



SWANSEA
Woolley
—
S. R. R. R.

SWEETHEART TRAVELLERS



"Into the woods,

Page 168,

SWEETHEART TRAVELLERS

A CHILD'S BOOK FOR CHILDREN, FOR WOMEN,
AND FOR MEN.

BY
S. R. CROCKETT

AUTHOR OF "THE STICKIT MINISTER" "THE RAIDERS,"
"THE LILAC BUNSONNET" ETC



ILLUSTRATED BY GORDON BROWNE
AND W H CROOME

LONDON
WELLS - GARDNER, BARTON, & CO
3, PATERNOSTER BUILDINGS



First Edition

October 1895

Second Edition

December 1895

Third Edition

January 1896

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Dedicated

*To all who have Sweethearts
of their own.*

*And to those others
Who only wish they had.*

PREFACE

I KNOW well that I cannot give these vagrom chronicles their right daintiness. I have grown too far from the grass and the good smell which it used to give when it came well-nigh to my knee. They ought to be full of the glint of spring flowers, when they are wet and the sun shines slantways upon them; full of freshening winds and withdrawing clouds, and, above all, of the unbound gladness of children's laughter. But when I come to look at them, they seem little better than hill flowers in a herbarium, pinched and pulled, pasted and ticketed, correctly enough, no doubt—but not the wind flowers and harebells that curtseyed and bent as the breezes blew every way off the sea.

Yet, because four years ago these papers were written to be read in the quietest of rooms, to one who could not otherwise accompany our wanderings, I cannot be content to leave them in a drift of dead magazine leaves. For they

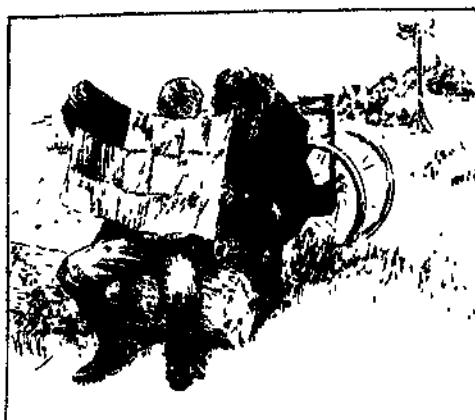
brought to the eyes of their first and kindest critic and only begetter, sometimes the unaccustomed delight of happy laughter, and again the relief of happy tears.

After a little time some of the papers came to be printed in various fugitive forms, and presently there came back to me many letters from those who have never quite been able to put away childish things.

Truthfully the book is not mine but Sweetheart's. For love was it first written, and the labour of making it ready for the mart of books has been also one of love, akin to that of dressing Sweetheart herself for the morning ride. For who could look to see better days than those of that deep summer time by brook-side and meadow, or high upon the cliffy corn-lands which look so quietly out upon the rushing tides of Solway?

Not I, at all events. Yet I am glad, for once at least, to have tasted so keenly and in such gracious company, the divine goodness of life.

S. R. CROCKETT.



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CHAPTER I

MIDSUMMER DAY'S DREAM

[*Mid-Galloway, 1891.*]



MY SWEETHEART is sweet. Also she is my heart of hearts. To look into her eyes is to break a hole in the clouds and see into heaven, and the sunshine lies asleep upon her hair. As men and women, care-weighted with the world, look upon her, you can see the smiles break over their faces. Yet am I not jealous when my Sweetheart smiles back at them. For my Sweetheart is but four years old, and does not know that there is a shadow on all God's world. To spend a day with her in the open air is to get a glimpse into a sinless paradise. For there is no Eden

anywhere like a little child's soul. One Jesus, a wayfarer, thought so also, for he said that with such is peopled the kingdom of heaven.

Not once or twice only have I run off with this sweetheart of mine. For there is a seat woven of cunning wicker-work, on which she sits safely between my arms, as the swift tricycle, rimmed with the prisoned viewless wind, bears us onward. There was a blue sky and a light warm wind that morning of our first adventure. It was just such a morning as completely to satisfy the mother of the little maid that she might safely be entrusted to my "courser of the air." So the charger was brought to the door, a miracle of shining steel and winking silver plate. And now—

"Boot, saddle, to horse, and away!"

My lady mounted—making a charming Little Red Riding-Hood in her cap and cloak, warmly tucked about also as to her feet while we spin through the air. "Good-bye, darling, good-bye!" the home-keeping folks said. From cottage doors the women ran out to wave us a last good-speed. The smiths, half-way up the village, stopped the ringing anvil and looked after us a moment, shading their eyes with duskiest hands.

Presently we were out into the high-road between low hedges which led us to the moors. The track was perfect as the day itself—hard, stoneless, flecked with alternate sunshine and shadow. A light breeze came in our faces and lifted the tangles of my Sweetheart's hair.

It was the very height of living. It was hardly ordinary breath we breathed, but some "ampler ether, some diviner air." Who was it that in haste and ignorance declared all "riding upon bi-, tri-, or other cycles no better than a vain wriggling upon a wheel?" Poor man! This proves that he never could have run off with a sweetheart like mine upon a good steel of Beeston steel.

"Haven't we only just left home?" asked in a little while the runaway maid. She turned round and glanced at me through the sunny ripples of her hair in a distracting way. It is pleasing to be able thus to praise her in print of which she cannot read so much as a letter. For though it is her private opinion that she knows the letter *O* by sight, it is a fact that she has been known upon occasion to pass even that favourite vowel without recognition. But then the cut direct is the privilege of her sex.

[I am commanded by Sweetheart to be sure to add in this place that she was "only four and quite little" when she said and did most of the things hereafter recorded. This is important, because I know she will of a certainty look to see if I have kept my promise. For now Sweetheart is quite grown up, and as far as words of two syllables.]

"It'll be ever such a long time before we have to go home?" she continued, "we are getting *very* far away from home, are we not, father?"

The sense of being out almost alone in the wide world, and thus sitting still between the galloping hedges, pleased her like sweetcake. She was silent for a long time as we whirled along, ere she turned her face upward again with a wistful look in it that I know well.

"What are you looking at, Sweetheart?"

"I was only looking to see if you were really my own dear officer," she said; "it's *such* a long way from home!"

Now this was a distinct breach on Sweetheart's part of our unwritten agreement to make no "references to allusions."

It was during the last ride we had together. We were passing some barracks where the soldiers were tramping steadily to and fro.

Some non-commissioned officers, off duty, were working in their little garden patches.

"Where is Nelly Sanderson's father's observatory?" my companion asked, as we passed the residence of a playmate.

"Nelly Sanderson's father has no observatory. He is a soldier, you know."

A pause for thought, and then :

"But I thought that *all* fathers had observatories?" was the interrogation.

This also was somehow explained, and the small bright logical faculty went upon its way.

"Well, then, if Major Sanderson is a soldier, why is he not working in his garden?"

This was a state of things which Major Sanderson's commanding officer ought manifestly to look into. Then, sudden as a flash struck from a flint came the words :

"Father, do you know what makes those soldiers walk so smart?"

"Why, no, Sweetheart, what might it be?"

"It's their ossifers that makes them walk so smart."

Again a little pause. Then triumphantly, as though recording the solution of a problem which had long been troublesome :

"And, father, do you know who it is that makes *you* walk so smart?"

"No, my Sweetheart, who is it?"

"It's mother that makes you walk smart! It's my own dear mother—she's your ossifer!"

But this, after all, is too serious a subject for even my Sweetheart to make a jest upon. So at this point we changed the subject.

"Do you see those pretty sparrows there on the hedge?" I said, as we continued to skim Solwaywards along a level road.

I did not look at the birds very particularly, being, as it were, occupied in hunting easy water. But the little maid immediately gave them her best attention. The result is not to my credit. She looked at me with a kind of crushing and pitying scorn:

"Those are not sparrows," she said, "those are chaffinches."

Again the conversation closed. And as we went, this four-year-old, who did not know a letter of the alphabet, told me the name of every tree we flew past, of every bird that perched on the hedgerows or flew athwart the path. Anon as we halted to rest in some quiet dell, she ran hither and thither to pick the mosses from the

wall, and the flowers from the banks for the "dear mother" so sadly left at home. She wrapped them, a damp and rather dirty love-token, in the folds of her cloak, trusting that the resultant "mess" would be forgiven, inasmuch as "her little girl fetched them because she loved her" — a forgiveness upon which she did well to depend.

CHAPTER II

THE LION-SLAYER



AS we skimmed down the sunny braes and followed the road as it plunged into the dark shadows of an over-arching wood, Sweetheart suddenly gave reins to her imagination.

"There is bears and wolves here, I know," she said, in a far-reaching whisper. "Yes, indeed, I see their noses and some of their teeth! They are just a-waiting till we pass by, and then they are going to jump on us, and grab us, and eat us all up—yes, every little bit!"

Yet this most alarming prospect seemed rather to delight Sweetheart than otherwise.

"Hush, father," she whispered, "we must go by so softly and quickly. Ole Father Bear, he's waiting just round that corner. Now, let us *buzz!*"

And so according to instructions we did indeed

buzz. Round the descending curves of the road we glided, flashing through the rivers of sunlight which barred the way here and there, and plunging again like lightning into the dark shadows of the "Forest of the Wolves."

"I would not let a wolf come and eat *my* father! You are not frightened when you are with me, are you, father? I have got a gun, and pistols, and a big two-handed sword. It has cut off the heads of twenty-six lions, besides bears——"

In this place followed a sanguinary catalogue which, I regret to say, carried on its face the marks of inaccuracy. If only half of it were true, Mr. Gordon Cumming bears no comparison with the Nimrod whom I carried before me on my saddle. Even Mr. Selous himself might hide his diminished head.

"And if a wicked man were to come and want to kill my father, I would shoot him dead, and then tell him—'Go away, you wicked man!'"

All which was extremely reassuring, and calculated to make a timid traveller feel safe, journeying thus under the protection of such a desperate character, all arrayed from head to foot in fine military scarlet.

Now came a long uphill push. We left sleepy, Dutch-looking Kirkcudbright to the south. We were soon climbing the long hill which leads over to Gatehouse by the Isles of Fleet. My Sweetheart trotted here and there, as I pushed the machine slowly uphill, weaving an intricate maze to and fro across the road. Suddenly there was a quick cry of distress from the undaunted lion-slayer. I looked back and saw the little maid putting a hand to her mouth, wailing most bitterly the while.

"O father! come quick, get a dock-leaf," she cried. "A naughty, horrid nettle has stung me on the hand just when I was pulling a flower."

The required leaf was not at hand, but I pulled a sorrel, in hopes that the juice would do as well. Once more I found that I had reckoned without my host.

"O father!" she said, with a hurt expression showing through her tears, "that's not a dock-leaf; that's only a 'soorock.' Get a docken, quick!"

Obediently I searched high and low, and finally discovered one under the hedge. Thereupon the sore-wounded member was duly anointed and kissed, and with all the honours the hurt made whole.



"My Sweetheart trotted here and there.

CHAPTER III

RUTHERFORD'S KIRK



GAIN we mounted and rode. The workers in the neighbouring field among the corn, above the blue of Solway, waved us greeting.

"Did you see that man on the top of the cart smile at you, father?" said my Sweetheart.

I had indeed noticed the circumstance of a smile passing over a countenance peculiarly saturnine. But I also knew that it was entirely unconnected with myself. Soon we glided into the clean, French-looking village of Gatehouse, after a most delightful spin downhill through leafy glades and long-vistaëd woodland paths. We were not to 'put up' here, so I made my way into a little baker's shop, kept by the kindest of women, who not only provided us with biscuits for our hunger, but added also of her tender heart some milk for "the bairn." I went out with these and found the little

in front of us both. It was her duty to clear the way. Let us say that we were on a long stretch of road. There was a man far in front.

"Ting-a-ling-ting!" went the bell.



* A man far in front

The man, tramp by profession, but now bent and aged, moved not an inch aside, steadily plodding on his way.

"Ting-a-ling-ting-ting!!" again went the bell,

with more emphasis this time, for Sweetheart's feelings were getting the better of her. But still there was no move till we came within ten yards. Then the well-seasoned tramp moved reluctantly to the side of the road and stood at gaze to watch us pass. My Sweetheart wished to stop and bestow a copper. The tramp received it, louting low with professional reverence.

"Mannie," asked the imperious little maid, "did you not hear us? We might have hurt you!"

"Thank you, miss; yes, miss!" replied the tramp stolidly.

"Why does he call me *miss*!" was the next question as we sped off, leaving the trudging cadger shifting his meal-pokes far in the rear. For this was a new name for our Little Red Riding-Hood, who has as many names as there are people in our village.

I told her that I could not tell, but thought it might very probably be because we did not hit him. The little one accepted the explanation with a simple faith which might well have made me ashamed. So we journeyed on, well content, the little birds in our hearts singing their sweetest. Presently a small hand was shifted along the handle-bar till it lay on mine.

"I like to feel your hand, father. It is so nice and warm."

"And so is your heart, my dear," very promptly I replied, as a lover ought.

When we mounted our patient steed at the lych-gate, our eyes were yet wet after the sweet singing in Rutherford's kirk—which, being now roofless and deserted, with only the tombs about it, seemed to have reverted to its original title of "God's Kirk and Acre." The Little Maid, like the child of whom Wordsworth wrote, was "exquisitely wild." Her merriment brimmed over. The mood of silent reverence for something solemn, she knew not what, among the grave-stones, the ivy-clad walls, and under the summer stillness, had now rippled into contagious mirth. There was a tinkle in her laughter like water running over loose pebbles, or the lap of wavelets within a coral cave. A rabbit scudded across our path. It was enough to set her romancing.

"Old Brer Rabbit, he knows! Oh, he knows! He's taking his little girl out to-day, too, on *his* tricycle. Go on, old Brer Rabbit, or Maisie and her father will beat you. And then your little girl'll cry! Did you know, father, Little Girl Rabbit's name is Twinkle Tail? Yes, indeed!

Her mother's name is Strokie Face, but her father's is just plain old Brer Rabbit. And little Twinkle Tail has a dolly, and her name is Little Mappitt."

"And where do they all live, Sweetheart?"

"Why, don't you know? God gave them a lovely hole to live in. And you have to crawl far in, and the first thing you see when you get in is a bit of blue sky."

The Sir Walter of the wondrous eyes looked up, to see if there was any twinkle of unbelief in the older and duller eyes that glanced down into hers. But to-day we were all bound for the land of Faëry, and the faith she saw was satisfactory in its perfect trustfulness. She went on:

"Yes, a bit of blue sky, and then you come out (if you are a little rabbit) in a country where it is all blue sky—the houses are built of bricks of blue sky, and the windows are just thinner bits of blue sky, and Little Mappitt herself is just a bit of blue sky, dressed in the old twinkles of last year's stars—— Oh, what a pretty bird! That's a Blue Tit. He's a bit of blue sky too, and he lives in a rabbit-hole. Yes, indeed, I saw him come out among the leaves!"

We were coasting along, now through the arches

of the trees, now bending to the left along the sea-shore. The roar of the swift Skyreburn, heavy with last night's rain, came to our ears. "Father, there is 'Mac.' Stop, father!" cried the Lady of the Bell. And very obediently the brake went down and we stopped. It was a painter of our acquaintance, an old admirer and present flame of the Little Maid's. She now responded to his renewed and honourable proposals by vehemently expressing a wish for an immediate matrimonial alliance—as she did, alas! the faithless maiden, in many other cases. But I was compelled to shut down, in the character of the ruthless parent of melodrama, upon "love's young dream," and speed incontinently onward while the swain with the fishing-rod was left lamenting. But woe worth the day for the inconstancy of woman! As soon as we were out of sight the lady said frankly, "Isn't it nice to be able to run off when you want." For Sweetheart is evidently of the easy-hearted lovers who love and ride away—at least, at the age of four.



CHAPTER V

THE HONOURS OF WAR



SOON we were crossing the rocks of the Solway side—a pleasant land open to the south and the sun, with cornfields blinking in the hazy light, and reaping-machines “gnarring” and clicking cheerfully on every slope. Past Ravenshall we went, where the latest Scottish representatives of the Chough or Red-legged Crow were a few years ago still to be found—a beautiful but unenterprising bird, long since shouldered out of his once wide fields and lordships by the rusty underbred democracy of the Rook. We passed a fountain of clear, cool water, sequestered from the sun beneath a tree, where

a little streamlet "seeps" its way through the ambient granite. It was the place for which the little maid had been looking all day.

"Where was it that Sir James gave mother a drink out of a leather cup?" the question had been asked a hundred times already.

Here was the spot. Alas! no more will Sir James Caird, greatest of agriculturists and most lovable of men, pursue his pastoral avocations—"watering his flocks," as he loved to say, by taking out his guests to taste "the best water in the Stewartry," at this well by the wayside, fresh from the lirks of the granite hills.

There, at last, was the old tower of Cassencary looking out from its bosoming woods across to the Wigtown sands, where two hundred years ago the martyr women perished in the grey ooze of the Blednoch. The small girl Sweetheart had heard of this also. And having to-day passed a series of monuments to the martyred men and women of the Covenant, she now wanted to know if any one would want to drown *her* for saying her prayers. If so, she frankly avowed her intention of saying them *after she got into bed*—the degenerate little conformist and latitudinarian that she is! She does not want to be drowned. So instead

she is going to play "Wigtown martyrs" with the oldest and least considered of her dolls as soon as she gets home. Thus history and martyrology have their uses.

Presently we wheeled peacefully into Creetown, and dismounted at a quiet-looking house over which, upon a small, fixed sign, was promise of refreshment. While the kind and motherly hostess prepared the eggs and ham, and spread the white cloth, an important question was discussed.

"Father, is this tea or dinner?"

"Dinner, of course, my dear."

"Then why did you tell the lady it was tea?"

"Well, Sweetheart, let us call it tea."

"Then, whether am I to get no dinner to-day, if this is tea—or no tea, if this is dinner?"

The conversation was suffered to drop at this point, but the interest did not lapse.

"Well, father dear, I hope it is dinner; for if it is dinner, we might get tea further on. But if it is tea, then we have passed dinner somewhere without noticing!"

For the angel is mundane on the subject of meals and sweets. Also upon another subject. The hostess had two comely boys who were brought, all dumbly resistant and unwilling, off

the street to be introduced, clinging shyly to their mother's skirts. The Little Maid, as became a traveller and a woman of experience in affairs of the heart, went forward to make the advances,



which is a graceful thing at four. But inexperience as to the proper method of saluting little girls with hair all a-spray about scarlet-cloaked shoulders, kept the bright lads silent and abashed,

in spite of maternal encouragement. Plainly they meditated retreat. There, 'tis done—a chaste salute, which each gallant swain wipes carefully off with the back of his hand!

At home there was once upon a time a parallel case. A mother, friend and neighbour of ours, heard her little boy come into the house bemoaning his lot with tears and outcries.

"What *is* the matter now, Jack?" she said, thinking that at last it had happened.

"O-hu-hu-hu! The little girl hit me on the head because she said she wanted to marry me and I said I wouldn't."

Nor, even when expostulated with, could the erring young woman be brought to see the impropriety of her action.

"But it served him right!" said Beauty, for even in a certain place there is no fury like a woman scorned. And taking everything into consideration there is no doubt that it did.

Being thus refreshed, we mounted once again, and the long clean street of the village sank behind us. We climbed up and up till we were immediately beneath the railway station, where signals in battle array were flanked against the sky; then down a long descent to the shore levels

at Palnure. It was now nearly four in the afternoon, and we paused at the entrance of the long hill road to New Galloway, uncertain whether to attempt it or not. A man drove along in a light spring-cart. Of him we inquired regarding the state of the road.

"Ye're never thinkin' o' takin' that bairn that lang weary road this nicht?" he asked.

It seemed that the road was fatally cut up with the carting of wood, that much of it was a mere moorland track, and the rest of it unrideable.* This might do for a man, but it would not do for little Sweetheart at four o'clock of a September day. Therefore we thanked our informant, who raced us, unsuccessfully but good-humouredly, along the fine level road toward Newton-Stewart, which smoked placidly in its beautiful valley as the goodwives put on the kettles for their "Four-hours" tea.

Here we were just in time to wait half an hour for the train—as usual. During this period the Little Maid became exceedingly friendly with every one. She went and interviewed a very dignified stationmaster, and inquired of him why he was keeping her waiting for the train.

* It is now very much improved, and is quite rideable all the way.

But the train did come at last, when we were whirled with some deliberation through the wild country to the eastward, and disembarked at the lonely little moorland station of New Galloway. It was growing dusk as we wheeled home along the dusty lanes by the side of the placid beauties of Grenoch Loch, the Lake of Fair Colours. We entered the village of our sojourn with the honours of war.

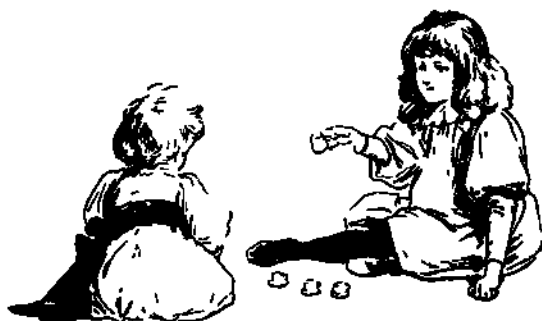
"Were you not frightened, Sweetheart?" asked the Lady of the Workbox when we sat down to "a real tea," the stains of travel having disappeared.

"Oh no, certainly not! Even father was not much frightened when I was with him. Do you know, mother, we shotted fourteen—yes, more than a hundred lions and tigers—we did, didn't we, father?"

A pause of corroboration, during which I blush, for really we had not destroyed quite so many as that.

"Yes, indeed, and father and I went down a rabbit-hole, and——"

[Left speaking.]



CHAPTER VI

SWEETHEART'S TEA-PARTY



HERE was a state tea-party in the nursery to-day. Sweetheart, Hugo and Baby Brother sent out the invitations. At least, Sweetheart did, for she is nearly five. Hugo did nothing but watch for a chance at the box of rusks. And as for Baby Brother he also did nothing but knock over the tea-table after it was all set. So he had to be tied in his tall chair by fastening his broad blue sash through the bars at the back. Then he said very loud that he did not like it at all—so loud that he brought in mother off the stairs. This was a chance for Sweetheart to ask mother if she would come to

the tea-party, and if she might take the note of invitation to the study, where father was working, and must not be disturbed.

So mother said she might, and Sweetheart came down and knocked very gently at the study door.

"Come in!" cried some one within, so quickly that Sweetheart was quite startled.

"If you please, Mister Father," she said very politely, "Lady Jane Howard, Sir Hugo, and Lord Baby Brother request the pleasure of your company to tea in the Castle Nursery."

That was the way Sweetheart said it, for she liked to pretend that she was either a duchess or a schoolmistress. She was quite determined to be somebody really great. Of course she liked best to be a school teacher, for it is so nice to whip



"If you please,
Mister Father

the chairs with a little cane when they are naughty—and then, you know, they mostly are.

Now, it happened that "Mister Father," as Sweetheart called him, was a little tired, or perhaps a little lazy (such things, alas! have been), and so he thought it would do him good to go up to tea in the nursery. He came in after the guests were all seated, looking very grave and solemn, as Sweetheart thought, when he peered over the top of his glasses.

Then Sweetheart, whose hands shook with the pleasure and dignity, made tea in a beautiful set of little cups without any handles, which had been given her at Christmas. This is how she did it. First she put a pinch of tea into each cup, and then she poured hot water out of a little teapot upon the tea. This pleased father very much.

"That is just the way that tea ought to be made," he said. "Do you know that in China, where tea first came from, that was the old way of making tea?"

Here Mr. Father looked very wisely through his glasses at the little cup and sipped his tea.

Sweetheart felt a little anxious.

"This is very nice," she said to herself, "but I do hope it's not going to be improving."

But father went on, without hearing her :

"Do you know, Sweetheart, that all the tea used to come from China in tall ships. And when the captains got their cargoes of fresh tea on board, they used to try all their might who would get first to England. Famous races there used to be. Sometimes two or three of the fast-sailing ships would keep within sight of each other all the way, and the sailors grew so anxious for their ship to win that they could hardly go to bed at all."

"Why did they want to get to England so fast?" asked Sweetheart.

"Because they could get more money for the tea in the market, and then the captain and all the sailors would get something for themselves for winning the race."

"That was nice," said Sweetheart. "I wish I had been there. I like to run fast, and I hate to go to bed."

Baby Brother here intimated that he had not had enough, by hammering on the tray in front of his chair with his little tin cup, which he held upside down. Sweetheart went to him and gave him a little piece of biscuit, which, grievous to relate, he instantly threw on the floor.

"It's more sugar you want, I know," she said sadly, "and that's just what you can't have."

"I'll take another cup, if you please, Lady Jane Howard," said father.

Lady Jane was very proud of being asked for another cup of her very own tea, and made it out instantly. Then she was ready to listen again.

"Do you know," Mr. Father continued, "that in a strange wild place called Tartary, the people boil the tea into a kind of porridge with butter and flour? How would you like that for breakfast?"

"Baby Brother could have that. *He* likes porridge," answered Lady Jane Howard, promptly.

After this the tea-party was broken up, for nurse came to the door to dress Lord Baby Brother for his perambulator. And as Lady Jane washed up the tea-things she said to herself:

"It *was* very nice, and not so very improving, after all! We shall ask Mister Father again, I think."

CHAPTER VII

THE SWALLOWS ON THE KITE-STRING



OW Sweetheart meant to do just the very same next day. But nothing ever does happen just the same way twice over. It is a way things have, and there is no reasoning with them.

But something quite as nice happened, and the way of it was this.

Lady Jane Howard has many friends. "Can you fly a kite, Sweetheart?" said one of them next morning. Perhaps he was trying to ingratiate himself at the expense of Sweetheart's other friends. (Young men have even been known to do this when there is a sweetheart in the question. Sad! but so it is.)

"No," answered Sweetheart promptly; "but I have seen a kite fly."

"And where might that have been, Sweetheart?" said he.

"It was up among the great big hills, once when I was with my father, and a brown bird flew quickly out of a wood. It floated very fast, but it made no noise. So I asked father what bird that was. He told me it was a kite. So it was a kite. I have seen a kite fly."

"But," said her friend, "that may be one kind of kite; but did you ever see a paper kite fly?"

"Go 'way," said Sweetheart indignantly; "paper kites don't fly—only feather kites with legs and wings."

For Sweetheart does not like to be imposed upon.

"But for all that paper kites do fly, Sweetheart," urged her friend patiently.

"*I* know paper things," said the little girl—and you must remember that she had never been to school and was at that time only five years of age. "I know paper things," said Sweetheart again, with much decision; "once, a great many years ago, when I was quite a little girl, I had a paper dolly. Her name was Edith Margarine——"

"Marjory!" interrupted her friend; "surely——"

Sweetheart looked at the daring man with a sudden flashing eye.

"Did *you* name that dolly, or did I?" she said.

"Oh, you did, of course," said the friend meekly.

"I should think so. Well, then, the dolly's name was Edith Margarine!"

Sweetheart paused for a reply, but there was none. The critic was crushed. So be it ever.

"Of course I knew the dolly's name, for I was its mother—at least, at that time," Sweetheart added forgivingly. "Afterwards I gave her to Essie Maxwell for a doll's rocking-chair. But I was her mother at that time—so, of course, I knew her name."

"Of course," said her friend.

"And I did not so much as know you to speak to at that time—except just to say, 'Oh, look at the funny man that's coming down the road?' That was the way I first knew you," said Sweetheart confidentially.

"Indeed?" said her friend.

"Yes, and mother said——"

But as there is no Assurance company in the world which would undertake the fearful risks of what Sweetheart might say next, and no one rich enough to pay the premiums if there were, her mother struck in :

"But you have not asked about the paper kites, Sweetheart. I am sure Mr. Friend will tell you all about them."

Sweetheart put her hands on her knees, as she does when she plays marbles or sails boats. Then she looked fixedly at Mr. Friend, who was smiling. Finally she decided that he was worthy of her confidence.

"Well," she said, "you don't look as if you would tell improving things. You can go on about the paper kites."

"Thank you!" said the friend, with a great deal of gratitude and submission.

"When I was a boy," began he, "I used to make kites of paper and fly them away up in the air."

"As high as this house?" asked Sweetheart, who has a passion for details.

"Oh, much higher," said Mr. Friend; "and sometimes they pulled so hard on the string that the kite nearly lifted me off my feet."

"How do you make that kind?" asked Sweetheart, who thought it might be in the same way that her kind friend, Marion the cook, made blackberry jam.

"Well," said Mr. Friend, "you take five or



"The dragon had the splendidest long tail."

six thin light pieces of lath, and you join them together."

"No, I don't," interjected Sweetheart unexpectedly; "you come and do it yourself tomorrow, and then I'll know how!" said Sweetheart, who never could understand explanations.

Mr. Friend looked across the room, to see if this proposition had due sanction. Mother smiled, and the bargain was made.

Next day Mr. Friend came, true to his promise, and he made a beautiful kite, which he called "St. George and the Dragon." The dragon had the splendidest long tail, made of crumpled pieces of newspaper.

Sweetheart soon knew all about kite-making, and got herself so sticky with paste, that she said it was just lovely. She had never been so happy. But then she had got on an old dress on purpose, because her mother also remembered what kite-making was like not so very many years ago.

When it was finished Sweetheart said:

"You won't be able to wash it when it gets dirty, will you?"

"Why do you think so, Sweetheart?" asked her friend, who always liked to know what Sweetheart was thinking.

"Well, because once I put Edith Margarine into the bath when she was dirty, and she began to come all to pieces. She was made of paper, though not so thin as the kite. It was after that that I gave her to Essie Maxwell for the rocking-chair," added Sweetheart thoughtfully.

"Do you know that, far away, big grown men fly kites?" said the friend, slipping in a bit of information artfully, as he was putting on a beautiful dragon's head with red paint.

"I suppose they fly grown-up kites there?" said Sweetheart.

"Yes; that is just right, Sweetheart. They are very big kites, and all the gentlemen of a town go out and try whose kite will go the highest."

"My father's kite would go highest if *he* tried!" said Sweetheart sharply.

Mr. Friend asked why, without looking up.

Sweetheart was surprised and a little hurt at the question.

"Why, because he *is* my father, of course," she said. Which settled it.

"I wish I had a little girl to stick up for me like that!" said Mr. Friend, sighing.

"Well," said Sweetheart encouragingly, "per-



Above the tops of the highest trees.

haps, if you are very good, you may get one some day. Of course, not as good as me," she added hastily, to prevent undue expectations; "for you would not be so nice a father, you see!"

"I see," said Mr. Friend, again smiling across the room to some one who smiled back again.

Then they went out into the field at the back of the house, and Mr. Friend had a large ball of string. He soon let the twine go a little, and with a great many pulls and slackenings he got the kite up high in the air.

Sweetheart jumped with joy as she saw it growing tinier high up into the sky. She danced as it went above the tops of the highest trees. And when it sailed away into the blue till it was just a little diamond-shaped dot on the heavens, Sweetheart almost cried, she was so pleased.

"Now, you can hold it yourself," said Mr. Friend, giving her the string.

"Oh, can I?" said Sweetheart breathlessly. Something would keep bobbing up and down like a little mouse at the bottom of her throat. She felt so happy and frightened all at once. She held both her hands high above her head to let the kite out as far as possible, and she danced on

tiptoe as she felt it pulling like a living thing away up near the clouds.

It was almost too much happiness for a little girl.

"I think this is nicer kite-flying than any old Chinaman's with a pigtail," said Sweetheart, when at last she gave up the string to Mr. Friend, who stuck a peg into the ground and put the string round it. Then the kite rose and fell, dipping and soaring all by itself, while Sweetheart watched it with a glad heart.

"I wonder if our kite can see the China boys' kites flying on the other side of the world?" said the little maid, into whose head all sorts of things came of their own accord.

"No," said Mr. Friend; "it sees a good way, and many things that we do not see. But the other side of the world is rather a long way off, you know."

Then Mr. Friend got up, and taking a sheet of note-paper from his pocket, he put the end of the string through it. Away it went up the curved string, rising and leaping joyfully, like a white-winged bird.

"That is what we call a messenger," said Mr. Friend; "it goes up to the kite to take it a message from us."

Soon the messenger reached the flying kite. It was just like a point of light in the blue.

"Now the messenger has got there," said Sweetheart. "But what are these swallows doing?" She clapped her hands. "They are perching on the string, I declare!" she said.

Mr. Friend looked up. The young maid's eyes had been more watchful than his own. A family of young house-swallows were playing about the string, and every now and then one of them lighted on it. Then as soon as he was comfortably swinging on the slender line, one of his brothers would fly at him and knock him off. They played for all the world like boys on the street—noisily and merrily, but a little roughly. Each of them screamed and argued all the time, without ever attending to what the others said.

"I think," said Sweetheart, after meditating for some time, "that the swallows stay six months here with us to make us glad. And after that, they fly away to perch on the kite-strings of the little children on the other side of the world. That is the way of it."

And, do you know, perhaps it is.



CHAPTER VIII

SWEETHEART'S TEN-SHILLING DONKEY



SWEETHEART often goes without bread at dinner just to have the pleasure of feeding the robins outside on the garden walk.

"They need it more than me," she says, her heart being better than her grammar, "because, you see, they never get any soup to *their* dinner!"

But too much attention is not good for child or bird, and our garden robins had become very spoiled urchins indeed. There was one with breast plump as a partridge and ruddy as a winter apple, who stood every day and defied all his own kind to come near a large loaf on which there was enough and to spare for fifty snippets such as he. He erected his head. He drooped his wings, trailing them on the ground like a game-cock. He strutted and swelled himself like a perfect Bobadil. He would even fly like a dart at a blackbird or a thrush, so exceedingly self-confident and pugnacious did he become.

But this morning Sweetheart forgave him.

"Perhaps he had not any mother to teach him better," she said, "or never was allowed to go walks with his father."

Sweetheart appreciates the benefits of a sound commercial education. In fact, just at present she is saving up for a donkey, and she is not backward in announcing the fact.

"Not a gingerbread one, you know, like what you buy at the fair, with currants in the places where the eyes should be. But a real live donkey that stops in a stable, and makes a noise inside him—like he had whooping-cough and

it wouldn't come up right. You know the kind!"

I did know the kind.

"And when I get enough money," Sweetheart went on, "then we shall put the real donkey in a stable, and Hugo and I shall attend to it, and dress it with ribbons—and sometimes ride on it, when it is not too tired!"

The Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals will have nothing to do for its subscriptions round about Sweetheart's house.

But the thrifty resolve has also its drawbacks.

When our small maid goes a-walking, she informs every person worthy of confidence that she is going to get such a donkey, and that immediately.

"And I have nearly plenty to buy a first-rate one now—I have seven silver shillings and fourpence—all my own, in the bank!" she said yesterday.

"And I have dot two pennies and a little wee one!" cried Hugo, who was going to turn the concern into a joint-stock company of which he should be general manager—this being about the amount of stock usually requisite for the purpose.

"Sweetheart shall lead the donkey by the bridle and I shall ride on it!" he explained.

"Just like a boy!" answered Sweetheart, sharply; "boys is made of slugs and snails——"

"But w'y was girls made at all?" interrupted Hugo.

Having no answer ready, Sweetheart recurred to the general subject. Hugo had no right to be a rude boy. But then he was very young—not nearly grown up—and could not be expected to know any better.

"*I* am going to buy the donkey, but sometimes I shall allow you to feed it, Hugo!" said Sweetheart firmly.

"But it's *my* donkey," answered Hugo, sticking manfully to his point; "'cause w'y, I've dot two bid pennies and a little wee one."

"What's two pennies?" said Sweetheart scornfully, "they're only copper, and coppers is what you give to beggar-men—and put in the church-plate on Sundays!"

Sweetheart has been learning too many of the evil ways of the neighbourhood. This putting of coppers in the offertory is a habit which, when once acquired, is not easily got rid of. We must see to this.

But there were certain curious consequences which sprang directly from Sweetheart's public declaration that she was going to buy a donkey.

I was informed one roaring black night that there was a boy at the door wishful to see me.

"Well, my lad," I remarked, standing a little back, for the wind made the rain-drops splash into the hall, "what can I do for you?"

"If ye please, sir, I heard that ye was gaun to keep twa horses and a carriage. I'm used wi' pownies; so I thought I wad like to tak' the place?"

"But, my lad, I never thought of keeping even a pony. Who told you such a thing?" I replied.

The boy's countenance fell. There was a moment of hesitancy. At last, a little unwillingly, the answer came:

"It was Geordie Parton that said that his brither Tam had heard a woman tell anither woman on the street, that your wee lassie said it last Tuesday fortnight!"

It is a long lane that has no turning, a long Scottish explanation which is not finished at last. But the thing itself was clear. From Sweetheart's ten-shilling donkey and Hugo's joint-stock investment of twopence halfpenny, a coach

and horses of my own had grown within the brief space of ten days. It was an instructive local object-lesson, with the old fable of the three black crows for a text.

Once upon a time there was a man in Fife, not famous for the excellence of his stud of horses. He was on his way to the market town one morning to supply the place of a recent loss. As he went his way he passed the window at which his wife was washing dishes.

"Hey, John, bide a wee!" cried the acting head of the house.

John bided.

"Whaur are ye gaun, guidman?" asked his wife.

"I'm gaun to Cupar to buy a horse," said her husband.

"Hoo muckle siller hae ye wi' ye?"

"A pound," quoth John promptly, with the consciousness of ample enough means to buy a Derby winner.

"Hoot, man," cried his wife, "tak' ither five shillin's an' get a guid yin—*an' no' hae them aye dee-deein'!*"

Sweetheart's ten-shilling donkey is to be of "ither five-shilling" kind. It is not to be "*aye dee-deein'!*"



CHAPTER IX

THE UNSTABLE EQUILIBRIUM OF GRIM RUTHERLAND



JT must have been for some hidden reason of contraries that our large collie Grim was so named. Peace and goodwill were written broadly upon his countenance. Welcome shone benevolently from his eye. There was no possible guile in him. He was too fat for guile. Also he had been brought up along with Sweetheart, and had become inured, like the renowned Brer Fox in the fascinating tale of Uncle Remus, to being made "de ridin' hoss of

de rabbit family." Sweetheart rode upon him for years, then Hugo had his turn. And now all unproved and fearless, Baby Brother twists tiny hands savigerously into Grim Rutherford's shaggy fell.

For Grim was placid by nature, and had become, besides, a dog of some philosophy. When he had had enough of his rider, he simply sat down. Then the laws of gravitation (which, as every sixth standard boy knows, were invented by Sir Isaac Newton), took their course, and—but it is obvious what happened. For family reasons connected with washing-day, this performance has been systematically discouraged on muddy afternoons. Such a tyrant does prejudice become in the domestic relations.

Not that Grim had any particular prejudices. He was quite ready to sit down anywhere. Indeed if anything he rather preferred a puddle. For he is a utilitarian, and submitted to carry weight only so long as it was clearly for his good. He sat down, therefore, so soon as he was tired. Usually he did this suddenly and without warning—even maliciously, like an Anarchist explosion. Then a new packet of Hudson's Extract of Soap had to be ordered. The traveller for that article

has noticed a marked increase in the orders from our village. But he did not know the cause. Sweetheart knew. It was all owing to the unstable equilibrium of Grim Rutherland. It is a strange thing that there is no Society for the prevention of Cruelty by Animals. If there were, we hold to it that both Sweetheart and Hugo have good ground for applying for a warrant against Grim, on account of wilful and mischievous damage done to the most sacred interests of dignity and cleanliness.

However, to square the reckoning as it were, many a tramp might also lodge informations, and then Grim's master might find it hard to find adequate defences. For the mild-mannered collie was ever a mighty respecter of persons. He was, indeed, glad to see every new visitor. But to none did he tender a warmer welcome than to a good average, slouching, hang-dog, foot-shuffling tramp. Grim might be couched in the shape of a very thick capital Q under the table in the kitchen. He might be sound asleep in his kennel in the yard. He might even be dreaming of the Elysian fields to which all good dogs go (where there are plenty of rabbits, a light sandy soil, and no rabbit-holes more than three feet deep). But so surely as the

gate clicked and a tramp slouched past the kitchen window, there was Grim up and raging like a fury. It is related in the rhyme of Thackeray how the

“Immortal Smith O’Brine
Was raging like a line”—

but Grim raged like an entire menagerie—indeed like a zoological gardens of some pretensions.

If he happened to be shut up alone in the house, the visitor hastily retired and tried the front-door bell. But, on the other hand, if Grim happened to be in the yard, and loose, he added to his already extensive collection of tramps’ trouser-legs. We all collect something in our house. One postage stamps, another damaged toys, a third stones of price. Or yet another personal “wanity” may be a library of rare volumes of unattainable editions, concerning the price of which the collector certainly prevaricates when put to the question. Wives will certainly have a deal to answer for some day. But assuredly this is too large a question. To return—Grim Rutherford was a plain dog, and dwelt in kennels. He did not attempt to collect anything really esoteric, but simply continued to amass his precious frayed fragments of tramps’ trouser-legs.

A horrid thought occurred to Sweetheart the other day which surprised and pained me.

"Are there never any bits of legs along with them?" she said.

For, indeed, to the disinterested observer, the process of collection seemed a rough one. The



' The tramp increased his speed "

enemy was usually retiring in some disorder down the road. Grim was following and shaking his head from side to side, steadily harassing the rear. Suddenly there would come an explosive rent, the tramp increased his speed—and Grim had made an addition to his collection.

But Sweetheart was not easy in her mind about the question of the possibly enclosed leg. For Grim is unquestionably carnivorous. No perfectly unprejudiced person could watch his habits and customs for a single day without coming to that conclusion.

"Horrid dog!" says Sweetheart, "I hope it is not true. I never could love you again if you did. And you getting as much nice clean dog-biscuit as ever you can eat!"

Sweetheart does not approve of the miscellaneous feeding of dogs—at least she draws the line at feeding them on tramps.

"And you are actually getting fat, too, Grim!" she continued severely.

Grim licked his lips and wagged a tail like a branch of spruce. He thought he was going to get something good to eat. But Sweetheart went on to give him a lecture instead.

"Are you aware that the butcher's boy complained of you to-day, Grim Rutherland, you wicked, naughty dog?"

I do not think I mentioned the fact before, but it may be as well to say that the family name was Rutherland. Consequently our dog's name is Grim Rutherland. By that he is known all

over the village, and even as much as a mile into the next parish.

But undoubtedly sometimes Grim Rutherland presumed upon his good name, and the head of the house had to suffer—as is usual in such cases.

It was, for instance, wholly certain that of late Grim had been getting too fat. He was, indeed, regularly and sparsely fed, as Sweetheart had said, upon dog-biscuit. But, all the same, like a certain famous person, he waxed fat and attached himself to many tramps.

And to this also there was a reason annexed.

One day, in the broadest sunshine of the forenoon, the horrid fact was made abundantly manifest. Grim Rutherland was a freebooter, a cataran, a wild bandit. There he sat crouched like a wolf, and crunched the thigh-bone of an ox upon the public highway.

So that the passers-by justly mocked and said among themselves, "What an example!"

Thus disgrace is brought upon innocent households.

Sad to relate, Grim Rutherland proved himself a bad character of long standing and consummate hypocrisy—a lamentable fact which we found out

as soon as ever we had started out to make inquiries. He had been obtaining credit on the family good name—trading on his name and address, indeed, like many other amiable gentlemen. After he had partaken of a good meal at home, he regularly started out to make the grand tour of the butchers' shops. And we found that the rascal's effrontery had grown to such a pitch, that he would march straight into a shop without even the poor preface of an apology. Nor did he return alone. He brought out a bone with him, in precisely the same fashion as that in which he brings a stick out of the water. He did not even hurry himself like an ordinary malefactor. For his name was Grim Rutherland, and he had never yet known what it was to have his entrances retarded or his exits accelerated by such a projectile as a pound weight—as would assuredly have happened in the case of any ordinary dog less respectably connected. For that is the kind of dog Grim Rutherland is.

You would never have thought it to look at him, as he basked upon the sunny part of the walk in front of the door. A conscious rectitude and tolerance pervaded his whole being. He looked as if he might almost have stood beside

the plate on Sundays himself—a very proper elder's dog. But yet he was entirely a fraud. Grim could listen to a first-rate sermon with his mind upon the delights of rabbiting—which, of course, could not be the case with a real elder, who never gives his mind while in church to anything but the divisions of the text. Or so, at least, we have been informed.

Yet you must not say that Grim Rutherland is an out-and-out bad dog. Every child in the village would contradict you if you did. And, besides, you would certainly forfeit the friendship and countenance of Sweetheart—which in a thinly populated district is a serious matter. For Sweetheart's friends have many privileges.

"Grim is *not* a bad dog," she would say, daring you to contradiction.

You try hard (but fail in your attempt) to appear credulous. Sweetheart looks at you with an air which says that you must be an individual of very indifferent morals indeed, to harbour such bad thoughts against a blameless "dumb animal."

"But he lets you drop in the mud, Sweetheart!" you urge pitifully on your own behalf.

"I know," she says, a little sadly; "but then,

you know, his head means all right. After all, it is only one end of him that sits down."

And so Grim Rutherford gets the benefit of the



"Grim gets the benefit of good intentions"

good intentions of his nobler part, instead of being judged by the actual transgressions of his worse.

Even so may it be with all of us.



CHAPTER X

OF HUIZZ AND BUZZ, ALSO OF FUZZ AND MUZZ



HERE was not a cloud in the sky, and the painters were busy giving to Conway station its spring cleaning. "Walk close behind, Sweet-heart—and keep the red cloak clean"—I was on the point of adding, "Remember, mother will not be pleased if you get paint on it." But I recollected that this was not quite the time to recall "mother" to a little four-year-old. A small heart is always a little sore till the wash of leaves, the steady push of the wind which drives the fair curls back like spray over the brim of the red cap, and the rush of wheels, bring the anodyne of distance to its aching. It is a standing sorrow with the maid



Through the narrow Conway streets

that there is only room on the tricycle for one passenger. It is also true, on the one hand, that if there ~~were~~ room for another even of Sweetheart's fighting weight, the unfortunate engineer would come to an early grave at the first long hill.

Outside the station we sprang at once to the saddle, and through the narrow Conway streets we wheeled, sharp-featured, dark-haired Welsh women looking out in sympathy upon us, shrilly commending my Sweetheart's curls, and deprecating the hazardous quest on which she was bent. It was still and hot in the deep valley, and before we were clear of the town altogether, there were provisions to buy, for we were going into an unknown land. We entered the shop, leaving the steed surrounded by a reverent crowd of shy Welsh children. With whom—O happy and unusual experience!—it was perfectly safe. We laid in our stores with appropriate gravity and deliberation. Chocolate was the staple of life—"creams" for the front and "plain" for the rear rider. Then a reprint of some good old fairy tales in cheap wrapper for the reading of both. It is indeed most fortunate when two sweethearts travelling upon one horse have the same literary tastes. A difference in taste as to what constitutes a jest

is more fatal to domestic peace than a difference in religion. But as neither of us have ever yet got beyond Jack the Giant-Killer, and as we both loathe the Folk-lore Society (or at least all its commentaries), everything went merrily as a marriage-bell—which for Sweetheart Travellers is certainly an auspicious comparison.

It is hilly, lumpy country out from Conway. After we got down into the valley it was a long and fairly steady pull for a good many miles. The road straggled off out of the straight path in quite an unattached manner, looking like anything in the world but what it was—the main-travelled road to the important towns and villages of the Conway Valley. We asked a man which of two roads was the right one for Llanrwst. He told us. We had not gone five hundred yards down this road before we met another man, who manifested an interest in us, and immediately informed us that the one we had just left was the only correct road to Llanrwst. The day was hot, and so were we. We hastened back, my Sweetheart and I, to express ourselves vigorously to the first misinformant, but he had seen us coming and escaped over into a field. We shouted anathemas, but he only shook his

head and said that he "had no Enklsh." Yet ten minutes ago he had enough to tell a great lie!

We were now on the crest of the ridge. We dismounted, walked a little, and lo! we were looking into a gulf of air through which we were about to project ourselves down to the depths of a great blue valley. It was very still,



"Had no Enklsh."

and the blue sky had come ever so much nearer to the earth. The horizon seemed to have pulled a navy-blue cap about its ears. As we paused, Sweetheart as usual tempered the observation of nature with chocolate. She was always great at observing colour.

"What a lot of blue things there are here, father—all different!"

That may be true enough, but it does not seem the observation of a child, says a wiseacre. Now that is just the thing that is most delightful about the Sweetheart. She never says what she is expected to say—and, indeed, very seldom what she ought to say. It is true that there *were* a lot of blue things there—all different. There was the sky, for instance, not far from ultramarine, so dark and infinite it was, yet apparently by no means far off. There was the nearer light-blue haze in the shallow hollows of the valley, and last of all there were the azure pools where one looked away into the “blind hopes and lirks o’ the hills” on the skirts of the Snowdonian highlands.

When Sweetheart was not yet three years old, it is recorded in the book of the chronicles of Rutherland that a conversation was conducted somewhat in this fashion.

There was a deep wooded valley underneath her private drawing-room (commonly called nursery) window. Sweetheart was standing, finger on lip, gazing into the haze which filled it—unexpectedly quiet, and therefore probably plotting further mischiefs. Her mother looked up to make investigations. It is a terrible thing to have a bad character. The innocent are so often misjudged.

No ; the crockery was safe. There was no actual transgression connected with jam. What, then, could be the matter ?

The little one's eyes were looking wistfully across the valley. There dwelt a deep puzzlement on the puckered forehead. At last it came.

"Mother, is leaves gween ?"

"Why, yes, Sweetheart ; of course leaves are green."

"But those leaves over there is *blue* !"

And they were—the blue of ultramarine ash—only our older eyes had not seen so clearly. We often said at this time that if Sweetheart treated all her other friends as brusquely as she treated her two principal lovers, conversations would have a way of dying a natural death.

But to return to our high-poised hamlet overlooking the Conway Valley, a kind of natural lookout tower both seaward and hillward.

"There is a policeman," said Sweetheart.

She was always friendly with these officers of the law. Perhaps Sweetheart is like the cautious old Scotswoman who, when her minister reproved her for praying for the devil, said :

"It's as easy to be ceevil as uncccevil to the chiel, an' wha kens hoo sune ye may need a frien'?"

So my Sweetheart smiled upon the best-looking and most kindly of portly Welsh policemen. It occurred to us that on the hill above Llanrwst, this particular representative of the law would have a bad chance in pursuit of an evildoer—specially if his steed, like ours, hailed



"The law would have a bad chance."

from "Beeston, Notts." But there was not an ounce of evil intent among the three of us. It was all downhill, we heard with joy—from now all the way to Bettws. So we were at peace with all men

So we skimmed downwards, and ran races with the pheasants which scurried along the road in

front of us, apparently forgetting till we were quite upon them, that they possessed such things as wings at all. Then, whirr! they were over the dyke and away to the woods, flying swift and low.

A big brown bee, homeward bound, blundered waveringly alongside of us for some distance, either heavy laden with pollen or a little tipsy with heather honey. If he does not mind where he is going he "won't get home till morning."

I repeated this to Sweetheart, and the tender little heart was instantly so much concerned that I was ashamed of the reference—to her happily meaningless. She seized the situation, however, as was her habit, for this was a part which exactly suited her. It was wonderful how long we could see the bee's great bulk, like the end of a black man's thumb which had somehow flown off by itself. At last he went from sight, but Sweetheart followed him with her eyes.

"His name is Buzz, father; did you know?"

"No, Sweetheart; how should I know?"

"Well, he told me—yes, indeed! His name is Buzz, and he lives in a hole in a hollow tree."

"No, dear; in a meadow, surely!"

"Well, I don't know—but" (severely) "he said 'in a hollow tree.' And his wife's name is

Huzz. And he has two little baby bees, and their names are Fuzz and Muzz—at least he said so—and he has to work so hard to buy bread and butter for them. He works a typewriter at home, and old Mother Huzz she makes their clothes and puts Fuzz and Muzz to bed. And every night when it is time to go to sleep, Fuzz puts his head in his mother's lap and says, 'Bless father and mother, and make Fuzz a good little bumble-bee, for——.'"

"That will do, Sweetheart!" I interjected hastily, for there was not the least guarantee as to what might come next. "It is time we were going on."

Now in our fateful journeyings we came to the long village of Llanrwst. We flashed through it at a great speed, and the children came running to see us pass. Outside the town we paused a moment to get a drink out of Sweetheart's favourite drinking-cup, being the joined palms of her faithful slave's hands. It is wonderful how daintily water can be drunk. You could not believe what a charming sight it can be unless you had seen my Sweetheart sip that water from the Welsh hills.

A little girl stepped up and gave the Red

Riding-Hood a bunch of flowers. Now it is the only unpleasant thing about these little Cymri,



"A bunch of flowers."

that they do continually pester the traveller with bunches of flowers—by no means expectant of nothing in return. But the way in which my

Sweetheart said, "Thank you, little girl, for your pretty flowers!" was such a natural lesson in gratitude, that I must perforce spoil the effect of it by adding a penny. For so the manner of blundering man is.

We went on in the quiet evening light until we reached the inn at Bettws—now, alas! a stately hotel. Here there was dinner, where we had the best of company—that is, we were left entirely to ourselves. But at another table four young men told one another in loud tones what great fellows they were. Mercifully they had only eyes for themselves, and did not heed, save to despise, the two wayworn and disreputable wanderers.

"*I like two dinners in one day,*" remarked a mercenary maid, presently.

And the working partner agreed that (at least while cycling in Wales) three would be no over-plus.

The sun was dropping down-hill rapidly as we took the broad, beautifully surfaced road towards Capel Curig. There was a white haze in the valley, and the workmen were coming home. It was a cheerful time. The crisp suggestion of fried bacon and eggs carried far, and the children were calling one to the other in shrill Cymraeg.

As we approached the scattered lakes of Capel Curig, with inns peppered casually among them, we hesitated a little whether we should dismount and abide here, or whether we should try the bolder adventure of distant Pen-y-Gwryd.

The lady, of course, was all for the bolder course. Also, equally of course, she got her way.

In a little, therefore, we were parting the mist with resolute shoulders, and leaving beneath us, ghostly in the gathering whiteness, the lakes of Llyniau Mymbyr. Up and up we went. There was no sound save the sough which the light wind makes as it forever draws to and fro through the valley, airing it out, as it were, before the light sheets of the night-mist are spread over it.

"Are you warm, Sweetheart?" I asked.

"Yes, father dear, warm and cosy. And I want a chocolate."

The road had recently been metalled, and there were long interludes of pushing. It was very lonely up here. Gradually the mist drew down beneath us, and we seemed to be riding on the clouds. Across the sea of white the summits of a long featureless range of hills stood black against the western sky. In the middle of the darkness the light of a farmhouse gleamed. It looked

gladsome to think of hearth-fires flickering cheerily on the bleak hillside. Suddenly the ghost of a great house started out of the night-mist before us, and an open door threw a gush of warm welcome across the road.

"Jump down, Sweetheart. It is Pen-y-Gwryd at last, and here is kind Mrs. Owen!"

We had arrived.



CHAPTER XI

HILL PASSES AND COAST LANDS



WHEN we arose betimes, we were astonished to look out and see the wind of the morning off the western sea, steadily pushing back the mists from the mountain-tops, exactly as a shepherd "wears" his flocks on the hill when his dogs are working well together.

"I thought you told me, father," said the Sweetheart, "that it always rains here?"

She was speaking to me through the closed window so eagerly that the little nose, not naturally "tip-tilted," flattened itself at the point in a way calculated to give pain to any lover

less devoted than I. But for all that she was a singularly attractive Juliet.

She was referring to a hasty speech of the night before, made when we were pushing up the long, slate-covered glen from Capel Curig. The cheery lights, gleaming hospitably from the long dark slopes of the valley opposite to our painful way, looked altogether too aggravating as they winked comfortably through the mist. And the contrast led to the unsupported assertion that "there never was such a hole as Pen-y-Gwryd for rain"—a remark, doubtless, which has been made about every place where travellers happen to arrive in a shower. But then Sweetheart always takes everything literally—perhaps, like others of her sex, desiring to compound for her own romancing by requiring an exact and inflexible veracity from all the world beside.

It was a pleasant scene which greeted our eyes as we looked out of the window. The crest of Moel Siabod, falling back a little like a wave which has not quite succeeded in breaking, showed silver gleams of leaping rivulets from last night's rain amid the flat blue of its higher slopes. All night we had heard the storm beat against the windows. Yet the morning came so brightly as to make us

forget that there had ever been such a thing as damp night-mist closing in about us and the rain running in streams from our mackintoshes. But the pools on the roadway and the sad state of our hastily stabled steed were evidence convincing enough. Sweetheart romped wildly about the roadway, while with rag and vaseline I groomed the noble animal, which stood patient and still, proudly arching his silver-plated Stanley head.

So steep are the slopes in this land of Wales, that the rains seem to run off almost as soon as they fall. Whenever it is blue above, the road beneath is dry. So that it was no long time before we were again in the saddle, and had committed ourselves to one of the primary powers of nature—that of gravitation—in order to take us down the steep pass of Nant Gwynant, which begins almost at the door of the hotel. Most happily, a complete trust in back-pedalling and the strength of our new band-brake, enabled us to regard the abrupt descent with equanimity. The road lay beneath us, in long winding loops and circles, like an apple-peeling which some Snowdonian giant had thrown over his shoulder for luck. At least it looked thus fair and inviting while yet we were high above it. But when we came actually upon it, even

Sweetheart became anxious for the safety of the pneumatic tyres. For it was not upon honest road-metal that we had to progress, but over the most unadulterated and natural of rocks. The ways of the Cymric Celt in road-mending among his own mountains are happily unique. A road there is to mend. Taffy has the job committed to him. That is well. He is just the man to carry it through. He betakes himself up the hillside to do his duty, for Taffy is an honest man and no "thief," as has frequently been libellously asserted. He fully intends to mend the road, and also he means to make a job of it which will last. So he loosens rocks from the side of the mountains—stones monstrous, shapeless, primeval—boulders last moved by the ice rivers of the glacial period. These he blasts and crowbars down, till to be rid of him they roll of their own accord upon the road. There he lets them lie. The road is mended. Then he goes to chapel a-Sundays, and sings and prays as if there were no Judgment Day.

Thus very slowly we staggered downwards amid this *débris* of creation and Taffy, and at a walking pace we finally conquered these difficulties—powdered resin giving some stability to our

band-brake, which had been wheezing and com-



"The road is mended"

plaining all the way from Pen-y-Gwryd. A small boy contemplated us with surprising disfavour

from the top of a wall, on which he lay prone with his legs in the air till we had passed, whereupon he rose and sent after us a shrill howl of derision.

"What dirty boy is that?" asked Sweetheart, to whom the animal was unknown, but who had returned the look of disfavour with usury thereto.

"Only a silly boy who does not know any better," I answered sententiously, after the manner of parents when they have no information, but who desire nevertheless to retain an appearance of superiority.

"I know," said Sir Walter of the Red Cap briskly, rending the futile make-believe without an effort. "He used to be a little puppy dog, that barked and whined after everybody. And one day he did it to a good fairy, and she turned him into a bad little boy on the top of a wall, who makes faces as people go by."

"Let us hope," I interjected, "that his father will give him something else as a present."

"I know what," cried the much-experienced maid, quick as a flash, "a whipping!"

Then, after a pause, and very thoughtfully, "*Whippings is good for boys!*"

Now at last there came a stretch of unbouldered



"He rose and sent after us a shrill howl of decision"

road, and then before us lay Bedd Gelert with its

quaint streets and sleeping houses. Ten o'clock in the morning, and there was not a dog stirring! Everything was fast asleep in the broad light of the morning sun. But we managed to obtain some milk and seltzer at an inn, which looked suitable for humble folk like us, at whom even the ragged boy upon the wall might shriek and gibber unreprieved. Our pride had indeed gotten a fall, for we had hitherto received so much kindness, that we had begun to think ourselves to be some great ones. But here in Bedd Gelert even the maid who served our seltzer looked at us with extreme suspicion, as though Sweetheart and I were making a Gretna Green flight in the wrong direction. However, the womanly eye of my fellow-traveller soon lighted upon one cause of the suspicion. It was that the lining of my cap had been saturated by the rain of the bygone night and the exertion of the morning. So that now sundry streaks of red dye were trickling over my face, imparting an appearance even more suspicious and felonious than is natural. Then, having hastily executed repairs by the summary method of turning the cap inside out—an excellent and reputable makeshift—we proceeded still downward, after having duly paid

our bill. The Maid-of-the-Inn somewhat relented when she found us unexpectedly solvent, but even then she evinced no emotion, following us stolidly to the door to watch us off the premises. "Her tongue does not go!" said Sweetheart, speaking by the book. But her perception for once was at fault. For no sooner was I at my straps and screws than we heard our servitor discussing us in high-pitched Welsh of a peculiarly piercing and up-three-stairs variety.

It cost us not a pang, therefore, to pass onward, over a road still copiously bouldered, towards the bridge, infinitely bepainted and besung, of Aberglaslyn.

"It looks quite shut-up here!" said my companion, expressing in her own way the idea that we were running our heads into a bag, as the mountain walls of the pass closed sharply in upon us. There was a little climb again after we had crossed the bridge and had begun to turn our faces away from the hills. As we breasted the little rise and set our horse's head downward a new scent—warm, wet, yet deliciously fresh, came up from the long wide valley, at the end of which we could see in a dreamy haze the network of lines which told of the masts of ships at Port

Madoc. The town itself clustered along the edge of a dark whale-backed ridge. The scent was the scent of the sea, whereupon my maid at once became clamorous for cliffs and sandy coves, and desirous of "throwing stones in the water"—a cheap form of recreation much affected by her, which happily immemorial custom does not stale.

Now again there was some level road, and the rain still lay in pools upon it. The road-making was still of the Welsh type previously described, but if possible more barefacedly so. For the piles of unbroken stone with which the road was to be "mended" were lying here and there upon it as we rode along.

"I do not call it very kind of them," was the Sweetheart's verdict, and it was mine also. My feelings were expressed chiefly by kicking vehemently at the largest stones as I pushed the machine along—a mistake, however, for one who wears tennis shoes. For the exercise was like driving a cart along a boulder-strewn beach. However, just before we got into Tremadoc the road unexpectedly improved. We leaped at once into the saddle and were thus enabled to make our entrance into that famous old town with some

distinction. It was market-day, and half a dozen carts stood about with their shafts on the ground. There were also many groups of chaffering country-folk, who on our appearance crowded about us, and had their due share of the excitement. Few of them appeared to "have any English." But they all seemed eager that we should visit the apothecary of the place, a certain notable Mr. Evans, domiciled at the corner of the road by which we had come in. Thither we went, and found a man, certainly remarkable enough in himself—in appearance the last of the bards—grey and reverend, and speaking English with a pretty antique flavour as of one who had learned it in his sleep.

But in nowise asleep was Mr. Evans. In his wonderful shop he had books of all sorts—volumes of legends into which Sweetheart and I peered with envious eyes. They looked so rich in possible giants and visits of the "tilwyth teg"—the Little People, with whom it was evident Mr. Evans was on good terms, and whom he might even be keeping concealed in some unseen corner of his shop—that wonderfully tangled, quaint-smelling magazine of his.

But, alas! the books were all written in Welsh

which, though we knew that it could be read musically enough, looked to us poor uninstructed ones only a chance lucky-bag of some consonantal alphabet without any vowels in it at all.

Mr. Evans was, indeed, for the time being our fairy godmother—in that he bestowed upon us everything we needed. Never was there such a man. He had cycle oil, into which he put a drop of paraffin that it might “seek further in,” as he remarked. Then he had colza oil for the lamp, and a nutshell of camphor to put in it to make it burn better. He had a square of American cloth to make a sausage-roll luggage-carrier to fasten on the handle bar. He cut strips from a tanned hide which lay on the counter to gear the roll on to the machine. He had sweets of various sorts, mellow with age. Above all he had extensive information about the uncycled region of the Lley to which we were going.

Altogether he was a treasure of a Mr. Evans, and when at last we left the shop, he came out to pilot us across the street, having charged us a perfectly infinitesimal amount for all this wealth—a sum indeed which made us ashamed to present a fraction of a shilling to such an ancient and honourable man, and withal a bard of Wales.

By him we were commended to a good wife at the inn opposite, who, as it was market-day, and the crowd were "drinking fine," had however no time to brew us tea. So that we had to be content with as much milk as we could drink and with the dark-coloured bread of the country. But as we had good-going appetites and teeth in excellent working order, we did not very grievously complain. Our fare cost us fivepence, and I remarked to Sweetheart that we would get rich, living in this way and at this rate.

"Then let us ride on for ever and for ever, and never go back any more," said the little maid promptly. "Unless"—she hesitated—"the rain should come on."

But, alas! just then the rain came on.



CHAPTER XII

THE PEARL OF POLICEMEN



YES, it was indubitably raining, and it is no joke when it rains in Tremadoc, where nobody is quite alive except Mr. Evans, who keeps the chemist's shop at the corner—and every other kind of shop. Our landlady, at least, being a Jones, one of a clan great and powerful, could give us no attention. It was surely bad enough to be compelled to give obedience and service to people who were paying for their

liquor, without troubling about suspicious gangrel bodies who ordered fivepence worth of milk and bread, and then took more than an hour to eat it. It was, however, raining, without any doubt about it whatever; and there did not appear to be any house of refuge for our tricycle. The country-folk about Tremadoc did their stabling simply, by unharnessing their beasts and tying them to the tail of their carts in the great open square of the village, where they stood arching their backs in the rain, their noses in moist brown corn-bags, with dumb pathetic patience and the most invincibly sad-eyed determination.

So I betook myself out to see what could be done with our steed. I stood a moment in doubt, till a very friendly policeman (whose name, strangely enough, was also Jones) came up and invited me to put it in a kind of market-hall on one side of the village square, the door of which he unlocked for the purpose. He had a "notion of them cycle machines," he said, and (O too rare officer of the Crown) he liked those who rode upon them. He did not mind much if they did occasionally ride on the footpath. And he was not grieved in heart because a vagrant cyclist rode through at nightfall without a lamp. He

was a most accommodating officer, and he did not seem over-burdened with duty. After I had returned to the inn, the Sweetheart and I watched him through the window. He had obtained a bottle of oil and a rag from some hidden treasure of his own. And there in the shelter of the market arches he was employing himself in going carefully over the tricycle's every part. Most excellent No. 37 of the Carnarvon County Police, Sweetheart and I have not forgotten you!

We abode in our inn for a long while, and watched the rain drip over the white crag under which the village nestles. I told Sweetheart, out of a guide-book which I found on a side-table, that the village had been founded by a member of Parliament named Maddox (Sweetheart evidently thinks him a Jones masquerading in disguise) in the beginning of the century, and that he had built all the houses.

Now Sweetheart has no opinion of guide-books, though she thinks maps pretty—specially those which she is allowed to colour with a penny painting outfit. She, therefore, promptly contemned the information.

"Did Mr. Jones build all these houses?" she

asked in a supercilious manner, indicating a number of houses with their fronts boarded up.

"The book says he did, but his name was Maddox," I answered meekly.

"Then why did he not make people come and live in them!" said Sweetheart, with the air of a Prime Minister moving the closure.

I could only weakly appeal to the book. But that authority was decidedly rejected, for the simple and sufficient reason that "it did not look a very nice kind of book"—which, considering that some generations of beer-pots had been set down upon its covers, was assuredly well within the fact.

The friendly officer of justice, having polished up our "Humber" to the point of perfection, as though it were the buckle of his own waistbelt and he loved it, came across the street to tell us that the sky was clearing, and that he did not think there would be any more rain to the west, whither we were going.

"It's the hills, you see, sir," he said lucidly. "It crawls down from the hills and it crawls up from the sea, and so"—with a sigh he said it—"indeed yes—it mostly rains in Tremadoc!"

As we went he wished us God-speed on our

way, and told us that he was hoping for a transfer to "Carnarfon, or some other lartch town." He was a very pearl of a policeman, and if ever I have to be taken up, I mean to send for No. 37 to do it. Sweetheart and I both earnestly hope that one day he will be made a chief constable, and dwell in peace and consideration in "Carnarfon or some other lartch town," according to his desire.



CHAPTER XIII

THE JONESES OF CRICCIETH



WE wheeled away over a much finer road than we had yet travelled on in Wales, a turnpike which reminded us of our own Scottish highways. We kept our eyes fixed on the blue peaks of the Rivals, to the foot of which we desired to go. As we went I told over again to Sweetheart what the retailer of drugs and fairy tales in Tremadoc had told me—how that this road on which we were travelling had been made to the great empty harbour of Porthdynlleyn to which we were going. But how

in spite of all the vast sums of money which had been spent upon it, not a vessel had ever sailed over from the harbour nor a ton of goods passed over to Ireland along this beautiful highway. Sweetheart was interested so long as I told her of the kind people who had made the road, in order that little girls could ride with their fathers to a beautiful sandy beach, there to gather shells and sea-weed. But she manifested no concern whatever in the economics of the question, and was left quite untouched by the short and simple annals of the failure of the wide shipless harbour of Porth-dynlleyn.

It grew very hot as we paced easily along the road towards Criccieth. So we refreshed ourselves, pulling the tricycle into a snug cavity where there had once been a heap of stones for road-mending. For this particular road is not kept in the simple primitive Cymric condition, of which we had tasted enough to suffice us earlier in the day. Sweetheart dispersed herself generally over the fields and gathered mighty store of cowslips, while the chief acting-engineer rested and watched the quick-flitting scarlet figure and the one blue peep of sea.

As we lazied here a train passed us on its way

to Pwllheli (which being pronounced is "Pooth-elly"). The fussy activity of the tiny engine



"Gathered mighty store of cowslips.

warned us that we must proceed. So we gathered our belongings reluctantly together and it was no

great length of time before we found ourselves within sight of Criccieth, which in the distance looked, on such a day of clean-washen skies and bright sunshine, precisely like a little Welsh Monaco, with its castle set almost jauntily upon the jutting promontory. Sweetheart looked long upon it, and at last pronounced it very good.

"I mean to live here when I am grown up—yes indeed! Then it will always be holidays at the sea-side, and I shall let my children play on the sand all day. And never tell them to come in, till it is tea-time and they are *quite* tired—and you and mother shall live here also——"

"And your husband?" I suggested.

At first Sweetheart was not at all willing to be convinced of the necessity for such an encumbrance. But, being finally over-persuaded to accept my amendment, owing to the overwhelming analogies which I suggested, she said, as an ultimatum :—

"Well, then, *he* could stop at home and work."

It is at least well that the poor man should be forewarned and forearmed.

At Criccieth we dismounted at the door of a house which promised refreshment, and which

looked clean and cosy. We were much too poor to go to the fine hotels which stood near the station. Besides which we had had enough on our first day out, of the manners and customs of the great to such as we. So, very respectfully we knocked at the door of "Glanarfon House," which, in spite of its grand name, is just like every other house in the village. And as soon as we set eyes on the cap of the particular Mrs. Jones who opened to us, we were sure that we had fallen upon our feet.

"Please, father," thus I was instructed, "ask for jam for two, and if there is a cat to play with!" There were all three, so the maid was more than ever determined to live always in Criccieth.

While things were getting into working order at "Glanarfon House," we strolled casually down to the beach, at sight of which, with its crescent of sand yellow shining against the pure blue, Sweetheart uttered a little cry of pleasure and darted out to see if she could find any store of shells upon it.

I sat down on an upturned boat. To me presently entered an aged man with a nautical hitch in his walk. He discoursed upon the glories of

Criccieth. He was also a laudator of the coming times. There was to be a great hotel. There were already the beginnings of a promenade—all made of expensive concrete, along the shore.



"He discoursed upon the glories of Criccieth"

By-and-by there would be exhibitions, and photographic saloons, and a band on the beach. Nay, it was even whispered, but for the present it must be kept dark to guard against the envy and jealousy of Pwllheli—that cunningest of rivals—

that the Commissioners of town improvements were in terms with a troupe of minstrels—real darkies, who had formerly performed upon the bones and tambourine at the mighty Blackpool itself.

I could not sufficiently express to the reverend man my envious admiration of the march of improvement. With geraniums on the village green, planted out in pots, and a troupe of niggers dancing clog-dances on a new concrete promenade—I felt that Criccieth would indeed be an Arcady all too perfect.

But I felt compelled to ask the seafaring man not to mention these things to Sweetheart. For the determination to reside permanently at Criccieth would undoubtedly have turned to adamant at the idea of the minstrels. The ancient mariner, who in his youth had often sailed to America, declared in the dialect of that country that “he would not give me away.” I thanked him with tears in my eyes, for I am a man under authority. He said that he was a married man himself, and knew how it was when “them childer got round the old woman.” In spite of the fact that his name was Jones, he was a most feeling-hearted man.

On returning to Glanarfon House, we found a repast spread for us. There was great plenty of the articles which were beloved of the Sweetheart—jam and also marmalade, besides the bacon and eggs which she and I consider to be the traveller's staff of life, and tea from the brown pot, brewed not boiled. We contributed on our own account two of the healthiest and most sufficient appetites on record. All the while Mrs. Jones (the nine and ninetieth we had encountered) stood over us, moving restlessly about and crooning with vague delight. She queried chiefly of Sweetheart's age.

"And is the young lady only four? Indeed, it is a wonder. It is beautiful to see—beautiful."

But what was beautiful I was not quite able to make out, though Mrs. Jones repeated the statement an inconceivable number of times. As for Sweetheart, she did not trouble herself about the matter. But, "like a well-conducted person," that eminently practical damsel "kept on eating bread and butter"—also ham, eggs, and marmalade, all on the same plate and at the same time. For this is one of the most sacred conventions of the gipsydom in which Sweetheart and I

love to travel—that everything good eats admirably with everything else, when served up on one plate with hunger sauce. In which sentiment Sweetheart concurs. The affidavit carries both our signatures.



CHAPTER XIV

THE HOME-COMING OF DAVID ROBERTS



It was a glowing evening as we wheeled slowly over the crisp road which led along the shore from Criccieth to Pwllheli. We were leaving the hills behind us, though the Rivals and the long undulating line of the Lleyen peninsula still rose before us. Sweetheart and I were almost too eager to get to our journey's end, to watch the quick tripping turnstones on the beach as they inserted their bills under a pebble, hitched it over cleverly with a quick turn, and gobbled up the worm which lay coiled beneath. Half-a-dozen dunlins, too, purred and squabbled further out. While beyond all the herring gulls

cried wildly, and a few terns with clipper-built, swallow-like wings, flashed and fell like rockets in the bay, sending up jets of white foam.

"What a lot of things there are!" said Sweetheart, unconsciously paraphrasing Mr. Stevenson, who sings :

"The world is so full of a number of things,
I think we should all be as happy as kings."

Along the unstable sandy indentations of the sea marge we took our way, now coming out on the broad sea view, now getting behind a cutting of the little railway—which pursued us all the way to Pwllheli, where we were glad to be altogether quit of its ill-natured snorting fussiness. Sometimes we got off to walk a little, when Sweetheart pulled a few flowers to go in the envelope of mother's letter. Where they made, we fear, a sad mess, the colour coming off and the viscous green of the stalks acting as a natural glue between the sheets.

At the foot of one of the short descents we encountered a sailor boy, with his bundle on a stick, resting on a heap of stones. It was like the old romances of forty years ago. He had been to sea and was coming back from his first

voyage. He showed us his pass to the little village station, half-way between Criccieth and Pwllheli. He also let us look at the order for his money, made out upon the post-office at the latter town, where he and his mother would joyfully go on the morrow to claim it. His "kit"



"Resting on a heap of stones."

had, he said, gone on by train. He seemed a nice boy, and so little bashful was he that, right before our eyes, he first washed his face and then combed his hair with a pocket comb into a sleek nautical curve over his forehead. He wished to be neat before he would venture

round the corner to his mother's door to take her by surprise.

There was poetry in the thought. Small doubt but that he had dreamed a thousand times of this when his ship was tossing round the Horn, or when he was loading grain at California and hides at Valparaiso or Callao. He had fancied himself back at this little brook just round the corner from his mother's cottage, making his toilet, and the brown Welsh bees humming all about in the stone-crop and the heather. So here after all his adventures he was, just as he had so often dreamed. And yet in spite of all he had time to talk to a couple of tramps by the wayside.

"Will your mother know that you have landed?" we asked.

"Oh no," he said; "for we just got into Liverpool last night at ten o'clock."

"But the newspaper——" I suggested.

The sailor lad laughed cheerily. He had thought of that. There is time aboard ship to think of everything.

"My mother gets the *Baner* once a week," he said—"on Saturdays."

Suddenly our friend leaped briskly over the turf

dyke, and to our astonishment whispered to us from the other side to keep still and say nothing. A tall slip of a girl, with her hair done into a plait, came slowly along swinging a cow-switch in her hand. She looked very hard at us, as Sweetheart and I sat mighty guiltily by the side of the road. But though we were all astonished, not one of us said a single word.

As soon as she was past, our friend sprang over the dyke with a joyous light in his eye.

"That was my sister," he said, "and if she had seen me she would have run right off and told my mother, and that would have spoiled it all."

Evidently the dramatic grandeur of this arrival was to pay for a great deal. He was to make a memorable entry, and we wanted with all our hearts to see it without being too intrusive. David Roberts was our sailor's name. We could almost have hugged him that it was not Jones. But it would, indeed, have been somewhat too cruel to have stayed and taken part in that welcome. So, rising from the stone-heap, he put himself into marching order. We all shook hands, and I think there was a warmth about our hearts, as if we too had all been round the



"She looked very hard at us

Home-Coming of David Roberts 113

Horn and were going after two years to take our mothers by surprise.

David Roberts went on ahead, while we mounted in some haste and followed discreetly after. There was a low-built, white-washed cottage before us, basking in the evening sun. And there, too, was David Roberts, who had now no eyes for the like of us. The door was open, and we caught a glimpse of a woman with grey hair and a print gown standing at a table within. We thought that her face looked weary. Be of good cheer, good mother! There is that on the threshold of your door which will bring back the light to the eyes, which have wept so many tears since the little lad went away. Go in, David Roberts, and shut the door. With the heart-joy of thy mother and thee, God forbid that a stranger should intermeddle.

As we glanced round for the last time ere we turned the curve out of sight, the road was empty and bare. But we knew where David Roberts was, and we knew, too, what his mother was saying to him.



CHAPTER XV

UNWIDDER-LIKE DEEDS



O Sweetheart and I posted on with our eyes a little dim. We were agreed in the opinion that David Roberts was the best of boys, but that would not help us to reach Nevin above the crumbling heughs of Porthdynlleyn. So at long and last came Pwllheli, where, in the funny little wooden restaurant by the station, a very polite maiden gave us most excellent tea. There was also an aquiline-faced young man, bold of eye, seated at the table.

He had a cup of coffee set before him, which he stirred round and round while he gazed without winking at the pair of us. He might, by his look, have been a policeman sent to take us up for some unheard-of crime, but he was clad in workman's moleskins and dusted grey with quarry dust.

"Been takin' the young 'un riding, boss?" he asked. "That's a bright idea."

"You've been in the States?" replied I, giving him back question for question, as a Scotsman must by nature.

He had, he said. It was "a son-of-a-gun of a fine country out there." He wished he had never left it. We asked him why he forsook it at all, since this was his opinion.

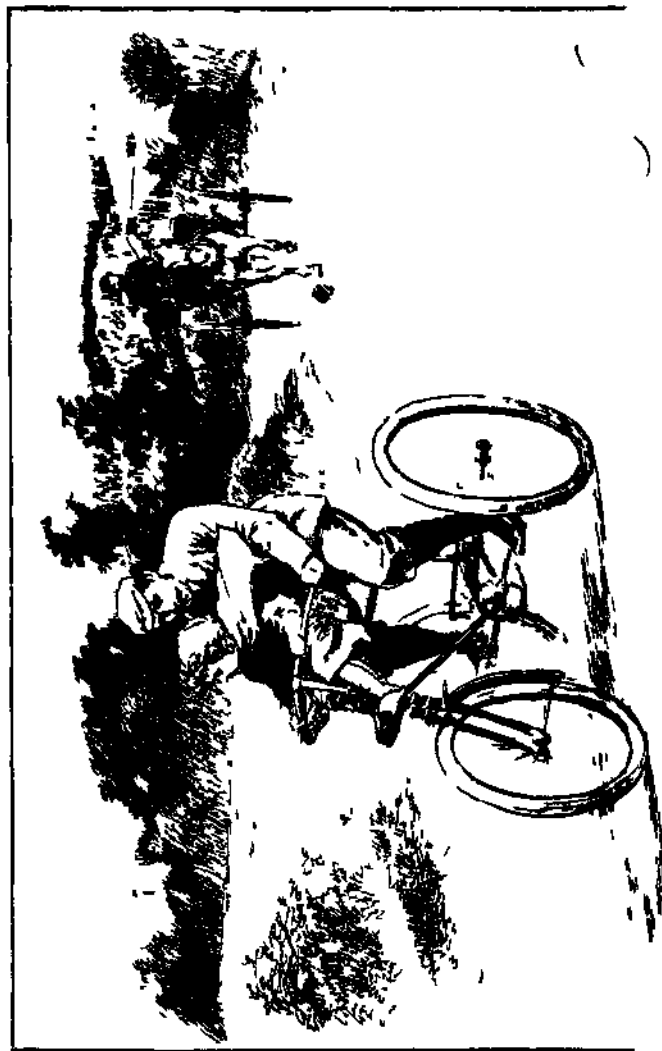
"Too much shoot," he said enigmatically. And he imitated with wonderful accuracy the movements of taking a revolver from his thigh and discharging it at a visionary antagonist. The Sweetheart looked at him with fascinated eyes and yet without the least fear.

"Did they make gold where you were?" she asked, looking at his great hands and arms as they lay resting on the bare boards of the table opposite us, veined and muscular with toil.

"Not so bright as your hair, missy," he replied, politely and kindly, as he rose to go out.

This was quite another type from our sailor boy. He was, we found, employed in managing the dynamite at some quarries in the neighbourhood, and was known there as "Denver Mike."

Soon we were speeding out of Pwllheli, through the fine trees which made a pleasant lattice-work overhead. It was more like Mr. Gale's Arcady in leafy Warwickshire, than the bare wind-swept west of Carnarvon. As we went a farmer driving a smart trap raced us for awhile along the splendid road. Sweetheart was, of course, immensely delighted, and leant back and forward to expedite the pace at the word of command. As we drew away, owing to our superior speed on the level, and also, I fear, to our recklessness down-hill, she turned round and waved her hand with a kind of dainty provocation, to which the jolly farmer responded right gallantly with his whip. I do not think that he really meant to beat us, seeing that the lady passenger's heart would have been well-nigh broken by that event. But Sweetheart and I were sure that he could not have done so if he would. Thus scouring the road, "like stour" as we say in Scotland, we came out on a fine,



The joy of riding a bicycle with a woman

open, wind-swept plain, across which the long, broad highway ran straight as an arrow right into the eye of the setting sun.

The telegraph wires, a perfect network of them, hummed and buzzed overhead. They were carrying messages, so we imagined (and let no man correct us if we be wrong), over to the green island—lovers' messages to their sweethearts, high above that beautiful, useless road which had been intended to carry so much precious merchandise to poor old Ireland.

So swiftly were we speeding, that it was not long before we came to the angle in the road, where a guide-post told us that we must turn aside and face the short hill which leads up to Nevin. Having arrived, we found our way to the Nanhoron Arms, which is a goodly hostelry and a kindly, whose ham and eggs are of the best, and where there is no scorn for the light-pocketed travellers who prefer "tramps' ordinary" to the state and expense of a dinner in three volumes.

There still remained time before nightfall for us to go out upon the great cliffs of which we had caught a glimpse as we rode into the town. The road was a pleasant one, meandering through

fields. Stonechats were flitting here and there, flirting with each other in pairs, and keeping just a few paces in front of us. The lover was got up in his gayest holiday attire, and he poised himself in the air like a humming-bird over a flower. There were many pairs of them on the open hill-side, and they were to be seen on almost every bramble bush. They allowed the Sweetheart to approach nearer than any one else—her red cloak and sunshiny hair being somehow akin to themselves, and her gait obviously devoid of serious or deadly intent. It is sometimes a great privilege to be but four years old. And this was the song she was singing. She had learned it that morning as we rode under the great Glyder and in front of the deep corrie of Cwm Dyli:

“A blooming young widder,
Ran right up the Glyder,
All in her widder's weeds;
She came back by Cwm Dyli,
Astride of a filly—
Dear me, what unwidder-like deeds!”

This I had taught her, to my lasting sorrow, and for my sins it had been ringing in my ears all the day. However, now at eventide, the stonechats



Out upon the great cliffs before nightfall

seemed to like it. And they were not shocked at the Bacchantic abandon of the singer, nor yet greatly at the "unwidder-like deeds" of the bereaved lady of the song.

The cliffs at Nevin are many hundreds of feet high—the exact number may be ascertained, no doubt, from the guide-books. To Sweetheart and myself they looked simply tremendous. The fact that they are nothing more than crumbling earth only adds to the aspect of alarm. We seemed in momentary danger of slipping over into the sea. As we came to the steep ascent, we saw a glorious picture before us. The sun was dipping into the water. He was as red as blood, and a broad pathway of fire stretched across towards him, which broadened as it went westward.

"What is over there?" asked the Sweetheart, pointing where the sun had gone down.

"That," I replied, "is Ireland."

"Then," she said, "it will just be beginning to be sunshine on Ireland!"

For which, indeed, we pray.



CHAPTER XVI

THE LOST LAND OF LLEYN



OUR last day out dawned like the appearing of a new heavens and a new earth, "emerged from some diviner bath of birth," as somebody says. Nevin, but for the slate roofs, might this morning have been mistaken for some exiguous suburb of Paradise. There was exactly the feeling of George Herbert's Sabbath around us, though as yet the day was only Saturday—

"Sweet day, so cool, so calm, so bright
The bridal of the earth and sky."

At last we were to perform what we had

come so far to do. So it was no wonder that we were up betimes. We had to circumnavigate, or rather circum-cycle, the entire promontory of the Lleyn. Years ago, before the Sweetheart hopped up like a restless Bird of Paradise into the world's cage, the Lleyn had fascinated the chief-engineer, as he saw it from the woody skirts of Cader Idris. Then, for the sake of a certain prehistoric Sweetheart, he made a verse-sketch which, though of no account in itself, had ever since held out to him the promise of an enchanted land some day to be visited.

Here it is :

“Goldener than gold's clear self,
Above the purpling mountain mass the sun
Doth hang, mist-mellow in the even-shine.
Higher, the level curtain of the rain—
Soft summer rain, that blesseth where it falls—
Lets drop two sun-illumined folds of shower
Over yon dim blue western promontory—
The folk here call it Lleyn. Seen hence it seems
A chain of islands like our Hebrides,
Adream amid the rain-stilled Northern Sea.

Even thus, my Love, as thy life circles mine,
And thy dear influence, like the blessed rain,
Stilleth and purifieth the sea's surge—
So is the barren, lone, unquiet sea
Bound by the bands of habitable land,
Stilled by the gentle falling of the rain ”

Ever since writing these lines between the summer showers on the slopes of Cader, exactly as a painter may throw a hasty memorandum on paper for memory's sake, the Lleyn had been a haunted land, and now at last we were to encircle it. To Sweetheart and myself it was indeed a "Blue day." There was a cheerful crying about the Nanhoron Arms in the early morning. William Hughes was shrilly requested to turn out our team in marching order, and in due time William Hughes, be it said, approved himself a good and capable groom.

"A fair good passage all the way to Aberdaron," cried after us Captain Thomas, a warm-hearted sailor, now safe in port at Nevin. He had talked of strange lands with us on the evening before, so now with his hearty benison we wheeled swiftly southwards, the sun and wind uniting to make for us a brisk perfection of riding.

The road, too, though stony and uneven, was of fair gradient, and conducted us through a country quite new and unknown. We found the Lleyn to be on the whole a flat, broomy, heathery country, rising towards the eastern side of the promontory into darkly shaggy and rugged ridges.

But it was far from being a land without inhabitants. On the contrary, blue-bloused men and



' A fair passage '

white-capped women-folk stirred slumberously about a score of small crofts and wayside farm-

towns. The Lleyn is indeed the "band of habitable land" which I had imagined it ten years ago from the shores of County Meirion.

But these were not at all the Lleyn folk I had pictured. There was something of the French peasant about them. Their cloaks of red, seen in the distance, burned holes in the landscape, like peony roses with the sun on them. The wind blew scraps of shrill Cymric speech athwart us. And miniature Welshmen, compendiously clad in their fathers' cast-off trousers for sole garment (buttoned over their shoulders, their arms through the pocket-holes), stood bareheaded to let us pass. Their instinctive courtesy was a marvel and a delight to us, accustomed to the Gothic boorishness of our own more northern type. Up from the sea edge came a waft of air blowing warm and cool alternately—warm from the heather, cool from the wide green-flecked, purple-veined levels of the sea, sown with white ships, and making with the sky one continuous hollow vault of opal.

Then again a swirl of still warmer summer air blew softly across the purple moorlands that divided us from the eastern seaboard, and touched our cheeks like a caress.

As we breathed ourselves for a few minutes on the summit of a long rise, Sweetheart said :

"Father, I can hear the fairy grass-chatterers!"

It was the chirr of the grasshoppers among the long bennet grasses which she heard. For the "chatterers" were out in hosts that fine spring morning, though as yet it was hardly their time, and in the sound we seemed to learn that hay-time was not so far off as it seemed. A clergyman stood at his door—a bluff farmer parson he, with straws on his coat and a fork in his hand. He was a heartsome cleric, and gave us jovial greeting with the hay-fork as we went by.

We kept the sea on our right all the way, and from that hand also the breeze unsteadily came. The sun beat on the other side, till all the southward slopes of Sweetheart and the chief-engineer were completely baked. Still there was no word of Aberdaron. The fourteen miles from Nevin had spun themselves out wondrously. There, at last, far away over the flat moorlands, we caught a glimpse of the crown of Bardsey Island. The green and purple streaked sea stood up behind it solid as veined malachite. A white path wound up to the heathery summit of a hill near at hand,

in mazy loops of rocky pathway. But that was the last ascent before we rattled down into Aberdaron, and descended at the New Inn to partake of home-brewed beer and delicious brown bread.



CHAPTER XVII

A CHILD'S PARADISE



BERDARON is unique. There is no place in the three kingdoms in the least like it. It is a village transferred bodily from the operatic stage. The houses are toylike and unconnected, so tiny that we looked instinctively for comely little hay-makers in pink and emerald green scattering baskets of flowers, to come dancing and balancing out of them, twirling skirts and pirouetting as they came. Little artificial-looking streams run here and there, dividing the whole place into a series of green islands, as if for the purpose of being crossed by a

multiplicity of wooden bridges transported straight from Lilliput. The houses are overgrown with creepers, and the aspect of the whole is that of a stage village after the play is over. The only thing practical about the neighbourhood seemed to be a universal provider's shop, and that was kept by a Scotsman, whole-souled and hearty. Shake hands, Captain Macdonald, you keep up right well the hospitable traditions of your country and clan. I have not forgotten your fraternal welcome in a strange land, nor yet the excellence of your good cheer.

As we went through the street of the village towards the shore, the sea might have been a hundred miles away. Suddenly, however, we turned a corner between a pigsty and an upturned boat, and lo, there before us—quick as a drop-curtain, a glorious half-moon of shining sand and a plain of sapphire sea were flashing upon us in a moment. The sight fairly took our breaths away. We could hardly believe that we were in the land of reality. It was so exact a "crib" from the landscape painter. Usually Nature is accidental and not pictorial. But let those who think that Nature never composes anything, go to Aberdaron.

The "sickle sweep" of Aberdaron Bay ends in two bold headlands, which to-day were touched with grey and purple and crimson according to the strictest conventions of water-colour art. Two islands had been placed in exactly the right positions to be most effective in the middle distance, and there they swam in a golden purple haze. Boats and wreckage strewed the beach, which was flecked with magnificently coloured pebbles, some red as blood, others splashed with orange and lilac and green. Pure white nuggets of quartz and saffron sea-shells lie scattered among them. The man who first builds a hotel at Aberdaron will first make his fortune—and then go to his own place for desecrating the fairest spot God has made.

The Sweetheart never had beheld such a place. She had always had lingering doubts about the possibility of greater joy in heaven, than she has experienced on earth. But the horizon of her possibilities of happiness was suddenly widened.

And the chief-engineer, too, began to dream of the works which might be accomplished in the tranced quiet of this earthly paradise, looking out on these summer isles of beauty, and stilled by the murmur of this slumberous sea. Perchance it might prove all too slumberous for

action, who knows? But at all events Aberdaron made a good and appropriate resting-place after our long-time journeyings. It was true that we had to return someday. But not yet! It was true, also, that in time Sweetheart might tire of collecting the red stones and the white. But what need to think of sad satiety—at least, not yet a while? Sufficient unto the day is the goodness thereof. See the Sweetheart thrill with laughter as she watches a green crab scuttle sidelong into its hole. There is not a note of discord or possible pain in all her world. The happiness of Aberdaron beach abides but for an hour—a child's paradise, maybe; but it is all perfect while it lasts. "Of such is the Kingdom of Heaven!" I wonder if we quite understand. It is the young child's hour, and it is without alloy. Heaven will last somewhat longer—that is all.



CHAPTER XVIII

SWEETHEART'S SWEETHEARTS



It grieves me to be compelled to put on record the facts contained in this chapter. But as a warning to wayward children, and an incentive to parents to practise a sternness which, alas! the writer only preaches, I am determined to do my duty. For what is life without love? And what is love without fidelity? It would be a proud day if, with some approach to the truth, I could speak of Sweetheart's sweethearts in the singular number. Once upon a time—ah, happy, happy day!—fondly I deluded

myself with the belief that she had but one—and that one a person whose many admirable qualities so speak for themselves that I may be excused from further allusion to them.

But that day has long passed away. The multiplication-table itself cannot contain the number of the victims. Even Twelve-times-Twelve itself is unequal to the strain. Yet when Sweetheart is charged with being of a fickle heart, she only tosses her head, and with the charming privilege of her sex she says, "I don't care!" And she really does not care.

Which is the saddest part of it, and argues a rapidly growing callousness. For once she did care. It is recorded in the earlier chronicles of the family that on one occasion little Johnny Fox ran in to his mother, beblubbered with tears and melodious with howls. He was the same youth to whom Sweetheart had once proposed honourable wedlock.

"Johnny, what is the matter?" asked his doting parent.

"Oh, mother," cried Johnny, between his sobs, "Sweetheart says—if I won't play—'Kiss-in-the-ring,' she'll bang me over the head with my bat!"

He was, to say the least of it, not a warlike youth.

"Never mind, Johnny," replied his mother, "it is possible that some day you may change your mind about 'Kiss-in-the-ring'!"

But when that day comes, it is possible that Johnny Fox's mother may not like the idea quite so well as she does now.

But the fury of a woman scorned no longer abides in Sweetheart's bosom. Boys, her equals in years, delight her not. For has she not sweethearts a many, all bearded and moustached, grown men of standing and dignity? Indeed, grave and reverend seniors have been proud to do obeisance to our Giddy-pate-a-dreams, and that for no brief space. She drags them captive at the wheels of her chariot, affecting a primness and distance of demeanour in the drawing-room, which is belied by the extreme familiarity of her favours to them in her hours of ease.

"Come here at once and help to play 'Going to church'!" was her word of command on one occasion to the least of her slaves.

"You come right into the vestibule!" she commanded. "No—not that way, but properly. I'll show you how. Take off your hat! There! Now, get your collection ready. No, you don't! [The unprincipled churchgoer being about to pass

in without contributing.] Oh no; put your penny in the plate *first*. There now! *Now* I will show you to a seat."

So, with slow and fateful step and haughty censorious chin in the air, the Slave is duly shown to a pew, and an imaginary door shut upon him. From which safe eminence—it is upon the rickety seat of an antediluvian summer-house—he is privileged to observe the dignity with which the small elder stands at the plate, the calm importance of her attitude, and especially the beatific smile with which each purely imaginary contribution is acknowledged. It is indeed a notable lesson in ecclesiastical deportment, and shows us kirk-proud Scots, that our most national and cherished institutions are capable of improvement. Yet there is not the faintest levity in Sweetheart's treatment of the subject. Indeed upon the least flicker of a smile being discerned upon any face, Sweetheart instantly decides that the smiler is wholly unworthy of her confidence, and dismisses him with ignominy into the outer void of those who are not fit to play in her plays.

But I promised to speak of Sweetheart's other lovers. I admit that the lady is by no means mercenary in her attachments.

"I am not allowed to take money," she said in a dignified manner to one who proffered coin of the realm to propitiate the favour of the goddess, "*but* you can send me a book—they mostly do. Or toffee," she added thoughtfully, "there is a good shop just round the corner."

So, as has been remarked by some superfluously wise man or other, there are more ways of killing a cat than drowning it in cream.

Sweetheart has a shelf of books—all her own, and nearly each one of them has been sent to her by the authors of these books. But, alas! not in every case does she appreciate the value of the gift.

She has, in fact, but one question to ask about a new arrival when it is unwrapped. And that is—

"Is it about fairies?"

If it is, well. She will be graciously pleased to be read to out of it, and to pore over the pictures, particularly if they are coloured. But if otherwise, and if no fairies appear to be treated of, she says—

"I think that I shall give this one to Hugo!"

For it is always a fine thing to be generous.

To Mr. Sagaman, the famous author of one of

the most approved books of fairy lore—and one, indeed, who afterwards stood on the most dizzy pinnacle of her favour—Sweetheart's first command was—

“Now, tell me *all* about the Giant Blunderbore!”

The unfortunate author, thus assaulted, intimated that all his information about the person alluded to, was summed up in a couplet which he is suspected of having feloniously made up on the spot. (With authors you never can tell!) The lines were these:—

“The Cornish giant Blunderbore,
He gave a mighty thunder-roar.”

Sweetheart, however, was entirely dissatisfied with this explanation, though Hugo instantly appropriated the stanza, and has repeated it to every person whom he has encountered even unto this day. But Sweetheart could not make out how the author of a book (and such a book), could fail to know more about one of his most important characters.

“Did you copy all that about Blunderbore out of another book?” she said.

And the wretched being could not deny it—

or at least did not. He only nervously laughed, no doubt in distress at being found out, and said :

"Some day I shall write you another story all for yourself!"

This was wholly satisfactory. But Sweetheart wanted a stated contract.

"All about Blunderbore!" persisted Sweetheart, to make sure.

"Yes, all about nothing but the most fearful and bloody kinds of giants and giantesses!"

For Sweetheart is no devotee of the school of fiction which deals in a nicely wrapped-up moral lesson in each book, like a surprise packet. A good-going, cut-and-thrust giant story, a pictured horror on every page, the corner of an arm-chair to curl up in, and something nice to nibble at, are good enough for Sweetheart. For she is a woman of a very old variety indeed. And had she been placed in the sinless garden instead of Eve, our mother, I do not think that the history of the race would very materially have been altered. But the Old Woman—she of the clan of Eve—has never been without distinct and undeniable attractions—at least for old-fashioned people. And such, for the most part, Sweetheart's admirers are.

One day a young man arrived. He was full of good humour and kindness. It was just as well. For when he made his first advances towards the shy especial favours of a lover, Sweetheart eyed him carefully.

"Have you written anything?" she asked.

The young man admitted that he had remarked books with his name upon the backs of them, lying about on bookstalls and such places. So he supposed he must have written them.

"Are they about fairies?"

Sadly the young man had to confess, under the sternness of Sweetheart's eye, that they were not. At this point he was made to feel very much ashamed of himself, as well he might. Somewhat weakly he added, that *now* he would have a fairy to write about. He had never seen one—before. In a year or two this sugared compliment might have served his turn. For he is an ingenuous youth, and has the prettiest turn for phrasing. But at the age of five (nearly) maids need compliments put very plainly in order that they may understand them—indeed, even concretely. Candy is best.

"Then," said Sweetheart remorselessly, "I don't think I shall like you nearly so much as

Mr. Sagaman. You know, I *love* him. Besides, he is much nicer-looking than you. He has such beautiful hair and is a darling."

The young man of letters expressed his sorrow, but said that he would immediately get some grey hair-wash. He wondered if putting his head in the flour-barrel would do. It was (green-eyed) jealousy which made him say this.

"Oh, do try!" said Sweetheart, instantly and eagerly, feeling that this might be even better than writing fairy books; "I should so like to see you do it! Our flour-barrel is in the back pantry. Come on! I'll show you!"

But the unhappy young man withdrew his offer on the shallow plea that his hair was so black that it would take the whole barrel full. And to that, as there might not be a fairy at hand to fill it again, cook Marion might object.

Sweetheart has yet another admirer, of whom she is exceedingly fond. Mr. Dignus is a grave man of affairs, in aspect serene and reverend. But he has a manner with him as of one who knows the way of a man with a maid—at least when that maid is very young indeed.

In his case, however, it was certainly Sweet-

heart who made the advances. She was younger then, and success had not yet made her shy.

But she gave the good man warning of her intentions—which, however, were strictly honourable.

“I think I am going to love you,” she said.

Whereupon my friend Dignus, somewhat flattered, said modestly :

“Thank you very much, Sweetheart. But I am married already, don’t you know?”

A saying which Sweetheart did not appear to notice at the time, but afterwards she showed that she had heard and remembered it.

“He need not have mentioned about being married just then,” she said. “It was not very nice of him.”

But for all that Sweetheart was true to her proffer of friendship. Indeed, her heart is remarkably capacious. And the fact that she already loves a hundred, is no reason why she should not love a hundred and one—that is, if due cause be shown.

Once upon a time, in the absence of her parents, Sweetheart, proudest of maidens, was doing the honours of the table all alone to an unexpected guest. She was engaging him in

conversation. ("Combesation" is Sweetheart's form, and a very good one, too.)

"What is that gentleman?" asked the guest, pointing to a portrait on the ledge of a book-case.

"That?" said Sweetheart; "why, don't you know? That is Mr. Dignus. *He comes to see me, but he has to talk to father about his American copyrights.*"

Which, when you think of it, is just what most visiting lovers do. They come to see the maid. But they talk to the parent about American copyright.

And they think that the elder gull does not see through the subterfuge. What ostriches these lovers be!



CHAPTER XIX

THE PHILANTHROPY OF BIRDNESTING



WEETHEART and I sometimes go a-birdnesting. We do this purely from motives of philanthropy. Sweetheart, you see, wishes to save the poor birds from the hardship of bringing up too large families. So we always take one egg if there are four, but two if the improvident and reckless parents have arranged for more than that number.

Yet Sweetheart and I share the lot of many other much more worthy benefactors of the race. We have never yet been thanked as we deserve for

our unselfish interest. For instance, no further gone than this very morning, a blackbird stood on a bough and used quite improper language to us, when we had only slightly interfered with his domestic arrangements, entirely for his own benefit. He wholly declined to see it, and most obstinately and stupidly continued to assert that a blackbird's nest is his castle—a perfectly absurd contention. Has a blackbird rights? Can he exercise the franchise? Does he get drunk on election-day? Go to.

“How would you like it yourself?” he said.

Now, we admit that this was rather a home-thrust on the blackbird's part, but Sweetheart did not mind. She said that he could come and take her third best dolly—and welcome—the one with only one limb remaining out of four and with the back of its head caved in. A fair exchange is no limited company.

Upon which the blackbird retorted that we always took *his* best egg, and asked us why we would not be content with the broken one which he had shoved over the side.

But Sweetheart very soon disposed of him. She threatened that we would tell three school-

boys of our acquaintance about his nest if he did not hold his tongue.

That very quickly made him humble, I can tell you. And he not only asked our pardons (though he was perfectly in the right), but in addition he promised to come and sing in the laurels outside our windows every morning from seven to eight—a promise which I am bound to say he has most thoroughly and conscientiously kept.

It is nice to awake in the morning and hear him hard at it in the earliest dawn. His mellow, seductive notes thrill deep down into us through the mists of sleep, and tell us what a fine morning it is to be out and about. And so it is, no doubt, when one is up. It is only the intermediate processes which are disagreeable.

"It is a strange thing," says Sweetheart musingly, "that one has to do the most unpleasant thing in the day *first*!"

"And what might that be, Sweetheart?" I ask.

"Get up!" says she—with, I admit, a good deal of truth and point.

There is, indeed, but one correct way of getting up—that is, never to stand upon the order of your getting—but to get.

He who hesitates is lost. I am not speaking of women, for these never get up till they cannot possibly help it.

One's head seems scarcely to have reached the pillow a single moment, when "Chirr-r-r-r-r!" like an angry rattlesnake off goes the alarm, apparently under one's very ear. It is a critical moment.

"What a fool I was to set that thing last night," we say. "I wish it would quit making that horrid racket."

It does stop at last, and then silence comes like a porous plaster to heal the wounds of sound, as somebody said. Or (once more) words to that effect.

The supreme moment has come. In thirty pulse-beats you will be asleep again if you are not upon your feet. And if you succumb now, in a morning or two the loudest and longest alarm will awake you no more. At best it will only punctuate the night with a snug reminder that it is three or four hours before you require to get up.

However, all this is beside the question. We two *are* up and going out for a spring ramble—that is, Sweetheart and I. The trees are not very far advanced even yet on these mountain slopes. Only the catkins of the alder and the bloom of the hawthorn give promise of the thousand

blossoming bushes of a month hence. The windflower and the celandine are all the flowers that one can find by the bankside. Ah, no! that was too hasty a saying. Here is the sweet violet—that precious flower of a good smell.

“Listen, Sweetheart,” I say. “Can you tell me what is that which we hear?”

“It is the snipe!” cries Sweetheart happily. For the bird, drumming far away by itself on the moorlands, always touches our hearts with a vague mysterious thrill. The melancholy whimperings grow nearer to us. But not until we are fairly out on the open moor can we see the quiver of the stoop, as the bird pauses and dives in his whirlings in the far field of blue.

The whaup sweeps wailing and “*willy-whaing*” across the braeface on his way to the marshy hollow where his nest is to be. Myriads of small birds are flitting and twittering in the copses. A white-flecked wheatear junkets about, flying here and there in his peculiarly aimless and casual way.

“Why does he not settle down to housekeep?” says Sweetheart, whose tendencies just now are markedly domestic. She has eighteen of a family herself, and is thinking of having nineteen as soon



“Why does he not settle down to housekeep?”

as she can raise a sixpence for a very fascinating kilted boy in a window. "And lay eggs," she continues. "I want two wheatear's eggs."

But strangely the wheatear does not agree. He is indeed a bird without serious convictions—probably a Malthusian or Anarchist of some kind. The willow wren, on the contrary, is already busy constructing his nest, and has entered on the happy condition of double blessedness which he has been anticipating ever since, five days ago, he was pecking insects on a North African palm, and saying, "It is getting a great deal too hot down here!"

So he started, and after many perils he found himself on this dwarf thorn, where, remembering Africa, he shivers in the cutting keenness of our April wind.

But he is a delightful little chap, and never goes far from running water. Sweetheart says that he is as nice a bird as if he had been bred in a cage and fed on hempseed. He is, to speak in the American language, the cunningest of birds.

And his fairy flute of a song—is it not sweet beyond telling?

Listen, Sweetheart, again, to what he is saying :

"Dididay-deay, what can I saay?

Indeed I am gay!

Far away-ay I did stay, now I'll stop if I may-ay!

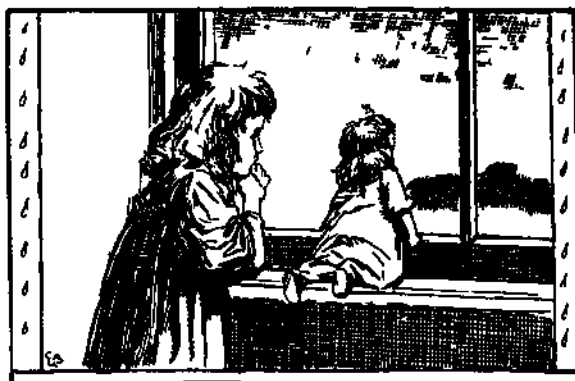
Dididay, deay, duay-day! didide-deay!

I'll not get in your way-ay.

Please don't send me away-ay."

"What a nice dear he is!" says Sweetheart, who approves of polite birds. "Not a bit like the nasty jay, who is only a vulgar boy for all his fine coat, and calls 'Yah-yah!' after you out of the bushes. But the willow wren is a nice bird to know. I shall only take one of his eggs—unless he has quite a lot!"

So you see what it is to be polite. Be virtuous, obliging, always subscribe to every pass-book that comes to the door, and the philanthropist will not take all your money—unless you happen to have quite a lot.



CHAPTER XX

THE MAGIC OF THE RAIN



WET day has a fascination for me. Tap! tap! come the stray triangles of the ivy leaves upon the study window. The wind drives a scatter of raindrops on the pane, spreading broad and flat like spent bullets on a target. Then what a fine heartsome roar there is in the wide chimney. There is truly enough and to spare to do indoors. Yet Sweetheart and I cannot for the life of us stop thinking of the way the branches of the trees are wheezing and creaking against each

other out there in the storm-tossed woods. And with the thought restlessness grows in the blood.



"We look out of the window"

We get up and look out of the window. Over the grey Pentland side the mist is driving. Across the lift the clouds are scouring, change-

ful and swift. The rain comes in furious dashes, and a chill blue blink looks momentarily through between. A white herring-gull wafts himself composedly athwart my field of vision. By way of imitation a rook tries vainly to fan his way across the hurl of the tempest, but, failing midway, he is blown heels over head down the sky, a ragged and bewildered tatterdemalion. However, a starling projects himself successfully from the pinnacle of the church, like a flat-headed Government "broad arrow" without any shaft. And with no difficulty whatever he transits the window of my observatory with swift jerky undulations, right in the teeth of the wind.

It is too much for mortal to stand. "O take the cash and let the credit go," sayeth great Omar of Naishapur. Such a day as this may not come hastily again.

Booted and cloaked I stand ready, and presently Sweetheart trips downstairs huddled in waterproofs, good advices and cautions showering after her, concerning the conduct of our walk and conversation and the care of her feet outside. The degree of sanity possessed by certain persons, who cannot remain comfortably by a fire on such a day, is also slightly dwelt upon by an unseen

orator somewhere high over our heads. But we are not much interested, though we listen dutifully enough. It is astonishing how many points of view there are in the world.

For instance, Sweetheart thinks that it is jolly to be out in the rain. And that for many reasons. First of all, because you can catch the raindrop which distils from the end of your nose upon your outstretched tongue. Sweetheart stands still for a moment while she illustrates the ease with which this notable feat can be performed. Now you cannot possibly do this upon an ordinary day. Again, it is jolly to come out in the rain, because you have not to pick your way among the puddles. And for an excellent reason. It is all puddle together.

There is but one slight drawback. The wind blows the small maid's hair all about her eyes, making in the meantime a picture of wind-tossed gold tangled above a scarlet cloak. But Sweetheart fears that the result will be "dreadfully tuggy" when it comes bedtime. But bedtime is far away, and as soon as we are really in the woods the fear of the future and of the stern comb of ruthless Fate are alike forgotten.

There is a rook upon the pinnacle of the

church. Sweetheart says that there is always one there. I assert hastily that she means a jackdaw. But she does not, as it appears. For this particular rook dwells in patriarchal ease among a colony of jacks, having probably been expatriated from his own community for reasons into which it is better not to enter. In fact, we may say, without fear of an action for libel, that he left his rookery for his rookery's good. Whether Mr. Rook dwells in the jackdaws' country for his own good or theirs is a still unsolved problem. Sweetheart thinks that a rook upon a church tower is somehow in keeping with the ecclesiastical surroundings. For by a simple association of ideas she asks next why clergymen always dress in black.

"What else could they dress in?" I reply, thinking a simple and Socratic method the safest.

Sweetheart does not know, because the idea of a clergyman arrayed in any other colour than black, has not yet dawned upon her mind.

"Do you know, father, how I should know an angel from a clergyman, if one of them should call to see me?"

I reply that, as she has not yet informed me of

her method of making the distinction, I certainly cannot guess.

"Well," says Sweetheart, "the way I could tell is this. An angel would be dressed in white and have wings. A clergyman would be dressed in black and have an umbrella."

Our practical Sweetheart does not mean to entertain any angels unawares if she can help it. She means to know it, and fully to occupy her visitors' time in answering questions. For there are many things which she exceedingly desires to find out—as, for instance, whether dolls go to heaven. And if the little children there sometimes get out to play or only have to stop in church all day. Upon the information received she means to settle the question as to the place she wants to go to.

A very good lady approached Sweetheart the other day, and claimed the reluctant and strictly ceremonial kiss which Sweetheart keeps for such occasions.

"Wouldn't you like to go to heaven, Sweetheart?" she asked, with the comfortable, purring affection characteristic of certain dear old ladies.

"Yes indeed!" said Sweetheart instantly, and with considerable emphasis.

Our good old friend was much pleased, and so (at the moment) were we. It is gratifying to find one's family equal to expressing so readily, such very correct and orthodox aspirations. But the querist ought to have let well alone. She should not have asked Sweetheart for a reason, but rested content with the fact. Yet this is just what she proceeded to do.

"And won't you tell me *why* you would like to go to heaven?" she said, sweetly.

Sweetheart was nothing loth, in spite of the frowns of her well-wishers.

"Why, because there is no night there," she replied briskly.

"And why because there is no night, Sweetheart?" persisted our friend.

"Because," said Sweetheart earnestly, "there would be nobody to say, 'It's bedtime!' right in the middle of sitting up in the drawing-room!"

Then there fell a great silence, and Sweetheart was asked no more questions. We felt distinctly rebuked, for the lack of capable instruction was manifest. But then Sweetheart's views on eschatology are wholly original, and her tendencies are distinctly rationalistic—in so far at least that

she must always have a reason for every fact supplied for her absorption and belief. Our only consolation is that any sort of a reason will do. Indeed, she is almost as credulous as a biologist.

But the rain sprays refreshingly on our faces as we enter the woods, and begin to tread on the pine cones and elastic fir needles. These make a delightful carpet for our feet, infinitely cleaner and drier than the muddy roads we have left behind. The trees are dripping with wet, of course, and shining drops are blowing from every bud and knot. Long pendent sprays whip the air and sprinkle us as we pass. Lucent pearls glance off our waterproofs. The sky above is perpetually brightening and paling. It is an April day which has somehow wandered and lost its way in mid-February.

From under a splendid umbrella-like spruce we look down into the whirlpool of shifting vapour which fills the deep glen. The dark green of every fir-tree is surrounded with a violet haze, sometimes deepening into purple, sometimes paling into lilac. Anon drifts of greyish-white misty rain make all the landscape glamorous, as though we were seeing it through a translucent veil. Again of a sudden the sun shines out, and the

red wet boles of the Scotch firs shine like pillars of crimson fire.

The larger birds are busy in the spacious open-air ball-room beneath us. Here is our sea-gull waltzing and balancing all by himself—as if he were practising his steps, Sweetheart says. A wood-pigeon blunders across the glen with prodigious fuss and bluster. He pretends something is after him, but his terror is most obviously assumed.

Sweetheart and I stand and listen to the varied noises the wind makes, and try to find out the reason of each sound. First there is the great, resonant roar of the storm in the nearer high trees over our heads. Then there is a more fitful *sough*, as the sucking swirls and reverse currents blow about the underbrush on the sides of the ravine. And, last of all, making one clear, sustained note, which sounds high above both of these, there is the steady scream of the storm as it presses northward up the long glen, hurtling unweariedly towards the Pole.

But now we must turn us homeward. It is sad, indeed. But, after all, there are such things as colds, and the consequences would be unutterable if even in the interests of science on

a rainy day, we were to take home one of these between us.

"I like so much to come out with you," observes Sweetheart, with the instinct of her sex—"because you never say 'You mustn't!' at the nice places. Nor 'You're going to get your boots wet!' at the dear little pools!"

I was, as a matter of fact, upon the point of making the latter remark at that very moment. But in face of such sweet flattery, how could the thing be done? I leave it to the reader who has been similarly situated.

"Do you know, I think it's very kind of you to take me out walking with you, father," is the next statement—also made in the interests of the future.

I disclaim any particular kindness in the matter, except to myself.

"Have I been a good 'panion to you, father?" is the next link in the chain which I feel being woven about me. Yet I have to admit the fact or perjure myself.

"And not been a dreadful trouble to you?"

This pathetically, and thrusting a small hand into mine. Which also being satisfactorily answered, I feel that the point is coming now.

"THEN," says Sweetheart, "can I have tea in the dining-room to-night, stop up till eight o'clock, and come out walking with you again to-morrow?"

As I have several times remarked, there are distinct reasons for believing that our Sweetheart is in the direct line of descent from Eve, the wife of one Adam, who kept a garden some time ago.



CHAPTER XXI

SWEETHEART TRAVELLERS IN WINTER WOODLANDS



As you may see, she is not a Sweetheart only for the summer-time, this of mine. Now that she is grown up (four years and six months is quite grown up for a Sweetheart), she and I go a-walking even in the time of frost and snow. We have received, in fact, a roving commission to inquire into the condition of the furred and feathered unemployed, into the housing of the out-of-doors poor, and into various other things. We are also interested in the problem how the birds and beasts

of the fields and woodlands eat and sleep during the black and bitter winter weather. And very specially we try to find out how, in this time of coal dearth, they manage to obtain fuel to keep the fires burning in their brave little hearts.

We have it on good authority that God thinketh on these. But as no one else seems to think on them much, at least in our neighbourhood, Sweetheart and I humbly take the matter in hand. There are many feathered pensioners on Sweetheart's bounty, and yet not a word of pauperising do we hear. Even the Charity Organisation Society does not interfere. Only the great black rook, who eats everything, grumbles, "Why was so much good crow's meat cut up into little bits and given to the poor?" By which he means to the tits, sparrows, thrushes, blackbirds, robins, and wrens who most do congregate about, and wait with fluffed feathers and indrawn heads for Sweetheart's bounty.

As she and I go towards the woods the snow is crisp with frost and whistles beneath our feet. There is a sharpness also about our faces, as if Jack Frost had been sharpening the end of our noses at his grindstone—as indeed he has.

First we go through a little woodland ravine.

It is almost waist-deep in fallen leaves. Here the mighty beeches, in all their plenitude of foliage, have stood for ages on the slopes above. And in this place all the summer you can listen to the noise of their rustling branches. Now they are bare and stark. But the winds have swept all their russet and orange leaves into this narrow defile. Some few perhaps have sped over the boundary wall. But for the most part here they lie, and now they crunch sharply under the feet with a pleasant sound. They are matted together on the surface with frost, but underneath is a whole underground world of dormant living things which we must explore some day.

But it is not until we get fairly into the woods and leave the shallow frozen snow of the fields behind us, that we see any signs of life. The silence of these winter woods is their main characteristic. But that is chiefly owing to the observer. It strikes the wayfarer, tramping along at a good steady policeman's pace to keep himself warm, that there is not a single sign of life in all the frosty woodlands. And this is natural. For sylvan eyes and ears are exceedingly acute.

The stamp of a leather-shod foot can be heard many hundreds of yards. Then at once every



"The silence of these winter woods

bird and beast within the radius stands at attention, to judge of the direction of the noise. *Crack* goes another rotten branch. In a second all the woodland folk are in their holes, in the deepest shrubberies, or in the upper branches of the trees. The twang of the broken twig tells them that the intruder is off the beaten path, and is therefore probably a dangerous intruder. At the best, after no good.

But Sweetheart and I are warmly wrapped up So we can crouch and watch in the lee of a dyke or stand wrapped in one great cloak behind a tree trunk. It is not much good to go abroad at noon. In the morning when the birds are at their breakfast is the time. Or better still, in the early afternoon when the low red sun has yet about half-an-hour to travel—that is the time to call upon the bird folk in the winter season. They are busy, and have less time to give to their suspicions.

“The sun is like one big cherry,” says Sweetheart, suddenly looking up between the boughs; “like one big cherry in a lot of streaky jelly.”

And it is so precisely. He lies low down in the south in a ruby haze of winter frost. The reflections on the snow are red also and the

shadows purple. The glare of the morning's staring white and blue is taken off by the level beams. Certainly snow does not help the colour of a landscape. Sweetheart has something to say on this subject :

"Father, I thought the first day that the snow was prettier, but then it keeps us from seeing such a great many pretty things."

Never mind, Sweetheart. It will also let us see a sufficient number of pretty things if we only wait and look closely enough. But it is certainly true that the glare of the snow does reduce most of the delicate tints of the landscape to the uniform black and white of a mourning attire. For instance, the dainty low-toned lilac of the tree-branches is killed, just because there is a strip of snow along each branch on the eastern side, the direction from which the snowstorm came. But as a compensation there is brilliant colour above our heads. The cherry-coloured sun, shining on the boles of the Scotch firs in the plantation, turns them into red gold, and causes their crooked branches to stand out against the dull indigo sky like veins of white-hot metal.

But look down, Sweetheart—see the tracks on

the snow. Can you tell me what all these are? There is the broad-spurred arrow of that black vagrant, Mr. Rook, who is every where. We need not mind him. See a little further on the regular



"She has been carrying one foot off the ground

lopings of the rabbits as they cross the beaten path down from the bank, and go into the hedges for tender shoots and leaf-protected grasses. Here they have been nibbling at the leaves themselves—even at the laurel leaves, which surely

must be an acquired taste, and must mark a particularly decadent and depraved bunny. Here is a hare's track—a wounded one, too. See, she has been carrying one foot off the ground. Only here and there do we see where the wounded limb has just skimmed the snow. Her trail goes dot and dash like a Morse telegram. Sweetheart does not know what that is, but she is brimming over with pity for the poor lame hare. Would it not be possible to find him and get his poor foot tied up, like the robin redbreast of precious memory, whose wounded leg we once doctored and healed.

Ah, I reply, but this is quite a different matter. You see, Mr. Hare unfortunately omitted to leave his card in passing. We really do not know where he lives, and besides, even if we did, it is hardly likely that we could catch him. For he would run a great deal faster on three legs, even with a spare one to carry, than Sweetheart and I on our whole equipment of four between us. Sweetheart thinks with a sigh that this most fascinating ambulance work must be given up.

Yet it is a pity. A wounded and grateful hare coming to the back door every morning with a bandaged foot in the air, would just fill her cup

of joy to the brim. But I remind her that there are two dogs at the back door, and that it is possible that they might receive the visitor with quite another sort of gratitude. Why, O why (thinks the little maid), will things turn out so contrary?

But here is the place where we must turn off the path and go softly down into the thicker woods. Let us watch our feet carefully, and tread on no brittle branches. For the birds will surely hear, and then we may say good-bye to our chance of seeing them. Presently we are behind the giant bole of a beech, whose tender grey satin skin gives a dainty and ladylike expression to its winter beauty.

Now, wrapped closely in our one cloak, and with the pair of field-glasses ready in hand, we abide warm and eager. There are birds all about us. We can hear them.

"*See—see—see,*" from above. "*Chip—chip,*" from somewhere underground. Sweetheart's quick eye catches the flash of the first bird. She points with an eager finger through the folds of the cloak, and looks up to me with a hushed and awe-struck face. "*Oxeye!*" she whispers.

Oxeye it is—the great tit, with his yellow breast flashing like a lemon-coloured sunbeam, and above it his bold black-and-white head. How he darts and dashes! Now he is lost to view, now he is out again. He has a bit of bark in his bill, and he shakes it furiously, as a terrier shakes a rat. He puts his foot on it, and tears at it, just as Sweetheart once saw an eagle do at a dead rabbit, in those unforgotten (Zoological) gardens of delight—from which, a most reluctant Eve, she was expelled still protesting, by the stern guardian at closing time.

We stand breathlessly silent. This Oxeye has enough energy in him to decimate a countryside. If he were only as big as a horse he would not leave man, woman, or child alive between Pentland and Solway. As it is he makes it hot indeed for the bark-boring beetles. Tap, tap—shake, shake, he goes. And out tumbles from a hole in the bark a wicked little gentleman, *Scolytus* the Destroyer by name, a very Attila of beetles. He looks exactly as if he were the business end of a much bigger beetle chopped off short. Or, as Sweetheart more descriptively says, “like an engine without the tender.” Oxeye winks, and there is an end of *Scolytus*. But the victor is

at it again. He is up on the elm, clinging head down exactly like a Creeper, though he does not run so quickly up the trunk as that darling little bird. But what he does is to walk round the trunk till he finds something to suit him, and then he has it down on the ground in a moment to inquire into its nature.

But chiefly Oxeye delights in poking about among the tangled *debris* of rotten branches thrown down by the great storm of 1884. Do you remember that, Sweetheart? No; how stupid of me, how could you possibly remember? Dear me, that was eight years ago, in the Krakatoa year. How time speeds while we stand still and forget! That happened nearly four years before Sweetheart was born!

"Where was I then?" whispers Sweetheart, eagerly.

But I hastily point her again to the Oxeye, for Sweetheart's metaphysical mind in pursuit of a solution to such a question, has greater terrors than the stiffest pass examination. Luckily there are several Oxeyes now, and they are giving Scolytus the Destroyer and all his clan a warm time of it. Without doubt they must

be doing much good to the growing trees. Though I find that the gamekeepers hereabouts, ignorant of all that does not strictly concern the rearing of game, class them with the lesser vermin of the woods.

Now there is a wren among the tits. Only one little Jenny. But she is in the best of spirits, and, I grieve to say, is quite ready to flirt with anybody. She also is hunting among the leaves, and (what is very curious) carrying them in her bill to a hollow in a tree stem, which is nearly as full of them already as it can hold. We examine this cavity before we depart, and agree that if Jenny nestles in there at night she has none so poor a sleeping-place, except perhaps when the wind is in the north. Dropping the leaves, Jenny makes overtures of friendship to a very handsome (but sadly misanthropic) Robin, clad in a splendid scarlet vest, who is moping listlessly about, taking an occasional aimless peck at nothing, and watching us all the while furtively with a sharp and shining eye. But Robin is incorruptible, and takes not the slightest notice of her. Whereat Jenny jerks her saucy tail, and says, with a quite perceptible sniff, "*Mfff!* Think you are somebody great, don't you!" And with

that she flies off contemptuously to the nearest birch-tree.

So all too soon it comes time to go home. As we march along there are a thousand things which Sweetheart wants to know, and "Whys" and "But, father's" hurtle through the tortured air. She has not been able to speak for a whole hour, and is therefore well-nigh full to bursting of marks of interrogation. On the whole I do as well as can be expected, and receive an honour certificate.

The crows also are going home to tea, and fly clanging and circling overhead, playing at "tig" to keep themselves warm. Sweetheart watches them, cogitating the while. I point out to her how the brackens, being thin and poor in blood, have all died down, brown and rusty; while the stronger and sturdier male ferns and bucklers still keep their greenness, though even they have got a little tired standing up, and laid themselves down to sleep under the snow.

Yet in spite of all Sweetheart has not lost track of a former problem.

"But, father, I want to know where I was when the trees fell ten years ago."

Then I say hurriedly: "We must be quick,

Sweetheart. They will be waiting for us at the window. Now, would you like two lumps of sugar in your tea—or three?"

For one must act promptly in such an emergency.



CHAPTER XXII

DRIPPY DAYS



AFTER the frost, sooner or later, comes the thaw. The huddled birds separate. The snow wreaths dissipate, as though the warm south wind, blowing upon them, had sucked them up in its passage. Which, indeed, is just what it has done. For wind will not only blow the snow off a road, but also the ice. Such a wind as this, whistling up a country road on a January day, will soon clear away the little ice-bound pools in the cart-tracks, not by thawing them, but simply by blowing them away.

To-day Sweetheart and I ventured out, though it was still raining a little. It is wonderful upon how many days in the year it is possible to go out and see Nature, if only one makes a little preparation before starting. It had very decidedly "come fresh," as they say in this country-side. But being booted and cloaked, the grey drizzle above does not daunt us, nor yet the *snow-broo* beneath make us afraid.

Though it was already afternoon (which in these northern latitudes and in the heart of the short days means evening), the smaller birds were enjoying themselves in the soft *smurr* of rain which came souglingly from the south. They were no longer chilled into silence by the oppression of the binding frost.

"What is that?" said Sweetheart, before we had gone many yards over the doorstep.

From far down among the dripping woods came the half-human cry of the pheasant. He was telling his mate that "gloomy winter's noo awa'"—which is as may be. At any rate, he thought so, and his rejoicing cry rang upward through the wide gloomy spaces.

"Look at these beautiful birdies," said Sweet-

heart again; "they are playing at 'Catch-as-catch-can.'"

And indeed it looked like it. Some twenty pairs of yellow-hammers were sporting in the branches of a low scrubby thorn, which tangled its branches away from the south-west wind, and trailed them shapelessly on the ground like the distorted limbs of a dwarf. The yellow-hammer is not a bird of the trees, but at this time of the year you can see him in all the copse bushes upon the margin of every wood. As Sweetheart and I came up, the "yorlins" took fright at my companion's red cloak and flew in a compact body over to a hedge a hundred yards away.

"Now, watch them, Sweetheart," I said; "do you see how they are flying?"

"They are going two and two!" said Sweetheart.

It was true. The yellow-hammer had already found his mate. In the large wise books which are our favourite reading, it is usually stated that the yellow-hammer pairs in March or April. But Sweetheart and I venture to be of a different opinion. We are sure that, at least among our woods and fields in the

North, nearly all the birds which keep together in flocks during the severe weather have their own friends and particular companions right through the winter.

This is specially true of the rooks which are at this moment passing above us on their homeward way in countless myriads. The rook goes forth in armies, it is true. He blackens many a field when he alights. He devours in innumerable company the squirmy worm, the succulent slug. But at a word he flies off in platoons. At the sound of a nearer alarm, the same squad of half-a-dozen rooks will always scurry off together. These doubtless form a *mess*, just as a number of soldiers do in a regiment. And as in barracks, so every rook will have his own chum, mate, or comrade. I cannot say that these friendships are formed in every case between the sexes, but in most cases, no doubt, they are.

Now our yellow-hammers had flown off accurately in pairs, and in a little, from the topmost boughs of the thorn which looks over the park wall, we heard their monotonous song. The singer was still a little indignant at our intrusion, though, as Sweetheart said, he need not have troubled his head. We were not going to touch

him or his mate. But the yellow yorlin is a foolish, fretful bird and easily upset.

*"Chich, chich, chich, chich, chee-ee! Churr-ee, churr!
Please go away, my go-ood sir-ee, sir!
Chich, chich, churr—chee-ee, churr!"*

That is what he sings—nothing about bread and cheese to-night, you observe. Sweetheart claps her hands at this new interpretation, and away go the little clouds of flashing citron dress suits, yellow most elegantly slashed with brown. See how they wheel in the air like starlings, as accurately in time as soldiers manoeuvre. Here and there they dash, changing and turning. Suddenly in mid flight they fall, as if shot dead in a body by some concealed sportsman with a great noiseless air-gun. Plump! Down they go into a clump of ash trees by the stackyard, where they sit snugly concealed.

"Are they all dead?" says Sweetheart, much concerned for their fate. For she loves the bold uniform of his excellency the Trumpet Major, as in memory of Mr. Hardy's hero we always call him.

Now there ensues great chattering and scolding in a little wood of thick spruces and Scotch firs just

over the park wall. Sweetheart and I wonder much what can be the matter. There evidently



'Sweetheart will be better on my back

is a row down there and no policeman. So we decide, in the interests of Her Majesty's peace and public morality generally, that we shall go

down and see what is the disturbance. Nobody asked us to interfere; but that is the way of all philanthropists. It is rather a marshy place, and Sweetheart will be better on my back. Once—twice—thrice, and up she goes! We are off among the trees. Such behaviour may be considered somewhat unusual between sweethearts, but this particular Sweetheart is perfectly accustomed to the performance.

“Go on quicker, father; I believe it’s a hawk!”

The “hawk” is the wicked uncle—the interesting petty tyrant of our fields and woods. So we splash hastily into the depths of the little wood, stepping over the ditches where the thaw has melted the snow and reduced it to a slushy and unpleasant pulp. As we get nearer the chattering waxes louder and the bad language becomes more pronounced. It sounds, indeed, quite an unseemly riot in this quiet place.

“Hush, Sweetheart! Draw your cloak about you. We shall see everything from here. Listen! It is in the spruce just above us to the right.”



CHAPTER XXIII

THE REVOLT OF THE SWEETHEARTS



WE look eagerly upward, but for a long time we cannot see more than a confused passing and re-passing of dark forms between the interstices of the branches. And we can hear no more than a babel of sharp scolding voices.

The shrewish scolders are evidently gentlemen

blackbirds, and they are very angry indeed about something.

"Check! Check! Check—check—check!!!"

Fifty of them are reeling off this word at once in every variety of tone and key. But each is more indignant and vixenish than the other. Now your blackbird, for all that he is so genteel a bird when he comes out in his fine black calling-coat upon the garden walk, and hops about in such a purely disinterested and observational way, without asking for anything like a mere sparrow or chaffinch, has yet a fund of bad barrack-room language (to which only Mr. Kipling could do justice) whenever he thinks that he is not overheard.

He is, indeed, a black hypocrite and deceiver. When you hear him pouring out his fluty melody, as Mr. Birket Foster has pictured him many a time, from the farthest-reaching branch of a tree set purple against the evening sky, his notes are as soft and mellow as if he had never said a bad word in all his blameless life. It is just the difference between the tenor's expression when he is singing a serenade in the balcony scene, and the same artist's look and tone when the stage-manager rates him for coming late to

rehearsal. And certainly these blackbirds are very much in undress now. Sweetheart waxes silent and sad. She could not have believed that her favourite could possibly have acted so disgracefully. Why should a blackbird want to be a blackguard? Why should a human being, for that matter?

In a moment the reason of the racket became plain. The turmoil grew till the wheeling rooks above paused on their homeward way, and sent a scouting party to the copse to find out what was wrong. Suddenly a pair of cushat-doves dashed out of the bush with a tumultuous swirl of wings, flapping them clatteringly like little lapping waves beating against a rock. They flew upwards with a rush like a pair of rockets. A cloud of blackbirds darted after them a little way, screaming with shrill anger. Then the blackbirds returned and had quite a lively little friendly "turn-up" among themselves, as soon as the wood-pigeons had betaken themselves to pastures new and copses less frequented.

It was after all nothing more than a vulgar going-to-bed quarrel. A pair of great blundering doves had quite innocently taken possession of the upper branches of a spruce, where, under

cover of the thick spines, for all the world as though they were snug under an umbrella, the blackbirds had been accustomed to roost. Hence this unseemly waking of the woodland echoes.

Sweetheart was quite relieved.

"Then after all it was not the blackbirds' fault, perhaps!" she said. "But" (thinking the matter over) "I do think they might have objected them more quietly."

Sweetheart mixes words sometimes, but we never correct her. All too soon she will learn to talk as other people do.

But what was done is well done from the point of view of the blackbirds. For soon we could hear them settling themselves in the branches with little sleepy murmurs and complainings at each other's encroachments.

It was time also for Sweetheart and me to be turning homeward. We looked above us. A pale half moon was already sailing through the fleecy cloudlets. I quoted from Lucy Gray :

"The minster clock has just struck two,
And yonder is the moon."

"But it hasn't—it's after three!" said Sweetheart, so much alarmed by my unveracity that

she forgot to be quite polite. I explained that it is not meant to be true. It was only poetry.

"*Oh!*" said Sweetheart, contentedly, with much meaning in her tone. The explanation was entirely satisfactory. There are no ten commandments for poets.

But immediately, as is her wont, she proceeded to better the quotation according to her lights—which, I fear, were not Wordsworth's.

"The eight-day clock has just struck three,
I must go home to cake and tea."

But this is, indeed, one word for sense and one for rhyme, for really Sweetheart cares very much for cake but not at all for tea. All poets feel these little difficulties, and are compelled to the same inaccuracies. This, in turn, was followed by :

"The minister's clock has just struck four—
That cake is good—I'll have some more."

It was indeed time we were going home. Easy (we have it on authority) is the descent to Avernus. And many a bold bad poet has begun with something quite as innocent as these nonsense rhymes of Sweetheart's. So on the spot I reproved her severely, and asked if she

was aware that I promised the clergyman at her christening to bring her up to respectable habits, and to give her a sound commercial education—instead of which she goes about the country making poetry.

But Sweetheart was not at all abashed.

"There is a whole book of poetry upstairs which mother says *you* wrote!"

Whereupon I replied, more severely still: "Little girls should be seen and not heard!"

For this is ever the distressed parent's final line of defence—his last ditch, garrisoned by his Ban and Arrière-Ban of argument.

But Sweetheart only laughed merrily, all unashamed. What is to come of the British constitution if young people take to answering back to their elders in this fashion? Let us sit down and write to the *Nineteenth Century* about "The Revolt of the Sweethearts."

But after all we make it up with a kiss and go homewards quietly and happily. And then the curtain of night falls upon the scene—upon the nestling blackbirds in the copse, and on us for whom there is waiting cake and tea, in the mysterious dusk ahead of us where the lights of home are beginning to glimmer.



CHAPTER XXIV



SWEETHEART is At Home on Saturdays. But she desires it to be as widely known as possible that she does not turn away her friends on other days of the week, especially if they are in the habit of carrying chocolates about with them. So, of course, since she receives, she must also pay calls.

In consequence of this she has had her cards printed. In fact she prints them herself upon paper begged from Mr. Father for the purpose.

There is one of the original pasteboards before me, and it says :—

SWEETHEART.
when this you see remember ME.
xxx326.

Sweetheart tells me she did *not* make up the poetry all herself. In fact she owns to saving up and using the lovely verses, which are to be found in the lucky-bags from the village confection-shop, and those also which come out of the crackers at Christmas. Then she prints one of the poems on each card. The effect is striking and original. From evidence into which there is no need to enter, I gather that Sweetheart wrote this verse on her calling card soon after having had an interview with a piece of bread and jam—red currant jam, I should judge.

Sweetheart has another habit of her own which marks her originality. She does not leave her cards on those who call upon her. Why should she? They will come to see her in any case.

Sweetheart leaves her cards only on people who do not come to see her. This is a custom worth thinking about.

Now, Sweetheart has a great many friends besides those who live in houses made of stone or brick. Many of Sweetheart's friends build their own mansions. And none of them ever talk about the weather or ask if you have been at the Academy—so it is quite pleasant to go visiting with Sweetheart. I often go myself. In fact, I hold upon visiting days what is known among wise and learned men as a "watching brief" on behalf of an interested party. It is, indeed, no light matter to be responsible for Sweetheart.

Now it is May time of the year, and many of Sweetheart's friends are busy with their house-building. But they do not object to a visit even at this time—for though she takes her cards along with her, it is mostly for grandeur and because it is the fashion. Sweetheart does not really stand on ceremony with her friends.

As I say, I am permitted to accompany the young lady on her round of calls. But quite often I have to stand at a distance, for the familiarity of Sweetheart's friends with herself

does not always frank a stranger, who has not the pleasure of their so intimate acquaintance.

Our first call was made on Master Robin Redbreast, who lives all the year round with his wife at No. 1 Ivy Terrace. Both Mr. and Mrs. Robin are our constant friends, and call on us with the utmost regularity every morning in the winter-time, while Robin perks himself up on the window ledge and "cocks a shining eye" knowingly at us as we sit at breakfast.

Sweetheart thinks him a delightful friend, but the less forgiving of us have our doubts. He has a habit of not knowing us in the summer, like a schoolboy when his provision basket has come, and he never invites us to have any of *his* breakfast. Then he slips along in the shadow of the hedges like a shadow, and he does not like any one to knock at his door, or look in at his children—except, it may be, Sweetheart herself. So she calls on him and he sits on a bough a little way off and looks trustingly at her with full rich eyes.

"Little Sweetheart—little Sweetheart!" he calls to her, till his wife is jealous and hops off the nest in a huff. Now we can go near and look in. Sweetheart beckons to us with her hand. We approach cautiously on tiptoe. But

Robin does not admire or trust every one as he does Sweetheart, so he jerks himself indignantly away after his wife.

"There, you see! Did I not tell you? You see what comes of encouraging that chit with the yellow hair!" Robina says spitefully.

But we only just look a moment at the beautiful white eggs with their spots of soft red and brown, harmonised with shaded grey specklings. Sweetheart, who has grown very punctilious, leaves one of her cards on the Redbreasts—though privately, I think her call was rather an ill-advised proceeding, seeing that the lady of the house flounced out when she came. But I dare not say anything, for Sweetheart is quite emancipated, and might tell me to mind my own business. I note, however, that it is one of her prettiest cards which she leaves. And upon it there is, besides the inscription, a charming picture of Mr. Robin himself, cut from one of the sheets of coloured scraps which are to be bought at the bookseller's.

So that is one call finished. Next we set forth to drop in upon Master Grasshopper, who is singing *chirr* to his own sweetheart in a distinct falsetto. Sweetheart thinks that he cannot have had

a good music teacher. Mr. Grasshopper lives in the hayfield among tall bennet grasses. But he is not at home this morning, and there is a dead beetle lying at his front door. So perhaps he has had "times" with that beetle before he went a-Maying. Sweetheart wishes she had been there to see. She does not, however, waste a card on him. She is not going to leave a fine piece of poetry lying alongside of a dead beetle with its legs waving awkwardly in the air. That would be too ridiculous. She is almost resolved to cross Mr. Grasshopper off her visiting list. He is extremely provoking. This is the third occasion upon which she has called and he has always been out. Yet each time she could hear him braying away in the long grass. She believes he went and hid on purpose.

"Which, when you think of it," adds Sweetheart, "is fearfully rude!"

But I interpose, "Suppose, Sweetheart, *you* were among the clover, and a great giantess came clumping along——"

"I didn't clump!" said Sweetheart indignantly, for being a woman, she makes the personal application by instinct.

"It was just a way of speaking," I reply. But

Sweetheart does not understand ways of speaking and is justly offended.

So we proceed, in a somewhat constrained silence, to call next upon Cousin Frank's Guinea-pigs. One of them had once come (in a basket) to pay Sweetheart a visit, and because it had a pink nose Sweetheart broke through her rule and returned the call.

We asked her the reason.

"It's because Guinea-pigs are more interesting than common pigs, and ever so much cleaner."

Sweetheart says that Cousin Frank's Guinea was certainly quite fit to entertain the Queen—or even Miss Priscilla Prim from Prinkwell Cottage down the shady lane—who is quite the cleanest person hereabouts, and has combed all her poodle's hair out, so that she has lately been obliged to have a wig made for him in Paris.

Cousin Frank's Guinea-pig sniffed at us upon our arrival, winking very hard with its funny jumpy nose at us, and then beginning to nibble at the parsley Sweetheart had ready. Sweetheart put all the chopped green stuff down in a bowl, and Guinea nosed among it, tossing most of it out on the floor while seeking for the juiciest bits.



"We found him reclining."

But alas! Guinea would not allow even his own wife to come near.

"Just like a boy," said Sweetheart sententiously; "boys is always selfish."

After this sad occurrence we came out and called on a real pigsty pig, whose name was Mister Snork, an unpleasant person with red eyes. We found him reclining on his side in a pool in the muddiest part of his courtyard.

Sweetheart did not leave any card on him. She turned up her nose instead.

"I won't eat none of you, now then—so you needn't think it!" she said.

This was no doubt an extreme thing to say. But really Mr. Snork fully deserved it, and I don't think either of us were sorry for him. He was so exceedingly disreputable-looking.

When we came away, Sweetheart asked me, "What relation is Mr. Guinea Pig to Mr. Sty Pig?"

"Really, Sweetheart," I reply, "I don't know. Perhaps cousins twice removed."

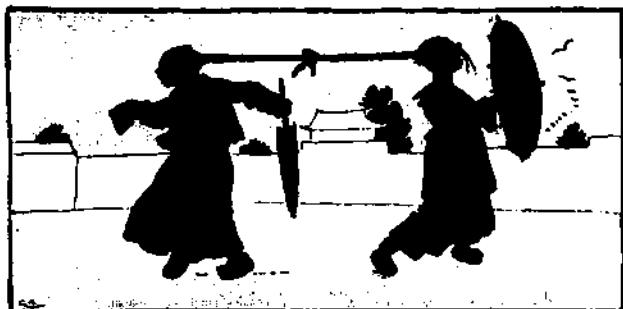
"I don't think they are related at all," she said, putting her head sideways to think about it. "I can't believe it to look at them."

"Then how do you think they got the same name, Sweetheart?" I ask, for I can see a great idea struggling for expression in her discriminating mind.

"I think," said Sweetheart, after immense consideration, "that they must only be connections by marriage, just like mother says she is to you!"

Then we went home, and I sat down to record these marvels.





CHAPTER XXV

HUGO'S OPINIONS UPON PIGTAILS



WISH you were a Chinaman, Sweetheart," said Hugo to his sister the other day.

"Why?" asked Sweetheart, pausing with a raspberry half-way to her lips. They were down on the bank-side, pulling rasps, and making "perfect sights" of themselves—as their nurse justly said when they came in to be dressed for lunch.

"Because," said Hugo, "then you would have to wear a pigtail, and it would be so proper jolly to pull!"

Why all boys named Hugo take to mischief

as naturally as ducks to water, is one of the problems that has never been explained—and very probably never will. But here is Sweetheart ready to vouch for the fact.

"I think that I shall pull your hair now, and then you will know how it feels to be a little China boy," said Hugo, with whom to think is to act.

"No, indeed, you shan't pull my hair! I don't want to be a China boy, or to have my hair pulled. I want to pick raspberries," said Sweetheart, defending herself girlfully* with a branch of bramble, which happily kept the assailant at arm's length.

"Mother says that it will make us give more to missionaries if we feel for the poor Chinese," said Hugo dexterously, putting the matter on quite another footing.

"I don't want to be made feel for the Chinese by having my hair pulled," protested Sweetheart emphatically.

The young desperado was on the point of proceeding to extremities, when a higher power appeared on the scene, in the shape of the Lady

* Why should not one say "boyfully," "girlfully," if one can say "manfully"?

of the Workbasket. Who the Lady of the Workbasket may be, is a dead secret. The writer is under oath not to tell. But as Sweetheart and Hugo sometimes call her "mother," it is probable that she must be some relative of theirs.

The Lady of the Workbasket sat down on a garden-seat, first looking carefully if there were no tigers crouching under it, or any rattlesnakes coiled upon it.

This is what the Lady of the Workbasket always does before she sits down. She has done it all her life, and has never yet found any tigers or rattlesnakes. But, after all, you know, one never knows.

"Children," she said, "what were you quarreling about? I heard you as I came down the garden."

"Oh, mother, Hugo said"—began one.

"Oh, mother, Sweetheart said"—began the other.

"Now, not both at once, please," said the Lady of the Workbasket, holding up her hand to check the flow of mutual accusation. "Sweetheart, you are the oldest. Tell me what it was all about."

"It was about the Chinese and their pigtails," said Sweetheart.

"Yes, and Sweetheart said she didn't want to feel for the poor missionaries!" cried Hugo, over his sister's shoulder.

"Not by having you pull my hair, you horrid boy!" said Sweetheart, frowning at him.

I am sorry that Sweetheart said "You horrid boy!" There is, however, no use denying the fact, that Hugo and she sometimes refer to each other in such terms. But then they are so different from other children. I am glad to think that no other brothers and sisters ever speak to each other like that. Such expressions are not found in the authorities upon the subject—in nice story-books, I mean.

"I want to hear about the Chinese," said Sweetheart piously—not so much, we fear, because she cared to hear about the Chinese, as because she wanted to nestle down beside the Lady of the Workbasket and play with the reels of silk of different colours.

"I don't," said Hugo frankly, "I want to go on pulling raspberries and eating them."

"Oh, Hugo, you greedy boy! Isn't it nice to hear about the missionaries in church? Ever

so much better than sermon," said Sweetheart, who has her own opinions on ecclesiastical matters.

"This isn't church," said Hugo, putting a large rasp into his mouth, with a relish which really amounted to a thanksgiving that things were as they were.

"Here comes father out of his den! Hurrah! He'll tell us all about China," cried Sweetheart triumphantly. "And now you'll *have* to listen," she said under her breath to her brother—"so now, Master Hugo!"

Mr. Father did come down, and was duly asked to explain the pigtail question. He is supposed to know everything. All fathers know everything. Only sometimes, when this father was not quite sure, then he said, "I have not time to tell you now." And with that went in and looked it up in the *Encyclopædia*. All fathers do that. Children must learn to respect their parents.

"Chinese pigtails?" said Mr. Father slowly. "It was afternoon tea I came after. What do I know about Chinese pigtails? Not much, I fear." (You see, he had not had time to go to his *Encyclopædia*.) "I know that pigtails have
o

not been many hundred years in China, and that is a very short time out there. It was the kings of the present ruling family who made the Chinamen wear them."

"And did they like it? I should not," said Sweetheart emphatically.

"No, I don't suppose they did at first. Indeed many of them were killed because they would not wear them."

"And did they wear them after that?" queried Hugo, taking another raspberry.

Mr. Father apparently did not notice the interruption. This is called being dignified.

"But they like them now, and are very proud of them," he went on.

"I saw a pig yesterday," cried out Hugo irrelevantly. "It had such a funny tail, black and curly, and it said, '*Week, week!*'"

Mr. Father, whose useful information machinery had now begun to work, was just explaining that the speech of the Chinese was monosyllabic. Whereupon Sweetheart looked at the Lady of the Workbasket, because she did not know what the big word meant, and she did not like to ask out loud.

"The little piggy with the tail said, '*Tweek,*

week!' Wasn't it funny?" repeated Hugo, who has no fine feelings about interrupting at any time when he has anything to say. He thought that his former statements upon the point had not been sufficiently attended to.

Mr. Father laughed, and went on to tell Sweet-heart and Hugo that though one Chinaman



"We were only savages."

might look very funny with his pigtail, yet the Chinese were a very great and numerous people, and that there were indeed more Chinamen in the world than men of any other race. He told the children also how the Chinese had been wise and learned when we in this island were only naked savages, painting ourselves blue, and

running about everywhere fighting with one another.

"I wish I was a savage now! I could paint myself such a lovely blue. Prussian would be best," said Hugo thoughtfully. He has a paint-box of his own now, and wished he might be at liberty to colour himself rather more comprehensively than he had hitherto done. "I'd rather be a savage any day, and be able to cut round naked."

"I think, after all, I *should* like my hair done in a pigtail," said Sweetheart, who had been thinking the matter over, and not attending to Hugo. "Then it would not blow in your eyes, nor ever get tuggy."

"Pooh!" said Hugo, "the tail I saw was black and curly, and the piggy said '*Week!*'"

Then while Mr. Father told of the little boys in China, their plays and their schools, and the hard lessons they had, every one listened because they had to. But when he came to tell about the kite-flying and paper-burning, even Hugo stopped eating rasps and came nearer to hear about them.

"Mother told us before that they burned paper over their parents' graves," said Sweetheart,

"because they think the dead people are appeased by the smoke."

Sweetheart loves fine words even more than the scrapings of the jam-pan.

"Hu-u!" said Hugo contemptuously, "yesterday I burned a whole pile of newspaper under *my* father's study window, and he only said, 'Go away from there, you dirty boy!' He wasn't 'peased by the smoke one bit!"



CHAPTER XXVI

BY THE BOGLE-THORN



SEPTEMBER is usually just August with the gas screwed down and the fire out.

Yet there was no such fault to be found with the September afternoon when Sweetheart and I last set off. Our journey was a surprise for Sweetheart, and there is nothing that Sweetheart loves so much. But then you see at five years of age all surprises are pleasant. Afterwards they get a little more mixed. The happy life is to be always five, to have surprises every day, and to believe like fire in Santa Claus.

At four by the clock Sweetheart was climbing on a bank all overgrown with flowers—fifty kinds

of them, such a tangle. Many of these are now losing their fresh beauty, but Sweetheart is not interested in the flowers to-day. Her hands have purple stains on them, and her lips, alas! are no more of "her own geranium red."

For the blackberries are ripe. The little knobby globes of the bramble hang everywhere. And every night in our own hired house the preserving-pan is put on, till the delicious smell of ripe boiling fruit fills all the garden walks. At these times Sweetheart becomes so sticky that we have to keep her at arm's length, whenever the warmth of her affection threatens to overflow into a caress. Afterwards she and I clean out the brass preserving-pan with blunt horn spoons—once, twice, thrice, and start fair!

But there is one thing in the world that will take Sweetheart away from a bank of blackberries and the superintendence of Lord Baby Brother. That young nobleman toddles everywhere after her on fat tottery legs and declares his intention of getting "fine wipe gambleberries," returning triumphantly in a little to his nurse with the greenest and hardest to be obtained within half-a-mile. But Lord Baby Brother generally manages to crawl up the bank, and having

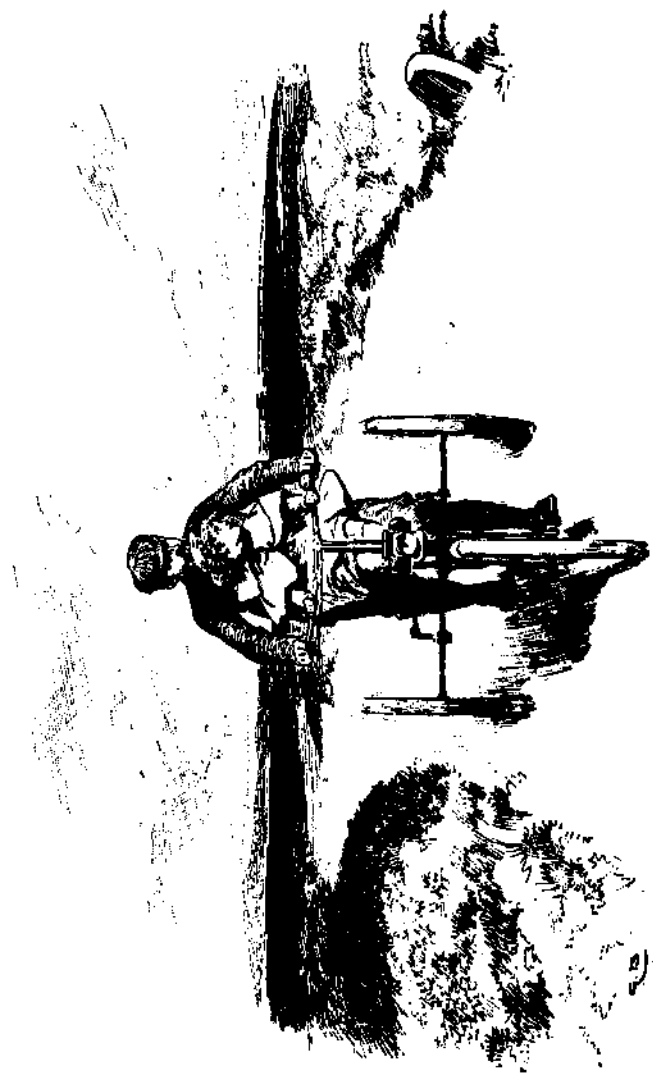
secured his prey he immediately proceeds to tumble headlong down again heels over head. He is, however, a sturdy Spartan, and never either cries or lets go the precious "gamble-berries." He brings them to his nurse clenched in his chubby fists, declaring all the time at the top of his voice, "I'se got such a yot, I'se got such a yot!"

But when I ride up on the tricycle, Sweetheart is down upon the road in a moment.

"Oh, where are you going? Can I come, father?" This with petitionary grace and thrilling accent of appeal.

Sweetheart can, provided that the red cloak of the traveller is obtained. We have to go far away along the breezy lochsides, in order to meet the Lady of the Workbasket, homeward bound. And as it is September and already late in the day, we must be well wrapped up.

This explanation is not more than half over, when Sweetheart is on her way to the house, locks flying, bare legs twinkling in the sun. In a trice she is out again, waving the red cloak and munching a piece of bread, running all the time at top speed—three things which I should not care to do all at once at my time of life.



"Sweetheart turned her head to count the milestones which we passed."

In addition she is hurraing with all her might. So these are four things which this most notable of Sweethearts can do at one and the same time.

We left Lord Baby Brother behind us, engaged in a determined attempt to storm the Redan of a specially inaccessible bank or break his neck in the attempt. He had seen some greener and harder brambles at the top than any he had yet obtained, and so have them he must. Thus he was happily all unconscious of Sweetheart's base desertion.

Through the winking shadows of the tall Lombardy poplars we swept onward. The road was smooth and hard as asphalt. Sweetheart turned her head to count the milestones which we passed. The wind just drew in our faces so that we felt the cool pressure, but it did not retard us.

Sweetheart said: "How long is it since you saw me on the top of that bank, father?"

"It is about ten minutes, Sweetheart. Why do you wish to know?"

"Because I was thinking what a difference ten minutes make. Ten minutes ago I did not even know that I should be riding on the tricycle with you, father. And now here I am?"

No doubt a mental philosopher could make something of this. It is beyond me.



"He gazed solemnly at us."

A stone-breaker was breaking stones at the side of the road. He gazed solemnly at us through his wire goggles with a singularly

antique look, as though he had been one of the cave-dwellers come to life. What he thought of us as we sped past we could neither tell, nor yet wait to find out. But Sweetheart thought that it must be very nice to be a stone-breaker.

"See, father, he is looking after us now. He cannot be very busy. If I were a stone-breaker, do you know what I should do?"

We do not, most certainly.

"Well," said Sweetheart, "I should have a dog—name of Trusty—a big brown dog. Yes, he should be brown—and he should be the most faithful animal in the whole world. He would lie on my coat, and take care of it, while I went on breaking stones, piling them up and cracking them into little bits as regular as lump sugar. I *should* like to be a stone-breaker, father. Can I be a stone-breaker and have a dog named Trusty—a brown dog?"

I replied that her parents had not yet considered the matter with the earnestness which the crisis required. But that, having heard this expression of her preference, I doubted not that we should give the matter our immediate attention. Or, as frequently before, words to that effect.

Now Loch Grenoch lay beneath us, sparkling with a myriad facets, as the light veering winds *criss-crossed* over it and sent the wavelets in a tiny "jabble" against the stones. We were soon under the Bogle-thorn. In an uncautious moment, once upon a time, I had informed Sweetheart that on the branches of that tree in years long past, when I used to trudge past it on foot, there used to be seen little green men, moping and mowing. So every time we pass that way, Sweetheart requires the story without variations. Not a single fairy must be added or subtracted. Now it happens that the road goes uphill at the Bogle-thorn, and to remember a fairy tale which one has made up the year before last, and at the same time to drive a tricycle with a great girl of five thereon is not quite so easy as sleeping. So most unfortunately I omit the curl of a green monkey's tail in my recital, which a year ago had made an impression upon a small girl's accurate memory. And her reproachful accent as she says, "Oh, father, you are telling it *all* different," carries its own condemnation with it.

I urge that it was not easy to tell the exact truth about green monkeys, when pedalling all

one's might up a hill against the wind. But I am conscious even as I utter the words that the plea is radically bad, and it certainly does not impose upon Sweetheart. We were soon on a smooth stretch, see-sawing along the ups and downs of the moorland way. Here the fascinating memories of the farm where Mr. Father lived and played when he was a boy, gave Sweetheart plenty to ask about as we spun along :

“ And what happened just here, father ? ”

Happily by the time the explanation is begun something else has been seen, and another question has to be asked. Thus one interest destroys another in Sweetheart's mind, whilst I am left in peace to make the wheels go round.

We heard as we went the rattle of the trees falling over in the woods of the Hollan Isle, where they were dragging copsewood to the waterside to be stripped of its bark. There came over to us also the cheerful clank of chains, as the horse was checked at the edge of the water.

In the face of the light breeze we sped northward, passing mile after mile of delightfully varied scenery behind us with precision and regularity.

The roads were perfection, the sun was cool, the wind light—on the front seat sat Sweetheart, and she chattered incessantly. Who in such circumstances could be a pessimist?

We skimmed under the imminent side of the Bennan Hill, now purple and golden-brown with the heather and the dying bracken. On our right, by the lochside of Ken, we passed the little cottage which thirty years ago was known to all in the neighbourhood as Snuffy Point, from an occupant who was said to use so much snuff, that the lake was coloured for half-a-mile round with a deep brown tint whenever he sneezed. A little further on is a deep tunnel of green leaves, down which we looked. It leads to Kenmure Castle. Sweetheart and I always stop just here to dream. It seems as if we could stretch our arms and float down into the waver-ing infinitude of stirring leaves.

In another minute we had come to the summit of the hill and were sliding smoothly down the long, cleanly-kept street of New Galloway. Not a cur barked in our track—a fact so remarkable that Sweetheart asked why.

“Because New Galloway is a royal burgh,” I said, for a complete answer.

And Sweetheart, who had so cavilled about the curls on the tails of the green men at the Bogle-thorn, accepted the reasoning without a murmur.

We passed the entrance to that fascinating Clatteringshaws road, which leads through the wildest scenery that can be reached by wheels in the south of Scotland. Soon we were steering still northward along the green holms of the Ken, and as we looked to the west the sun was beginning to sit low on the horizon.

Still there appeared no Lady of the Workbasket to greet us, and Sweetheart began to ask at every half-mile when the meeting was to take place. In a trice, still going rapidly, we found ourselves climbing through Dalry and passing the admirable Lochinvar Hotel. We came out again presently on the high, lonely road which leads to Carsphairn. But, alas! we discovered that there were two roads to that place, and that by either of them it was possible for our erring relative to arrive.

"Which road shall we take?" was then the question. Sweetheart was appealed to, and said:

"The one which mother is coming by." Which was arguing in a circle. So we span a coin—"Heads or tails?"

Thereupon Sweetheart cried "Both!" very loudly and decidedly. But this only still further complicated matters. So we had to do it all over again.

As we are thus waiting a gentleman dressed like a minister passes, driving a low pony-phaeton. We ask him if he has seen a lady and gentleman. He says "Yes," and as Sweetheart and I have every confidence in the veracity of a minister who keeps a pony-carriage, we take the road to the right.

Just as we are going out of sight the minister turns round, and calls out after us :

"The lady and gentleman were going the other way, *in a donkey-cart!*"

Our feelings are more easily imagined than described. Indeed, Sweetheart's can neither be imagined nor described, and the publisher peremptorily refuses to permit me to express mine. He says it would be certain to injure the sale of the book. So perhaps the less said the better. Only, this minister had a low pony-carriage and he wore a low hat. Sweetheart and I decline to indicate the monosyllabic adjective fitted to characterise his conduct.

By this time also the shades of night were

falling fast, and our time to Allangibbon Bridge beat the record. Finally I fell off altogether, and left Sweetheart to run on by herself. But that



"I left Sweetheart to run on by herself."

self-possessed young lady was accustomed to steer a tricycle, and so remained perfectly safe. Both my saddle-springs had snapped clean through. And thus we found ourselves at eight o'clock of a

September night, by the closest and most favourable calculation, at least fourteen miles from home. Moreover, there was no sign of any relative of ours upon the horizon near or far. Of course, also, there was no oil in our lamp. The wise virgins would have claimed no kinship with us, but we did not care. For Sweetheart said soothingly: "Never mind, father; nobody shall touch you while *I* am with you!"

So I picked up the broken saddle, lifted down Sweetheart from her basket seat, and the pair of us sat down upon Allangibbon Bridge to think things over.

First of all there arose the question of provisions. Sweetheart possessed a piece of chocolate which had worn grey and round in a little girl's pocket. So we halved that. Grey chocolate goes best with a flavour of crumbs. And we ate it that way with the sauce of hunger and thankfulness, as we kicked our heels on the bridge and looked up the road, singing the while at the top of our voices, "O where is our wandering mother to-night?"



CHAPTER XXVII

THE ROGUE WITH THE LUMINOUS NOSE



WE sat a long time thus, swinging our legs upon the bridge. The night dropped down, and Sweetheart crept closer inch by inch. The wind came whistling off the great hills with a kind of eerie sough, and the bushes in the glen beneath us creaked and moaned.

"I want to get on your knee, father, the water is so lonesome behind!" she said.

It was indeed time that we were trying to repair damages and return. For, as I have already said, we were fourteen miles from home, and the Lady of the Workbasket, into whose cosy carriage-wrappings Sweetheart was to nestle, seemed more difficult to meet with than an average African explorer.

"She must have gone home before us, the other way round," said Sweetheart lucidly. And I think the water grew lonelier behind her at the thought.

Finally, with a stout stick out of the hedge-root for a splint, I bound (as well as I could) the broken saddle-springs down upon the bar. Sweetheart was once more set firmly on her seat, and we started.

At the village of Dalry we laid in provisions for our adventure.

"I wish this was home," Sweetheart said a little wistfully, when we rode again in among the bright lights of the shops and houses. But I took her into the shop with me, and there we bought sweetmeats, biscuits, and grapes. For I knew that the way would be long without these. Be-

fore leaving the lights behind us and slipping forward into the dusk, I wrapped Sweetheart well about with her shawl and set her feet deep in my coat, so that only her face peeped out, her eyes shining meanwhile with the excitement. Sweetheart had never been away from home so late in all her life.

We pushed out swiftly, and in a moment were well past the houses of the village. The twilight shut gloomily about us, and it was fully a mile before our eyes became accustomed to the gloom, so that we could be sure that we were not in danger of running down any fellow-traveller of the night. But strangely enough after a little we could see more clearly than if we had carried a lamp with us. For the road in front was shining with a grey lucid light of its own, and we could have seen a dog a hundred yards ahead of us as plainly as a blot on a sheet of paper.

Sweetheart's heart was beating rarely. I think she had not often been so happy. The dark hedges galloped behind us. The air soughed blithely in our faces with the increased speed. Big trees glided more solemnly to the rear, and Sweetheart settled herself down to an enjoyment which was almost ecstasy.

And I—well, now when I come to think of it, I enjoyed myself too going at this rate.

It was not long before we came to the head of the long street of New Galloway. The folk there were all astir, though the doucer sort had begun to prepare for bed.

Sweetheart and I had good ten miles before us yet, so we made the lights flit past almost as swiftly as the hedges had done.

“Ho!” cried a friendly policeman, “where are ye gaun that gate?”

“It’s a fine night,” I replied affably, as though I had been giving some valuable information.

“It is that,” said the policeman dryly, “for lamps!”

He had me there, but he was a kindly officer. Also he laughed, and, being satisfied with his own very tolerable wit, he did not pursue either the subject or the culprits. For which Sweetheart and I owe him five shillings and costs.

Then I told Sweetheart of the rider who was once upon a time seized by a policeman in our home district. He was in our own predicament, in that he carried no illuminant with him except a few lucifer matches. But, lighting upon a tender-hearted officer, the victim was permitted

to depart upon leaving a contribution of five shillings to the county authorities. Of the requisite silver coins he possessed but four, but because he had the appearance of an honest man, he was permitted to proceed upon his homeward way on giving a promise to remit the odd one. He was as good as his word, and next day the policeman received the following letter :

"DEAR BOBBY,—Here with one Bob.—Yours,
"ROBERT."

"He should not have said 'Bob,' should he, father?" said Sweetheart, at the conclusion of this improving tale. "Nurse says that it is vulgar to say 'Bob' instead of shilling, and the young lady in the post-office does not understand Hugo if he says 'Bob' when he asks for a shilling's worth of stamps."

I cannot pause to argue upon the subject, for we are passing under the deepest arch of trees, and it needs all my attention to keep a plain track before us. Presently we emerge again into the clearer light. The West begins to glow till the stone dykes grow purple, and we can see the features of the passers-by.

And well it is that we do. For a cherry-nosed

rascal, driving an omnibus or some other towering conveyance crowded with people, charges straight upon us, in spite of Sweetheart's quite remarkable performances on the bell and my loudest warning shouts. He cracks his whip menacingly over us as he comes, and there is nothing for it but to risk running into the side of the road. The Messrs. Humber of Beeston may well advertise the strength and security of their machines, for, after a dozen bumps and dives, shaken but safe, we come to a standstill at the foot of the bank.

Then, though naturally (I think) I may claim to be much enduring, it is no wonder that I leaped off in wild anger and rushed after the scoundrel, shouting dire threats of wounds and imprisonment at him for his brutality. I did not, indeed, carry these out. But instead, I shall set him in the pillory here in the faithful chronicle of the travels of Sweetheart, which will do just as well. It shames me to think, that the only instance of brutal treatment which Sweetheart and I met with in over two thousand miles of road-riding, happened here in the very centre of our own Galloway.

But I cannot believe that the blackguard can

have been a Galloway man, and that, at least, is some comfort. And by this sign shall the traveller know him, that, like the glow-worm, he carries a lantern on the poop. For so long as his cherry nose shines bright and clear, he will need no sidelights to his waggon.

I found that my broken saddle had been again jolted off its bearings, and needed to be again more firmly lashed. But in spite of this it was no long time before we were again riding southward. Sweetheart had been perfectly brave in the hour of danger. Never had she made a sound when we bumped down the bank, nor even when she was left alone while I ran back to take up my testimony against mine enemy, the Rogue with the Luminous Nose. But just now when it is all over, I heard a little sob begin in her throat which threatened to grow into a greater trouble.

"There are nice purple grapes in that bag!" I said quickly, with comfortable intent, "and chocolate in my pocket—which will you have, Sweetheart?"

The curative properties of these two have never, I think, been fairly tested by the faculty—especially in juvenile cases. After consideration Sweetheart preferred the chocolate "just now,"

but signified that she cherished no permanent ill-feeling towards the grapes in the bag on the handle-bar. Presently she took her hands out of the cloak and laid them upon my wrist. They were trembling a little.

"I wish I had that rascal of a driver here," I said, thinking aloud, as I felt her small fingers quiver.

"Would you give him some grapes or some chocolate?" asked Sweetheart innocently.

"No, Sweetheart," I replied, "that was not precisely what I was thinking of giving him!"

"What would you give him then, father?"

"Never mind," said I; "something that he would be much the better of!"

"What a pity that he is not here to get it!" the maid replied wistfully.

It was indeed a heart-breaking pity. For the present I had in mind for him of the Nose was a skinful of sore bones, to remind him of the danger in which he had placed our Sweetheart, and to revenge that little quiver of her hands upon my wrist.

The loch gleamed in the pale yellow light from the west, and strangely enough it grew lighter instead of darker as we went on. We



"I lifted a double handful to Sweetheart's lips."

crossed the Portpatrick railway just at the point where it begins to push forward into the great western wilderness of bog and boulder. Soon we plunged into the darker shades of the woods again. The light in the west still remained clear. Now a short mile further on, there is a well of purest water by the roadside. I had promised that sometime Sweetheart should have a drink there. Often I had told her tales of drinking from it when I was no older than she. It lay in deep shadow, and when we found it the water was cool and refreshing as ever. I lifted a double handful to Sweetheart's lips. I fear indeed we both drank more of it than was strictly good for us. But the clear cold draught in the duskiness of the wood washed away all unpleasant memories of Rogues with Luminous Noses.

From this point, the time Sweetheart and I made on our journey was something remarkable. Every half mile we allowed ourselves a single grape, and so busy were we trying for the next milestone, that we quite forgot to be frightened till we had passed the Bogle-thorn. But nevertheless Sweetheart is quite sure that she caught a glimpse of the little green monkeys that always swing among its branches after dark. According

to the best authorities, they have coats of sword-grass and boots made out of the husks of hazelnuts.

In our village street there was quite a respectable crowd out waiting for us to arrive, and when we came in, with bell chiming and handkerchiefs flying, the popular acclaim was only kept within bounds by the narrowness of the road in front of our house. At one time there must have been quite ten people present.

"Good evening," said Sweetheart, politely and generally to everybody, "why have you not all gone to bed?" We whistled bravely as we went in, for we were culprits and knew it. But like all guilty consciences, we kept a bold front and made a gallant show of ease. And when we were made conscious of a certain silent and chilling disapproval of our reckless courses, we touched one another's hands sympathetically under the table when nobody was looking. Thus, cheered by the companionship of guilt, Sweetheart and I managed to make a fairly good supper in spite of the pricks of our consciences.



CHAPTER XXVIII

HEART OF GOLD



SWEETHEART loves to go upon embassies. One day she had to run all the way through the village and past the old schoolhouse where her father was so often thr—I mean, where he got the good-conduct medal and always did whatever the master bade him. Sweetheart carried a letter

with her, and she went toward an old farmhouse nestling on a knoll among trees, where there is a pond and the most beautiful spiky chestnuts. The name of it is Greystone, and it used to be haunted when I was a boy. Midnight apparitions were specially numerous about the time when the apples ripened—that is, as soon as you could set your teeth fairly into one, without immediately having to make a face which screwed your head completely round upon your neck.

So this haunted orchard of Greystone was the place to which Sweetheart was sent. And she went off right gaily. Because, before she went, she had seen our noble steed groomed for travel, and had marked the delight—the calm delight, with which he partook of his morning meal out of the crackling oil-can.

Sweetheart therefore felt secure of a happy day in the saddle, for she could put two and two together very well. So she started off in high spirits to do her errand. Neither did she stop to play at Greystone, though the chestnuts were getting brown, and a lot of the fine spiky ones lay among broad green leaves, where the wind of the night before had brought them down. Sweetheart knew that the school children

would be along the road in an hour, and that this was her only chance of gathering the glossy brown marbles. Yet she passed the place without stopping to lift more than she could snatch without stopping, and thrust in passing into the pockets of her jacket.

For the virtue of message-going consists, not in the speed of the outward journey, but in the promptness of the return. Anybody, says Sweetheart very wisely, can go a message, but not everybody can come straight back.

A rosy-cheeked, white-aproned woman came to the door of Greystone in answer to her timid knock. Sweetheart spoke by the book and delivered the envelope with its charge of round heavy coin of the realm.

"Tell your mother, dearie, that I can let her have the eggs and the butter," said the goodwife. "And won't you come in and sit down. I will get you a 'piece.'"

"Thank you very much," said Sweetheart, "but I promised to run home all the way."

And so all "pieceless" she turned and tripped down the green loaning with her message. She lilted and sang gaily as she went. And as she danced along a burnside part of the way, the

water lilted and sang and danced also for joy to see so bright a thing.

But meanwhile at home the tricycle had been brought to the door, and now stood winking in the sun, expectant of passengers. Hugo was playing with his horses, and had just fed them all three with the same handful of grass. This being finished, he looked about for something else to do, which would be equally satisfactory and economical. His eyes fell wistfully upon the tricycle.

"Would you like a little ride in Sweetheart's seat?" I said, watching his longing and lingering gaze.

For Hugo had as yet been counted of too tender years to be set upon that seat of honour and danger. Pleasure gleamed instantly responsive in the boy's eye. He threw down his whip and the handful of hay which had already done such signal service to his stud. In a moment we were in the saddle and wheeling slowly and circumspectly through the village street. As we passed the garden gate, Hugo waved his hand to an old man digging potatoes. He responded with a gay flourish of his fork, and then stood leaning upon the handle to watch us out of sight.



"Hugo was playing with his horses."

Down the road we went, past the schoolhouse in which father was thr—got the medal, I mean, and then wheeling still onward by the old smiddy where the ancient well of sweet water is.

Suddenly round the corner toward us tripped Sweetheart, dancing light-foot homewards, expectant of certain delight, and singing with all her might.

But so soon as she saw us the song stopped as if by magic, and she walked a little slower. Presently, however, she came running towards us faster than ever.

"I am so glad dear Hugo is getting a ride! I am so *very* glad dear Hugo is getting a ride with father!" she cried.

Hugo waved to her with his hand a little condescendingly. But he was so much occupied keeping his seat, and so greatly elated with the importance of his position, that he had no time to say anything.

Sweetheart turned—forgetting a little, I fear, about going quite straight home with her message.

"I will just run alongside," she said, "I can run so fast. See, father, how fast I can run. You won't leave your Sweetheart behind, will you, father?"

And her little feet pattered right determinedly along the road. Sweetheart was now running all she could. For though, stupidly enough, I did not know it then, she was trying to keep down the trouble rising in her heart.

"I am so glad to see Hugo sitting in my place—so very glad!" she panted. "It is nice for dear Hugo to get a ride."

She ran close alongside, waving her hand at him, and smiling pitifully all the time. I might have seen, if I had thought of looking, that her eyes were brimming. It was the warm, quickly beating little heart which was pumping something up into them. But with crass grown-up stupidity I took no heed.

Presently the wheels began to spin a little faster, for we were running down a little hill. We were beginning unconsciously to draw away from the little red-capped runner. The twinkling legs could really not be made to move any faster. Though very manfully Sweetheart still tried to keep abreast of us.

"I am so glad"—we could hear the broken accents, full of childish love and goodwill, pursuing us—"so glad dear Hugo is getting a ride."

We shot ahead quite rapidly now towards the

foot of the hill, and once round the turn we would be out of sight. But when the poor Sweetheart saw that she could not possibly keep up with us any longer, all suddenly something went snap in the brave little breast, and she threw herself down in the middle of the road, crying as though her heart had been broken.

It had been too hard a trial. Her seat was filled. We were going out of her sight without a word. She had done her best to rejoice in another's joy, but she could not bear to be altogether left behind. And so—and so, that is how it happened. In a moment or two Hugo and I were back, but the mischief was done. I lifted the little one.

"Sweetheart, Sweetheart," I said, "what is this—why are you crying like this?"

"I am not crying," she protested, though the big drops were falling thick and fast and making each a little round ball on the dusty road, "I am not crying. It is only because I am so glad dear Hugo is getting a ride. But—but I thought I was not to be father's little 'panion any more."

This is a sad tale and it ends here. The chief engineer had a warm coat upon his back, as he

rode up the village street with Sweetheart and Hugo both before him—as it were, “three upon one pony.” But he richly deserved it. For, quite ignorantly and like a man, he had been trying a loyal little heart just one peg too high. Now Sweetheart has risen to the dignity of having a tricycle of her own. And though Hugo (or even Baby Brother) rides sometimes in the old wheezy basket-seat between the horn handles, Sweetheart does not mind, for she has never ceased to be “father’s little ’panion.” Nor is it likely that she ever will.



CHAPTER XXIX

CRIMINALS IN HIDING



IT was a day or two after the little tragedy mentioned in the last chapter had been forgotten. Sweetheart was going with her father, to see the old farmhouse on the edge of the moors, where for many a day he had played as a boy. There were many things to be seen there. A score of fascinating stories, legends, romances, were

that day to find a local habitation and a name. Sweetheart had been awake since earliest day-break thinking about it.

It was the hottest mid-noon when we arrived at the edge of the hillside of heather and rocks popularly called the Duchrae Craigs—which, after all, is only saying the same thing twice over. For, as even Sweetheart knows, "Duchrae" just means Black Crag.

"Was this exactly where you played at 'Pilgrim's Progress,' father?" asked Sweetheart, with whom the tale is a favourite one.

"It was."

"And were you Apollyon, father, and where did you stand?"

The spot was pointed out. It seemed now an insignificant knoll. Then I considered it little inferior in real eminence to Mont Blanc.

"And did you indeed beat Christian and Faithful, and make them roar for mercy?"

Sadly I had to reply that such were the facts of the case. Indeed, two small boys had usually to be heavily bribed to enact these parts. And if the "Pilgrim's Progress" had been written from the facts of that campaign, it would have

been an infinitely shorter book. Also there would have been no sequel.

"And where was it," Sweetheart went on, "that you threw stones into the water for Dog Royal to dive after?"

This spot also was pointed out. It is a sharply sloping bank of gravel and sand by the lochside.

"Was it not very kind of the master to give you leave to stay here all day, and throw stones into the water instead of going to school?"

For the sake of discipline, I had to climb round the corner of this interrogation.

"And your people at home must have been very glad, that you were so kind as to make Royal a clean dog by sending him in swimming every day?"

I took a flying leap over this one. The folks at home certainly ought to have been both glad and proud of my cleanly habits. Probably they were. Only, you see, they certainly never mentioned it. Indeed, at least at the time, they did not quite take Sweetheart's view of such aquatic sports. Even the best people have their prejudices.

"And where was it that you were standing when you broke the kitchen window with your sling?"

"Did I do that, Sweetheart—surely you must have been mistaken?" I interrupted with some alarm. For when the next sling mania seizes our neighbourhood, I am likely to hear of this again. It seemed best, therefore, to take time by the forelock and deny, or at least query, the allegation.

But Sweetheart suddenly waxed very eager and very positive—even argumentative, which in a woman is worse.

"Yes, indeed," she cried; "Uncle Willie said you did!"

"Well then, Sweetheart," I replied judicially, "*if* I did break the window, I have no doubt that I was very soundly and very properly beaten for it!"

I considered that I had saved myself rather well that time.

"Oh, but," said small Miss Pertinacity, "Uncle Willie says you never were beaten. He says that you ran and hid in the barn instead, and made faces at everybody through the portholes, where they couldn't get at you. I wish we had a barn like that!"

What a dreadful thing it is to be afflicted with over communicative uncles,—men who, in their hours of ease, think nothing of giving you away

to your own children! How is discipline to be kept up in a household where the children have visions perpetually before them, of the head of the house putting out a contumelious tongue at his elders and betters through the triangular wicket of a barn?

But something had to be done, or worse might happen.

I resolved to treat the question brutally, or at least heavy-parentally.

"Now, look here, Sweetheart," I said, with lowering countenance and a quite portentous frown, "it does not matter a bit what Uncle William or any other uncle or aunt says I did when I was little. Uncles talk a great deal of nonsense, specially those who have no children of their own to bring up. But if I catch you pulling faces at anybody out of the barn——"

"We haven't got any barn," interjected Sweetheart, "only a carriage-house—and a pigsty, but no pig."

"Well, anyway," I replied, "if I catch you making faces at anybody out of anywhere, do you know what would happen?"

And I frowned a frown which ought to have been very terrible. Sweetheart looked down at

the ground, and I thought she was duly impressed. So I said more gently, "You know what I should have to do, Sweetheart?" And I shook my head sadly, to indicate a chain of tragic, almost fatal consequences.

"Yes," said Sweetheart sweetly, "you would have to laugh."

It was no use pursuing the subject further after this. But I made a mark on my cuff, to remind me to give Uncle William the benefit of a "few words" that very night.

"Now I should like," Sweetheart went on, "to go down to the bridge and see where you used to wade on washing days. And the place where you caught the big trout, as long as your arm—and the pool where you fell in and they had to hook you out with a hay-fork in your waistband behind. They could not do that so easy now, could they, father?"

It is, alas, too true. But I think Sweetheart might have alluded to the fact more gracefully. I never speak in that slighting way about her.

However, since it was clearly necessary to see all these places, we walked down slowly to the waterside. We passed through a beautiful mead overgrown with Queen of the Meadow and Clown's

All-heal. And when we came to the edge, lo, there before us, remembered like a part of another life, was the unforgotten island a little way north of the bridge. Tall bushes of the Greater Willow Herb were waving crimson and purple upon it, and the cool clear loch water soughing and clattering over the pebbles beneath it, just as they had done a quarter of a century ago.

Presently we came to a most fascinating little ford, with the most practicable and delightful stepping-stones in the world.

There is one great stone in the middle, with all sorts and sizes of smaller ones bending away from it on either side. These, except in very high floods, serve admirably to convey the wayfarer over to the pretty little cottage in the wood—which is such a paradise of rest and retreat to those who do not mind the midges in summer.

I looked down, and lo! I saw the bottom of the ford covered with softest moss and a little green-starred water-plant. I could remember the very touch of them upon my feet when I used to wade there so long ago.

"Can I take off my shoes and paddle?" pleaded Sweetheart wistfully.

I knew she ought not. But after all it was a fine day, and I wanted very much to do it myself. So we stripped in company, and with many shriekings and much splashing we spent a long hour, which lengthened imperceptibly into two, grappling as of old for loch pearls and "guddling for bairdies." Our success was not what could be called phenomenal, but at least we got most delightfully wet. And after all, that is the main thing. Never once did we think of what would be said to us when we got home.

All in a moment a happy thought leaped up in my mind, like a trout in the pool below :

"DON'T LET'S TELL AT ALL!"

In a moment Sweetheart and I had become companions in infamy. Our several knickerbockers were wet. Our caps had fallen into the water and were sopping. I cannot even remember the names of half the things belonging to Sweetheart which were wringing wet. But what matter? Was there ever such a day, so bright a sun, so green a grass, such clear cool waters?

"I can almost feel the heat bringing out the freckles," said Sweetheart, whose greatest aim in life is to be freckled like the girl she saw in the hay-field the other day. She has worn her cap

pushed very much on the back of her head ever since—"on purpose," as she says.

How near the flowers are! Sweetheart and I seem somewhere about the same age—possibly Sweetheart may even have a trifle the advantage of me.

Then we went back through the meadow again and so out upon the road, carrying all the wet things we dared take off without risk of being apprehended by the authorities (if there are such things about Loch Grenoch). Sweetheart had her stockings round her neck. Over her shoulders she carried mine, which hung down nearly to the ground. I was diligently engaged in pushing the tricycle. Sweetheart meanwhile padded rapturously along in the warm white sunshine, sometimes stopping to rub one foot over the other, and sometimes burying both in the hot delicious dust.

If heaven is anything like this, Sweetheart is going to be a good girl "from now right on." So she says.

But just then we heard the sound of a horse's feet. We looked guiltily at one another. Were we to be caught in the very act? Hastily we pushed the tricycle into an empty stone-breaker's stance cut deep into the edge of the wood. And

then we—well, we walked with dignity and calmness into the shelter of the forest.

No, certainly not. What an idea! We did *not* run and hide. That would have been a hasty and improper description of our movements, though I admit that our retreat looked a good deal like it. But mere unbalanced judgments from circumstantial evidence ought never to be expressed publicly. They are apt to be dangerous as well as misleading.

It was a pony-carriage which came trundling round the corner. In it sat the Lady of the Workbasket.

As soon as she saw the tricycle she pulled up.

We could see her looking everywhere about for us. We could even hear what she was saying.

"They must have gone up into the wood for blackberries. They are trying to surprise me by bringing home a lot. How like them, and how kind!"

Sweetheart and I blushed for very shame. But the case was too bad to be bettered by making a discovery and confession now. Presently the Lady of the Workbasket tied a little knot of ribbon to the handle-bar to let us know that she had been there, and drove on her way.

Sweetheart and I looked long at one another. We sat thus indeed, hardly speaking, till most of our apparel was dry enough to put on. Then we said, "We *must* find these blackberries now."

And after a long search we did a capful, and a pocketful, and a handkerchief-full.

When at last we got home, they said, "What has kept you so long?"

Then we smiled at one another and said nothing. We meant to keep on doing just that.

But when she came home, and before she saw our treasure-trove, the Lady of the Workbasket said kindly, "You stopped to gather blackberries in the Duchrae Bank for to-morrow's pudding. But I won't tell you how I know!"

Then Sweetheart and I had the grace to blush again and yet again. But all the same we never told what we had really been doing. And even now we beg that it be considered a dead secret.



CHAPTER XXX

I ENJOY QUIET



It has been remarked that, considering her size, Sweetheart occupies a considerable space in the chronicle of many lives. But I found out quite accidentally the other day, that Hugo and she occupied a good deal more space than I thought.

It was noble seaside weather, and they were at the seaside. There were three of them, all with given names.

These names are Slim Jim, Fat Jack, and the Dutchman.

"For," said Sweetheart, "it is only natural that we should have different names at the seaside. Everything is quite different there."

Sweetheart's seaside name is Slim Jim, for reasons which easily commend themselves when you see her in her bathing suit. The name of "Fat Jack" is, however, considered something of a libel upon Sir Hugo.

"But," as Sweetheart says again, "bless you, Hugo does not mind what you call him, so long as he can drive his horses and dig in the sand."

And the Dutchman is just Lord Baby Brother in a Panama hat, and a bathing suit drawn over his other things and tied round his neck with a string—a good costume for one who does not so much dig in the sand as grovel and burrow in it.

These are the true explanations of the seaside names of Sweetheart's family. But, alas! I was not there to see. I had been left behind in order that, in peace and quietness, I might be able to tickle the fretful typewriter to some purpose—at least, so far as covering a certain number of sheets of paper was concerned.

But I found, instead of the "quiet" having a good effect upon the imagination, it had just the

reverse. Out here in the domed wooden structure, where in the summer season I am wont to write all day with open windows, the noise of the "quiet" grows appalling. I find myself stopping and leaning forward to listen without rhyme or reason.

"Ah," I say to myself, "I can hear them—they are coming along the lower walk. Young vagabonds, they will soon be setting up a fine racket here—playing at "tig," very likely—or singing

*"Who goes round my house this night?
Who but Bloody Tom?"*

And for a moment I feel a little quiver of apprehension. For though I have not the personal acquaintance of "Bloody Tom," yet the vision of him perambulating round my house after nightfall never fails to fill me with respect.

I find myself waiting for the song to begin. But somehow it does not come. I begin to ask myself why—a little nervously, too, for the rascals may have made up a ploy to steal quietly upon me, and yell simultaneously at the door—a pleasing habit which assists composition wonderfully.*

* The patent has been applied for.

So I sit waiting for that yell and thinking of how I shall rush out upon them, and of all the terrible things I shall say and do when I have captured them. For I cannot abide such practices. They are upsetting and discomposing to every well-regulated mind.

Why does not that yell come?

I declare I forgot—they are all at the seaside, and I am enjoying a blessed quiet!

I remember "blessed" was the word used when the thing was first proposed.

Then I continue thinking how much I am enjoying the cessation from interruption and noise—till, finally, I grow restless. Even the relaxation of killing the procession of wasps which, marching through my writing *châlet*, takes fifteen hours to pass a given point, begins to pall a little upon me.

In the courtyard everything is sound asleep in the sun. The tricycle stands stiff and prim as if it were in a window for exhibition. Sweet-heart's little wicker chair looks down at me from a high shelf in the carriage-house with a sob in its throat. Some people may laugh, and say that a wicker chair which fits on to a tricycle with screw nuts, cannot possibly have a sob

in its throat. I know the kind of people who say such things—know them well. And to tell the plain honest truth I would not give two-pence-ha'penny (2½d.) a dozen for them.

So I turned away quickly from the carriage-house because—well, because I am enjoying the quiet so much—for no other reason in the world.

There is a pleasant runnel of water which falls pattering into a bucket by the old stable. It never stops summer and winter. It is the same spring which saved us all from perishing of thirst during the long four-months' frost last year. And now in the very deepest heart of summer it goes on just the same, falling into the pail with a pleasant sound of plashing waters. I go round the corner to look at it. Everything is spick and span. The pail into which the runnel falls is brightly scoured. There are no stones filling it half-way, as is usual when our gipsy tribes are at home. The little drain which takes the waste away is not choked with hay. No wooden horse with a waggon precariously attached by a piece of whipcord, and a dolly driver with her head resting on the horse's tail, is to be seen waiting for a drink, with the water soaking down the coachman's back.

How peaceful and proper everything is. Every stone of the gravel is in its right place. I thought of the last time I had come round that corner. And of how, seated peacefully at my work, I had been startled by a noise like the concerted roaring of all the bulls of Bashan. I remembered how I went out somewhat hastily, and there in the court below, whom should I find but Sweetheart and Hugo, soaked to the eyes, splashing each other with water, and shrieking with savage delight at each fresh achievement. The pail lay overturned. The water made a kind of *Lodore* Cataract over it, before running in a broad stream down the path and across the road.

I wish I could state that my sudden appearance and stern demeanour struck terror into the hearts of the young barbarians. But, alas! the contrary was the case. There came a yet louder yell. "Hurrah! here's father!" they shouted. "Come on and be splashed, father. It's such fun!"

All our maiden aunts are sure that we do not bring up our children properly or such a thing could not happen. It shows that something is very far wrong somewhere.

Now, however, I go away a little sadly and leave the water falling lonesomely and correctly

into the pail. There are no Lodore Cataracts any more. The trough always keeps its right side up, when the savage tribes are at the sea-side. I go to the high garden in order to walk and smoke, and also to think how much I am enjoying this blessed quiet. Yes, "blessed quiet" were the words I used. What else could one say?

But as I saunter sedately along the paths and think things over, it seems to me that Sweetheart and Hugo never did, in all their lives, anything to give their parents a moment's uneasiness. Surely it can never have been the case, that a dozen times a day somebody has had to rebuke them, generally with the tongue, sometimes otherwise, for pieces of perfectly gratuitous mischief. It must be some other children I have been thinking about. Ah, here is the seat over which, when I was meditating a beautifully moral passage for a monthly agricultural journal, Hugo suddenly sprang out of the bushes upon my back, so suddenly that I forgot all about it. And the world lost—ah, how much?

But what a distracting noise these wretched bees make, buzzing and humming among the flowers. Strange that I never noticed them before, when Sweetheart and Hugo were scara-

mouching hither and thither among the flower-beds, making such a pother and din, that at last old Grim rose and walked out of the garden and into his kennel in dignified protest.

How loud all the clocks are striking! And how many we seem to have of them! I declare I can hear half-a-dozen of them sitting here at my desk, though the house is a good fifty yards away. One might just as well live next door to a tin-smith's. I never heard them clanging like this before. A rook—(hang all naturalists, I *will* say a crow), a crow lights on the nearest post of the drying-green and remarks "Croak!" in a voice sudden and loud as an explosion. He too makes me jump in my chair, and disarranges a whole train of the finest ideas in the world—which, no saying, might have made me famous as far as the midland counties.

The black, hard-favoured, gap-feathered knave dared not have done so much, had Sir Hugo been on hand with his "bow-n' arrow" and other deadly weapons of offence.

But after all, am I not enjoying a blessed quiet? That, at least, is a great consolation. But just then it strikes me that perhaps I am not justified in keeping so much pleasure to myself? I cannot

believe that I am, when I come to consider the matter. Let me see. There is a train to the seaside at twelve. I shall just be in time to catch them all on the beach before they come in for tea.

I have certainly enjoyed the quiet immensely. But I do not consider it a fair or an honourable thing to keep all this enjoyment to myself. It is, in fact, distinctly selfish. So I am going in to pack my bag.

*"Then sing Hey! sing Ho! for the ships that go,
For the twelve o'clock train
That takes me amain,
To Slim Jim, Fat Jack, and the Dutchman."*

At this point I dance out with my hands in my pockets, singing this beautiful poem to the tune of the "Old Hundred"—which is the only one I know.

"Well, Sweetheart, do you like the seaside or home best?" I remarked when I got there. I felt exceedingly pleased with my self-sacrifice, when I saw them all together on the sands. I did not even stop to wash my face before coming down. This I did, not from laziness but because it seemed almost an insult to wash one's face in a

basin, in the presence of the mighty ocean just out of the window.

"I like home for steady—here for a while!" replied Sweetheart, as briefly as she could, and yet judiciously.

"I like home best always!" cried Hugo eagerly, one part for truth and nine for contradictiousness. Hugo is going to be a critic—or else an engine-driver, and earn his living honestly.

"Why do you like home best?" I said, watching him digging a big hole in the sand.

"Oh, he just says it!" said Sweetheart, with brisk off-handness.

"Well, I do like home best!" persisted Hugo, who knew the strength of simply sticking to his guns without explanation or theory, which are apt to confuse.

"But the sea, Hugo," I pointed out to him, "we have not got the sea at home?"

Hugo paused and leaned upon his spade as he has seen our old gardener do, when I stop to be informed what is to be done with my own garden. He is only restrained by urgent authority from carrying the imitation further and spitting upon his hands.

"Well," said Hugo thoughtfully, "the sea

may be bigger than our pond at home, but it has got no lilies in it. Aha, sea!"

And Hugo waved his hand towards the German Ocean and called the game about square.

But Sweetheart shook her head.

"He just says it," she repeated, with as superior an air as if she had (recently) been to Oxford, "he really likes the sea more than any of us. But, you see, he is only a boy, and just says it for contradiction."

Sweetheart is not going to be a critic. On the contrary, she sees through their method. She knows that they "just say it."

But I knew the way to change the critic's tune. I set him to a little original construction on his own account—which is infallible. The tide was just coming in, so we all took our spades and went down to the last tide-mark. There we staked out a large square, about which we dug a trench, throwing the sand inward till we had made quite a high castle. Hugo worked like a Trojan, and as for Sweetheart she worked like two. Then I personally undertook the architecture. After much thought I decided upon using the composite style, and the result amply justified my choice. It was very decidedly composite.

We had a donjon tower. None of us knew in the least what a donjon tower was, but for all



"We made quite a high castle."

that we said, "Hush! let us make a donjon tower." So that was the kind we had.

And a very good donjon it was. For one
s

thing it had temporary windows, which is a great advantage in a well-regulated donjon. For if an enemy approaches from any particular side, all we have to do is just to hit the threatened part a flap with the flat of the spade. And there you are! That whole side of the tower is safely defended from all attack. Because why—there is no opening by which an enemy can possibly enter.

"You can't take a place," said Hugo pertinently, "unless you have some hole to crawl in by." So, as you see, our temporary windows in the donjon keep were a great advantage. We are going to get out a patent, and make all other builders of donjons pay for using our temporary windows. Who knows but we may yet make a fortune.

Then we made corner towers, which did very well so long as Sir Hugo did not trample too hard in the middle of the castle. For this was sure to shake them down, or at least to crack them as badly as if a ramping young earthquake had rambled that way. These were not quite so great successes as the donjon tower. For when (as you shall hear) we let the water into the moat, it took one of us standing on the outside all the time and building up the walls, to keep them from

melting into the tide altogether. "Just like brown sugar in tea," said Sweetheart, who sometimes buys a pennyworth of that kind for her common afternoon tea-parties. Dollies get so much milk in their tea that they are not critical about the quality of their sugar. Even the end of a barley-sugar stick has been known to serve as sweetening upon occasion. And very nicely too.

We worked hard, and soon we had erected a most noble castle, with a high drawbridge over a moat two feet wide and more than a foot deep at the deepest part. By this time we had quite a crowd observing our operations, and no end of offers of assistance. Sweetheart engaged labourers at a halfpenny a-piece—or twenty pins, and bring your own spades. Quite a number paid (for it was the volunteers who had to pay for their places), more than we could accommodate round the moat. So that some of those who were out of work even clamoured either for occupation or their money back.

Before long, indeed, we had all the elements of a riot on our hands, and there is no saying what might have happened. The military might have had to be called out. For there was one urchin (he was the only one who had not paid any pins) who showed signs of haranguing the malcontents

in the usual Tower Hill way. He was evidently an embryo organiser and delegate. But Hugo promptly clubbed him over the head with a spade and bade him "hush." So we had no more trouble. Which is not at all the way that things happen in real life. Though Sweetheart said she would not care a button if they did turn out the military. She knew all the officers. They always wanted to kiss her.

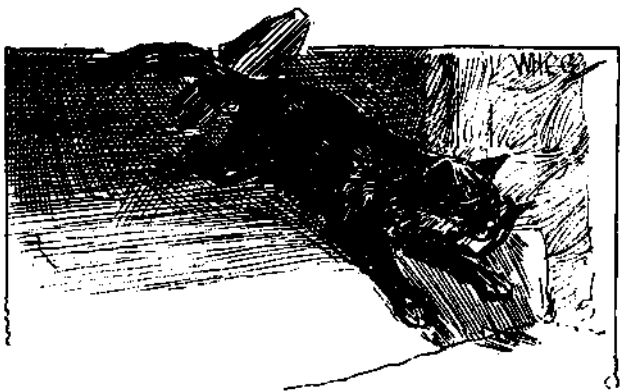
When it was finished, such a castle as ours had not been seen on any seaboard for years. At last the moat was completed and the bridge thrown across. We dug a trench to the sea and let the water in. It poured along with a gush like the opening of a sluice. And it had the loveliest yellow froth creaming on the top, which made it look all right, nice and old and smelly, when it got into the moat.

Four boys fell into the ditch, one after the other, trying to straddle across. Sweetheart was not popular with the mothers and nurses on the sands that afternoon. We heard afterwards that at least two of the boys had their trousers dried as carpets are cleaned, by friction—which is said to be one of the oldest and most successful methods in the world.

The ruins of the castle could be traced for nearly a week, for ours happened to be one of the highest tides of the month. And as Sweetheart said, "It took a regular one-er to knock down our hump."

I cannot think where she picks up such words. They are, I presume, seafaring terms.

And the best of it was the bread and butter which Hugo the critic interviewed and reviewed when he went home. He both cut it up and buttered it himself. Now the ordinary critic strictly confines himself to the first. Besides which Sweetheart indexed and arranged three kinds of jam upon her plate. And they both drank real tea (only half milk) so rapidly that it could not be brewed fast enough. And, above all, were there not real undeniable freckles, as big as sixpences and as brown as berries, which the sunshine of the seaside was bringing out? For with great delight both Sweetheart and Hugo showed me the accomplished desire of their hearts. They were enveloped in a very tan of freckles, which covered their faces and hands as thickly as a goodwife spreads country butter upon country bread, kneading it down with her thumb.



CHAPTER XXXI

THE MISDEMEANOURS OF BINGO



TIME brings changes. The observation is not exactly new, yet we may venture to repeat it. For the man who is listened to, is the man who is not afraid to say old things over and over again in his own way.

The name of Grim Rutherland has been already mentioned. He was for some time the "ridin' hoss of de rabbit family." But in these latter days he has retired from business, and (as is customary in such cases) he has waxed inor-

dinately fat. Once he was a slim young collic, frisking after a stick upon a Galloway braeface. Now he is so broad across the back, that when Hugo bestrides him, he looks exactly like the young Bacchus sitting upon a barrel.

There is yet another member of the family, of the name of Bingo. She (for, in spite of the masculine termination, Bingo is a lady) occupies the responsible position of family cat. The first time it was my privilege to see Bingo, she was packed in cotton wool and curled up in a little basket. There she looked the sweetest, grey, little furry kit that ever was. She had a pale-blue ribbon about her neck, and when she was put into Sweetheart's bed in the morning—well, you should just have seen that young person's eyes.

"Oh, it is a toy kitten!" she cried excitedly. For it was the tenth of August, Sweetheart's Birthday Morning, and the presents were beginning to arrive. But when the "toy kitten" woke, yawned, got up, stretched—and then stepped daintily over the edge of the basket, out upon the coverlet of the cot—nay, when she actually mewed, Sweetheart burst out into a passion of sobs. And when asked the reason

of this most disgraceful exhibition, she could only say, "'Cause—'cause I *is* so happy."

But now, Bingo is well stricken in years—that is, for a cat who dwells in a house on the edge of the woods. Bingo has done many misdemeanours, but I think the halo of that triumphal arrival clings to her still. She has brought many extraordinarily short-lived families into the world. She has been lost for days. On several occasions she has retired hastily from the dining-room with a piece of fish before and a slipper behind her—both in immediate contact with her person. For Bingo is occasionally a shameless thief. At the best she is but indifferent honest. She would not perhaps steal a leg of beef, but I would not risk her alone with a salmon. Bingo might be trusted with untold gold, but certainly not with a full-flavoured red herring.

Again, Bingo is a fair (or rather a foul) weather friend. In summer she is jumpy and shy—*farouche*, as one of her admirers says. In the summer season (when soft is the sun), she pursues the unwary hedge-sparrow and the reckless robin with the fellest intensity of feline cunning. Then, being well able to fend for herself, she will hardly recognise her nearest and dearest.

But at the first gliff of winter she will go out at the back door, dodge round the house, and appear upon the window-ledge of the study. There she sits and mews so piteously that, though I am well acquainted with the deceit, I have perforce either to rise and *shoo* her away, or open the window and let her in. It is much easier to do the latter, a fact which Bingo counts upon. So as a consequence, the insidious beast spends a large portion of the cold months lying before my fire upon the warmest spot of my hearth-rug.

But in the summer she will scarcely notice me at all. It is, in fact, as difficult to attract her attention, as that of the schoolboy whose hamper has just come from home. Bingo makes one exception, just enough to show that she is human—I don't mean feminine. She cherishes a romantic affection for Sir Hugo, and this in spite of the fact that the sturdy rogue habitually abuses her—that is, when he takes any notice of her at all, which is not often.

Meekly and devotedly will the enamoured Bingo follow those twinkling fat legs through all the devious windings of a long summer day. She trots a few yards after him, pulls up, and arches her tail over her back. Then she looks

about her, and presently comes trotting on again.



"Meekly and devotedly will Bingo follow."

Any one who is near can hear that she is purring

all the time. Hugo may shoot arrows at her. He may carry her long distances by the tail—a thing which, attempted by any gentler hand, would certainly drive Bingo into ten concentrated furies. But she only purrs the louder.

Or the young tyrant makes her “be a load of sand.” He carts her about, tied with ignominy to his waggon wheels, and she loves him the more for it. Sweetheart privately thinks all this rather shocking. She does not understand why Bingo should behave so. For after all, Bingo is her cat. However, I cannot conscientiously say that Sweetheart is wholly free from blame. For she has taken little interest in Bingo ever since she grew up.

Sweetheart wants to know why it is that cats are so much happier when they are kittens and little girls when they are grown up. It may be because in both cases they have then no lessons to do. She thinks that a machine for keeping cats kittens all the time, would achieve a great and a deserved success. She is of opinion that the inventor would be sure to make a lot of money. Sweetheart would take two machines herself—“to encourage the poor man.” She knows that this is the proper way to speak of authors and inventors.

Now above all things Sweetheart likes to play at going to church. She can make a very fair congregation out of her dressed dolls alone, and at a pinch she does not mind officiating in the pulpit herself. But she does not think it at all proper, that Hugo should be allowed to make Bingo sit up with her front paws together, for all the world like the minister saying his prayers. And it only makes the matter worse, that our black Bingo is coloured white from the neck down—"on the front side," as Sweetheart says.

Sweetheart draws the line at having Bingo for preacher in her church. But Hugo says sweetly, "That's just because you can't make her do it yourself!"

"So like a boy!" replies Sweetheart, as before, with the same weary patience and resignation. She has had large experience of boys, and has come to the conclusion that they are all alike—alike bad, that is.



CHAPTER XXXII

WHEN LOVE WAS IN THE MAKING

(A Chapter contributed by Two Older Sweethearts.)

"This was the garb the World wore
When Love and I were Twenty-Four."



IT is again that pleasant land, the Welsh country of Christian surnames and liquid consonants. There is about it less paint (but more whitewash) than about the Dutch model villages—something warmer, kindlier, less formal, nearer to the simple life of the soil. So we two Sweethearts will tell

you a little more of morning and noon and evening in Ap Jones's land, more too of Ap himself, of Ap's wife and all his little Aps, and especially of what we thought of them and they of us.

Generally speaking, Ap shows himself broad in face and figure, bland in smile, with a lurking native curiosity which causes him to interest himself in the most catholic manner in every one else's business—specially in the erratic ongoing of the mad Saxons, whose money he rejoices to handle but whose sanity he wholly contemns.

Mrs. Ap upon acquaintance proves shrill-voiced and communicative. She is given to fluent gossip and hard work. And further to bringing up, in grave and God-fearing way, her extensive progeny.

Young Ap is vociferous and vehement with his brothers and sisters — shy, suspicious, furtively desirous of small gratuities from the alien. Young Ap's sister mostly watches us from behind her mother's gown, and when brought to bay she dashes her elf-locks impulsively out of her gleaming gipsy eyes. But all of them are well acquainted with the properties of soap. In fact, they do not sufficiently wash it off after copious morning applications, which oftentimes gives their faces a peculiarly sleek and even glossy appearance.

In the flatter parts of Ap Jones's land (comparatively flat, that is) are to be found small farms with small fields, and small houses with small rooms. In fact, Ap delights in subdivision. In the wilder parts the land runs mostly to mountains, which the owner encloses in stone walls of incredible height and stoutness, like the pictures one sees in the magazines of the Great Wall of China.

Ap Jones will fence anything. He will run a stone wall straight up a precipice—as we found to be the case on the steepest of all his mountains, the Tryfan, at the head of Nant Francon. He will fence a small garden or a bathing-machine, Snowdon or a patch on the hillside, upon which he grows a cabbage and four leeks. Then he puts up a notice to trespassers, and like a very lord of the manor, he stands at the gate smoking his pipe, with hands in his pockets—"same as a town man," as Uncle Remus would say.

We two older Sweethearts have long ago found out that the fairies have not left off haunting the old land, but that now they are mostly beneficent. Even the weather fairy is generally propitious, or at least equitable. This August morning, at least, there came a delicious breath

of air in our faces, wafted from nowhere that we could see. We thought that it must be the wind of the fairies' wings, and we were sure that the little people had exquisite taste in perfume, with some preference for new-mown hay. The sea was very bright and sparkled blue under the early sun. The air was clear beyond telling, for the rain had all come down in the night, and was now going rejoicingly up again in the springing greenery.

We were on this occasion (to begin with) travelling by train; and we sped quickly enough through the wooded valleys, till we burst in a moment upon the Conway.

It was a slow train, as the custom of the country is, and the pace was not so breakneck as to prevent earthy scents of last year's leaves reaching us, of fresh wet grass, all mingled with the odour of the salt sea and the bleaching seaweed on the shore. These came across us in blended wafts defying analysis.

Our fellow-travellers were exceedingly interesting to us, perhaps we two also to them.

Here for instance was a girl who fascinated us—off whom indeed we could not keep our eyes. She was curiously and wonderfully clothed. Either she

was wearing some one else's dress, or the tender mercies of the Cymric dressmaker had been cruel. The garment was tight where it should have been loose, and *vice versâ*. Fascinating speculations got afloat about it. The victim had got into it so that *obverse* was *reverse*. She was born so. She had grown like that gradually, laying on additions as necessity dictated, like the farm out-houses in Norway. Or she was carrying her library in that large cubical capacity behind—as one of us used to carry Scott and Thackeray, or as it might be “Nick of the Woods” beneath his waistcoat into places where literature of that kind was under the greater interdict. This hump meant, perhaps, a pocket Shakespeare, this table-land a quarto atlas, this avalanche an edition of a particularly voluminous romancer. This soft, spongy mass was an antiquated Mudie novel in three volumes—— But at this time she got out at a wayside station, and as library and librarian vanished with mighty tread past the ticket-collector, we were left with our problems unsolved, but with appetites sharpened for further inquiry.

We had been so busy spying upon others that we had not observed two pairs of eyes which had been watching us from opposite corner seats—

one pair sharp and uncompromising, the other childish, faded, and somewhat watery.

They belonged to a couple of decayed gentlewomen, we decided—old maids trying to snatch a holiday away from their struggling second-rate "School for Young Ladies" in some provincial town. Poor things, we reflect, their occupation and doorplate of burnished brass are almost gone. Secondary education and the School Board have banished at a breath their lean propriety and gentility as stiff as figured brocade. The elder sister, in tinted glasses, ancient spotted veil, and severe black reticule, regarded us wintrily over her prominent pinched nose. The younger, with weak characterless face, pale mobile mouth, looked somewhat wistfully at us out of her babyish eyes. Both might have stepped out of a pre-Waverley romance, and their names might have been Selina and Amelia. The younger tried to get some enjoyment out of reading passages from the guide-book to her elder sister. But it was without animation, as knowing the performance to be a sham. In a little while she subsided, and handed the book to her sister, who instantly locked it into her reticule with a snap which said, "Stay there, and

don't make a fool of yourself any more." So the tired grey woman leaned herself back to watch us—conscious, perhaps, of a time when life had not narrowed itself down to one grim sister and a few gawky schoolgirls. It did not seem so long ago since she used to read the poets in carefully edited selections (with gilt edges). And is there not somewhere a little white book, tear-stained, tied with blue ribbon, scented with lavender, in which are certain original verses written in a delicate handwriting, "almost as good as those of dear Mrs. Hemans?" Was there not a little old love-story hidden away back in the dim past, and has the quick flushing of that pale cheek made some man's heart beat faster? But Selina set her foot on the poor little heart-plant, and crushed the life out of it. ("No one can resist Selina, you know, my dears; she always was so positive!")

"Bettws! BETTWS!! BETTWS!!!" came in Celtic *crescendo* from the porters as we ground to a standstill. "Be quick; we get out here!" cried Selina. It broke sharply into poor Amelia's reveries, and into ours. There was an accent in her words which, being interpreted, meant—"and travelling is too serious a business for silly mooning!"

"Good-bye, Amelia," we murmured, as we moved groaning out, and saw the wistful eyes still regarding us, while Selina was vigorously directing the attention of a reluctant porter to their scanty belongings.

The interior interest had now departed, and we turned our eyes to the scenery as it streamed past our windows.

We were ascending a long incline. Listen to the heavy *chay-chay* of the overtaxed engine. We were glad when the telegraph poles went past at an easy walk, because it gave us time to observe a pretty enough pastoral.

What was that our sharp eyes noted, forsaken in a "field's high corner?" Not, indeed, "coat, basket, and earthen cruise," but white umbrella, rack-work easel, and battered japanned box. Chapter first of a circulating library romance! Chapter the second opened in a hayfield a little way along—haymakers raking the hay, prominent among them the farmer's daughter, tall, well-girt, and bonnie, playing at the same.

The secret was a secret no longer—"Ars longa, amor æternus," muttered one of us. Or, once more, words to that effect. Tremble, O young painters, all of you who ever, on any August

morning, studied pose passion and pastoral, instead of copying local colour and catching fleeting skies in the upper Conway valley. But our four eyes were sympathetic and not at all envious. So we left you, knowing that to you exhibitions were a pain, picture-dealers and publishers a dream, studios and life-schools a weariness to the flesh. For what is that you are saying? "*What is the Welsh for love, and what is the word for sweetheart, and what does one say when one asks for a kiss?*"

And then the answer, given with one swift up-glance from under the shady haymaker's bonnet? "One does not *say* anything half so foolish in Welsh, sir. And if you are going to help with the hay, you had better begin, or go back to your painting!"

We are not going to open the third volume at the last page, and tell you whether it ends with "And they drove off amid showers of rice. But the old man went to the top of Snowdon, and sat there sadly during the rest of his natural life." Or whether it was, as the forgotten song says,

"Adé, Adé, Adé, and the blue Alsatian mountains,
Keep watch and ward away!"

You can take your choice. We have made ours.

So unwillingly we leave them to their haymaking and their lovemaking, and the long uphill journey to Ffestiniog contains nothing one-half so interesting. There is only an old man going a-fishing, picturesque but ridiculous. He is standing in the clearest of water this bright blue morning, industriously whipping the stream. He is attired in coat of scarlet and leggings of pure white—a laughing-stock to every self-respecting fish for miles. He calls up a friend in the North Countrie who had to be prevented from fishing by the Local Authority, Board of Fisheries, or something of the kind, because his attempts so tickled the fish, that they strained themselves with laughing, and it threatened permanently to injure the breed.

Do you know anything in nature more seductively delightful than a by-path through a wood? You cross a shallow brook by four stepping-stones in order to find yourself in it. The tall trees stand widely about, the copses nestle close round it, a birch tree's pendant plume brushes across your face like your lady's love-locks as you turn into it. Sunshine glints sprinklingly athwart

it. Rabbits "*scat*" across it. Squirrels drop hazel husks and shells upon it, and then disappear



"A laughing-stock to
every self-respecting fish."

with the flashing of a russet brush. Then, again, a by-path is always the nearest way, wherever you may be going. It is certain to cut off a dull corner.

There is no dust on it ; " Let us go this way," we say. But we soon forgot where we were going in the lingering delight of it. By pleasant little copses, over open green swards, among bees and birds and flowers who all love it as much as we, over stiles and betwixt hedges it goes ; through birch plantations that extend down to the river-side, with the water's pleasant murmur coming up all the time in an undertone of song from beneath the leaves. The birds are ever clamorous there, and insist upon telling each other what a paradise it is this lucent, cloudless noontide. And resting on a mossy bank we know of two who agree with them.

So we descended by the riverside and crossed a stile, high-tilted like the roof of an Alpine chalet. Then presently we found ourselves on a picturesque old bridge, and continued on our way down the valley in the fervent heat. We saw no one among the skirting woods or anywhere about the scattered farms.

At the next bridge we turned sharp to the left, to the time-honoured inn. Here we had reason to wish that the bread and mutton had been a little less time-honoured. Two travellers, casuals like ourselves, had just come in—young cotton opera-

tives from Oldham, walking in their Sunday best. They looked much more dusty and travel-stained than we—not from any virtue in us, but because cricketing-flannels and summer prints possess this inherent advantage over black broadcloth—that they are both cool in themselves, and look cooler than they are. But the travellers were honest, hard-working, rough-spun lads, and it was much to their credit to be thus tramping the worth out of their money and the sun into their cheeks, instead of spending all their living in one grand local “spree,” or at the annual saturnalia of the “Wakes.”

There were three pianos in the room, each in its way curiously suggestive of the lapse of time. The first was old-fashioned, low, spindle-legged, spinnet-like, full of quaint pathos and lavender delicacy. It suggested “teacup times,” and Squire Western growling and nodding his head as his daughter Sophia played him to sleep to the tinkling of quaintly dainty minuets. The second was of the earlier part of the century, recalling a faded portrait of one’s grand-aunt under the Regency, with a limited amount of ringlet and a good deal of compensating shoulder. Its stiff, organ-like, high-backed case was panelled with crimson silk, now

happily faded to wine-stained russet. Still there was not wanting a certain old-maidish dignity about it, which completely put to shame the smart Philistinism of the brand-new German over the way—with its gilt pedals, polished mouldings, and back of grass-green silk.

From the bridge we took a lingering look up and down the beautiful vale lying beneath the afternoon sun—a very lotus-looking land—as still as it was in the days before ever man or any creature came thither. Our two last memories of the day were peaceful also. They were of the clatter of the shoes of the home-going quarrymen along the streets of Ffestiniog the Upper, and Conway Castle standing lone and purple against the glowing estuary and the broad crimson sunset.

All these—our dear old maids, our lover and his lass in the valley hayfield, our woodland path and mossy bank, our brave rough Oldham lads—abode still with us, set in bracing mountain air, as we came slowly back through the cornfields.

There is only room for two on the woodland path among the birch trees, yet many pairs of sweethearts have trodden it, and many more will go that way.



CHAPTER XXXIII

THE TRANSMIGRATIONS OF THE PRINCESS MELINDA



I POSSESS not one, but many Sweethearts in the course of a day. Yet can I not be charged with fickleness. There is, for instance, the early morning one. She is a Sweetheart of intense application, and is endued with qualities quite portentously business-like. This particular Sweetheart at present occupies the uncovenanted position of under-gardener. I passed her this morning on the way to the

châlet. She was carefully brushing the leaves off the path, and picking the weeds which will persist in growing along the borders.

"You would not believe how trying these weeds are!" she said as I passed, without pausing for a moment or even looking at me. Up came the weed! *Whisk* went the garden brush, or rather besom of stiff birch twigs. This Sweetheart must not be interfered with, except at one's peril. There is no time for nonsense or philandering with such a very practical person. In fact, you may look, but you must not touch.

But this morning energy of hers takes many forms. Sweetheart shows, indeed, no very marked persistence in any particular occupation. A week ago, to my certain knowledge, Sweetheart was an enthusiastic under-housemaid, and the dust she was raising in the passage showed how thoroughly she was mistress of her business. It made me cough full five minutes by the clock, and, when next Sweetheart applies for a place, I am prepared to state the fact on oath in the usual testimonial—or character, as I believe it is called in the profession.

But all through the fruit season, in spite of all temptations, Sweetheart sticks to the post of

under-gardener—that is, the one who pulls the fruit and sends it in to the cook.

“Sweetheart, what are you doing?” I called out one day last June, when I happened to see a blue-bloused figure bending among the strawberry beds.

“Pulling strawberries for lunch, father,” she answered readily—almost too readily.

“And where have you got the basket?” I asked.

“Here it is,” said Sweetheart, lifting one from between the leaves.

“Oh,” said I, “I was afraid that you might have been compelled to use your mouth. I saw your hand going there so often, that I thought you must have forgotten an ordinary basket.”

“It was only one or two mushy ones that broke off in my hand,” said Sweetheart reproachfully, and with such an innocence in her uplooking eyes as almost to make me call myself a brute for my unjust suspicions.

One day I saw Sweetheart shelling peas on the garden-seat, with only a doll stuck stiffly up in one corner for company. I stole up “unknowns” behind her. She was talking to herself. “And the prince dived down again to the bottom

of the sea and brought up another oyster-shell full of most precious pearls, and gave it to the princess. Then the princess took the shells in her lily-white hands, and with taper rosy fingers she opened them, till all her apron—no, her royal mantle I mean, of course, was full of the radiant pearls."

This is what she was saying, for Sweetheart in her plays talks by the book, or at least as like it as ever she can.

Suddenly she looked over her shoulder, moved by a subtle knowledge of some one near. She was instantly silent. It came to me with a moment's pain that one short year ago she would not so have silenced her romancing for my coming. Now I know very well that my Sweetheart will grow past me one of these days. I fear it will be *I* who must lose my "little 'panion." Already she has her secret plans, her plots, her schemes, her prodigious secrets. Most of these she still confides to me, but the number she does not tell me will gradually increase.

I know that it must be so, and I do not repine. But I would keep the little heart open as long as I can, and for my own good be like her wayward

and childlike, a comrade of the child's thought and the child's play.

"Princess," I said to her, "let me play your play. I will be the prince who dives down into the sea. I cannot be a very elegant Prince Charming, but at least I shall be very willing and faithful. I will bring you gold and jewels, done up in precious caskets of sandal-wood and costly veined malachite."

She glanced up with eyes keen as love, quick as life.

"Is father in earnest?" she was asking herself. I could see the thought in her eyes.

Indeed I was never more in earnest in my life. My service was accepted. I expected it, for above all things she likes the sound of fine words. So I raided fiercely upon the pea-sticks, and brought back noble handfuls of the pods.

"Fair Princess Melinda," I said, "light of the palace, Princess of the Golden Crown, accept these trifles which the meanest of thy slaves brings thee. They are reft for thy sweet sake from the halls of the King of the Sea—costly emeralds are they, and aqua-marine translucent as the nethermost ocean."

Sweetheart holds up her pinafore for the gift, bending her head and smiling graciously the while. "I like you to speak proudly like that," she says; "I do so love fine picture words."

And so I pour out all the jewelled words five syllables long that I can remember, and when, like the prodigal, I have spent mine all thus riotously, I set to work to invent more. And so on till Princess Melinda of the Pinafore has in her lap more than enough of the treasured preciousness of the ages—smaragdus, cornelian, topaz, chrysolite, chrysoprasus, jacinth, all bearing, however, a strong family likeness not only to each other, but also to that domestic pea, to which in spring the thoughts of men turn so lightly in connection with roast duck.

"O Sweetheart," cried the Lady of the Workbasket, coming just then to the place where we were sitting, "you have shelled enough for two days."

In a moment the princess was herself again.

"Well, mother," she cried, "that is easy. Have peas to-morrow for dinner as well."

I looked at Sweetheart and Sweetheart looked at me. I knew what was in her mind, but I did not tell. To-morrow at eventide she will, I fear,

certainly lie in wait in the hall as the dishes are being brought out, and like a pirate bold, levy contributions of diamond, sapphire, and veined agate of the sea. But this is after all no more than the right of the Princess Melinda. For did not her own Prince Charming (save the mark) bring the jewels at his peril from the Sea King's palace among the pea-sticks in the fastnesses of the kitchen garden?

CHAPTER XXXIV

GOOD-NIGHT, SWEETHEART



UT for a moment more I must return to my various Sweethearts. After the application of the morning has dulled the eager edge of diligence, arrives once more the Sweetheart of riotous play—the same for whom I looked in vain, that day when I walked about so long enjoying the blessed quiet. This Sweetheart needs no herald to go before her. You can hear her approach quite a mile off.

When she comes there is a sound of distant revelry, a gleam of fluttering kirtles winking through the woods, a barking of dogs, a crackling of branches. Presently, scratched, flushed, dishevelled, toused, Sweetheart appears with Hugo in full chase after her. And the pair roll over each other on the grass, gripping and nipping like young puppies at their play. This same wild

romp, who has to go back a hundred yards to find her hat, who scatters her buttons and distributes her shoe-strings over a league of ground, is just our model housemaid and under-gardener of an hour ago. I state it upon oath, attested by the seeing of the eye and the hearing of the ear.

In the afternoon you will find yet another Sweetheart, on a seat in the shade with a fairy book—blue, green, red, or, as it may be, yellow. She is deep in tales of prince and princess, goblin and fairy, and she is hoping that it will be a long time before she comes to the part about them being married and living happy ever after. Of course that must come in time, for Sweetheart justly resents any other ending. But for all that, it must not come too soon. If it arrives before she is ready for it, Sweetheart decides that the writer man does not know his business.

Sometimes it is not a fairy book which Sweetheart holds. I found her the other day deep nestled in an arbour with a most rare and valuable octavo—nothing less than the first edition of the Catechisms of the very venerable Westminster Assembly of Divines, a book to which this most quaint and whimsy of maids is (for the time being) passionately attached. For

Sweetheart is a perfectly eclectic lover of fine words, upon what subject soever they may be expended.

She really and genuinely loves the roll of the great dogmatic sentences—involved, turgid, surcharged with the thunders of a thousand years of controversy. “God is a Spirit, Infinite, Eternal, and Unchangeable. In His Being, Wisdom, Power, Holiness, Justice, Goodness, and Truth.” Or, again, a little further down, “God’s Works of Providence are His most Holy, Wise, and Powerful Preserving and Governing all His Creatures and all their Actions.”

Such sentences please Sweetheart like the roll of drums. And if her understanding lags some way behind her ear, who shall cast the first stone at her?

Once more: in the afternoon appears a young lady who can very politely receive and entertain any guest in the absence of her elders. This is the Sweetheart of the tea-party, the drawing-room, the afternoon call. This is the grown-up young lady, who smiles reprovingly or complacently upon the childish irresponsibility of Hugo, who explains his doubtful passages, suppresses or extemporises the context, and finally

leads him out gently but firmly when he misbehaves.

But I have yet one Sweetheart more, perhaps the sweetest of all—she of the twilight. And for a name we call her our little Miss Wistful. Sometimes you may come upon her sitting very still, and looking out at the sky with eyes that are unfathomable like its depths—the shadows in them deep as night, and with lips that are parted with the wonder of things not seen.

The day has been long, but now after all the time approaches to say, "Good-night, Sweetheart!"

A little sadly shall we say it, for as the shadows thicken, the time begins to seem long till morning. Sweetheart saddens at the thought of separation. The dark hours are but a barrier between her and the new day.

"I shall lie awake, father," she says, "till you come to kiss me good-night."

Yet well do I know that when I steal to the bedside, through the chaste hush of children's breathings, I shall find Sweetheart's eyelids down, and a smile on her lips which means that she is far off among the fairies, dancing with them within their green and magic rings.

But by-and-by, just before the dark really comes, if you walk softly enough and peep—just round the nursery door you will hear a sound that is better for the heart than much preaching (for I who write have tried both and know), the voice of a little child's prayers.

Amen! you say. So may it be. Even thus, little maid, may we one day at nightfall lay aside our sins and be—well, just like you.

And now, Good-night, little Sweetheart. The good God Himself keep you, and His best angels ward you soul and body from all the evils of all the nights.



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