselves diligently to the bread-and-milk.

CHAPTER XIII.

DERMOT'S REPENTANCE.

ALL through the long day the children were shut up together in the dark, stifling room. As soon as they had finished their breakfast, Goodie put on an old battered bonnet, and hobbled off downstairs. But in a few seconds they heard her come panting up again, in a state of breathless haste.

'Sally says you're not to stir from here, till she

allows you,' she cried; then, shutting the door with a bang, she locked it and hurried away. And so, for the present, there was not the slightest chance of the little ones getting out of their wretched prison.

At first they were really glad to be left alone, and began to lay wonderful plans as to what they should do, and how they should escape. But as the hours went slowly by, they grew sad and lonely, and longed for someone to come in.

'Oh, Snow, dear Snow, how wretched it is here!' cried Dermot. 'How different from Kilteen, our own dear home!'

'Yes, very different indeed. But, Dermot, I do wish we had never gone for that picnic, but just stayed quietly in the garden.'

'So do I. But, Snowdrop—it—it wasn't the picnic; it was all that horrible short-cut that we took. Oh dear! oh dear! why did I ever run away from nurse? And why did I take that short cut?'

'You ran away from nurse because those O'Briens laughed at you; don't you remember?'

'Yes, of course I do. And, oh, I know now—it was all my conceit—and—and vanity that got us lost and—stolen.'

'Your—— What uncle called your "rock ahead"?'

'Yes—my biggest fault. What papa told me I should pray and fight against—and there—and there—I didn't. And now, oh, Snowdrop dear, you see how unhappy it has made us both,' and, burying his face in his hands, Dermot wept bitterly.

'Oh, don't cry, Dermy—don't cry! God will take care of us, and take us safe home. I'm sure He will;

so don't cry. Let us think and think what we can do to get away from here.'

'But what can we do? Look how they lock us up so that nobody will see us.'

'Yes, that is the dreadful part of it; and just think how angry my papa and mamma would be if they knew their little Snowdrop was shut up in this horrible room. If they would only let us out we might meet them, and then they would soon take us away from Sally.'

'Yes, wouldn't that be splendid? I do wish we could manage to slip out the next time Goodie opens the door. We might, you know, if we were quick.'

'No; I don't think we could. And then, I don't know where papa and mamma are; they have left the house we used to live in, and, oh, Dermy, London is such a big place.'

'So it is—so it is. Oh, why was I conceited—why was I conceited? Snowdrop, if I ever get home, if I ever get out of this hole, I'll never be conceited again —never. I'll never think I know the way anywhere, or that I can do anything—or—— And those O'Briens may laugh at me till they are sick, I shan't mind.'

'No, dear,' said Snow mournfully. 'But when shall we get home? When—when?'

'Well, dear, I've been thinking. Sam didn't seem to like Sally stealing us, and maybe he might help us to get away.'

'But how?'

'Well, if he would just give me a piece of paper and an envelope, and tell me the name of this place,

I could write to papa, and then he would soon come over for us.'

'Yes, yes, let us ask Sam when he comes back,' cried Snowdrop feverishly. 'He looks good-natured. Oh, how I wish he would come in! Dermy, Dermy, I just long to get out of this dreadful room.'

'Poor little Snow—poor little Snow! I feel so wicked, dear, when I see you sad. Will God ever forgive me for my bad, wicked conduct?'

'Yes, dear, indeed He will; and, oh Dermy, we must pray hard and ask our dear Lord to save us from these cruel people. Mother says God is very good, and loves little children so much, so I know He will help us; I know He will;' and, putting her arms round her cousin, she kissed him lovingly.

'Why, there is Sam, I declare,' cried Dermot. 'Listen! that's his voice, I'm sure. Dear! but he is fond of that old song, "The Jolly Miller."'

'Perhaps he's come to open the door and let us out,' cried Snowdrop eagerly. 'If he does, I think my heart will break with joy.'

'I care for nobody, no, not I,
And nobody cares for me,'

shouted Sam on the stairs, and in a moment the key turned in the lock, and the noisy young gentleman entered the room.

'Hullo, you two kids,' he cried, ''as she left yer there all day? Well, she's a rum 'un. But, see 'ere, I've brought yer somethin' nice,' and out of his pocket he produced two small pork-pies, rolled up in a piece of paper.

'Oh, thank you—thank you,' cried the children. 'But we are not hungry—we couldn't eat anything. We want to ask you—oh, please don't refuse us! We want to ask you to let us go away from here. Please do let us out;' and, clasping their hands, they raised their eyes imploringly to his face.

'Of course you'd like to get away,' he answered, 'an' I'll do what I can to help you. Eat your pies, for you've had nothin' all day, I hear. Sally's been away with her pals, an' poor Goodie 'ad no money. She took hevery sixpence from 'er. Spent all her hextra coin bringin' yer from Hireland, where she ought to 'ave left yer at 'ome. I'm sorry she stole yer, downright sorry; but I couldn't, I daren't open the door an' let you out.'

'Well, if you can't do that,' said Dermot, 'will you give me a sheet of paper and an envelope? I want to write to my papa and tell him where we are.'

'Lor' bless yer simple little 'eart!' cried Sam. 'Do you think I could do such a thin' an' get poor Sally run in for dear knows how long! No, no, you'll get no paper nor pens from me. If you gets away it must be haccidental like. Sam's not the boy to peach on them that's been good to him. But have you no frens in Lunnun?'

'Oh yes,' cried Snowdrop; 'my papa and mamma are in London, only I don't know where.'

'That's mighty strange, then,' said Sam, scratching his head, 'an' will make it werry 'ard for yer to get found. But there must be no writin'. If yer does such a thing, Sally will pack yer off to another place, where yer'll be far worse treated nor yer treated

'ere. So just yer be quiet an' peaceful, an' somethin' may turn up. Heat yer pies now, for that's all the supper yer'll get.'

'Thank you ; it was kind of you to think of us,' said Snowdrop. 'But, Sam, how are we ever to get to my papa and mamma if you won't let us write, and we are kept locked up here all day ?'

'That's wot I call a question to the pint, missy,' said Sam, seating himself cross-legs on the floor and taking out his pipe. 'But you're going to be metamorphosed to-morrow mornin'.'

'Oh, Sam, will that hurt ?' asked Snowdrop in alarm.

'Lor' love yer, no. That's just a tidy way of sayin' yer'll be changed.'

'Changed !' cried Dermot.

'Yes, changed,' said Sam, taking a pull at his pipe. 'Yer see, I go hout with a hinstrument wot's called a French pianer, an' Sally thinks if missy 'ere was dressed as a Hitalian girl an' you as a Hitalian boy we might pick up a little money. Childer always draws the coin. I'm gettin' big now, an' nobody looks my way. But a sweet critter like missy there would be sure to get money.'

'Why, that would be begging,' cried Dermot angrily. 'We are not beggars. I am a gentleman's son. I shan't beg, and I shan't go out with you and your French piano.'

'Werry well,' said Sam carelessly ; 'yer can sit up 'ere in this 'an'some drawring-room all by yerself, an' miss all chance of findin' yer frens.'

'Oh no, Dermot dear, come out—come out !' cried Snowdrop. 'We shall look up and down every street,

and maybe we might just meet papa and mamma. Wouldn't that be nice?'

'Yes, dear. I'll go if you wish, Snow—and I do hope we may meet them.'

'I dessay you do, for it would be werry nice and uncommon likely,' said Sam, with a chuckle. 'But yer pride 'll 'ave a fall, young master, I'm thinkin'. If Sally 'eard yer say yer wouldn't beg, she'd give it to yer. An' mind yer, 'er 'and is a 'eavy one. I've felt it myself, so I know;' and, springing to his feet, Sam put the pipe in his pocket and went off. He locked the door carefully, and ran downstairs, singing as gaily as ever.

When night came on, Sally and Goodie returned. They both looked cross and angry, and the little ones clung together in alarm when they saw them enter the room.

'Oh, there you are! Don't keep starin' at me, you foolish creatures!' cried Sally. 'Take them out of my sight, Goodie.'

And the old woman seized the children and drove them off before her.

Dermot was pushed into a wretched garret all by himself, and, having cried and sobbed for hours alone in the dark, he at last lay down on a heap of straw in the corner and fell asleep.

'Get yer in there,' said Goodie, 'an' if yer not in bed when Sally an' me comes down, yer'll catch it;' and Snowdrop found herself in a big, wild room, without carpets, curtains, or even a chair.

But side-by-side stood two miserable-looking beds, and into one of these the unhappy child crept without

waiting to take off her clothes. And, before closing her eyes, Snowdrop said the prayers she had learned at her mother's knee, adding another little one of her own, craving for help and protection: 'O dear, good God, let me find my papa and mamma very soon.' Then a feeling of peace came over her, and she forgot her troubles in the deep, happy sleep of childhood.

The next morning the children were, as Sam had said, completely metamorphosed. Snowdrop's long fair curls, that her mother loved so well, were cut off by Sally, and the little girl was too frightened to complain. Then her pretty coat and cashmere frock were taken away, and she was told to dress herself in some strange-looking garments that were thrown to her with a laugh. Without a word Snowdrop put them on, and, had the articles been cleaner, the costume would have been picturesque and charming.

There was a crimson petticoat with rows of braid; a low, black bodice, showing a white chemisette; an apron made of a striped material of many colours; and a square of linen that was pinned, as a sort of cap, upon her little cropped head.

Dermot's change of clothes was more miserable, and could never, at the best of times, have been pretty. The poor boy shivered as he dressed, and felt thoroughly ashamed and disgusted as he left his garret, arrayed in the dirty rags.

The children met on the stairs, and, rushing into each other's arms, bemoaned their hard fate and cruel treatment.

'Snowdrop, Snowdrop, is it really you? Oh, my

dear, how strange you look!' cried Dermot, gazing sadly at his little cousin. 'And just look at the sight they have made of me. Anybody would take me for a beggar now. Oh, what would mother say? what would mother say? But I gave Sam some fine kicks when he was making me put them on, I can tell you.'

'Oh, I was too much afraid even to speak,' whispered Snowdrop. 'If I moved a little bit the wrong way, Sally gave me a pinch or a slap.'

'Poor little Snow—I'd—I'd like to punch her ugly old head. I don't believe we'll ever get home now No one would ever know us dressed up like this. I—feel such a sight—I—and you, Snow—oh, no one would ever recognise you.'

'I don't think anyone could,' said Snowdrop. 'But if I see mamma I'd know her in a minute, and I'll shout, and jump, and call till she looks at me, and then—— Oh, Dermy, it sets me wild to think of it.'

'Yes, so it does me. But come in and try to eat something now. Sam is going to take us out soon. I'm very glad, for we shall be able to talk better as we walk along—and then, perhaps—— Who knows what may happen?'

And they went into the sitting-room to look for some breakfast.

'Now then, young uns, 'urry hup!' cried Sam. 'Finish your bread-and-milk an' come along. We 'ave a long day's tramp before us, an' the sooner we start the better.'

'We are ready,' said Dermot; and, taking his cousin by the hand, he drew her down the stairs.

When the hall-door was opened and the children found themselves in the street, they clapped their hands and uttered cries of delight.

'Oh, how lovely it is to be in the fresh air again!' said Snowdrop joyfully. 'Isn't it delicious, Dermy?'

'Yes, indeed it is. I think I should have died if I had stayed another day in that frightful room.'

'Sam, Sam,' cried the little girl, 'don't bring us back to this place any more. Take us away where we'll never see Sally or Goodie again.'

'I wish I could, missy—I wish I could; but I'm bound to Sally, an' I must keep ye till yer frens turn up.'

'That will never happen—never!' replied Snowdrop mournfully; and the look of joy went out of her face as she followed Sam and his piano down the street.

CHAPTER XIV.

SAM TRIES TO BE KIND.

At the end of a long day's tramp, the little party returned to the shabby old house and climbed wearily up the stairs. The children were sick at heart, and utterly miserable. They had seen no one they knew, and had not even gone to a part of the town that was familiar to Snowdrop. People had pitied them, they looked so poor and unhappy, and pennies were thrown to them wherever they went. This put Sam in very

good spirits, and he shouted and sang more lustily than ever as he put his piano away for the night.

'These kids wos a goodish spec,' he said with a laugh, as he poured the coppers into Sally's lap. 'Treat them well, for if the perlice doesn't nab 'em they'll make yer fortune.'

'We'll do nothing of the kind,' cried Dermot, flaring up. 'I'll take no more pennies, and I'll scream at everybody that I have been stolen.'

'Yer may just save yer breath, then, for no one would believe yer,' said Sam. 'They'd think it were some sort o' play yer wos performin' an' give yer more pennies than afore;' and, chuckling to himself, he sat down to eat his supper.

'You are a horrible lot of wretches,' cried Dermot; 'and when I get back to my father I'll—I'll get you well punished. It was wicked of you to steal us away and keep us in this nasty den.'

'When you get to your father you may punish us,' said Sally; 'but you'll never see him again—never.'

'Oh, don't say that!' cried Snowdrop, weeping. 'I shall die if I stay here—for, oh! I am so unhappy.'

'Hush, little missy; don't cry,' whispered Sam; 'yer'll on'y make Sally angry. I'll 'elp yer to find yer par, never fear. But don't tell Sally, or she'll kill us.'

'Oh! you good, good Sam!' cried the little girl rapturously.

'Don't believe him, Snow,' cried Dermot, who had overheard Sam's words. 'He's a liar and——'

'Yer'd better shut up, young un, or maybe I'd give yer one in the hye,' said Sam, kicking poor Dermot

on the shin. 'Much yer knows whether I'm a liar or not. Take yer supper an' dry up.'

'That's the way to treat him,' said Sally, laughing. 'He wants a little taking down, that youngster. His pride's too much for his clothes.'

'Yes,' thought the boy to himself, 'they're not much to be proud of; but the very feel of them makes me boil with rage;' and he glanced at his tattered trousers and clumsy boots with a groan of despair.

'Don't mind her, Dermy; we'll find papa and mamma yet. She won't be able to prevent us.'

'Oh, she could, she could, Snow,' and Dermot's tears dropped hot and fast.

'Dermy dear, we're more unhappy than the Babes in the Wood, for they died and were covered with leaves by dear little robins. It would be far nicer to die than live here always with Sally;' and Snowdrop began to weep afresh.

'There—there,' whispered Sam, dashing his sleeve across his eyes and turning away his head, lest Sally should see that he was crying. 'Don't yer be so miserable; take a bit of bread an' a drop o' milk an' make yourselves happy for to-night.'

'Oh, Sam! Sam! how could we be that?' said Snowdrop mournfully, and then, as Sally went over to the window, 'I'm afraid, Sam, I'm afraid, she might kill us. I'd like to die like the Babes in the Wood; but, oh, to be killed!—Sam, Sam, I couldn't bear it.'

'She won't kill yer, dear,' answered Sam in her ear; 'she 'ates yer like pison, but she'll never kill yer. 'Ere, heat this bit o' bloater; it's nice an' tasty like.'

'Oh no—no, thank you, Sam. Keep it for yourself; you like it. I would rather have the bread.'

'Lor' love yer, yer a sweet little darlin',' cried Sam, with his mouth full of bloater. 'I'll do my very best to find yer mar for yer, so there.'

'Oh, thank you, thank you, dear, kind Sam!' cried Snowdrop; and, jumping up, she flung her arms round the lad's neck and kissed him.

'Don't, Snowdrop. How can you?' cried Dermot, and, getting very red, he pulled his cousin down on her seat.

'I don't deserve it, missy; I don't indeed,' said Sam. 'But if anything would ever make me good it would be yer dear, kind little ways.'

'Be quick and finish your suppers and get off to your beds, you two,' cried Sally, coming over to the table. 'And I'll tell you what, Sam: if you get so mighty friendly with that girl I'll pack her off to the other side of the water, where there is someone that will make her work, and not pet and make much of her, as you seem to do.'

'Oh, I'm not friendly with 'er; don't yer go and think such a thing,' said Sam quickly, and, giving Snowdrop a push, he muttered: 'Don't come botherin' me wid yer nonsense; I'm not to be won over with kissing. I've little enough o' this fish for myself; so don't yer come beggin' for it. Yer an awful beggar, yer are. But 'ere goes,' and he put the last piece of bloater into his mouth.

Greatly terrified at the sudden change in his manner, Snowdrop shrank away from him, and, covering her face with her hands, burst into tears.

'You big bully! you great coward!' cried Dermot, with flashing eyes; 'she never asked for your bloater. I told Snow you were a liar, and she would not believe me. It's cruel to push a little child away and frighten her. If I were strong and tall I'd fight you, so I would, and——'

'No, yer wouldn't,' said Sam; 'for if yer wasn't a babby yer'd see wot I mean;' and, jumping up from the table, he ran out of the room.

'Now then, away you go, you two; clear off,' cried Sally. 'No one can have any peace where you are.'

Too much alarmed to make any reply, the children dropped the bread they were eating and followed in Sam's footsteps. Outside the door they found the big strong lad leaning against the wall, his whole frame shaken with sobs, the tears streaming down his face.

'Sam,' cried Snowdrop, 'oh, Sam, what is the matter?'

'Oh, missy, missy, where's yer par an' yer mar? My 'eart is just breakin' to see yer pinin' away in this 'ere place. I 'ad to speak rough to yer, or Sally'd 'ave treated yer worse; forgive me, missy, an' tell me where's yer par an' mar.'

'I do forgive you, Sam; but, oh! I cannot tell where papa and mamma are, for I don't know—I don't know.'

'I'd give anything to be able to drop yer at their door; for I can't bear to see yer cryin', an' then to know 'ow yer's knocked about—I——'

'Then let me write to my father at Kilteen Castle,' said Dermot boldly. 'I have only to write a few lines and he'd be here in a day.'

'I couldn't let yer write,' said Sam doggedly.

'Then it's nonsense to pretend you want to help us to get home. You don't, or you would let me write at once.'

'Yes, an' get Sally taken up. No; I won't betray Sally, so there;' and, turning on his heel, Sam returned to the sitting-room, and the children heard him laughing and talking as they went sadly downstairs to bed.

'He's worse than Sally,' cried Dermot; 'for he's a hypocrite. He pretends to be sorry for us, and he's not.'

'I think he's trying to be kind, Dermy,' said Snowdrop gently; 'but he doesn't quite know how.'

Then, as Goodie was seen approaching, they kissed each other lovingly and ran into their rooms. Very soon they heard the keys turning in the locks, and they knew they were prisoners till the morning.

The next day Sam was in a rollicking humour, and was noisy and rough as he sat at breakfast. He and Sally joked and laughed till the children stared at them in astonishment. How could these two be so happy when they felt so miserable? But when Sam and the little ones started off with the piano, he became strangely silent, and sighed heavily as they went along.

Dermot and Snowdrop walked after him, wondering greatly what could be the matter. Instead of stopping every now and then to play, as he had done the day before, he trudged on and on, up one street and down another, till the children grew weary and implored him to stop.

'Sit down, then, and rest a bit by the side of the road,' he said, and, stopping, he perched himself on the handle of the piano, lost in thought.

'Sam's very queer to-day,' said Snowdrop. 'He hasn't played a tune yet.'

'No; I don't know what can be the matter with him,' replied Dermot. 'He was so gay at breakfast, and now he seems quite sad. I can't make him out.'

'Perhaps he is not well. Shall I ask him?'

'Oh, he's well enough. Why, he ate a fearful breakfast.'

'Yes; but I'm sorry to see him sad. I like Sam very much, Dermy.'

'You've strange taste, then; he's just a big bear.'

'Missy,' said Sam suddenly, 'wot kind of a place did yer live in afore yer went over to stop in Ireland?'

'In a beautiful house, Sam, in a large square with trees and flowers, and——'

'Well, an' 'ave yer no idear wot wos the name o' that 'ere square?'

'Oh yes, of course. Why, it was New Square; I remember it quite well. We lived in 102, New Square, Hyde Park.'

'Why,' cried Sam, jumping to his feet, 'yer told me yer didn't know where yer par an' mar lived, an'——'

'No, Sam, I don't know where they live,' said Snowdrop, the tears springing quickly to her eyes. 'Papa and mamma went to a different place after I went to my cousins. They sold the house and went to live in lodgings somewhere. I've often had letters from mamma, but I never noticed the address, and Aunt Julia always directed my envelopes when I was writing, because I wrote so big. But, oh dear, I wish I knew where my dear mamma is now.'

Sam wheeling the French piano, accompanied by Snowdrop and Dermot.
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'It's a bad business, an' it's makin' me feel downright queer, missy. I do wish Sally 'ad leaved you an' young master 'ere alone. It were a wicked thing to steal yer away, that's wot it were.'

'Yes, Sam, so it was. But it's wicked of you, at least, it's unkind, not to let us write to——'

'Come, now, missy, none o' that. I'd do anything for yer but write—that's a thing that can't be done. Yer see this is the way o' it. If yer was to write to this young man's par, yer must put in the name o' the 'ouse where Sally, Goodie an' me lives. Well, the fust thing yer par 'ud do is to bring the perlice, an' he'd nab Sally an' Goodie, an' maybe me, too, an' run us all to prison. Goodie, poor old soul! 'ad nothin' to do with stealin' yer, an' she'd suffer well, for even if they didn't put 'er in prison, the gentleman wot owns the 'ouse wot we lives in would dismiss 'er an' not let 'er be caretaker any more, for, don't yer see, 'e thinks she just lives there alone, takin' care o' it and washin' it down. But, of course, she 'as to hearn a 'onest penny by takin' in a lodger when she can, an' so me an' Sally lodges with 'er. Well, so yer see, it would never do to write an' put hus hall about so much. It would be werry uncomfortable an' disagreeable.'

'Yes,' said Snowdrop; 'but——'

'No, no, yer needn't begin to argufy, for it's no use. My mind's made hup—yer mustn't write. But come an' we'll walk roun' the square, an' maybe ye might 'appen on a fren haccidental like. If I sees yer talkin' to hanyone wot seems to know yer I'll just 'ook off with my hinstrument an' leave yer there;' and, smiling at the child, Sam pushed his piano up the street.

'It's no use, Dermy, it's no use going there;' and Snowdrop wept pitifully as she went along. 'The house is sold and they're all gone away; so it's no use.'

'We may as well go there as anywhere else,' said Dermot despondingly. 'Oh, Snow, how I hate this big, busy London! the roar and the noise of these streets makes my head feel all in a whirl. I long and long to be back in the green fields again.'

'So do I, dear; and doesn't it seem a long time since the day of the picnic, Dermy—since you and I played at "Excelsior," and you took the short-cut?'

'It seems simply ages, Snow, and yet it is only two days. This is our third day with Sally.'

'Only two days! Oh, Dermy, Dermy, I think I shall choke if I stay much longer in that horrible room. Oh, how I wish I could see my dear mother's face again! Every lady I see go past with a little girl makes me feel so sad and lonely.'

'Poor Snow! poor darling!' cried Dermot tenderly. It was I got you lost, dearest. Oh, how I wish I could get you home—could find your mother for you!' and he stooped to kiss the tear-stained face.

'Hie, hie! look where you're going!' cried a voice.

And before the boy had time to draw back, a carriage and pair went dashing past, and the two children were thrown rudely on the ground. But in an instant Dermot was on his feet again, looking wildly about for his cousin. A little crowd had collected close by, and on the side-path, Sam kneeling close beside her, lay Snowdrop, as white as her pretty namesake, a stream of blood flowing from her head.

'Snowdrop, darling! Oh, Sam, is she dead?—is she dead?' and, rushing through the crowd, Dermot flung himself down by the unconscious child.

'Not dead—not dead,' said Sam, with a sob; 'honly stunned—I 'ope. But I must take 'er to the 'ospital. Take care o' yourself, my boy. Stand 'ere by the pianer an' I'll come back for yer when I've seen missy made comfortable;' and, hailing a four-wheel cab, Sam got in.

The little girl was lifted gently, and laid in his arms.

'To the hospital in Great Ormond Street,' cried a man, shutting the door.

And then the cab drove quickly away, and poor Dermot was left alone, in sorrow and despair, at the corner of Oxford Circus.

CHAPTER XV.

SNOWDROP MAKES A FRIEND.

WHEN Snowdrop recovered consciousness, she looked about her in surprise. What had happened she could not remember, and where she was she could not possibly imagine. Gazing round her, she saw a large, airy room, the walls covered with pretty pictures, numbers of little beds ranged along side by side, and kind-looking ladies moving softly about in a pleasant, subdued light.

'Do you feel better, dear?' asked a sweet voice.

'You have had a nice sleep, so I am sure you must be better.'

'Yes—I feel—but, oh! what is the matter with my head? Why, it is all tied up. Ah, now I remember. The street—the crowd—Sam—Dermot. Oh, where is Dermot, dear lady? Do let me see Dermot;' and, starting up in bed, Snowdrop looked everywhere for her cousin.

'Hush, dear; you must not excite yourself so much,' said the nurse, and she laid the child back upon her pillow. 'Dermot will come to you to-morrow.'

'But where is he now? I want him now—oh, where can he be now?'

The nurse thought for a moment as she smoothed the clothes over the little girl. Who Dermot was, or where he was, she had not the slightest idea, for she knew nothing of the poor mite's friends. But wishing to soothe and comfort her, she whispered:

'Dermot has gone home, dear; so don't fret about him. Try to go to sleep again.'

'Home? Oh, has he gone home? No, he would not go without me. Oh no, he has not gone home—he could not, for it is too far—too far,' and the tears ran down the little one's pale cheeks.

'Come, now,' said the nurse, 'you must not cry, dear, or you will be very ill to-morrow. Little children come to this hospital to get well and strong, not to weep. If you are good and rest properly you will soon be all right again. You were carried in here stunned and bleeding, and we thought you were in a bad way. But the doctor says the cut on your head

is very slight, and that you will be well in the morning. All you require is care and quiet. If you have a good night you can go home to-morrow, and I dare say Dermot will come for you, and——'

'Oh no, no; be my friend—be my friend—and don't send me away.'

'I am your friend, dear; but when you get well, you will be glad to go home and——'

'Yes, but my home is so far. So please, please, if Dermot comes, let us stay here with you. You are so good and kind, and I feel so much afraid of Sally and her cruel, cross face. So please don't send me away.'

'Poor little girl! she is wandering, I am afraid. She will work herself into a fever if she goes on like this,' said the nurse to herself. 'I wish the doctor would come round again. I shall have to go for him if she will not keep still. Try to sleep, dear,' she whispered gently. 'You shall stay where you are till you are quite well, and Sally shall not touch you.' And she laid her cool hand on the child's burning brow.

'Can you write?' asked Snowdrop suddenly. 'Dermot always said it would be the best plan.'

'Yes, I can write,' answered the nurse, smiling. 'Can you?'

'Oh, badly—big—big letters. But, please, if you are my friend, would you write to Uncle Jim and tell him that little Snowdrop is staying in your house, and that if he comes he can find her and take her home?'

'Yes, dear, I can write all that,' she answered, more certain than ever that the little one was wandering,

yet thinking it best to humour her. 'But where shall I send the letter? Where does Uncle Jim live?'

'At Kilteen Castle, of course. But oh,' and Snowdrop gave a sudden cry and sat once more up in bed, 'what shall we say about Dermot? Dermot, his dear little boy—Dermot, who was always so good to me—Dermot, who loved me? What shall we say about Dermot?'

'But who is Dermot, dear?'

'What! You don't know who Dermot is?' And Snowdrop stared at the woman in astonishment.

'No, dear. You see, I never saw you till about an hour ago, when you were carried in here, and I put you to bed, and watched the doctor dress your wound.'

'And wasn't there a little boy with me—a pretty boy with curly hair and——'

'No, dear. A big boy brought you here in a cab, I was told. A carriage had knocked you down in the street, and your head had hit against the kerb-stone; but, fortunately, you were not seriously hurt.'

'But Dermot was with me. Dermot had his arm round me; and now he's gone, and I don't know what to say to Uncle Jim about him.' And Snowdrop wrung her hands in despair.

'But who was the boy who brought you here?'

'Oh, that was Sam. A kind boy, I think; but Dermot says he's just as wicked as Sally.'

'Sally!—who is she?'

'Well, you do know a few people!' said Snowdrop, with something of scorn in her voice. 'Sally is a big, dark gipsy woman; and when Dermot and me got into her van at Bray Head, she carried us away to

London. Stole us from our home. She cut off my hair, and put on that dirty little dress you saw on me, and sent us out to get money with Sam and the piano. She lives in a horrible old house that smells, oh, so badly! She makes faces and frightens us; and we cannot get home, because I don't know where my papa and mamma live, and Sam won't let us write.'

'Is this really a true story?' asked the nurse, gazing in astonishment at the child. 'Were you really stolen from your home?'

'Really—really—I never told a fib in my life; indeed I didn't. My own dear mother said it was wicked to tell fibs, and so I wouldn't, not for all the world. Oh, if Dermot were here, he would tell you how true it is, and how miserable we have been.'

'Poor little darling! And what is your Uncle Jim's name, dear?'

'Mr. O'Connor, Kilteen Castle, Ballybrack, Ireland,' said Snowdrop glibly. 'Dermot and I used to say it over and over, for we did so want to write. But Sam would not let us, and so we couldn't. You will write for me now, I know. You look so good and kind, and you said you were my friend.'

'Yes, I shall certainly write and tell this Mr. O'Connor the story I have just heard,' said the nurse gently; 'that is, if you will lie down, close your eyes, and go to sleep.'

'Yes, I will try. And, oh, please, say that Dermot is coming to see me in the morning; for he is sure to come—he is sure to come.'

'Very well; and now, little Snowdrop, you must

talk no more. You must keep quiet, and sleep if you can.'

'Thank you,' whispered the child, putting her arms round the nurse's neck, and kissing her. 'I love you very much. I feel so happy now, for I know that Uncle Jim will soon come, and I shall never see Sally any more.'

'No, darling, I sincerely hope not,' said the woman with emotion. Then she laid the child back on her pillow, covered her tenderly, and, drawing the curtains round the little bed, stole softly away.

'Dear God, take care of Dermy,' whispered Snowdrop, when she found herself alone. 'Take care of Dermy, and send him back to me soon.' And then, with a sigh, she fell asleep.

CHAPTER XVI.

A WONDERFUL CHANCE.

WHEN Dermot saw the cab disappear from view, and found himself alone amidst the hurry and bustle of Oxford Street, his heart sank low, and he shed bitter tears as he thought of Snowdrop's sufferings and his own forlorn condition.

'Oh, my darling, if I could only get to you it would not be so dreary. It was cruel of Sam to take you away and leave me here by myself,' he cried passionately. 'Cruel—cruel to carry Snowdrop off and leave me to watch this old piano! I wish to goodness I could get rid of it! Then I would soon run off to

Great Ormond Street. That's where the man told the cabman to go. Poor Snow will be so lonely without me; she loves no one as she loves me. But, then, Sam told me to stand by the piano; so I suppose I must. If I left it, it might get stolen.'

'Now then, youngster,' said a policeman, 'move off. We can't have you blockin' the way with that old pianer of yours. Take it away!'

'Please, I can't,' said Dermot. 'It's too heavy; I can't move it.'

'Well, you are small to work with such a big thing. But come and I'll put it round the corner into Great Castle Street. It will be out of the way there.'

'Thank you; you are very kind,' replied Dermot; and as the policeman pushed the piano along the street, the little boy followed meekly at his heels.

But suddenly a bright idea flashed across his mind, and his face shone with happiness.

'Now's my time,' he whispered to himself—'now's my time to escape. Why should I stay here and wait for Sam, and be dragged back to that horrible house again? The policeman will mind the old piano and give it to Sam when he comes back. So I'll just run away;' and without a word he turned and fled down Oxford Street.

'Now then, my boy, you can stand here and wait till someone comes to look after you,' said the policeman, as, having pushed the piano into a quiet corner, he looked about for its owner. 'It will be out of the way here, and—— But hallo! why, the young shaver's

gone! Well I never! I suppose I must land this thing off to the station. He'll come and look for it by-and-by. My word, but that's a sharp un!' and he laughed heartily at the trick the child had played upon him.

Meanwhile Dermot ran quickly along, panting and breathless, yet afraid to stop, lest he should find the policeman at his elbow, ready to drag him back to his wearisome post by the old piano. At last, however, he was forced to rest, and, leaning against a shop-window, he looked cautiously round. But no policeman was to be seen; and, feeling greatly relieved, he stood gazing about, wondering what he should do now that he was free.

'I shall never go back to Sally—never! I would rather starve than do that. I shall just follow Snowdrop to the hospital and find out how she is, and tell her I have left those wretches for ever. And, oh! I know what I'll do. I'll write my letter to papa, and tell him where I am. But where am I?—oh, where am I? Where can I tell him to come? This is such a big, wide street, and I have no house to go to. So what is to become of me? Oh, papa, papa, if you could only find me!' and, quite overcome at this bewildering state of affairs, Dermot sat down on a doorstep, weeping bitterly.

'I'll go and see Snowdrop, anyway,' he said at last. 'She'll tell me what to do, for she's a wise little thing—a great deal wiser than me, I'm afraid;' and, getting up slowly, he asked someone to show him the way to Great Ormond Street, and then off he went, determined not to stop again till he got there.

But all at once another bright idea struck him, and he laughed aloud.

'I'm a fine fellow!' he cried. 'Of course it will do to tell papa to go to the hospital. Yes, that's a capital thought. I'll write my letter at once, for the sooner it gets posted, the better. Then, when I've done that, I'll go on there, see Snow, or, if they won't let me in, linger about, sleep on the doorstep, anywhere, till papa arrives—and then, oh, what joy! But what am I to write on? What am I to write with? No paper, no pen! Oh, what am I to do? what am I to do?' and again the little face clouded and the blue eyes filled with tears.

Presently he passed a stationer's, where paper, envelopes, and pens were set out in tempting array.

'If I had only a penny, or even a halfpenny, I might buy some and write my letter. Oh, how I long to write that letter! What is the use of getting away from Sam if I can't write my letter? And Snow, I'm sure she's longing to write one too, poor darling! I will go in and beg a little bit of paper and the loan of a pen. I'll implore the man to give me even half a sheet;' and, trembling and blushing, Dermot entered the shop.

It was a small place, and two ladies and a gentleman stood at the counter selecting photograph-frames, about which they could not agree. The shopman was occupied showing off his wares, and looked round hurriedly when he saw a ragged boy enter the shop.

'Go away, child! Get out of this at once!'

'Please,' began Dermot timidly, 'will you give me——'

'There's nothing for you. Go away, I say;' and the man pushed him out, slamming the door in his face.

'Oh, my letter, my letter, are you never to get written? How am I to be found if I can't write to papa?' sighed Dermot. 'But I must just run on and talk to Snowdrop about it. And, who knows, maybe there might be some paper in the hospital. Yes, I'm sure there will be. I remember going to a hospital in Dublin with mamma, and in the parlour there was a nice blotter, and pens and ink—I don't remember paper, but I'm quite certain there was some;' and, quickening his steps, he turned down Hanway Street, across Southampton Row, never stopping till he at last reached his destination.

'Please, could you tell me which is the hospital they take little children to when they are hurt?' he asked of a woman who was passing by.

'There, dear—that big red place,' she said. 'That's where they're nursed and taken care of, poor things!' and, sighing gently, she went her way.

'I've come along very fast,' thought Dermot, looking up at the building, 'and Sam might be there yet, ready to pounce upon me and carry me back to Sally. I think I'll go back and walk about till I think he is sure to be gone. I'll know the place now, and will be able to go to it when I feel quite certain he's gone right away;' and, turning, he sauntered leisurely down the street into Southampton Row.

'Oh, how nice those buns look!' he said, as he

stopped in front of a confectioner's shop. 'Dear, dear, I do feel hungry! I wish Sam had left me a penny or two. But I dare say he had no money, for he never played a tune this morning. It is such a time since I had my breakfast. How am I to live until papa finds me? The sight of those cakes makes me feel dreadful. But I mustn't look at them any more; they only make me worse; and I shan't beg till I'm just forced;' and, putting his hand over his eyes to shut out the tempting dainties, he walked away.

As he passed the door of the shop, a lady with a pale, sad face stepped out and laid her hand on his shoulder.

'Are you hungry, little man?' she asked. 'I saw your face at the window, and I thought you looked white and faint.'

'Yes, I am hungry,' said Dermot, blushing. 'But I have no money, and I hate to beg—it—it makes me —feel—so horrible to beg.'

'Poor little boy! I shall not ask you to beg. Come in here and eat as many buns as you like.'

'But—but,' said Dermot, 'I could not pay——'

'No, of course not. I shall pay for them. Don't be afraid of me. Come along.'

'Oh, you are good—you are good! And do you know, dear lady, you make me think of my own mother—my dear, dear mother!'

'Indeed,' said the lady, smiling. 'Now, sit here;' and, leading him into the shop, she made him take his seat at a little round table. Then, carrying over a plateful of buns and cakes from the counter, she sat down to see him enjoy his repast.

'And so I am like your mother, dear,' she remarked, wondering greatly at the gentle voice and manner of the little street-boy.

'Yes—not your face, but the way you speak,' said Dermot, his eyes filling with tears; 'and—and—your smile is too——'

'Come, eat your buns. I am glad I am like your mother, since you love her so much. But where is she? Why does she let you stray about the streets?'

'She doesn't let me; she—she——' and, putting down his cake, Dermot burst into tears.

'Poor little man! poor little man!' said the lady, and rising, she walked away to the door. 'I must not talk to him just yet,' she thought. 'I dare say his mother is dead, poor child! When he has eaten something I shall question him more. He has a sweet little face, and talks like a gentleman's child. Perhaps I may be able to do something to help him. My heart is very tender towards all stray children now;' and she raised her handkerchief to her eyes.

Left to himself, Dermot choked back his tears, and, feeling really hungry, was glad to eat the buns the good lady had set before him.

'I will take this to Snowdrop,' he thought, setting aside a sponge-cake; 'perhaps they won't give her any in the hospital, and she always liked sponge-cakes so much. I wonder if the lady would mind me taking her this one?' and he glanced inquiringly at his kind benefactress.

As he did so he found the lady's eyes fixed upon him, and, blushing brightly, he slipped off his chair and ran up to her.

Dermot makes himself known to Aunt Eleanor in the confectioner's shop
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'Please, dear lady,' he said timidly, and holding out the cake as he spoke, 'may I take this to my little cousin, who is ill in the hospital in Great Ormond Street?'

'Certainly you may. What is the matter with the little cousin?'

'I don't exactly know. She and I were walking along with Sam and the piano, and she was crying, because she said we should never be able to get back to our papas and mammas again, and—— But, oh! lady, dear lady, are you ill? You look so white, and——'

'No, dear; only a little faint,' and she sat down at the table. 'What happened to the little cousin, then?'

'Well, we were both knocked down—how, I don't know; but I think it was a carriage. But when I got up I saw poor Snowdrop lying——'

'Snowdrop! Did you say Snowdrop?' cried the lady, starting to her feet and trembling in every limb.

'Yes, Snowdrop; that is my cousin's name.'

'And yours—what is your name? Tell me quickly.

'My name is Dermot. Dermot O'Connor.'

'Dermot, Dermot! My God, I thank Thee! My darling, my darling! I am your Aunt Eleanor;' and, catching the boy in her arms, Mrs. Elton kissed him over and over again.

'What?' he cried joyfully. 'Aunt Eleanor—Snowdrop's own dear mamma? Oh, I am glad; I am glad!'

'And I. Oh, Dermot, I can scarcely believe my senses. But my little Snow. Is she much hurt, is she much hurt?'

'No, I think not. Her head was bleeding; but Sam said she was only stunned, and he took her off to the hospital and left me all by myself to mind his old piano. But I ran away; and, oh! it was a wonderful chance that brought me down here.'

'God was taking care of you, dear, and He has answered our prayers, our many prayers for your safety.'

'Yes, auntie, and Snow and I prayed, oh, so hard!'

'Poor darlings! And now let us go to her, Dermot. I long to press her to my heart. Oh, my dear boy, how I have wept and mourned over my little lost child! My heart was breaking when I saw your face at the shop window, looking so hungry and sad. But, please God, all will be well now. Snowdrop shall—must get well. Her father and I have lodgings in Queen Street. That is close to the hospital, and we shall have her moved, if possible. Your papa and mamma are in London, Dermot, and——'

'Papa—mamma? Oh, Aunt Eleanor, where? Let me go to them; let me go to them.'

'They are out, dear; searching about; giving orders to policemen; doing everything they can to find you. But they will come to our rooms in the evening, darling, and then what joy! But come, Dermot; let us hurry to see my little Snowdrop;' and, taking the boy by the hand, she walked rapidly up the street to the hospital, and rang the bell.

'There was a little girl carried in here some hours ago—a white, delicate child—how is she?' she inquired breathlessly of the man who opened the door.

'She is doing nicely, ma'am. The boy that brought

her here waited till she recovered consciousness, and then went away. He was mighty fond of her, poor chap.'

'Yes, yes,' said Mrs. Elton hurriedly. 'Thank God she is better! Can I see her?'

'I'll ask,' said the man, and he went away.

'How long he is!' cried the imptient mother. 'Will he never come back, to take me to my darling?'

But at last he returned, and with a beating heart Mrs. Elton followed her conductor up the stairs.

'She is asleep at present, ma'am, but will soon awake, I think,' said the nurse, as the visitors entered the ward and stood at the foot of Snowdrop's bed.

'Is she ill?—very ill?' asked Mrs. Elton, in a choking voice.

'Oh no, not at all. It was a very slight accident. I have something here that will comfort her when she wakes up,' and she held up a letter. 'She implored me to write this for her, and it contains a very strange story. She will be well to-morrow; but I hope to be able to keep her till I hear from this Mr. O'Connor.'

'Mr. O'Connor! why, that's my papa!' cried Dermot. 'And so the letter is written at last—but, oh, thank goodness! it is too late.'

'Too late?' questioned the nurse, in surprise.

'Yes, too late,' said Mrs. Elton, smiling. 'Mr. and Mrs. O'Connor are both in London, and will soon hear the good news.'

'Who is talking? I heard mamma's voice,' cried Snowdrop, pulling aside her curtains, and looking up and down the room.

'So you did, darling; so you did,' and in an instant Snowdrop was clasped to her mother's heart.

CHAPTER XVII.

A HAPPY RETURN.

THERE is wild excitement in Kilteen Castle, and the children are flitting about with smiling faces and joyful hearts. The rooms and halls are filled with plants and flowers; the little ones are dressed in the whitest of frocks and the freshest of ribbons, and even the dogs and the cats are in holiday trim and wear bells round their necks, that tinkle wherever they go.

'Haven't we made it all look nice, Harry?' asked Nora gaily, as Harry O'Brien appeared at the door, with a beautiful bouquet of roses in his hand.

'Yes, indeed you have. But, Nora, this is for little Snowdrop. Dick and I are so sorry we ever made fun of her, or laughed at Dermot for being fond of her. We want you to give her this from us.'

'Oh, but you must stay and give it to her yourself.'

'No; I'm afraid Mrs. O'Connor would not like to see us here.'

'Indeed she would. Mamma is very fond of you now, Harry, because you were so kind and good helping to look for Dermot and Snowdrop. She says you were the kindest boy she ever knew, and that you were a great comfort to her.'

'Did she say that? Oh, I am so glad!' cried Harry joyfully. 'Well, then, I think we may stay. I'd like to give them a good cheer when they arrive.'

'Yes, that will be grand. But where is Dick?'

'Oh, he's outside somewhere. He didn't like to

come in. Dick! Dick!' shouted Harry, 'Nora says we may stay.'

'That's right,' answered Dick, bounding into the hall, with Baba on his shoulder and Topsy hanging on by his coat-tails. 'What time do you expect the travellers?'

'About half-past six or seven,' said Nora. 'And, oh, Dick, I'm just longing to see them all! It seems such an age since papa and mamma went to London to look for those poor children.'

'Yes, so it does. But, Nora, who are coming, dear?'

'Every one of them; uncle and aunt, papa and mamma, Dermot and Snowdrop; and we're going to have such jolly holidays!'

'I should just think so. We shall have to do all sorts of things, to celebrate this safe and happy return. But I say, Nora, next time you have a picnic on Bray Head you must take Harry and me. We'll prevent the old gipsies walking off with any of you.'

'Oh, there won't be any more' said Nora confidently. 'That bad Sally was mad, and mamma wrote to nurse that she had been locked up in an asylum. When she heard that the children had been found by Aunt Eleanor, she nearly killed Sam: that's the big boy that was kind to them, you know, and then she was taken away and locked up.'

'That's capital,' said Dick. 'But what about that other woman? She was wicked too, I'm sure.'

'No, she wasn't. She tried to help papa, and told him she was sure the children were in London; but she did not know where Sally lived, or what she did.'

'But why did she let them go?'

'Oh, because Sally gave her chloroform—stuff that put her to sleep—and she didn't know they were going.'

'Dear, dear, what a wretch! But what about Sam? Are they going to punish him?'

'No, indeed; he was very kind to them; and he loves Snowdrop so much. Uncle is going to try to get him some work to do, and mamma says she hopes he will grow up a good man.'

'That is good news, certainly. He's going to cut the French piano business, then?'

'Yes, when he gets something better to do. But wasn't it fun the way Dermot slipped off and left the policeman to mind it for him?'

'Splendid—and very lucky for him; for if he had stuck there like a stupid, he'd never have found Mrs. Elton. But I suppose Sam got the piano again all square.'

'Oh yes; he met the policeman on his way back from the hospital, and he told him where it was.'

'But wasn't he sold when he found Dermot had given him the slip—run away?'

'No; mamma says he told her he was very glad, only he was afraid the poor child might get lost more and more.'

'I say, what jolly long letters Mrs. O'Conner must write; she seems to tell you everything. It's very good of her.'

'Yes; she writes to nurse, and nurse reads the letters out to us. Oh, we were glad when we got the

telegram to say they were found. We all shrieked and danced as if we were mad.'

'So did we. Dick and I had a bonfire that night, and we danced round it like maniacs. But, I declare, here comes Pat. I say, won't there be a jolly lot of us to welcome them home?'

'The more the merrier,' cried Dick, tossing Baba in the air. 'Hurrah for Dermot! Hurrah for Snowdrop!'

'Good-evenin', Miss Nora,' said Pat, stepping into the hall. 'Are you expectin' the happy party to come soon?'

'Yes, Pat, by the next train,' replied the little girl, giving him her hand. 'Papa will be glad to see you; for you were so kind when the children were lost.'

'Kind is it? Shure I'd have thrown myself into the say yonder if that would have brought them back. Me that was fool enough to send them off in the van!'

'Come now, Pat, don't be abusing yourself,' said Harry, 'or Dick and I shall have to begin to do the same. Nora says Dermot told his mother that it was because we laughed at him and called him a baby that he went away so far from nurse, and then to show himself a man he took that short-cut and got lost. So you see we were more to blame than you.'

''Deed an' that's very likely to be true,' said Pat, shaking his head. 'Them little chaps don't like to be laughed at, poor dears. Of course, if they was big an' had sense, they wouldn't mind. But when they're small they're foolish an' feel things like; so it's cruel

of big boys to laugh an' tease the creatures, so it is, an' I hope you won't do it any more.'

'I hope not,' said Harry. 'We've promised Mrs. O'Connor we won't; and Dick and I are going to be father and brother to Dermot in the future. Aren't we, Dick?'

'Yes, indeed we are.'

'Well, thin, it's a pair of wild relations he'll be afther havin',' said Pat, laughing. 'But who put up that fine arch over the gate? It's just downright beautiful.'

'Harry and I did,' said Dick triumphantly. 'The little girls gathered the flowers and leaves, and we tied them together. Then John helped us to put it up.'

'Bedad, thin, it's well done. But, listen, Misther Dick; I thought I heard the sound of carriage-wheels.'

'So you did! so you did! Here they come! Hurrah! hurrah! Now, Baba, right to the front. Lesbia, Topsy, Nora, range yourselves all in a row, and the minute the carriage appears set up a loud cheer of welcome.'

The children did as desired, and with eager smiling faces stood waiting for the happy moment to arrive. The beautiful waving trees hid the carriage from their view, but the sound of wheels could be distinctly heard, and they knew the glad sight that would soon meet their eyes.

'Hurrah! hurrah! Here they are! here they are!' shouted Dick. 'Now for your cheers! now for your cheers!'

And then all the little voices were raised in hearty welcome, as the carriage drove in under the triumphal arch, and Dermot and Snowdrop were seen smiling and bowing to their friends.

'Oh, joy, joy! At home once more,' cried Dermot; and, springing from his seat beside his mother, he flew from one little sister to another, hugging them in rapturous delight.

'Snowdrop, Snowdrop, we are all so glad to see you safe back from the gipsies,' cried Nora. 'But, oh dear, where are all your lovely curls?'

'I don't know, dear, and I don't care,' said Snowdrop gaily. 'Sally cut them off, but I didn't much mind. But oh, Nora! it is nice to see you all again. Dermot and I were so miserable with that dreadful woman.'

'Yes, dear, I'm sure you were; and we all cried so much when we found you were lost.'

'And so did we. But, Nora, isn't my mamma a darling?' and she clung to her mother's hand. 'I am so afraid she will go away, or that I shall get lost again.'

'Oh, you must not do that, Snow. Must she, Aunt Eleanor?' asked Nora, looking up shyly at her aunt.

'No, dear, indeed she must not. Dermot and she have promised never to wander away by themselves any more,' said Mrs. Elton, smiling. 'And I hope she will make friends with you, Nora, for you look a wise little girl.'

'Oh, but Dermot calls me a baby, and, then, Snowdrop doesn't care to play with me.'

'I shall never call you a baby any more, Nora dear,' said Dermot, putting his arm round her. 'I used to long for a sight of your dear little face when I was dragging about through those noisy streets in London. Didn't I, Snow?'

'Indeed you did. But oh, Dermy, don't talk about those dreadful days,' and the little one nestled up close to her mother's side.

'And now, my friends, I think we had better get ready for dinner,' said Mr. O'Connor. 'I feel as if I wanted mine, after my long journey. What do you think, George?'

'I quite agree with you,' said Mr. Elton, smiling. 'Eleanor, you can make acquaintance with the little people to-morrow.'

'Run off, darlings, and get Dermot and Snowdrop their tea,' said Mrs. O'Connor brightly. 'Come, Eleanor, I will take you to your room.'

'Very well. But, oh! it makes me so happy to see all their merry faces. I feel as if I never could have another sorrow, now that my Snowdrop has been given back to me.'

'God has been very good to us both, dear,' said Mrs. O'Connor, in a low voice. 'We can never, never thank Him enough for sending the children safely home, as He has done. When I think of how wonderfully they escaped from the hands of that mad woman, my heart is filled with gratitude to our good and merciful God;' and, putting her arm round her sister, she drew her upstairs.

'Dermot,' said Harry O'Brien, 'Dick and I are glad to see you back; but—but we want to beg your

pardon and tell you how sorry we are for laughing at you so much.'

'Yes,' said Dick, 'we are very sorry.'

'Oh,' said Dermot, giving each of them a hand, 'do not fret about that. I was a foolish boy to mind you. I thought I knew a lot of things I didn't know, and so did not like to be laughed at. Papa says that's all conceit and vanity. I'm going to get over all that, for those few days in London showed me that I was a silly fellow, and knew nothing; so you may laugh at me as much as you like.'

'You're a brave little chap,' cried the boys, shaking his hands; 'and we hope we'll be great friends from this day forward.'

'Yes, indeed we shall,' he said, smiling. 'Mother says I may go with you as much as I like—or, at least, when you'll have me.'

'Oh, we'll have you fast enough,' cried Harry; 'and it's very kind of your mamma to say you may go with us. She's been very good to us lately, and since she's been our friend we are not half so wild. But it's hard luck on fellows not having a mother: ours died when we were ever so small.'

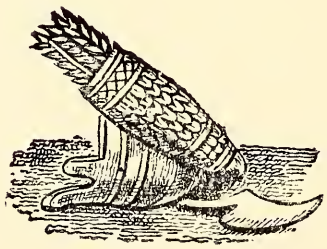
'Yes, indeed it's hard,' cried Dermot, and his blue eyes filled with tears. 'I never knew how much I loved my darling mother till I lost her.'

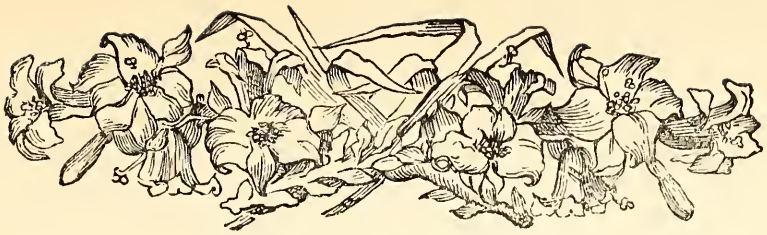
'Dermot, Nora says tea is ready,' whispered Snowdrop, slipping her little arm round her cousin. 'Will you come, dear?'

'Yes, go, Masther Dermot,' said Pat, shaking the boy warmly by the hand. 'I'll say good evenin' an' God bless ye. But, afore we part, I'll give ye one

word of advice. Don't take no more *short-cuts*, an' if ye do, take them alone. Don't go draggin' that little girleen into any more troubles and vexations.'

'No, Pat, indeed I shall not,' said Dermot firmly. 'From this day I will have no more to do with what Aunt Eleanor calls "THE STRANGE ADVENTURES OF LITTLE SNOWDROP."'





THE TALE OF A GREEN COAT.

KEVAN was going to the fair ; his mother could not go with him, but some friends were to bear him company, and he was to ride into Wicklow on a quiet old donkey, that had belonged to the Widow O'Brien for many long years.

Mrs. O'Brien was a person of thrifty habits. Her cottage, though small, was clean and comfortable ; her little plot of ground well cultivated ; and her only son, Kevin, the neatest boy in the village school.

Now, Kevin was ten years old, and his mother's dol. She was proud of his fair curling hair, his dark-blue eyes, his rosy cheeks and straight little figure. In all the country-side she thought there was not such another child to be seen, and as Kevin was ever in her company, she soon filled his little mind with the same idea. There were doubtless good, nice boys to be found amongst his companions ; he did not deny that ; but the handsomest and best was certainly Kevin O'Brien.

Mrs. O'Brien was poor, and often found it very hard to gather together the few pounds necessary for the payment of her rent ; but no matter what her troubles

were, Kevin was never allowed to suffer, and the good woman did without many comforts herself, that she might be able to buy boots and stockings for her darling boy.

So when she heard there was to be a fair in the town, she promised to let him go, and in order that he should surprise the neighbours by his beauty and elegance, she made him a beautiful new coat. It was green, not bright, but still distinctly green, with bone buttons of a slightly darker hue.

'Sure it's yourself looks lovely, Kevin, machree,' she cried, as she knelt before him in admiration and delight. 'There won't be another like ye in the whole fair. It's pleased I am wid ye this day, and if it wasn't that I'm that busy that I don't know which way to turn first, I'd go wid ye, just to see the looks that'll be cast upon ye. It's mighty jealous they'll all be, I'm thinkin'.'

And she pulled down the coat at the back; arranged the bow at his neck; twisted the fair curls once more on her fingers, and turned the boy round and round that she might see how he looked from every point of view.

'You're a beauty an' no mistake, my Kevin!' she said, hugging him to her breast and covering him with kisses. 'There's many a grand lady would give half her fortune to have such a purty boy for her son. I'm just right-down proud to be yer mother.'

'For shame, Mrs. O'Brien! It makes me blush to hear you talk,' said a voice at her elbow, and, looking up indignantly, the widow met the eyes of the village schoolmaster fixed upon her in stern displeasure.

'An' why for shame, Misther Flanagan?' she asked, springing to her feet. 'Would ye not allow a mother to be proud of her only son?'

'Certainly,' he answered gravely, 'if that son were good, clever and industrious. But I would not allow a mother to dress her child up like a monkey and puff him up with vanity, because the Lord has given him a pair of blue eyes and a healthy colour in his cheeks.'

'Sure ye're only an old bachelor, Misther Flanagan, an' ye can't understand the feelin's of a mother. But if ye haven't a heart of stone in yer breast, can ye look at that child an' say he's not the purtiest ye ever saw?'

'He's well enough,' he answered gruffly. 'But there's plenty others just as good-looking; and what's the value of a pretty face to a boy like that? Teach him to be honest and hard-working. Let him bear the ups and downs of life like yourself, and leave fashionable coats like that to his betters.'

'But doesn't the green suit his fair skin, the darlin'? An' look at his illigant figure. Och, Misther Flanagan, sure he's the very cut of a little Irish gintleman this day.'

'Humph, I'm sorry for the Irish gentlemen. No, no, Mrs. O'Brien; Kevin is a child of the people. There's no coat, green or—or blue that'll make him a gentleman; and take my advice—it's for your sake and his I give it—leave the boy alone. Don't puff him up with nonsense. Don't flatter him any more. Flattery is a poison that encourages pride. If you go on as you are doing, the child will turn out badly.

You'll make him vain, conceited and selfish, take my word for it.'

'Go along wid ye, Misther Flanagan, an' lave prachin' to Father Murphy,' Mrs. O'Brien said angrily. 'Kevin is goin' to the fair wid the Moriartys, and he'll be the purtiest boy along the road, I'm thinkin'. There won't be such another anywhere about.'

'A little cockatoo!' cried the schoolmaster, with a scornful laugh. 'A nice sight he'll look, riding along with a party of poor farmers in a green coat like this!'

'It's very purty, Misther Flanagan,' said Kevin hotly; 'I like the colour, and so does mammy, an' we don't care what ye think.'

'A chip of the old block, Master Kevin—you'll come to no good—I give you warning. But go your own way. I'll say no more.'

And turning on his heel, Mr. Flanagan strode away.

Mrs. O'Brien smoothed her ruffled plumes, and recovering her usually placid temper, gave Kevin a few last words of advice about his ride, and put some slices of bread for his lunch and three or four pence, with which to buy cakes at the fair, into his pocket. Then, embracing him tenderly, she said:

'Away ye go, my purty boy. Ye'll have fine fun, I hope; an' see that ye're good on the way.'

'Oh yis, mammy, I'll be that, niver fear. Sure I'm not altogether the spalpeen Misther Flanagan makes me out?'

'Indeed ye're not. He's an ould fool; an' ye're—well, ye're the beautifullest boy in the village.'

Kevin laughed gaily, and, jumping on the donkey's

back, kissed his hand to his mother and galloped off down the road.

On leaving the cottage, Kevin turned, as he had been told to do, towards the farm, where he was to meet his friends, the Moriartys. But as he went along he suddenly remembered the schoolmaster's words :

'A nice sight he'll look, riding beside poor farmers in a green coat like this !'

'He was quite right,' thought Kevin ; 'I'm quite too well dressed to ride with the Moriartys. They're a poor set. Sure I know the way to the fair—Uncle Pat will be there waitin' for me—an' it's real nonsense for a fine boy like me to be wantin' people to take care of me. I don't wan bit ; go on, Ned, we'll show them all what clever fellows we are.'

And, giving the donkey a blow with his stick, he turned down a side-road away from the farm.

In going alone Kevin was disobeying his mother, who had given him strict injunctions to go with the Moriartys. But the spirit of pride had taken possession of him, and he forgot everything but the figure he would cut when he arrived at the fair in his beautiful new coat.

In order to avoid the farm and not meet the Moriartys, he was obliged to leave the direct route and make a long round.

'But that is nothing,' he said; 'I'll make Neddy go a little faster, an' I'll get there as soon as any of them.'

So he coaxed the donkey into a fast canter, and, sitting well back in his saddle, his head proudly erect,

his arms well rounded, and his toes turned out, he passed quickly through the village.

He looked a pretty boy, certainly, with his glowing cheeks and fine manly carriage. But alas, alas! he was full of pride.

As he rode along, he met a friend, one of his companions at school and at play.

'Good-mornin', Kevin! why, how grand ye are, to be sure!'

Kevin paid not the smallest attention—pretended not to see him—and went on as fast as he could. This boy was the son of a poor woman, and was very shabbily dressed. He had patches on his jacket and on the knees of his trousers.

As Kevin rode past he turned and ran after him.

'Hullo! Kevin, where are ye ridin' to like that?'

But Kevin made no reply, and when the little boy came up beside him, he made the donkey swerve suddenly, and knocked him up against a wall.

'Bad luck to ye, Kevin O'Brien! But it's you that's high and mighty this mornin',' cried the boy indignantly; 'ye weren't so proud the other day, when Paddy Flynn was batin' ye, and I came to help ye.'

Then, as Kevin made no answer and he began to lose his breath, the child dropped behind, and donkey and rider soon disappeared from sight.

And yet Kevin was not generally ill-natured—quite the contrary. He seldom troubled his head about the number of patches worn by his friends. But, then, Kevin was not always arrayed in such a splendid green coat. Dressed in this fashion, one required to be particular.

So on he went. In order to reach the road he had determined to take, he was obliged to go down a very narrow lane. As he rode along he saw an old man coming slowly towards him. He was bent with rheumatism, and leaned heavily on his stick. Now, there was barely room for the donkey on the path, and to make way for the poor cripple Kevin should have drawn up to the side.

But this did not enter his thoughts, or, if it did, was rejected with scorn. And on he pushed, nearly upsetting the helpless creature, and, kicking him violently with his foot as he rode past, hurried on without a word of apology.

The old man was very angry.

'Arrah, thin, but yer the ill-mannered boy!' he shouted. 'Sure a child that doesn't respect gray hairs will have no luck through life.'

But Kevin only laughed.

'What fools these old beggars are!' he thought. 'As if he shouldn't have got out of the way, when he saw a young gintleman ridin' up in an illigant green coat. But they've no manners—that's a fact.'

And the boy rode gaily on, singing and whistling, in time to his donkey's footsteps.

It was about ten o'clock in the morning. The sky was almost without a cloud—a beautiful clear, deep blue. The sun was shining brilliantly, and the air was warm and balmy, almost too warm for such an early hour. But Kevin did not notice this, so absorbed was he in the thought of his own importance, riding alone into Wicklow, arrayed in a charming green coat.

And yet the country through which he passed was well worth a glance of admiration. On before him rose the Wicklow hills, with their rich purple heather and their stretches of shady wood. Beside the road ran a little brook, whose waters looked cool and fresh in the burning sunshine. Pretty wild-flowers grew on every side, and hundreds of birds carolled joyously amongst the branches of the trees.

But the roads were dusty; and Kevin's proud soul was wrung with anguish on seeing the treasured coat grow white and shabby, as the dust settled gradually upon it.

'Arrah, thin, the Lord love ye, honey, for sure yer a fine gintleman, an' would ye be afther given' me a penny to buy a bit of bread?' said a voice, and, looking around, Kevin saw a young man with only one arm and one leg, half lying, half sitting on the grass. His crutches were on the ground beside him, and he seemed very tired.

'Fine gintleman.' The boy's heart gave a bound, and his cheek flushed. Here was a man of sense. He would certainly give him a penny.

'But no,' whispered pride, 'if you do you'll have hardly any money to spend at the fair; and no one will think much of you then, in spite of your fine coat.'

So, turning a deaf ear to the man's earnest appeal, he rode on as fast as he could. But his conscience pricked him for his want of charity, and he felt really sorry that he had been so unkind.

'But sure what could I do,' he reasoned. 'A gintleman in a new green coat must have money to spend,

so I had to refuse. It would look badly to see me go round the fair like a beggar.'

So it would, Kevin, my boy. But who knows—perhaps after all you may never get there.

A few steps farther on he met a boy holding a little girl, with bare feet and a ragged old frock, by the hand.

'Pat, asthore, I'm so hungry,' cried the child.

'Wait a bit, darlin', and maybe we might find somethin' to ate.'

'I'm so hungry, Pat; so hungry.'

Kevin heard all, and remembered the slices of bread and butter in his pocket.

'One of these would be a breakfast for that child, an' sure I wouldn't miss it. But no, I may feel hungry before I reach Wicklow, and sure that would niver do.'

So he closed his heart and rode proudly on.

Next, he came upon a poor old woman, who had walked down from the hillside, where she had been gathering sticks. Exhausted with heat and fatigue, she had been obliged to drop her heavy bundle and rest for a while. But now, as she wished to shoulder it again, she found she could not manage to do so alone.

'The Lord love ye, my boy,' she cried, as Kevin approached. 'An' will ye give me a han'? Just jump down for a minute an' put this on me back.'

'I can't. I'm in a hurry,' he answered, digging his heels into the poor donkey's sides and riding quickly on.

'The idea of such a thing!' he muttered. 'Fancy

me, Kevin O'Brien, in my lovely new coat, looking every inch a gintleman, liftin' a bundle of dirty sticks on to an old crature's back. Sure its funnin' me she was.'

Thus poor Kevin thrust the spirit of charity aside, and grew every moment more completely absorbed in himself and his own perfections.

Meanwhile, the heat had become more intense. Big clouds gathered round, and crept slowly up, hiding gradually the clear blue sky. Then they came on more swiftly, in heavy dark masses, and in the distance the low rumbling sound of thunder was soon distinctly heard.

This frightened Kevin, and he whacked the donkey to make him go faster. But the animal suddenly grew obstinate. He was hot ; he felt that it was only a child he had on his back, and canter he would not. He was not in a hurry to go to the fair. There was a storm coming, and he did not care to tire himself too much.

Kevin gave him a blow across the ears, and broke his stick in two. This, and the fear of getting his beautiful green coat spoilt by the rain, filled him with rage, and he kicked and shouted to make the donkey go on.

Almost blind with terror at the thoughts of what might happen should the storm break before he reached his uncle's house in Wicklow, Kevin was forced, much against his will, to go at a very leisurely pace indeed, for Neddy would not be hurried. At last they overtook a boy who was leading a horse, carrying a quantity of large dead branches. He was

going very slowly; for the animal's load was extremely heavy. Seeing this, Kevin tried to pass them by, but the wood stuck out, filling the road from right to left. The boy drew his horse a little to the side, and waited to allow the donkey to ride past.

However, whether it was that Kevin did not look where he was going, or whether there was really no room for him to pass, I know not. But suddenly he ran full tilt against a long sharp branch. A scream —a tear—and the sleeve of the beautiful green coat was torn right across. A pretty sight he would look at the fair now.

All Kevin's vanity was up in arms—all his anger was turned upon the offending boy, and, raising the piece of broken stick that he still carried in his hand, he struck him violently on the cheek. The poor child's face was scratched, and he uttered a cry of horror. But Kevin, in his rage, had given Ned a harder blow than usual, and the donkey started off at a mad gallop down the road.

The sky had been getting darker and darker. At intervals, strong gusts of wind came whirling past, carrying dust and leaves along with them. Then followed a heavy calm, and across the heavens flashed brilliant sheets of lightning. Kevin looked wildly round. The tall trees shook and creaked in the storm. Not a bird was to be heard; not an insect to be seen—all animals, big or little, had hidden themselves away—not a living thing was visible. The old donkey lifted his head and pricked up his ears at the strange noises that were going on, and Kevin suddenly realized that, in trying to avoid the

Moriartys, he had taken a terribly long road—a road that he did not know, and could hardly tell whether it led into Wicklow or not. He had been riding for several hours, he felt sure, and he saw nothing to indicate that he was getting near his destination. And then the storm would soon oblige him to stop. Where? Under some large, wide-spreading tree. That might prevent his getting wet; but meanwhile the fair would go on. His uncle's family would eat their dinner, whilst he stood shivering and miserable by the roadside.

At this moment great drops began to fall.

'I am lost,' cried Kevin; 'I'll be wet through and through. Gee up, Neddy; we must go as fast as we can,' and he struck the donkey on the back with his broken stick.

But once more the donkey was obstinate. He did not seem to feel the blows. He whisked his tail and tossed his head; but he did not hasten his footsteps. His coat was of no value; it was old and well-worn—a little rain would do it no harm. In fact, he found the damp very agreeable after the burning heat of the last few hours; so he sniffed the fresh air in evident enjoyment, and walked quietly on his way.

Kevin was almost beside himself with rage. He could not bear the thoughts of getting his new coat destroyed with rain, and he knew not what to do. Presently, however, to his great delight, he saw a large, shady-looking tree, and, turning Neddy with much difficulty, he managed to force him under its spreading branches. He was not an instant too soon.

Down came the rain in torrents; peal after peal of thunder echoed through the hills, and seemed to shake the whole country-side; whilst vivid sheets of lightning flashed in quick succession round the terrified boy.

White with terror, Kevin clung on to the donkey's back; expecting that every moment would be his last, he forgot all about the beautiful green coat, and prayed fervently to God, begging Him to have mercy on him, a poor helpless boy, and send him safe home to his mother.

But the storm still raged on. The rain fell fast and furious, sweeping down the road in perfect torrents. By degrees the leaves of the trees became saturated, and heavy streams of water soon poured in, drenching poor Kevin, and soaking the green coat through and through. Then he slipped off his donkey, and dragging him in close to the trunk of the tree, tried to get a little more shelter for them both. But this change of position was of no use, for the rain seemed only to increase in violence, and flowed in upon him with renewed vigour.

However, after a time, it suddenly ceased.

'Now,' thought Kevin joyfully, 'I must make a start. I can't be far from Wicklow. An' sure if Ned will just go a bit fast we may get there soon. I'm well wet, but sure it's clean water after all, an' won't do my coat much harm.'

So saying, he managed with much trouble to clamber up on his donkey's back, and with a few coaxing words, and a well-directed blow or two from his stick, he urged the animal out on to the road.

But alas! it was hard work getting along. On all sides were seas of mud and pools of water; Neddy slipped one moment, and stuck fast in the soft ground the next.

Kevin was in despair. It seemed quite impossible to get on quickly, and the rain would surely begin again soon.

The poor boy let the reins fall from his hands, and gazed sadly round.

What a change since the morning, both in him and the weather. Where was the bright sunshine? Where was his pride? Gone—all gone. He was no longer proud. His spirits had fallen. He felt weary and sad at heart.

But presently he gave a shout of joy.

'That's the church steeple of Wicklow. Sure I know it well,' he cried. 'Hurra! hurra! we're nearer than I thought. Hi, up, Neddy, an' sure we'll soon get there.'

And, for once, Neddy graciously vouchsafed to obey his orders, and made valiant efforts to increase his pace.

'That's right, my boy—sure ye're not such a bad donkey after all,' cried Kevin, his spirits rising at thoughts of soon reaching his uncle's house. 'Just keep to that trot an' we'll soon get to the end of our ride.'

All at once the donkey stopped short. Nothing would induce him to move. Down the side of the mountain, rushing and roaring, came a torrent of water, and flowing out across the road, it made a deep, wide stream. Into this Neddy would not go.

Neither coaxing nor beating would make him put even one foot into the running water. He was terrified at the sight, and refused obstinately to carry his master over it. What was to be done? And to make matters worse, the rain began to fall again.

'What a miserable wretch, I am,' cried Kevin, struggling to the ground, and running under another tree. 'I'll surely die of cold and wet. Ah! why didn't I do as mammy told me, an' go wid the Moriartys? Sure no matter what sort of a coat a fellow has on—if—if it's only dry an'——'

And covering his face with his hands he burst into tears.

The hours passed over, one after the other—those of the morning and those of the afternoon; yet poor Kevin was kept a prisoner under the dripping branches of the tree. He ate his bread and butter and felt thankful to have it, although it seemed a very unsatisfactory meal compared to the fine dinner he would have had at his Uncle Pat's.

'And now,' he thought, as the daylight began to fade, 'the only thing to do is to go home. Neddy will never take me across that stream, an' sure I'd get my feet wet worse nor they are if I walked. So I'll just go back to mammy an' get her to dry me an' give me something hot to drink. Come, Neddy, come along, me boy.'

And he turned to look for the donkey, but he was nowhere to be seen.

'Gone! Oh, ye unkind—ye unnatural baste!' cried the boy, 'to desert me like this—me that always gives ye corn an' carrots; gone home to yer stable an'

lavin' me to die by the roadside. Oh, Kevin O'Brien, it's the sad death will be yours.'

And, overcome with misery, he sobbed aloud.

Neddy's desertion at this critical moment was indeed a sad blow, for, tired and weary as the boy was, he knew he could never walk all those long miles back to the cottage. He now understood, but too late, unfortunately, the folly of his conduct, and he saw that he was only receiving just punishment for his faults. He repented now, but alas! it was too late.

As he sat alone, wet and miserable, under the tree, he seemed to see all the people he had met and treated so cruelly during the day; and they all looked at him, and laughed scornfully as they passed him by, saying:

'Too late, proud boy! Too late!'

And all this time night was slowly but surely coming on; every moment it grew darker and colder. The waterfall close by made an awful roaring sound, that grew more and more terrible as the light disappeared; the heavy rain had ceased, 'tis true, but the air was damp and chill, and poor Kevin was nearly dead with fatigue, terror, and hunger.

'Arrah, sure if I'd just been contint to go quiet an' asy wid those respectable men, I'd have been safe at Uncle Pat's be now. Och, it was all your pride, Kevin O'Brien, an' this bit of a green coat. Troth, Misther Flanagan was right, an' it wasn't fit for the likes of me at all.'

And, careless of coat and everything else, he lay back on the wet grass, and groaned in his anguish.

But suddenly a wild shriek, then a shrill whistle, sounded through the air. It was now pitch dark. Nothing could be seen at the smallest distance, and Kevin shivered with fright. Again the cry was heard; and at the same instant the child saw a flaming torch going and coming from one side of the road to the other. In his present state of mind, his heart full of sorrow, his imagination excited by the events of the day, the melancholy noise of the waterfall, and the horrible darkness that surrounded him, Kevin was nervous and easily alarmed. So when he saw this moving flame, and heard the piercing cries that accompanied it, he thought it must be something supernatural. He remembered in an instant all the terrible stories that had been told him of ghosts and goblins. His soul was now torn with remorse; he was weak from want of food; and he felt convinced that some dreadful chastisement was about to fall upon him, and that this wandering torch announced its approach.

As this awful certainty grew upon him, he trembled like a leaf; his teeth chattered, and his hair stood on end with horror and dismay.

Nearer and nearer came the strange, mysterious light, and the deep, angry voice sounded louder and more fierce. Kevin grew faint; a cold perspiration broke out all over him. The whole country seemed on fire, and hideous noises rang wildly in his ears. Then suddenly a large black form knocked up against him. The flames seemed to envelope him on all sides. He felt their cruel scorching heat upon his face—their glare in his eyes; and with a shriek he fell back unconscious on the grass.

How long he remained in this state he never knew. But when he recovered his senses he found himself in a strange position.

'What can be happenin'?' he asked himself; 'for sure if I didn't know I was sittin' alone on the wet grass, I'd think I was on a fast-trottin' horse. Kevin O'Brien, are ye mad or dramin'?'

But Kevin was neither mad nor dreaming, and he soon discovered that he was, indeed, on horseback, for he was bumped uncomfortably over the stones, and he distinctly heard the noise of the animal's hoofs upon the road. At the same time he found that he was closely wrapped up in a large heavy cloak—even his face was covered—so when he opened his eyes he could see nothing, and knew not where he was. His attitude was painful; his legs were cramped; his head hung down in an unpleasant manner. But he was afraid to move; for through the thick stuff that was round him he felt that he was tight clasped in the arms of a big, strong man.

'Oh, my God, take care of me!' murmured Kevin. 'Do not let this strange creature destroy me. I feel wild wid fright and terror—for sure, I don't know where I'm goin'.'

And then he lay very still, listening eagerly for some sound of life. But nothing was heard but the noise of the horse's feet as he trotted quickly along.

Presently the horseman moved a little, and the cloak in which Kevin was enveloped fell aside, allowing him to get a peep at the outer world. It was night—dark night—but here and there amongst the heavy clouds, blown swiftly along by the wind, the

child saw a bright star shining down upon him. This was all he could see, however, for his face was turned up towards the sky.

'What will become of me?' he said to himself over and over again. 'Oh, mammy, mammy! shall I ever see ye agin?'

And on went the horse—faster and faster—till he seemed to fly like the wind.

Terrified at his swiftness, Kevin clutched the horseman by the arm.

'Keep quiet, boy,' cried the stranger, in a loud, rough voice.

'Who are you?' whispered Kevin, trembling at his own audacity.

'I am the Spirit of Pride,' replied the horseman. 'The Spirit of Pride to whom you belong, and I am taking you off with me.'

'Och, sure, I was proud this mornin', but all that's done for. I'm not proud now, an' sure I'll niver, niver be proud no more. Take me home to mammy—poor lone mammy—and I'll—I'll—be good—surr I will, indeed.'

And the poor child began to sob aloud.

On went the horse—now in a trot, then in a gallop; and Kevin was sore and bruised with the constant bumping.

'What a beautiful green coat you had on this morning,' said the man, laughing. 'A fine gentleman you looked, Master Kevin.'

'Oh, that hateful coat! I'll never put it on agin—niver. But—please—oh—please—I want to go home to mammy.'

'You must try to be sorry for your wicked pride, then. You must be humble and modest, my boy.'

'I am—I am—I'm sorry for all I did bad and unkind to-day.'

And then, to show how true was his repentance, he went over everything that he had done, said, or thought since the morning. He did not spare himself. He told all—from the moment when he put on his new coat until he fainted under the tree. He did not forget to mention any of the people he had met, nor to point out his uncharitable manner towards them. He sobbed and cried as he told his story; and whilst he spoke the horse trotted briskly forward, and the strange horseman never uttered a word.

A long silence followed, and then all at once the horse stopped, Kevin was seized upon by two soft, warm arms, and, when the big cloak was pulled quickly aside, he found himself at home, his mother bending over him in an ecstasy of joy.

The terrible horseman had been no other than Mr. Flanagan, the village schoolmaster.

'But, mammy, how did you an' Mr. Flanagan know I wasn't at the fair wid the Moriartys?' asked Kevin, after a time.

'Sure, when Neddy came trottin' home by himself we guessed that somethin' was wrong,' she cried, kissing him lovingly. 'I flew to the farm; no one had seen you there, an' Mr. Flanagan said he felt sure ye'd gone by yerself. He said it was all yer pride, Kevin, asthore, an' blamed me—for—fillin' yer head wid such nonsense.'

Kevin flung himself into her arms.

'No, mammy, it wasn't you. Mr. Flanagan mustn't say that; but it was my pride, an' sure if he hadn't found me I'd have died on the roadside.'

'He's a good man, Kevin, machree, an' we must mind what he tells us in the future,' she said solemnly. 'If it hadn't been for him, what would have become of me this blessed day? For sure when I was distracted, not knowin' where ye had gone, he got on his horse, took a lantern an' his little dog, Spot, an' went off to look for ye.'

'An' that same lantern frightened me well, mammy. An' sure Mr. Flanagan gave me a lesson—saying he was the Spirit of Pride, an' that I belonged to him. But I'll give it all up, mammy; I'll niver be proud no more.'

'Be that as it may, me darlin', it's me that's thankful to see ye safe home,' she cried, hugging him tightly to her breast.

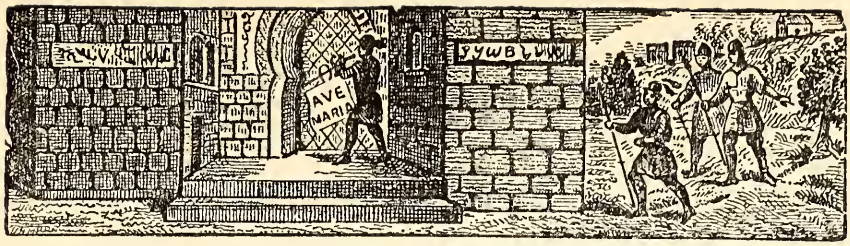
Then a big fire was made up in the kitchen, and having changed all his clothes, Kevin sat down to his supper.

'I'll niver wear that green coat agin, mammy,' he said, 'for it would niver bring me good luck. But I'll hang it up on a nail over my bed, an' ivery time I look at it I'll pray that I may niver be so wicked an' proud as I was to-day.'

'Capital, Kevin, my boy—capital!' cried Mr. Flanagan, who entered the cottage just in time to hear the child's good resolution. 'Your manner and words make me feel sure that you will never be so proud again. After all, this has been a happy day for you. You did not go to the fair; you lost a good

dinner at your uncle's, but you have corrected a fault, got rid of a vice; that is worth any amount of trouble, and I congratulate you and your mother.'

And so ends the tale of Kevin's green coat. I hope none of my readers will ever have the misfortune to wear one like it.



A BUNCH OF VIOLETS.

A SHARP wind was blowing from the east; the air was heavy and dark; and as Meg stood at the corner of Oxford Circus, her basket of violets upon her arm, her little face was pinched and blue with cold. Nevertheless, she was very cheerful, and hopped gaily from one foot to the other, as she called in a shrill voice: 'Vi'lets! Sweet vi'lets! Penny a bunch! Vi'lets!'

The child was thinly clad. Her frock was short, and patched in many places. But her face was clean, and her brown eyes and curly hair looked pretty and bright, peeping out from under her old tattered hat.

'You're in wonderful spirits, Meg,' said a miserable-looking woman who stood near, arranging the flowers in her basket. 'But, then, though you do cough a bit, you don't suffer from rheumatics and aches in your bones as I do.'

Meg laughed.

'No, I've no rheumatics. But my bones ache sometimes, when granny beats me.'

'Does she beat you? Well, that's a shame! I'd leave her if I was you. She ain't really your granny.'

'No, but I've lived with her these five years—since mother died, and I was six. And'—sighing—'I wouldn't know where to go if I *did* leave her. Besides, you know, when I bring home the money right, granny's kind enough.'

'So she ought to be. You're a good child, reg'lar and honest. Not like some—buy a bunch of vi'lets, lady!'

And she darted into the crowd after someone who looked a likely purchaser.

As she disappeared, Meg's little face grew sad, and for a moment she forgot her violets, and began to think.

'Aren't they lovely! They smell so sweet, and they look so fresh! Oh, Kitty, how I wish I had a penny!'

And a small boy, with a satchel over his back, laid his fingers caressingly upon a bunch of violets in Meg's basket.

'Tommy, Tommy, don't touch them!' cried Kitty. 'You know we can't buy them. Father's too poor, now that he's out of work, to give us pennies for flowers. Come along, and don't look at them.'

'But mother would love a bunch. It's her birthday, you know. Think what a delicious surprise for her to-night! Think of the smell in our room! It would be exquisite.'

'What's the use of thinking? We can't have them. So come on, Tommy, or we'll be late for school.'

But Tommy would not move.

'Little girl,' he asked imploringly, 'would you—could you'—blushing and stammering—'give me a

few—just a few violets? Mother's been ill, and—but I have no money.'

'Tommy, for shame!' cried his sister. 'You shouldn't beg. The little girl is poor. Come to school.'

Meg looked at him sadly, and shook her head.

'Yes,' she said, 'I'm poor, very poor. And granny counts the pennies. She beats me if I haven't enough.'

Tommy's face fell, and tears came into his eyes. He had set his heart on having the violets, and could not drag himself away.

'Poor mother's been so ill!' he said, with a sob. 'She'd just——'

'Then she shall have them,' cried Meg suddenly. 'Here, little boy, take this bunch.'

And she thrust one of the largest into his hand.

Tommy seized it eagerly, and, with sparkling eyes, exclaimed:

'Oh, thank you! thank you!' and ran off down the street.

'You should not have given it to him,' said Kitty. 'You'll suffer for your kindness, I'm afraid, little girl.'

'No, no: I hope not. Maybe it'll bring me good luck. Granny shall never know. I've thought of a capital plan for that. So don't you fret.'

Kitty's face brightened at once.

'I'm so glad! Thank you very much. It will be a rare treat for mother to smell those sweet flowers. Good-bye!'

And she ran after her brother.

Kind, unselfish little Meg! She felt happy as she

watched the children run away with her violets, and thought of the pleasant surprise they had in store for their poor sick mother.

'What a fool granny would think me!' she said to herself after a while. 'But *she* shan't suffer. The bunches are going like the wind. Everyone seems to want violets this morning. That bunch was my own, my very own. So I had a right to give it, and go hungry if I chose.'

The price of one bunch was allowed Meg, with which to buy her dinner. But in her generous sympathy, moved by Tommy's entreaties, she had decided to give him the flowers and go hungry all day. And as she saw the look of pleasure in his face, she felt glad that she had made the sacrifice, and resumed her cry of 'Vi'lets! Sweet vi'lets!' with a light heart.

But as the day wore on, Meg grew tired and weary. Having eaten nothing since her early, meagre breakfast, she began to feel faint towards the afternoon, and was at last obliged to lean against a lamp-post for support. The hours seemed very, very long. The cold became intense, and her cough was troublesome. She wished she could creep home, and lie down until granny would come in from her day's begging, and give her some supper. But three bunches of violets still remained in her basket. Till these were gone, and the pence they represented in her pocket, she dared not return to the wretched den she called her home.

It grew late; the daylight waned; and as evening came on, a thick, drizzling rain began to fall, and

poor, thinly-clad Meg was soon wet to the skin. Yet she lingered sadly about, hoping to dispose of all her flowers. The streets were still crowded ; but umbrellas were up, and men, women, and children hurried along, their one thought being to escape the rain, and reach their destination as quickly as they could. No one noticed the little girl. It was not the weather in which to stand at the street corner to buy violets, and the passers-by pushed on their way, without a thought for the weary child, whose feeble voice was scarcely audible above the noisy din of the great city. And so, as time wore on, Meg's heart sank low ; for she saw that she must face granny with the three bunches still unsold. She trembled violently, and tears sprang to her eyes, as she remembered how she had been treated the last time such a thing occurred.

'And I'm so hungry and so weak I don't know how I'll stand the blows,' she murmured. 'That bunch of violets has brought me no luck after all. Ah! well, it made that sick woman happy, perhaps. But, dear—oh, dear, I'm so hungry !'

Then, as the lights appeared in the various shops, Meg suddenly found herself face to face with a window full of cakes and buns of every description. How delicious they looked ! How eagerly the poor famished child longed for one ! In her pocket were several pennies. She heard them jingle together. And as her fingers closed round one, and she drew it forth, she resolved to enter the shop, and buy one of the milk-white scones that looked so delightfully tempting.

With her hand upon the door, she paused, uttered a sharp cry, and, like some hunted animal, turned and

fled. This money was granny's: she had given away her own. Every penny missing when she gave an account of her day meant an additional blow; and this evening she felt she could not bear a beating.

'If I could only get rid of these three bunches I might go home. Oh!' she cried, 'why won't somebody buy them from me?'

But nobody heard and nobody heeded; and, dragging her weary limbs along, she turned out of Oxford Street, and wandered down towards the Langham Hotel.

'Rich people going out to dinner sometimes want a flower,' she said, and, approaching the door of the great hotel, she looked anxiously up the broad marble staircase. But the porter, seeing the pinched white face peering in, came out upon the steps, and roughly called to her to move on.

Frightened at his surly tones, Meg did not venture to speak, and ran as fast as she could down a narrow street. Here all was dark and gloomy. High handsome houses rose on either side, but their blinds were drawn down, and the lamps over the doors sent forth but feeble rays of light. So, not knowing and hardly caring where she went, the little girl walked on. She was weary and sick at heart, and longed for some quiet spot where she might lie down and rest. But the streets were wet, and nowhere could she see a gateway under which to take shelter. At last, to her joy, she saw an open door, and, looking cautiously around, she crept up, and stole quietly into a silent and dimly-lighted church. A few people were scattered about, kneeling with downcast eyes before the

Blessed Sacrament. They did not look up, or notice the little flower-girl ; so, taking courage, she went up the aisle, and sat down upon the steps of Our Lady's altar.

Poor, ignorant Meg looks about her in surprise. She has never been in a Catholic church before, and she wonders what it all means. She gazes at the statue of the Blessed Virgin with the Infant Saviour in her arms, and says half aloud :

'How kind and beautiful she looks, that lady! She must be his mother.'

For Meg remembers how her mother used to love her, and, looking at the statue, she seems to feel those tender arms once more around her ; and as she sits under the shadow of the altar, she grows less hungry, less cold and weary, and a feeling of peace and happiness steals into her heart. Gradually the statue fades away ; and her mother, her face all bright and shining, a kind and beautiful lady by her side, looks at her, and, smiling, beckons her to follow her.

'These will just do for Our Lady's altar. I suppose I may take them all,' said a sweet voice in a low whisper, as Meg awoke from her dream.

And a young girl stooped forward, took the violets from the basket, and, pushing a piece of money into the child's hand, vanished.

Meg looked at the coin. It was a shilling. The blood rushed to her head, and her heart beat violently. She could now buy bread without fear of a scolding. Then suddenly she grew pale and faint. It was a mistake. The violets—there they were in a little glass on the altar—were worth only a penny a bunch.

'Please,' she said, running after the young girl, who just then emerged from the sacristy, 'this—this is too much—and I—have not enough change.'

'You may keep it, dear. And say a prayer for me now. Ask Our Lady to help me.'

'I—I don't know what you mean. I—never—say prayers!' cried Meg faintly.

And then the church seemed to swim round. She clutched a bench and tried to speak; but that sank away from her, and she fell unconscious to the ground.

Twelve months have passed away. It is the Feast of the Immaculate Conception, and on a bed in the Convent of the Sisters of Charity a little girl lies dying. It is Meg. By her side is an altar of Our Lady, and in a small glass a bunch of sweet violets. A young girl, with a beautiful face, and a mass of golden hair, kneels in rapt attention by the bed. Her lips move as though in prayer, and her blue eyes are full of tender, anxious love as she watches the sleeping child.

Presently Meg awakes, and, seeing who is by her side, utters an exclamation of joy:

'My darling,' whispers the watcher, 'are you happy?'

A brilliant smile illuminates the pale face.

'Very,' the child answers. 'Since the day of my First Communion, I have been so happy! I feel no pain, no suffering. My cough is troublesome at times, but that is nothing. The doctor says I shall soon go. And, oh, Miss Marian, I am so glad! I do long to see Our Lord.'

'Yes, pet. And I feel that I envy you. But before *I* go, Meg, I have work to do.'

'But will your father let you?'

'In time, I hope. But you must pray for me, Meg, when you go to heaven. Ask Our Lady to help me. Implore our dear Lord to soften my father's heart.'

Meg turned her eyes lovingly upon the speaker, and laid her transparent hand upon the bowed head.

'Yes,' she whispered; 'my first prayer shall be for you. And very soon you shall be allowed to do what you wish. Before long you will be able to enter the convent. *You* first taught me how to pray. You put me here, where the dear nuns have instructed me, and told me about God and all His goodness. You have helped poor granny for me, and will, I trust, make her, too, a Catholic before she dies. You, dear Miss Marian, have saved me from a cruel, weary life, and made me a happy, happy child. When I tell Our Lord and Our Lady that, they will surely grant my request. Oh! yes, I know they will.'

Meg's voice died away. Marian moistened the parched lips with a little water, and smoothed back the hair from her brow. The sick girl smiled gratefully, but did not speak. Her eyes gently closed, and she fell asleep.

Marian knelt on by her side, praying fervently. Then, as a nun came in to replace her, she pressed a kiss upon the little one's forehead, and stole quietly from the room.

The next morning, when Marian returned from early Mass, a messenger from the convent was wait-

ing for her. Meg was dead. Her pure soul had passed away to heaven.

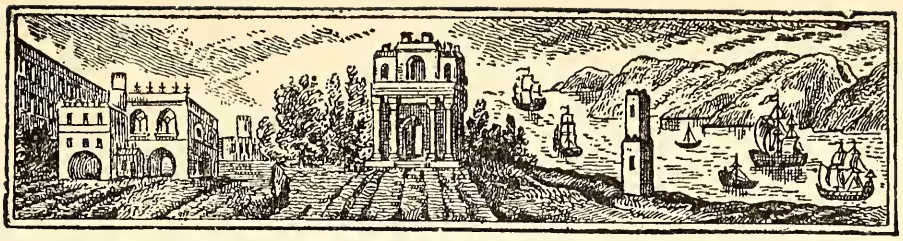
During breakfast, Mr. Hope scarcely spoke to his daughter; but he watched her closely. There were tears in her eyes, and yet her face wore an expression of peace.

'Marian,' he said after a time, 'you have been a good daughter. I shall miss you daily, hourly; but you may go when you please. You have my permission to enter the convent whenever you choose.'

Then, without waiting for a reply, he rose abruptly, and left the room.

Marian fell upon her knees, and, raising her streaming eyes to heaven, gave thanks to God for His goodness and mercy.

The little flower-girl had told her story, and Our Lord had listened, and granted her request. So before the grass on Meg's grave was green, Marian had forsaken her luxurious home, and was wearing the habit she had coveted so long.



LAZY NANCY AND THE FAIRY.

WHEN Nancy Dare was twelve years old, she was tall and strong, but shockingly lazy.

She lived with her mother and tiny sister in a room at the top of a house, in a lane near Soho Square.

Her father had been dead many years; so the little family depended upon the earnings of the poor widow, who worked from morning till night in one of the West End shops.

Upon Nancy's shoulders fell the cares of housekeeping. To her was given the task of washing and dressing Trotty, of sweeping and dusting the room, and preparing the daily meals.

But, alas! she was lazy and careless, and paid but scant attention to any of these duties.

One evening in December she sat dozing by the fire, whilst Trotty lay on the floor, playing with a piece of wood that she had dressed as a doll.

The room was in a state of disorder. The carpet was torn and unswept; the table strewn with dirty plates and knives; the window-blind was soiled and thick with dust; the grate stuffed with ashes; the

hearth full of papers and rags. In a couple of hours the weary mother would come home for supper, and yet Nancy was too lazy to stir even her little finger to make things comfortable for her on her return.

And as the evening came on, and the room grew dark, Nancy closed her eyes and folded her hands upon her knees.

Suddenly a light shone in through the window and illumined the whole place. The girl started to her feet in surprise, and looked about to see where it came from.

Now, the lane in which the Dares lived was very narrow, and, from her place by the fire, Nancy could see straight into the opposite house.

In the room that faced their own she saw a girl of about twelve or thirteen. She had just lighted a lamp, and was placing it on a table in the middle of the floor.

Her face was sweet and pleasant; her hair was brushed tidily back from her brow, and her dress, though poor and much patched, was covered by a clean white apron.

The houses on both sides of the street were exactly the same, the rooms of equal size; but the difference between them in other respects was very marked.

The one into which Nancy now peeped was scrupulously neat. The curtains were fresh and clean; the floor carefully swept; every chair well dusted and in its proper place. A cheerful fire burned in the grate, and the walls were hung with pictures from illustrated papers, prettily framed with scarlet braid.

The girl glanced round her own untidy home, then across at the room on the other side of the lane; and,

as her neighbour approached the window and drew down the blind, she sank back on her chair with a sigh.

'Oh,' she cried, 'how cosy it looks! What a horrid hole this place of ours is! Now, if I had lived at the time when fairies were going about, as they did when Cinderella was in the world, I'd just call to one and say to her, "Please, fairy, make my room as tidy and nice as the one over the way." But there are no fairies nowadays, so I must content myself here for ever. Heigh-ho! what a shabby lodging this is, and what a sight Trotty looks with her black face and old torn frock! However, it can't be helped. There are no fairies, and——'

'Not so fast, Miss Nancy, not so fast!' cried a shrill voice. 'There are plenty of fairies, if people only knew how to make use of them.'

Nancy jumped in her chair.

'Who spoke?' she asked sharply. 'Who says there are fairies?'

'I did,' said a little woman at her elbow. 'I am the fairy Mistress Putinorder.'

'Are you really?' gasped Nancy, as she gazed in astonishment at her strange visitor.

Mistress Putinorder was very tiny, with a pale face and piercing blue eyes. She was dressed in a short gown of green quilted satin, a scarlet cloak, and black velvet hat with a red aigrette at one side. In her hand she carried a long, slender wand.

'And now, Miss Nancy, what do you want?' she asked, smiling at the startled girl.

'Please,' replied Nancy, trembling, 'I should like

to have this room made as pretty as the one over the way.'

'Well, why do you not set to work and make it so?'

'I can't. I don't know how.'

'But the girl over there does it all herself. I know her quite well,' said the fairy. 'She is poor—just as poor as you are. And yet she manages to keep everything neat and pretty. You should work hard and try to do the same.'

'But I can't. I——'

'But you can if you like. Where there's a will there's a way, remember.'

'But there is so much to do here,' said Nancy plaintively. 'There's Trotty to wash, the beds to make, the floor to sweep, mother's meals to get, and a hundred other things besides.'

'Of course, there are many things to do. And every girl who has a mother working hard to earn her bread, should do her best to have everything neat and nice for her when she comes home tired. Now you never do that.'

'No, because there is so much to do, it doesn't seem worth while to begin to do anything.'

'That is a foolish answer. I wonder you can speak so.'

'But I never could do all the work.'

'And so, because there is so much to do, you sit down with folded hands and do nothing,' said the fairy reprovingly. 'Surely you cannot think that right?'

'No. But it seems hard to get through so much,

so I just leave it all there. Mother tidies things up a bit when she comes home. So we manage to get on somehow.'

'The girl over the way mends her own frocks and those of her sister,' said the fairy, swaying her wand from side to side. 'She keeps her room in order, and yet has time to read and improve herself in the evenings.'

'But she is clever—I am stupid.'

'She is industrious—you are lazy.'

'Yes—but——'

'Idle people are fond of excuses. But come, would you like to become clever, diligent, and useful?'

'Yes, yes, indeed I should.'

'Well,' said Mistress Putinorder, 'it will give me great pleasure to help you. I see you are really ashamed of your present condition.'

'Yes, I am very much ashamed,' cried Nancy; 'and, oh! dear little fairy, what will you do for me?'

'The very best I can, believe me. And now listen. I have in my gift ten active little fairy men, who will, if you direct them, do instantly everything you desire. Would you like to have them, do you think?'

'Yes, indeed I should,' said Nancy. 'You are very, very good.'

'I thought you would be glad to have them,' said the fairy, and she waved her wand three times. 'See, here they come, one after the other. They run gladly at my call and are eager for work.'

And as she spoke Nancy saw ten small men, in tight-fitting satin costumes, running here and there upon her knee.

'These two,' continued the fairy, laying her hand on a couple of little fellows somewhat shorter and stouter than the rest, 'are not so clever and nimble as the others, but they are strong, and help to keep them in order.'

'Thanks, thanks!' cried Nancy. 'But do they know how to keep rooms tidy, and do the kind of work we want done here?'

'Most certainly they do. You have only to wish them to do something, and they will set to and do it for you at once.'

'How useful! And how pleased mother will be to see our room look nice!'

'Yes, I am sure she will,' replied Mistress Putin-order, with a smile. 'But there is one thing about these little men—they require to be hidden. If people saw them going about they might be startled, or think you were a witch; so we must manage to hide them.'

'But where? Shall we shut them up in this box? Or, I tell you, let us pop them into the cupboard there.'

'No, no,' and the fairy shook her head. 'That would never do. Supposing you wanted to take them out to do some work? How would you hide them then?'

'I don't know. Put them into my pocket, or up my sleeves.'

'No; that would not do either. They would be no use in either place.'

'Then what shall we do?' asked Nancy, much perplexed.

'I will tell you,' said Mistress Putinorder decidedly. 'I shall hide them in your ten fingers. The stout little ones will fit nicely into your two thumbs; then you will always have them at your finger-ends.'

'What a capital idea! Thank you so much. Now I shall have no trouble. These tiny workmen will do everything for me.'

The fairy laughed softly, and disappeared.

* * * * *

'Trotty, did you see that funny little woman? Did you see the fairy?' cried Nancy, springing suddenly from her chair and gazing round the room.

'See a fairy? What do you mean?' said Trotty, looking up at her sister with big, round eyes. 'You must have been dreaming. You were snoring quite loud.'

'Nonsense, child, I was doing nothing of the sort. I was talking to Mistress Putinorder, and—— But there, you're only a baby, so I shan't tell you what she did. However, I shall just make a start and see what I can make these little men do for me.'

And, to Trotty's astonishment, Nancy flew from one thing to another, putting everything in order with the greatest rapidity.

About an hour later their mother returned, tired and weary after her day's work.

The room looked neat and cosy as she entered; the fire was bright, the hearth cleanly brushed, the table spread for tea; the kettle sang upon the hob, and Nancy, with shining face and tidy hair, sat reading to Trotty, who looked fresh and rosy as though but lately washed.

'Why,' said Mrs. Dare, looking round her in surprise, 'how nice everything is! What good fairy has paid our room a visit to-day?'

'Mistress Putinorder, mother dear,' answered Nancy briskly. 'She has given me much good advice and some help, but that is a secret;' and she laughed merrily.

'Mistress Putinorder is a fairy of great value and much wisdom,' replied her mother, smiling. 'And if my Nancy would think of her often, she would make me very happy.'

'I shall never forget her—never!' cried Nancy; and, flinging her arms round her mother's neck, she kissed her lovingly.

The girl kept her promise well. From that hour the little men were but seldom idle, for Nancy made them work continually.

And in a very short time her room became quite as pretty as the one she had admired so much on the other side of the street.

THE END.

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