ANN'S FAMILY

JANET · FIELD · HEATH

ANN'S FAMILY

OH, HOW THEY DID ENJOY IT ALL! — *Page 153.*

ANN'S FAMILY

BY

JANET FIELD HEATH

ILLUSTRATED BY
L·J·BRIDGMAN

BOSTON
LOTHROP, LEE & SHEPARD CO.

Ann's Family

PRINTED IN U. S. A.

NORWOOD PRESS
BERWICK & SMITH CO.
NORWOOD, MASS.

CONTENTS

ILLUSTRATIONS

ANN'S FAMILY

I

TO THE FARM

"WELL, here I am, starting around again," said Ann. As the train pulled out of the station the little girl took off her hat and settled herself as comfortably as she could for her long ride out into the country. She felt a little lonely as she folded her hands and looked out of the window.

"It seems to me I'm handed around a lot—almost like Aunt Margaret's recipe for sponge cake," sighed Ann. "I do

wish I had a steady, stay-all-the-time family like other children."

Now, to look at Ann you would think she was just the kind of a little girl to belong to somebody. She had shining blue eyes and soft brown hair that waved about her face and nestled in soft little curls at the back of her neck; she was really a dear, pretty little girl. If she had had a father and a mother, they would no doubt have been very proud of her, but both parents had died before Ann was five years old, and her aunts and uncles took turns caring for her.

"Such a fortunate little girl to have such good relatives," every one said, and Ann knew that they spoke the truth. She wouldn't have liked it at all to have had to go to the big Children's Home that they passed on the way to church.

But it had seemed of late as though a great deal of work was mixed in with being taken care of. Perhaps the aunts and uncles did not mean to, perhaps they did not think of it at all, but each one seemed to ask Ann to visit at the time when she could help the most.

During the winter months she stayed with Aunt Margaret. There were always errands to be run at Aunt Margaret's, and there were little Tom and Peggy to be entertained and watched.

In the spring the little girl was sent to Aunt Rachel, who lived in the old home on Madison Avenue, where Ann's mother had lived when she was a little girl. "Aunt Rachel's" meant housecleaning and learning all the many things that Aunt Rachel thought every child should know. Ann was always

glad when, as a last duty, Aunt Rachel taught her to pack her trunk neatly and sent her to Uncle John's farm, where she usually spent the summer. She was on her way to the country this very morning—starting around again, as she said.

"I hope they'll be glad to see me," thought the little girl, looking out of the car-window at the scenery she now knew so well. "And I do hope they'll have a new baby calf! Oh, and some darling baby pigs!"

Ann began to smile as she thought of

RIGHT INTO THE FACE OF A LITTLE BOY

the little pigs that were always so funny, and as she smiled she looked right into the face of a little boy who sat opposite her. He was sitting up very straight, and looked rather uncomfortable in his stiff collar and new shoes. He thought Ann was smiling at him, and he smiled back, but Ann felt that his smile was almost as stiff as his collar.

"I wasn't smiling at *you,* anyway," she said to herself. "Your clothes look pretty rich, but you don't look a bit cozy."

"Why don't you read your book, William?" she heard the lady beside the boy say to him.

"His name's William," thought Ann. "And I guess that's his mother."

She glanced shyly across at the lady who had spoken. Ann always liked to

look at mothers, especially as she hadn't one of her own. She noticed the fine silk travelling-suit that the lady wore, and her handsome umbrella and hand-bag.

"Yes, I guess they're rich, all right," Ann sighed. "I wonder where they are going, and if they have any more family."

She knew it was not polite to stare at people, but out of the corner of her eye she watched her fellow-travellers, wondering what book it was that the boy was now reading so attentively. She was surprised, when they reached Fenly station, to see them gather up their things and prepare to follow her from the train.

"Why, I believe they are going to visit here, too," thought Ann as she her-

self jumped lightly to the platform and looked about for some one from her uncle's farm.

"Oh, Pete, hello!" she exclaimed, spying at last the young fellow who had been for several years her Uncle John's helper.

"Well, here you be, Ann," said the big, good-natured man, lifting her into the old buckboard. "Growed some, hain't you?"

"Oh, yes, indeed," answered the little girl. "I've grown a whole inch and a half, and I've gained four pounds; they told us all at school before we came away this year."

"You don't say! Be a young lady 'fore we know it, won't you now?"

"My, no, I'm only ten," Ann told him.

"Oh, Pete, you've got a new horse to go with old Jerry, haven't you? Have they got anything else new?"

"Well, jest the usual things," drawled Pete; "pigs and ducks and calves and the rest."

"Oh, Pete! A new baby calf!"

"Two of them," laughed the man; "fine, frisky ones."

"O-ooh!" squealed Ann, bounding up and down on the rickety seat: "I can hardly wait to get there. Let me drive, Pete; I can make them go."

Pete handed over the reins, and go they did. It was not long before they came in sight of the old farmhouse, and Ann's little cousins came running out to meet her—Mary and Jack and Florence. Yes, and there was even the baby, tod-

dling unsteadily to the door. Ann caught him up in her arms.

"Why, Precious, how you've grown!" she cried. "Kiss Ann, darling."

Still holding him, she ran in to greet her aunt and uncle, and, as they all gathered about the big dinner-table, Ann felt very happy again.

"After all, it's very nice!" she thought, "even if it isn't a *steady* family."

II

A BUSY DAY

"ANN, Ann, wake up, it's six o'clock," cried her cousin Mary the next morning, jumping up from her side of the bed which Ann always shared with her.

Ann sat up blinking and rubbed her eyes. "Dear me," she said; "I couldn't think where I was. It always mixes me up dreadfully at first when I change families."

"Don't you like it?" asked little Mary anxiously. She was two years younger than Ann, and very fond of her. "I'd just love to be going to different places.

I never go anywhere except once in a while when Father takes us to town to buy new shoes."

"Well," replied Ann, now wide-awake, "it might be nice if you were going to *new* places all the time, like Alice in Wonderland, you know, but I keep going around in a circle. I don't believe, if I live to be a hundred, I'll ever get to more than three places—here, and at Aunt Margaret's and Aunt Rachel's."

The mention of the last name made Mary think of something.

"Oh, Ann, Pete brought up your trunk. Let's unpack it. Did Aunt Rachel give you anything?"

"Two aprons," said Ann, getting dressed as fast as she could. "That is, Aunt Rachel bought the stuff and I

made the aprons. Wait, I'll get them out."

Lifting the lid of the trunk, the little girl dove in among her small belongings and brought out two diminutive bungalow-aprons. "They're French-seamed—that's sewed inside and out," she said proudly.

"Oh, aren't they nice!" said Mary.

"Well—they're *aprons,*" said Ann with a sigh. "Come on, Mary, we'd better go down for breakfast. Perhaps Aunt Flo will let us come up and unpack right afterward."

But it was late in the morning before Ann had a chance to unpack her little trunk, for there were all the breakfast dishes to be washed and Baby Donald to be taken care of while Aunt Flo did the churning.

"Let's take him out to the barnyard," said Ann. "Just think, I haven't seen any of the chickens and things yet."

"Come, see the new calves," shouted Jack, rushing on ahead. "I'll show you where they are, Ann!"

"And the baby duckies!" cried little Florence. "I'll show you *them*, Ann."

"Dear me, so much to see!" laughed Ann. "But you'll have to go more slowly. Precious Baby can't run so fast."

Around the barn and down into the orchard they went. Ann loved the farm animals,—the funny pigs that came grunting right up to you, the calves, with soft, big eyes, that ran away from you. She loved the meadow with the little brook, and the orchard with the friendly fruit-trees. She was so inter-

ANN LOVED THE FUNNY PIGS

ested in everything that it was nearly two hours before the children came back to the house, Ann carrying the baby, who was nearly asleep. She gave him into Aunt Flo's outstretched arms and ran up to her room.

Taking her things out of the trunk, she folded them neatly and put them away in the dresser that Mary had emptied for her. Last of all, she took out the photographs of her father and mother, which she always carried with her. The little girl placed them on her side of the bureau and gazed at them earnestly. She had been only four years old when her mother died, but she could remember that she was blue-eyed like herself, and that her arms were soft and tender. And she remembered that after her mother died the laughing look had

gone out of her father's eyes, and soon after he had left her with Aunt Margaret and gone away to Camp—to be a real soldier in the Great War, they told her.

He went to France, and they told her about that, too, but he never came back; only the letter from his lieutenant and the report—"Captain Ralph Burdette killed in action."

Ann gazed proudly at her soldier-father's picture and then back at her mother. "You're my really realest family, you know," she whispered. "And I guess you're somewhere loving me."

A tear fell over Ann's little nose, but she brushed it hastily away.

"I think I'd better make up a little verse and sing," she said. "I'll make it a loving one, like you, Father and Mother dear."

The pictured eyes seemed to smile at the little girl, who, a moment later, was bravely singing:

"Just loving every one, and loving everything
Keeps people happy and makes people sing."

"Ann, oh, Ann!" cried Mary, running up the stairs and into the room. "Father says Mrs. Gates wants to know if we can come over this afternoon and help her pick the peas for market. She's afraid they'll spoil if she waits for Jim's foot to get better, and she'll give us twenty-five cents a basket. Mother says we may do it, you and I!"

"Oh, jolly," said Ann, hopping up. She liked to go to the big truck-farm near by, and she liked big, energetic Mrs. Gates, who usually had something good tucked away in her apron-pockets

for visiting children. And, besides, twenty-five cents a basket!

"I bet I can pick *ten* baskets," she declared. "That will be two dollars and a half—oh, Mary!"

"Oh, no, you can't," said practical little Mary. "They're great big baskets, Ann. Here, I've got two sunbonnets, and Mother says we must wear aprons. Will you wear one of your new ones, Ann?"

"Yes, and you'll wear the other," laughed Ann, bringing them out.

Aunt Flo laughed at them when she saw them all ready before dinner.

"Are you going to wash the dishes in your sunbonnets?" she asked.

"Oh, bother, I forgot the old dishes," said Mary.

"Well, you may forget them this

time," said her mother, with a smile. "I think Mrs. Gates wants you early."

But early as it was when they started, it was supper-time before the two little girls came back, and pretty tired little girls they were, too. The damp curls lay in ringlets on Ann's forehead, and her nose was badly sunburned, but in her pocket she had, if not two dollars and a half, at least half that sum.

"Rich young ladies, aren't you?" said her Uncle John at the supper-table, when Mary, too, produced a whole dollar that she had earned. "Whatever are you going to do with so much money?"

"Save it till I go to town and buy candy with it," said Mary promptly.

"Some for me! Some for me!" screamed Jack and Florence together.

"Yes, some for everybody," declared

the generous Mary. "What are you going to get, Ann?"

"She'd better get a bigger sunbonnet to cover her nose," laughed Aunt Flo.

"No, get candy, too, Ann," said Jack expectantly.

Ann hesitated. "How much would one of the baby pigs cost, Uncle John?" she asked timidly. "I'd love to have the little black-and-white one for all my own."

Uncle John laughed heartily. "Upon my word, Ann," he said, "you've got a business head on your shoulders. You must get it from your Uncle Robert."

"It isn't business," Ann replied. "It's having something that belongs to you."

Her uncle smiled at her across the table. "I guess you can have your pig,

but you'd better keep the money. Maybe Aunt Margaret can use it for you later on."

"Oh, thank you, thank you, Uncle John," cried Ann in a glad voice. Her heart seemed swelling with happiness, and that evening, when she ran out to see her own pig, her very own, her little song came trilling back to her;

"Oh, just loving every one and loving everything
It *does* make you happy and it *does* make you sing."

III

"WILLIAM"

"DO you think it's going to rain, Father?" asked Mary a few days later. "You know it's the Sunday School picnic to-morrow."

The Sunday School picnic! Ann's face brightened. At last year's picnic they had all had such fun. They had gone in Mrs. Gates' big truck wagon, and then, when they arrived at their destination, there had been the lake, with the little boats and the basket-luncheons, with ice-cream for a treat for everybody afterward.

"You came just in time, Ann," Mary said happily.

Aunt Flo looked up. "I thought perhaps Ann would stay home with Baby this year and let me go," she said. "I haven't been for a long time, and Ann doesn't know the new minister or his family."

Ann's heart thumped angrily for a moment, and tears of disappointment started to her eyes. This was usually the way when something very nice was in prospect. She had to stay at home with the baby when she was at this place, or with Tom and Peggy when she was at Aunt Margaret's.

Aunt Flo saw the tears.

"Oh, if you feel bad about it, Ann, you may go, I suppose," she said in a tired voice. "You don't go to that Sun-

day School very often, so I didn't think you'd care."

"Couldn't we take Baby and all go?" pleaded Mary.

"No," said her mother firmly. "He'd get tired, and then nobody could have a good time. Besides, some one has to be here to give Father and Pete some lunch. Ann may go if she wishes."

But Ann had been thinking! How good Aunt Flo really was to her! And she had so little chance to go anywhere until she, Ann, came to help. Her face changed back to sunshine.

"Why, of course I'll stay with my Precious," she cried, catching up the baby, who was toddling about. "We can keep house together beautifully, so we can."

Aunt Flo's face brightened. "I'll get

everything ready before I go. It will be a real treat for me."

So it was that before eight o'clock the next morning Ann saw them all pile into the big truck and drive away, a jolly crowd, leaving only little Donald and herself, and Uncle John, already busy in the hayfield.

Ann felt quite proud to be left in charge of everything. She hurried about, making the rooms clean and tidy, Baby running to and fro after her as she worked. About ten o'clock the little feet began to drag, and Ann saw that he was getting sleepy. She felt indeed like a little mother as she picked him up and sang a little song while his drowsy head rested upon her shoulder.

"Sweetly sleep, my baby dear,
I will stay with you quite near;

While you sleep I'll work away,
When you wake, we'll gayly play."

"That's a nice song," Ann said as she laid the baby carefully down in his crib. "I'd better remember it, because when I'm grown up I'm going to have a hundred children."

When Uncle John came in later she had bacon and eggs ready for luncheon. She was very happy to think she had not burned the bacon and that none of the egg-yolks were broken except one, which she carefully kept for herself.

"You're quite a housekeeper, Ann," said Uncle John, smiling to himself over her hot cheeks and tumbled hair; "this bacon is very nice."

"I'd much rather do this than go to the picnic," said Ann fervently; "*much* rather."

"Think what nice bacon *your* pig will make some day," said her uncle with twinkling eyes.

"I guess not," answered Ann. "That pig's never going to get killed! He's just going to live on and get fatter and happier every year till he just dies!"

"Well perhaps he is," laughed Uncle John. "One never knows what's going to happen to him, whether he's a pig or a person."

"Be all right till the folks get home?" he asked a little later, preparing to go back to work.

"O my, yes," said the young housekeeper.

She flew about again, getting the dishes washed, and, when Baby awoke, was ready to feed him the rice and milk Aunt Flo had left for him.

"I feel as though *I'd* like a nap now," sighed Ann afterward, leading little Donald outside to the hammock under the trees. But Master Baby didn't believe in naps for other people. He felt as frisky as a rabbit after his own long rest, and kept his little nurse busy watching him.

"Dear me," she said at last, "I guess I'd better put you in the go-cart and take you for a walk. We can go down to the back pasture and get some blackberries for supper."

Baby was always happy in his little cart. He jangled the tin pail Ann brought out all the way to the pasture where the blackberries hung thick and large upon the bushes.

Ann had just started to pick them

when she heard a voice a little distance away; "Ooo—ouch—ooh."

Looking up, she saw a little boy pulling away from the sharp blackberry thorns. He was sucking his fingers in pain, and two sudden tears stood in his eyes.

"Ouch!" he said again.

"OUCH!" HE SAID AGAIN

Ann ran to him laughing. "It *does* hurt," she said, "but I can't help laugh-

ing; you're just 'the man from our town.' *You* know

"'He was so wondrous wise
He jumped into a bramble-bush
And scratched out both his eyes!'"

"Oh, Mother Goose," said the boy disdainfully, still sucking his fingers.

"Don't you like Mother Goose?" Ann asked politely.

"No, it's silly!" said the boy.

"I suppose you think 'Alice in Wonderland' is silly, too," said Ann a little crossly. *She* loved Mother Goose.

"Yes I do—silliest thing I ever read in my life."

Ann looked at him curiously.

"Why, you're William," she exclaimed suddenly.

"I don't know you," said the boy, staring back.

"No, but I was the little girl that sat near you on the train. I remember now. You got off when I did. Does your grandmother live here or something?"

"No"—the little boy's tone was more friendly—"we board—right in that house over there. I got sick, and the doctor said I had to come out to the country. I don't like it, either."

"*Why* don't you?" asked Ann, who thought that he didn't look much more comfortable than he had in the train, although his stiff collar had disappeared, and his new shoes, too.

"Nothing to do," said city-bred William.

"O my, yes there is; there's lots to do in the country! You can come over and play with my cousins and me," said warm-hearted Ann.

"I hate a gang of kids," said William, honestly. "I like it better here." He looked at Ann. "You come here, can't you?"

"Well, I guess I can. I'll tell you, I'll come to-morrow and maybe we can make up some games. I often do. But I can't play now—I have to pick some berries. Here, can't you help me pick? And eat some; they're good."

The little boy stuck his hand in very carefully. "I thought they were just bushes before," he said.

The two children picked until the pail was full.

"Now I must run," said Ann, "but I'll

come to-morrow, William. Get in, Precious Baby; the folks will beat us home if we don't start now."

She felt quite excited as she hurried along the road with the baby and the blackberries.

"It's almost an adventure," she said to herself. "I shall be like Uncle Wiggly after a while, finding something strange every time I go out. I wonder if he *will* come to-morrow."

IV

THE NEW GAME

"I WONDER if he'll come," was Ann's first thought when she awoke the next morning. She felt quite delighted about finding the strange boy in the pasture the day before. Somehow he seemed to be her own special friend, and little Ann had few friends of her own age.

She told them all about William at the breakfast-table, and everybody laughed about his getting stuck in the blackberry bushes.

"They must be staying at the Kimballs'," said Aunt Flo. "They take city people to board sometimes."

"I'm going, too, to see him," declared Mary.

"So'm I—So's me," sang out Florence and Jack.

But their mother laughed. "Not this afternoon; you are all tired out already from that picnic yesterday. A good long nap for all of you. Besides, Ann was such a fine housekeeper yesterday she's going to have this afternoon all for herself."

Ann looked up gratefully.

"I think just at first he'd rather not have so many. He seems like such a quiet boy, somehow."

All the way to the pasture that afternoon she was wondering what she could play with her new friend. "If he comes," she said, looking around the blackberry bushes.

He was there before her. Ann saw him get up and wave a book at her. She started to run.

"You beat me here, didn't you?" she said in her friendly way. "Have you been reading while you waited for me. What's your book?" adding mischievously, "Mother Goose, I suppose?"

"I guess not," said the boy. "I'm not a baby!"

" 'King Arthur Stories'," read Ann. "Oh, yes, we had some at school. Do you like them?"

"They're bully," said William. "I brought it here to read till you came. I ran off right after dinner so I wouldn't have to take a nap."

"Didn't you tell your mother where you were going?"

"Nope."

"Well, I haven't any mother," said Ann soberly, "but I think, if I had, I'd tell her everything."

"Mothers are all right," remarked William, "but sometimes they're awful fussy-cats, wanting you to take medicine or drink milk."

"Don't you like to drink milk?"

"No, I hate it," confessed William.

"I can just guess you like candy, though," said wise little Ann.

"You can bet I do," grinned William, producing a bag that minute from his pocket. He held it out to Ann. She took a gumdrop gravely.

"Maybe that's why you were sick," she said. "Maybe you don't eat the right things. Don't you have verses and cards at school about it? We do."

"Not at our school! I go to private school."

"Well, at our school we have a nurse that comes. She has cunning dolls and they have a play to teach us health lessons, and little rhymes like this:

'Candy isn't good for me,
So I'll eat it sparingly;'

and

'Plenty of milk—a quart a day—
Will add to your health and what you weigh.'

"You'd look better a little fatter, too," Ann added seriously.

"Oh, all right, I'll drink milk, maybe," said her companion hastily. "Come on, let's play something. What can we do here?"

"Hide and seek?" suggested Ann.

"Not much fun," said William, who was rather lazy. "Let's get up a real game. It would be a fine place for Robin Hood, only we'd have to have a whole crowd. Let's think of something for just us two."

"A secret game!" exclaimed Ann, entering into his spirit. "Oh! and something magic!" She knitted her brows in thought. Ann often made up games for herself. Her blue eyes slipped to the book on the ground.

"I tell you, William," she said suddenly, "you can be a knight, and every day you can set off on an adventure. You can really do things, you know, and then the next day you can tell me about it, and I'll be the only one that knows."

"And what will *you* be?" asked William, sitting up with interest. "The king?"

"No—" Ann shook her curly head. "I don't think I'd want to be the king exactly. We can imagine the king. Let's have the castle over there under the oak-tree, and you can go to him for your orders."

"But what will *you* be? Won't you be in it?" persisted William.

"O my, yes," replied Ann, thinking busily. "Suppose I be the one that sits here in my house and works the magic? I read an awfully nice name in a book once—'The Most Wise Counsellor.' That's what *I'll* be. 'The Most Wise Counsellor'—and you must always call me that."

"All right, and what will my name be?"

"You'll be Sir William—Sir William the Brave." Ann clapped her hands. "Oh, doesn't that sound fine?"

"Just like the fellows in that book. Shall I go out every day to fight with the other knights for practice?"

A STICK FOR A SWORD

"Go on right over there now," said Ann, "and don't forget to visit the king first. And I'll stay here in my secret room."

William pranced off on an imaginary horse, and Ann saw him galloping about,

using a stick for a sword in mock battle.

She gazed at him happily. "He's my *friend,*" she said to herself.

When William came back his face was flushed and he was out of breath.

"What shall I do for my first adventure?" he asked. "The knights say there's a big dragon to be killed."

Ann's eyes began to twinkle.

"There's a *terrible* dragon," she said, "He's called 'Too Much Candy.' You must kill him and bring his skin to the king."

"Oh-h—that's no fair!" protested the new knight.

"Well, if you're going to do something, you might as well *do* something," said the Most Wise Counsellor. "You mustn't eat any more candy till I see you again."

"Just two pieces," said the knight, looking into the bag.

"Well, just those two and not a bit more," said Ann, taking the last chocolate bud to help him along. "And the best way for you is not to buy any more."

Ann made a profound bow. "Farewell, Sir William, be brave and good," she said.

Sir William made a stiff bow in return. "Farewell Most—Most Wise Counsellor," he said.

V

A FAREWELL PARTY

THE days that followed were happy ones for Ann. Of course the mornings on the farm were long and busy. There were always dishes to be washed and beds to be made, chickens to be fed and vegetables to be gathered from the garden. Baby Donald, tumbling about after her, became Ann's shadow, and sometimes a troublesome one, but she dearly loved the little fellow and would often pick him up when he became restless and carry him off to see the fast-growing piggies that they both loved to watch.

Then Ann would point out the black-

and-white one with pride. "He's mine," she would tell the baby. "You must take care of him for me all winter, Precious."

But if the mornings were full of work, the afternoons brought unusual gladness to Ann, for while her younger cousins napped she could run off to the pasture to William and the fascinating game; for the knight game did not lose its charm, and no one knew the happy hour each afternoon that the two children spent in the shady pasture, half in fun, half in earnest, about the wonderful adventures they planned. Mary might join them later, Florence and Jack might tumble about in the hay with them, but this was their own secret enchanted land. Sometimes it seemed as though they could really see a king's

castle standing under the oak-tree. Sometimes the people they named and described to each other seemed almost as real as themselves, and sometimes, it seemed to Ann, that William *did* look almost like a knight.

"He does *stand* straight," she said to herself one day. "And he's ever so much braver about a lot of things. If he'd only drink more milk, I believe he'd get fatter, too. I wonder if I could make *that* into an adventure like the candy one."

"There's a beautiful princess in trouble, Sir Knight," she said as William came prancing up before her a few minutes later. "She is kept a prisoner by two wicked brown giants over there. You must make haste and deliver her."

"Upon my honor as a knight, I will," declared Sir William. "How can I set the princess free, Most Wise Counsellor?"

Ann could not help smiling. "The Princess' name is Milka, and the giants are Tea and Coffee. Every time you drink a glass of milk, you cut one of the cords that tie the princess," she whispered.

William laughed at that. He had learned to take these ideas of Ann's in good spirit, for he had found it rather jolly to get some fun out of the things you had to do anyhow. He had really enjoyed the last one—where he was told to rescue Old Lady Vegetable and her children from the Tyrant Meat. His mother had never seen William eat so many carrots as he did that week. She

did not know that her son, sitting at Mrs. Kimball's humble table, was a fearless knight setting free, with every helping of spinach or beans or carrots, one of the old woman's numerous daughters.

"This country air is certainly doing him good," she said to Mrs. Kimball. "If you can keep us, I think we will stay another week. Who are these children he plays with so much of the time? That little blue-eyed one seems a sweet little thing."

"That's little Ann Burdette, John Fairlee's niece. She's a nice child and steady as daylight." Busy Mrs. Kimball sat down on a porch chair for a moment, glad of a chance to rest and talk. "Her poor father was killed in the war, and she lost her mother before that, when she was a mite of a thing. I never did

see her father, but I remember her mother well—a pretty young thing she was. It's a lucky thing for the child that she has such kind relations."

"Yes, indeed, and this country air is good for any child. Here they come now," said Mrs. Hazard, as Ann and William came in sight, their hands full of wild flowers.

William's mother went slowly down to the gate to meet them. She noticed how much sturdier and browner her little boy had become, and she suddenly felt very kindly toward the motherless little girl with whom he played so happily.

The children saw her and came running to give her the flowers they had gathered, pale pink phlox and orange lilies.

"AREN'T THEY PRETTY!"

"Aren't they pretty! Thank you, dear," said the lady, smiling as Ann lifted admiring eyes to her face. "William will miss his little playmate when he goes home. We must have a party before we go. Couldn't you and your cousins come here and spend the afternoon with him to-morrow? Perhaps we could sail boats in the creek."

Ann's face shone with pleasure. The only place where the creek was safe for children to play was on the Kimball farm, but the Kimballs had no children of their own, and the little Fairlee children were not often invited for wading or boat-sailing.

"All of us?" she asked eagerly.

"Oh, yes," said William's mother.

"I'll ask Aunt Flo—I think she'll let us," said Ann.

"I'll come over in the morning and see if you can come," William told her.

Ann hurried home with the invitation.

"Me, too? Me, too?" cried Mary and Jack and Florence when they heard the news.

"You may all go but Baby. I wouldn't trust him near that creek this

summer," said Aunt Flo, and the children gleefully ran right away to get sticks for shipbuilding, and bits of cloth for sails. Until bedtime they were busy, but when they all started the next afternoon each child carried a boat, and Ann had one besides for William, that she and Mary together had made.

"We can play they are the king's fleet starting out on a voyage," she whispered to William later when they were all at the creek, ready to launch the boats.

William nodded, and Ann beamed with happiness to think that they could carry on this secret play while at the same time her cousins were sharing her pleasure.

Later in the afternoon they all went back to the shady veranda where William's mother brought out glasses of

Mrs. Kimball's home-made root-beer and great squares of molasses cake.

"I'm going to have a real party on my birthday," said William, biting into his cake with great gusto. "And I'm going to invite *you*." Then a sudden thought struck him. "But I won't be *here* on my birthday," he said regretfully; "It's in the winter."

"Where do you live, William?" asked Ann.

"In Memford."

"Why, so do *I!*" Ann cried out in delighted surprise.

"You don't, either—you live here."

"No, I don't," laughed Ann. "No, I don't, William; I live here only in summer. I live in Memford all winter with my Aunt Margaret. I go to school there and everything. I didn't see you

get on the train at Memford that day."

"*Where* do you live, whereabouts in Memford?"

"Sixty-five Stacy Street, with my aunt and uncle and Tom and Peggy Stratton," Ann told him, and the two children smiled happily at each other.

It seemed the crowning touch to their happy days together to think that they really lived in the same town. Ann's heart swelled with gladness as she and Mary walked home together awhile later—Jack and Florence skipping gayly in front of them.

"*Didn't* we have a good time?" she said. "It's such fun to have a friend. I made up a verse about it the other day. Listen, Mary:

"The very best gift the fairies send
Is to have a friend—to have a friend—

Almost as nice, it seems to me,
As ha-aving a family."

There, isn't that a nice one?"

"Yes," said Mary. "You do make up lovely verses, Ann. But I'm glad he's going, just the same," she added.

"Why, Mary!" her cousin cried reproachfully. "Don't you like me to have a friend?"

"No, I don't," said honest Mary. "When I get up from my nap now, you're always away somewhere with him."

"Well, you're my best friend, Mary," said Ann in a comforting manner, throwing her arms about the little girl. "Anyway, he's going home on Friday."

"And I'm glad of it," persisted Mary.

Ann laughed. "We'll have good times, won't we?"

She felt generous toward the whole world. In spite of Mary, her little verse held true:

"The very best gift the fairies send
Is to have a friend—to have a friend—
Almost as nice, it seems to me,
As ha-aving a family."

VI

GOOD-BY, ANN

WILLIAM came early Friday morning to say good-by. He had on his stiff collar again, and his new shoes, and reminded Ann of the little boy on the train who would hardly smile at her.

"Here's my mother's card," said William. "I didn't bring any of my own. And it's got on where I live and everything."

"MRS. WILLIAM ELLERY HAZARD,
17 FARGO STREET,"

read Ann.

"Wait a minute, William, I'll get a piece of paper and write down mine."

She ran into the house and came back quickly with a slip of paper. "Here it is, and don't lose it, will you?"

"Nope," said William; "and now you can write to me, and I can write to you."

"And go on having adventures. Be sure, William, won't you? Maybe I'll have some, too, and we can write to each other about them."

She stood at the gate and watched him running down the road. For a minute she felt as though her good times were running away with him. Then she looked at the card in her hand. Letters were fun; she would write to William to-morrow.

But it was William who wrote first. Early the next week Ann received a letter from him. Pete, with a pleased grin, handed it to her when he came

from town. Ann felt very important as she opened it, with Mary and the other children standing about, waiting to hear her read it out.

"DEAR ANN:

"How are you, and how are Mary and Florence and Jack and your pig?

"I had a great adventure on the way home. The train gave a big jolt and scared everybody. They thought it was going to be a wreck but it wasn't. It shook an old lady that sat in front of me so her glasses came off and all her knitting and things rolled down the car. I picked up her glasses and hunted up all her things, so she wasn't frightened any more. She wanted to give me a peppermint candy to pay me, but I said I wouldn't think of it. It was lots more fun than Old Lady Vegetable. I guess I'll have lots of adventures now.

"With love,

"WILLIAM (K)"

"'Old Lady Vegetable'! What does he mean?" asked Mary.

"Oh, nothing," said Ann, smiling down at the big (K). When *she* wrote she would put M. W. C. after *her* name, and it would be a secret sign for all their letters. "It's just a play we had. You and I can have one, too. Let's make it up to-day."

"What shall we do?" said Mary, always eager to follow Ann's lead.

"Let's get Flo and Jack and go down to the hayfield and play Boy Blue. You can be Boy Blue, if you like."

Ann knew her Mother Goose by heart. She had read the rhymes over and over to little Tom and Peggy the winter before. Now through the summer afternoons she gathered together aprons and sunbonnets, tin plates and

spoons, and all the dress-up material she could find, and, taking the children out into the sunny hayfield or the shady old orchard, she made them over into Mother Goose children, to their great delight and entertainment. Even Baby

MOTHER GOOSE CHILDREN

Donald was one of the children in the Old Woman's Shoe. It made it all the happier that the *Shoe* was just a big hollowed-out rock where he could sit and crow in safety.

Often Aunt Flo, feeling her little ones were so safely playing, stole away for a much-needed nap.

"I declare, Ann is a great help," she told Uncle John one night after the tired quartet were all fast asleep. "Sometimes I wish we could keep her all the time."

"But Margaret needs her during the winter," said her husband; "and then I imagine Rachel counts on having her some of the time. I really believe *she* thinks she knows how to bring up a child better than the rest of us do. I'll bet she keeps Ann busy. You know

how she is—never can stand a speck of dust anywhere."

"I'm afraid she's hard on the child," sighed Aunt Flo. "I believe she'd really be happier with us."

"Well, we can't ask for that just now," said Uncle John decidedly. "You know we all thought it would be better for her to go to a city school if possible. They are better than our district ones, and she'll need all the education she can get, poor mite."

He was especially kind to Ann after that.

"He's almost like a daddy to me," the little girl thought. She clung to his horny hand as they went the rounds of the barnyard at the evening feeding-time.

"Tell you what," her uncle said one

night, "I've got a surprise for you, Ann. That black-and-white pig of yours is turning out to be a mother pig. Maybe by next summer she'll have a lot of little black-and-white ones for you."

"Oooh!" Ann jumped up and down in delight. "My own pig babies! Oh, Uncle John."

"Ever read that story, 'Pigs is Pigs?' " laughed her uncle. "You'd better read it, Ann; maybe you'll be starting a stock-farm some day."

"I believe I'd *like* to be a farmer," cried Ann gayly. "Aunt Margaret says I'd better be a teacher, but I do love all the cunning baby things so."

"Learn all you can, little Ann," said her uncle gently.

"Oh, I'm going to, I'm going to learn to do everything, just everything, Uncle

John," said the little girl wisely, "because I've noticed that it's the people who can do everything that can do what they *want* to do."

Uncle John smiled his slow smile. "That's why I'm a farmer, Ann," he said. "Figure that out if you can."

The August days flew by like the crows that flapped over the pasture, or like the clouds that changed golden sunshine into silver showers. Almost before she knew it September first had come, and it was time for Ann to think of school and her return to the city.

Once more the old buckboard stood ready, this time to take our little girl away from the farm. Tears came to her eyes as Pete strapped on her trunk and the children gathered about her.

"Just when I'm happy I always have to go," she thought. She held Baby Donald close in a last big hug.

"Good-by, Precious, good-by; good-by everybody."

"Good-by, Ann—good-by."

VII

AT AUNT MARGARET'S

AUNT MARGARET sent Uncle Ted to meet Ann at the train. Ann waved gayly when she saw him. She liked Uncle Ted, and he, in turn, was fond of Ann, although he was usually so busy that he had little time to pay attention to her. Ann wondered why people in the city always seemed in more of a hurry than people in the country.

"I'll see about your trunk; hop out there and watch for our trolley," said Uncle Ted briskly as he kissed her.

"I feel like the meat in a stew when

I'm here, always being stirred around and around," sighed Ann as she obeyed, and as she waited for the trolley to appear she hummed:

"Around and around and around I ran,
And always came back to where I began."

"I could almost make a Mother Goose myself. Maybe when I'm big I'll make a whole book of verses and all the little children will call me Mother Ann."

"Good gracious, child! you almost let that trolley go by! I believe you've forgotten what a trolley looks like—living in the country."

"I hope I haven't forgotten what a schoolbook looks like," laughed Ann as she settled herself in the trolley for their ride to the house.

Aunt Margaret met them at the door and gave Ann a big hug.

"Well, dear, it's fine to see you again. Run up and wash quickly; I've a nice stew ready for luncheon."

"Aunt Margaret can't help thinking of stew, either," Ann smiled to herself as she ran upstairs. There little Tom and Peggy threw themselves upon her in delight. Ann told them the stories that their busy mother never had time to tell, and they were always glad to see her come back to them.

Peggy was a dainty little thing, with hair like Ann's but she had dark eyes like her father's. She was six years old now, but sturdy, blue-eyed Tom was as big as she was. They went downstairs, each clinging to one of Ann's hands.

"Did you bring us anything?" asked

Peggy as they sat down for luncheon.

"Yes, sir; a box of tea-berries and some little boats to sail in the bath-tub. We sailed ours in the creek and had lots of fun. And I brought Aunt Margaret a jar of gooseberry preserves that Aunt Flo sent her."

Aunt Margaret smiled over at Ann. "She looks well, doesn't she?" she said to Uncle Ted.

"And you've got freckles," sang out little Tom—"lots of them."

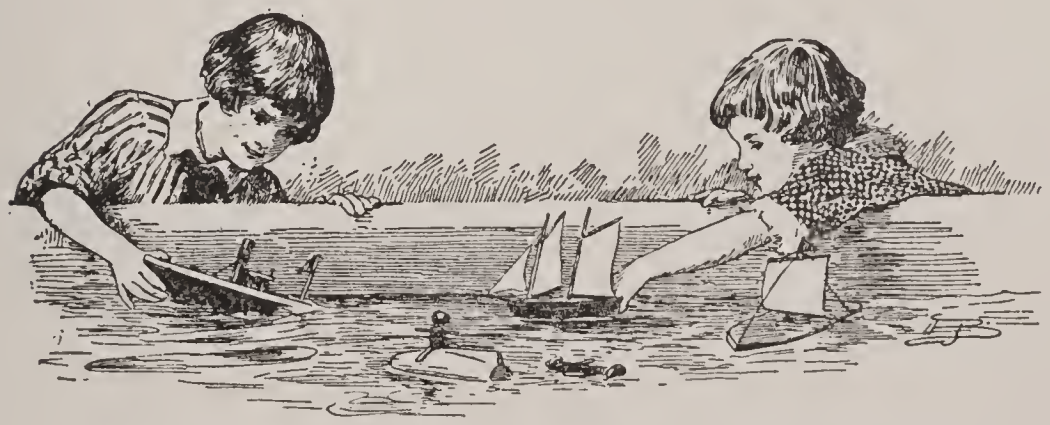
"I know I have," laughed Ann; "I got them in the hayfield."

She began and told them about her happy time on the farm, about William, and about her own pig, until Uncle Ted rose to go back to his work and the children begged Ann to show them the boats she had brought for them.

"Run along and unpack them," said Aunt Margaret. "I'll do the dishes to-day, and afterward I'll come up and look over your clothes for school. I do hope you won't need many new ones—money's so scarce this fall, and coal's so high."

"Oh, I won't," Ann assured her. "My shoes are as good as new because we went barefoot, you know, and my aprons kept my dresses splendidly!"

She started the boats sailing gayly in the bath-tub for the little girl and boy,



SAILING GAYLY IN THE BATH-TUB

and then put her own things in their old places.

"We're back again, dears," she said to her father's and mother's pictures. "This is second best, isn't it? I wish we didn't have to go to Aunt Rachel's later on." Ann sighed as she thought of the lonely house across the city.

"Well," said the little girl, getting up and throwing out her arms, "fussing never helps any; that's one thing I *ought* to make a verse about."

She went to the closet and took down her schoolbooks and pencil-box that she had put away months before, and on her pad she neatly wrote another verse.

"Trouble's like a cloud in the sky,
Oftentimes it goes right by;

And if the mean thing rains on you,
It sometimes leaves a lovely view."

"There!" said Ann. "I think, I really think, that's the best one yet."

VIII

A PLAIN DAY

IT was a good thing our Ann had decided "not to fuss."

There were many troublesome little tasks to be performed each day in the Stratton household. Aunt Margaret kept no maid, and it fell to Ann to run errands, dry the dishes, and help with her little cousins. Each morning she helped Peggy dress for school, and every evening, while Aunt Margaret prepared dinner, Ann would give the children a light early supper and take them upstairs to bed.

"There isn't much time for play," said the little girl to herself, "and I must

do my lessons. Fifth grade is going to be much harder than fourth—I can tell that already."

"I'll make an adventure out of it, and play that every day's a journey to the king's castle," thought Ann one night as she patiently helped Tommy untie a knotted shoe-lace. "I guess my lessons will have to be the castle to-night. Hurry, Peggy, do"; she said to the little girl beside her. "I've got fraction examples to do to-night, and they do mix me up."

"Tell us a little story, Ann, and we'll get right in bed," wheedled Peggy; "honestly we will, and we won't make a bit of *noise*."

"Run quickly then and brush your teeth and I'll find a short one," sighed Ann.

Coming back with one of her school-books a moment later, she found the two children sitting in bed with shining faces turned to her. She bent and kissed them both warmly. They were dear little things, after all, if they *were* so much trouble.

"Well, you are good lovies," she said, "and here's a story about a little boy who was just going to sleep as you are."

"THE WONDERFUL LAND"

"Once upon a time there was a little boy who was just going to sleep. His eyes were closed and his mother was singing beside him, when he had a dream. He dreamed that he lay beside a little brook, and that it was the brook and not his mother that was singing to him. And as he lay there listening, an angel came and led him across a golden bridge into a wonderful land.

ACROSS A GOLDEN BRIDGE

"At first it seemed like the country where he himself lived, but, as he walked with the angel and looked about, he saw that it was different. Everything that grew was larger and more beautiful.

Happy, gay-plumaged birds flew by unafraid. Even the sky seemed a deeper blue. And the little boy noticed that the faces of the people, as they went to and fro about their work, shone like the face of the angel beside him.

"'Why is everything so beautiful here?' he asked the angel.

"'It is because there is only love here,' the angel replied. 'Once there was hatred mixed with the love, and there was war and envy and sickness and waste; but the people became strong, one by one and all together, and little by little they drove all these ugly, fearsome things out of their land until only love remained to bring them peace and beauty and God.'

"'I see,' said the little boy, 'I will try to remember that, to tell my—' He was going to say 'to tell my mother,' when he woke up and saw that his mother was still sitting beside his bed, humming softly the bedtime song.

"The little boy never forgot what he had dreamed. Sometimes when he

closed his eyes he could see the wonderful country and he could hear the angel's words—'Only love will bring peace and beauty and God.'

"All through his life he remembered, and *because* he remembered his days were full of gentle thoughts and kindly deeds. Long, loving years he lived, and when he died the angels, looking in his heart, smiled, and they took the seeds of that perfect thing they found there, and, flying over the old man's own country, they scattered them far and near in the hearts of men.

"And it came to pass that years after, as those seeds took root and flourished, that glad things happened in that country and it became like the wonderful land that the little boy had seen in his dreams."

"I don't think *that's* a nice story," said Peggy, as Ann laid down the book.

"Why, *I* do—I thought it was beautiful," said her cousin.

"It's something like the 'Tidy Angel,' isn't it?"

"No, it's like 'Apple-seed John,' " declared Tom.

Ann laughed. "You're both right and you're both wrong. Now shut your eyes tight and maybe *you'll* have a golden dream."

She kissed the sleepy children again and went downstairs with her school-books in her arms, but Aunt Margaret caught sight of her in the living-room. "Could you lay the table for me, Ann?" she called. "I'm late to-night."

"I declare, I guess big people think children never get tired," sighed poor Ann.

By the time the table was laid dinner was ready, and it was a very drowsy little brown head that worked over fractions

that night. It was half-past eight before Ann stood before Aunt Margaret to say good-night.

Her aunt kissed her gently. "You're a good child, Ann," she said.

Ann went over and kissed Uncle Ted. "Good-night, little girl," he said absently.

Ann looked back at them into the warm lamp-lighted room.

"I wish one of them would put their arms around me," she thought as she stumbled up the stairs. "Oh, I do wish somebody would hug me tight!"

She got ready for bed very quickly, but she looked long at the dear pictures on the bureau. "*To-morrow may* be an Adventure," she told them, "but to-day's just been a plain day."

IX

AN INVITATION

"ANN, Ann, here's a letter for you!" cried little Peggy, dancing to meet Ann one afternoon as she came from school.

The lovely autumn days had passed all too quickly. Christmas had come and gone, leaving January with its snow and cold, short days. Ann's cheeks were rosy and her fingers stinging with cold as she threw off her tam-o'-shanter and gloves and took the letter from Peggy's hand.

"It's from Mary, I guess."

"No, it isn't; Mother looked at it, and

she says she doesn't know the writing at all."

"Why, it's grown-up writing, isn't it?" said Ann. She tore the envelope open and a pretty card, bordered by pictures, fell out:

"William Ellery Hazard, Jr.
is going to have a party
Saturday afternoon,
January sixteenth, from four until six.
SUPPER 17 FARGO STREET."

"Oh! he did remember!" Ann cried joyfully.

"Who is it? What did he remember?" asked Peggy, but Ann was running to find her aunt.

"Aunt Margaret, Aunt Margaret, I'm invited to a party. It's William, and I know it's his birthday—he told me in the summer!"

"William! Who's William?" said Aunt Margaret.

"Why, he's that boy I told you about. Don't you remember, we went to Fenly on the same train, and all!"

"Oh, yes"; Aunt Margaret remembered dimly something about a boy.

She took the invitation from Ann's hand and looked it over carefully, noticing the pretty, gilt-edged card, the delicate handwriting, and the uptown address printed in the corner.

"It's very kind of them to ask you," she said practically, "but I don't see how you can go."

Not go! Ann's heart went down into her little shoes.

"Oh, Aunt Margaret, why *can't* I go? I *want* to go."

"I suppose you do, dear," Aunt

Margaret spoke kindly, "but you know a party like this is different. You'd have to have a party dress and slippers and things, and you say it's a birthday—that means a present, too, you know. I'd like to let you go, Ann, but I really can't spare the money for things you'd probably not wear again this winter."

"But I'd wear *anything,*" the little girl entreated. "I could wear my tan challie I wear to church. It would look all right."

"Well, if it had fresh ruffles at the neck, I suppose it might," Aunt Margaret's voice wavered—then became resolute again. "But here's another thing, Ann, how would you get home? It would be too late for me to come over and get you; I'd have dinner and the children to look after. No, I think

you'd better give it up. You might give something up, Ann, we all do all we can for you."

The little girl crept away without another word. Her eyes were very bright, but she did not cry until she was on her own bed behind the shut door.

"I hate Aunt Margaret," she sobbed. "I hate her and I hate this house and everybody. I've never been to a party in all my life, and now she won't let me go!"

In the midst of her misery another thought struck her with cruel force. "William will think I didn't want to come. William will think I don't like him any more."

It seemed too much to bear. Ann cried until her head and her throat and eyes seemed all dried up.

"Oh, why can't I have a mother who would *make* me a dress?" she kept saying over and over.

Soon the gathering darkness outside interrupted her thoughts, and Ann sat up in surprise. "Why, I've stayed up here too long. Aunt Margaret won't like it if I'm naughty. Maybe—maybe if I'm very, very good, she'll change her mind."

She opened a bureau drawer to get a handkerchief. There in the corner of the drawer sat the little green box. Inside was William's card that he had given her before he left the country, and inside, too—"Why, I'd forgotten all about that," gasped Ann. She drew out of the box the dollar and a half she had earned picking peas.

Ann was only a little girl. It seemed

to her that a dollar and a half was a great deal of money—enough perhaps to buy all she needed for the party. Forgetting to wash her tear-stained face, she ran downstairs with the money in her hand. The children had had their supper and Uncle Ted had come home.

"Aunt Margaret, look!" Ann held out the money. "It's what Mrs. Gates gave me, and Uncle John wouldn't take it for my pig. I forgot all about it. Couldn't you take it and buy what I need for the party?"

"COULDN'T YOU TAKE IT?"

Her aunt looked at the money and at Ann's red eyes, and she laughed, but her heart softened.

"What's the matter?" asked Uncle Ted.

Aunt Margaret explained.

"Oh, rig her up in something and let her go," said Uncle Ted good-naturedly. "I'll go up and get her on my way home from the office."

Ann flew to him. "Oh, Uncle Ted, would you? Oh, thank you, Uncle Ted! Aunt Margaret, now could I go?"

"I'll see what I can do," said Mrs. Stratton with a sigh. "I suppose you can wear your best shoes instead of slippers, and I may be able to fix your dress so it will be presentable."

Ann could hardly eat her dinner, but afterward she hurried about, doing all she could to help. She carried out the dishes, scraped and wiped them. She

folded the cloth neatly and brushed up the crumbs. Then she began to study. Oh! her lessons were more troublesome! Somehow the geography seemed to be saying: "I'm going to a party. I'm going to see William"; but it was learned at last.

"Good-night, Uncle Ted; good-night, Aunt Margaret," said Ann, kissing them both vehemently.

They smiled at each other across the lamp-lighted table as she left the room.

And upstairs Ann was saying to herself: "Oh, I *love* Aunt Margaret, I *love* Uncle Ted—I love them *all!*"

X

THE PARTY

"I'M going to town this morning while you children are at school, and I'll try to get that boy a present," said Aunt Margaret a week after the invitation had been received. "Do you suppose he would like a book?"

Ann spoke up quickly. She had been thinking a great deal about what she would like to give William.

"Couldn't you get him a picture?" she said.

"A *picture!* Why boys don't care much for pictures," said Aunt Margaret astonished.

"William would like this one," insisted Ann. "It's in the sixth-grade room at school. It's a man standing beside a horse. I asked Miss Phillips who it was, and she said it was a knight and his name was Sir—Sir——"

"Oh, Sir Galahad."

"Yes," assented the little girl eagerly, "that's it, Aunt Margaret—Sir Galahad. Could you get a little one like that? If you could, I'd frame it as we do at school, with a nice green frame, and it would be lovely!"

"But why a *green* frame?" said Aunt Margaret amused. "I think a brown or a black one would look better."

"He'd like a *green* one, I think," Ann said in a low voice. "For," she thought, "the picture would be for the knight, and the green frame for the pasture,

and altogether it would remind William of the happy days together at Fenly."

"Oh, all right," laughed Aunt Margaret. She had felt better about the party since William's mother had called on the telephone to see if Ann had received her invitation and if she could come. William, she said, was looking forward to seeing Ann again, and Ann, herself, was looking forward to seeing the quiet-voiced lady who wore such pretty clothes.

"They're rich," thought the little girl again, "and I'm a little poorish, but it never makes any difference when you're friends."

The little maiden viewed her own clothes with satisfaction when the morning of the party-day came. Aunt Margaret had bought creamy ruffles for the

simple tan dress, and stockings that matched. As for Ann herself, her soft brown hair had been brushed to a satiny sheen, and only the curling ends waved out in excitement to match her flushed pink cheeks.

And beside the dress, so nicely laid out on the bed, was the little Sir Galahad picture, wrapped in tissue paper and tied with a pale green ribbon.

Ann felt so *gay*. She flew about, helping Aunt Margaret, she cut out paper dollies and made pasteboard houses so that Tom and Peggy would be happily occupied while she was at the party.

But alas! in the midst of it all Uncle Ted came home with a miserable headache and a bad sore throat.

As Ann saw him make ready to go

right to bed a terrible thought jumped upon her. Aunt Margaret, hurrying in with a hot-water bottle, had the same thought: "Oh, mercy, Ann, now Uncle Ted can't come for you at the party. Whatever shall we do?"

"I can come home myself," said Ann bravely. "Why, I'm ten years old, Aunt Margaret, and I can come alone as well as anything. I'll be ever so careful."

"I suppose it's the only thing we *can* do now, but do leave early, Ann, it gets so dark now even at five."

Uncle Ted was asleep, with Aunt Margaret sitting beside him, when Ann, carefully dressed for the party, tiptoed in to say good-by. She was so shining and spick-and-span that her aunt could not help smiling at her.

"Now you're sure you know the way?" she whispered. "Take the trolley here at our corner and change at Lafayette Street. Be sure and ask for a transfer. Did you get car-fare?"

Yes, Ann had car-fare. She rapturously kissed Peggy and Tom good-by and set out. This was indeed an adventure! Going all the way across town alone, and to a party.

But adventurous as she felt, it must be confessed her heart beat very fast as she left the second trolley at Fargo Street and walked up to number seventeen alone. Number seventeen was a large house set back in spacious grounds, and it surely was the one she was seeking, for the lights were all on, and through the windows Ann could see children going to and fro.

"I won't know anybody there," she thought.

"But *William* will be there!" and bravely Ann went up the walk and lifted the brass knocker on the door.

A smiling maid opened to her, and in a second William himself, on the watch for newcomers, bounded out to meet her. The two children stood and looked at each other a moment shyly but gladly, then William exclaimed,

"Hello, Ann!"

"IT'S A *KNIGHT!*"

"Hello, William."

Ann silently tendered her gift and anxiously watched her friend open it.

"Oh! it's a picture," was all he said.

"It's—it's a *knight!*" Ann told him.

"Oh!" said William again, but he smiled straight at her, the old William that she knew.

"Thank you very much," he said politely; "come on and see all the other things I got."

Ann was never shy long with children her own age. Although they were all dressed in the fluffiest of light dresses, she felt no distress over her own plain attire, and joined gayly in all the games and good times, drinking in happiness from it all, the pretty children, the lovely home, and William's sweet mother, gowned that afternoon in the softest of violet silk.

And the supper-table! Ann thought she would never forget it, with its pink and yellow candles, its hothouse flowers,

its dainty sandwiches and beautiful birthday cake. The supper itself should be *her* share, she thought, and the favors she would take for the family at home. Ann looked at these with great satisfaction, for there was really something for all. Aunt Margaret should have the sweet-grass basket she had drawn from the Jack Horner Pie, Peggy should have the lollipop baby, and Tom the pretty box of tiny candies. And poor sick Uncle Ted could have the pink rose that lay beside her plate.

With happy hands full of her presents she stood among the first to say good-by to Mrs. Hazard.

"I've had a *lovely* time," she said in breathless tones, and the eyes she raised to her hostess were like blue stars.

William's mother bent impulsively

and kissed her. "Good-by, dear; I'm so glad you could be here. Has some one come to take you home?"

"I have to go alone—Uncle Ted was sick," Ann explained in a low voice.

"But it's raining!" exclaimed Mrs. Hazard; "it's simply pouring!"

"Raining!" gasped Ann.

What should she do! The dark was bad enough,—somehow that seemed *worse* because the party was over,—but rain and no umbrella, and all her best clothes! But she spoke up bravely. "I can *run* to the trolley."

"Mother, mother!" William came racing up. "It's raining awfully hard. Can't Mason take Ann home? He's just come with Daddy!"

"Yes, yes—hurry and catch him, William. There, that will be better,

dear. It's too stormy for you to go alone; Mason will take you home in the car."

So it happened that in another moment our little girl found herself in the soft, warm limousine, comfortably settled for the long drive across town. Ann leaned back and enjoyed it all. What a beautiful car, and how safely it carried her through the beating storm! Ann was glad she had confided her adventure to William. He had remembered when he saw the rain that she was to go home alone. He was still her friend!

When the car stopped before her door Mason got down and helped her out.

"Thank you," said the little girl brightly; "thank you very much."

She stood in the sheltered doorway

and watched the lights of the car twinkle around the corner. She would probably never see it again, but William and his party could never be lost—they would live, beloved forever, in Ann's beating little heart.

XI

SPRINGTIME AND ANN

SPRING came early that year. It came with silvering showers and singing birds, with the softening green of leaf-buds and the deepening blue of the sky. The crocus bulbs that Ann's class had planted in October now dotted the school lawns with color,—purple, yellow, and violet. The children's voices were shrill with pleasure when they caught sight of them. Indeed, the whole world seemed bursting with gladness.

Ann shouted and danced with the rest of the children, although springtime did not mean all gladness for her. It meant

Aunt Rachel and house-cleaning. She had moved to the house on Madison Avenue the week before, and found Aunt Rachel ready with the hundred and one little tasks she thought every child should know how to do. Already Aunt Margaret's cozy home, Tom and Peggy and their Mother Goose, William and his party, seemed far away.

In the school-yard at recess the little girl jumped rope and played jacks and borrowed roller-skates with an added zest because she knew that, once at home, she would not be allowed to go out for afternoon play. Aunt Rachel did not believe in little girls "running the streets." Ann's mother had lived in that house when she was a little girl, and Uncle John and Aunt Margaret and Uncle Robert, too. Perhaps when they

were all there, boys and girls together, the old house had not seemed so big and gloomy, but now——

"Perhaps Aunt Rachel will need a spool of thread or something and I can come out again," thought little Ann as she skipped home that afternoon with two of her own special chums.

How pretty her little friends looked in their new sweaters, Betty in her yellow one and Katherine in her Alice blue. Ann stood at the corner of the street where she parted from them and watched them.

"I wish I had a pink one; I'd love to have a pink sweater. I wonder if Aunt Rachel would get me one."

She glanced down at her coat, which was growing shabby from the constant wear.

"Why do they always buy me brown things?" thought Ann. "I'm so tired of brown—brown coat, brown hats, brown shoes and stockings, everything brown. I wish I were big and could earn a lot of money. I wish I had a hundred dollars!

"O my, but wouldn't I be glad
If I a hundred dollars had!"

Ann laughed at the way her thoughts seemed to run in jingles. "I know what I'd do," she said;

"I'd hurry down into the town
And buy some things that were not *brown*."

"That's another verse for my book," she said.

"O my, but wouldn't I be glad
If I a hundred dollars had!

I'd hurry down into the town
And buy some things that were not *brown*."

"I guess instead I'd better hurry straight on home; Aunt Rachel always hates it when I'm late. She'd call my verse-making 'dreaming.' "

HER ARMS FULL

As she opened the door her aunt was coming downstairs with her arms full of newspapers and empty boxes. She did not wear her customary afternoon black silk, and at once Ann knew what was going on.

"Are you house-cleaning *already*, Aunt Rachel? she asked in a surprised tone. "Why, it isn't *May* yet."

"I know it isn't,"—Aunt Rachel's voice was calm, though her cheeks were flushed,—"but I had an unexpected letter this morning. I declare it quite upset me. It was from your Uncle Robert, and he's sailing for home!"

"Coming home! from China!"

"It's about time, I think," said Aunt Rachel; "he's been there five years."

"Oh, I wonder what he'll be like!" cried Ann, quite excited by the news.

"About what he always was, I reckon; we Fairlees don't change much."

"But I don't remember him at all," exclaimed Ann.

"You were so little when he went away. Five years in that heathen country," said Aunt Rachel again. "But then, Robert always *was* the *odd* one of our family. I thought I might as well plan

to get the house cleaned before he got here. Men are such a nuisance around when you're house-cleaning."

"Will he live here?" questioned Ann.

"Well, it's where he's always lived."

Ann stood with her books still in her hands, reflecting. A new uncle in the house might be very nice, and then again he might not like little girls. He might be queer, after having lived in China all that time. China *was* a strange country and——

"You'd better get an apron and come and help a bit," interrupted her aunt. "Tilly has to get the vegetables ready for dinner. I did two of the upstairs closets this afternoon, and to-morrow we'll get at the attic."

The attic!

"Oh, Aunt Rachel, will you really?

It's Saturday, you know, and I can help. I *love* to go up in the attic."

"And you can save me a lot of steps if you've a mind to," said Aunt Rachel; "going up and downstairs with this rheumatism in my knees is hard work."

Ann ran off for her apron. Gone were all thoughts of pink sweaters and brown coats. Life was too full of wonderful events—the attic was to be cleaned on the morrow, and there was a new uncle coming home from China!

XII

A SURPRISE

CLEANING the attic was always work of joy to Ann. In its mysterious shadows, in its chests and many boxes, were sure to be things that she had never seen—quaint clothes of another generation that the little girl longed to carry to her room and dress up in, happy childish things that seemed strangely out of place in that stiff, quiet, very clean old house of Aunt Rachel's. Sometimes Ann would find a book with her mother's name written in a round, neat hand:

"Annie Fairlee,
Christmas, 1895,"

and she would stand looking at it, wondering what her mother had been like when she was a little girl.

The day after Uncle Robert's letter came, therefore, Ann climbed the attic steps full of anticipation. She and Aunt Rachel threw open the little windows to let in air and sun; then all through the morning they worked, uncovering, dusting, rearranging.

The little girl worked industriously, hopping from one group of things to another, running downstairs with bundles of discarded articles, and all the while asking as many questions as she dared. And at the top of the steps stood a little pile of things Aunt Rachel had given to her for her own,—a book, a large silk handkerchief, and a tiny patchwork quilt for her one precious

doll. Ann was already feeling very rich when something even more wonderful happened.

"What's this, Aunt Rachel?" she asked, pulling from under a pile of books a large leather case she had not noticed before.

Aunt Rachel dusted her spectacles to look.

"It's an old writing-desk of your mother's," she said at last.

"A writing-desk!" exclaimed Ann. "That's the funniest-looking writing-desk I ever saw." But when she lifted the top of the case and saw the little ink-well and places for pens and letter-paper she understood.

"Oh, Aunt Rachel, isn't it cunning! I see, you can carry it around and write wherever you want to."

"Yes," said her aunt. "People don't use them any more. Your mother used to carry it around a lot, though; she was the letter-writer of our family. I don't believe your Uncle Robert's written more than ten letters in all the five years he's been over there."

Ann had been examining the old case with interest and longing.

"Mayn't I keep it, Aunt Rachel?" she asked. "Look, here is some sweet blue letter-paper and the queerest-shaped envelopes, and, oh! see this cunning little drawer!" Ann pulled open a tiny drawer that nicely balanced the ink-well on the other side.

"There's something in it," she said; "it's money—an old nickel or something." She held it out for her aunt to see.

"IT'S A FIVE-DOLLAR GOLD-PIECE!"

Aunt Rachel took it from her hand. "Well, of all things, it's a five-dollar gold-piece! Where did you get it, child?"

"A five-dollar gold-piece!" exclaimed the little girl. "Oh, Aunt Rachel, let me see it. I never saw *any gold* money. It was right here in this cute little drawer. Mother must have left it there and forgotten."

"Father used to give us girls a gold-

piece every Christmas. It's likely one of those," said her aunt.

She looked down at the gold-piece in her hand and then over at the little girl. "Well, 'finding's keepings,' Ann," she said. "This is yours, I guess, and you may take the old case along, too, if you want it."

Ann sat down suddenly in a heap.

"Mine! Do you mean it, Aunt Rachel? May I have it, really?"

"Not to spend foolishly, though," warned her aunt. "Keep it for something you need."

A sudden thought came to Ann. "I need a sweater dreadfully," she said. "All the girls have one, and my coat's so heavy."

"Well, maybe you do." Aunt

Rachel adjusted her spectacles and went on with her work as though nothing had happened.

Ann stood still.

"Could—could I have a *pink* one?"

"A pink what? A pink sweater! Good gracious, child, that wouldn't be very sensible. A brown or a tan would be better."

Brown again! Ann clutched the gold-piece tightly.

"There's some stuff that comes that you can put in the water when you wash them and it makes them all clean and pink like new. I could do it myself. Please, Aunt Rachel, I'm *so* tired of brown!"

"Humph!" Aunt Rachel looked at her sharply. "Well, when I go to town

after the Turkish towels, I'll see what I can do."

Ann clasped her hand. "If you'll get a pink one," she bargained, "you can have *all* the five dollars."

"Never mind now; stop thinking about it and get those books dusted. We must hurry now or we shall not get through before luncheon."

You may be sure Ann worked as she had never worked before. Her heart was beating to happy words: "Something pink—and my own mother gave it to me!"

A few days later, when the bundle of towels came from the down-town department store, a smaller bundle came with it. In it was a pink slip-over sweater.

Aunt Rachel handed it to Ann with a fifty-cent piece.

"There—you can buy your stuff, whatever it is, with that. The sweater was four dollars and a half."

"Oh, Aunt Rachel, thank you," Ann cried. "Isn't it a beautiful one!"

She slipped it over her head. "Does it look nice on me? Does it, Aunt Rachel?"

"Well, yes—it does," admitted her aunt.

Ann danced around in the new sweater.

"I do think you're the best person in the world," she said, stopping to give her aunt a shy kiss on the cheek.

"Well, well!" Aunt Rachel rose hurriedly. "If you like it, see what a

good girl you can be. We've lots to do before your Uncle Robert gets home, and we'll have to keep moving."

"Just like the tortoise that beat the hare," laughed Ann, and she slipped away to lay the precious sweater before her mother's picture on the bureau.

XIII

A SHIP WITH SILVER WINGS

AS Aunt Rachel said, the attic was only a beginning.

The old house was, as usual, scrubbed and cleaned with Aunt Rachel's thoroughness. Ann's feet ached from running up and down stairs, her knees and hands were red and sore from long afternoons with Tilly, polishing the furniture and doing work that Aunt Rachel's rheumatism did not permit her to share. Ann felt grateful for the rest that the hours at school gave her. It seemed as though the last speck of dirt would never be dragged to light.

"It's a very large house, isn't it?" she sighed one afternoon as she helped her aunt measure the last pair of curtains.

"A house is never big enough to hold a man," Aunt Rachel said grimly. "There! they're up, thank goodness, and we're about through—Tilly's finishing the bookcases. You might go out to the pantry, Ann, and start on that silver I laid out while I see how she's getting along."

Ann rather liked to clean silver. She rubbed and rinsed and rubbed again in a very housewifely manner, laying the pieces side by side in a shining row.

"I guess Uncle Robert will think everything looks fine," she thought. "I wonder if he'll bring any presents. Maybe he's forgotten I'm here. Oh, I

do wonder if he'll like little girls; I wonder if he'll like *me*. I wish, I do wish, I had a family of my own; then I wouldn't have to care so much whether he likes me or not. Mary doesn't have to, or Peggy, but I have to live here with him."

A sudden tear splashed down on the knives and forks. Ann wiped it away hastily. "I'm a dreadful cry-baby," she said. "I *won't* cry. I'll sing! I'll make up a verse and sing!"

Perhaps it was the shining spoon in her hand, perhaps it was thoughts of the big boat that was bringing Uncle Robert home, perhaps it was that sometimes a little girl feels lonely in a big house without other boys and girls,—perhaps they all together helped to make a verse for Ann to sing:

"If I were a ship with silver wings,
I'd fill myself full of the loveliest things,
And bring them over the wide blue seas
To all little girls without families."

Ann sang it over and over. "And when I go upstairs I must write it down," she thought quite happy again.

The doorbell rang just then, and she stopped to listen. She heard Tilly go to the door, then her aunt's voice in quick, surprised tones, then a man's voice answering.

"Can it be Uncle Robert already?" thought the little girl in the pantry. "Oh, I'm almost afraid to go in and see." But she had to go, after all, for at that moment she heard her aunt calling her.

Ann walked slowly into the living-room, to find that it *was* Uncle Robert.

She raised her eyes to his face and gave a start of surprise, for he wasn't queer-*looking* anyhow. He was big and really quite young, and he was smiling down at her with blue eyes that were somehow like her own.

"Well, well—and this is Nancy's little girl!" he was saying.

Ann's heart gave a great bound. Every one else called her mother "Annie," but here was some one who spoke of her in a tender voice and called her "Nancy."

"To think that that mite of a baby should have grown to this," Uncle Robert continued. "And I suppose all of John's tribe and Margaret's have shot up, too."

Aunt Rachel began to tell him about

the rest of the family, and as Ann watched and listened she made up her mind then and there that it was going to be very nice indeed to have Uncle Robert live with Aunt Rachel.

"Why, he's like bringing the spring-time inside," thought the little girl. "And he looks so kind. Perhaps he can tell stories. Oh, and maybe he'll let me kiss him good-night *hard*."

In the days that followed Ann found that Uncle Robert would let her kiss him good-night *hard*—and that he seemed to like it. Every time he smiled at her, Ann's loving little soul leaped to meet it. And the days that Uncle Robert spent visiting Aunt Margaret or Uncle John were days of longing for his return, for she had found also that her

newly acquired relative *could* tell stories —such wonderful ones that Ann would sit in quiet enchantment, forgetting her lessons and her little tasks.

"You're a pair of dreamers," said Aunt Rachel one day as she passed them by.

"Your knees wouldn't be so stiff if you had a few dreams in your head, Rachel," teased her brother.

"Some of us have to grow up; you're nothing but a child yet, for all your traipsing around," retorted Aunt Rachel, but she laughed.

Ann looked up in surprise. "Why, maybe Aunt Rachel's soft and smiling, too, *inside,*" she thought. "Maybe she's like a—like a turtle, all the hard part outside."

"I'll never be so afraid of her again, but I guess it's Uncle Robert, he makes everything seem different."

She drew her chair closer to him. "Just one more story, *please,*" she begged.

"You tell me one," suggested her uncle.

"I haven't any; that is, mine are all verses," said Ann.

"Verses! that sounds fine. Let's hear some of them," said Uncle Robert with a twinkle in his eye.

Ann felt a little shy about showing her little book with all the rhymes she had carefully put down, but she ran and brought it to him.

Uncle Robert laughed at some of them, but he seemed to like them. When she came to the one she had put

down last he looked rather thoughtful.

"Read that one again," he told her, and Ann repeated:

"If I were a ship with silver wings,
I'd fill myself full of the loveliest things,
And bring them over the wide blue seas
To all little girls without families."

"*You* haven't much of a family, have you?" said Uncle Robert.

"Not a *steady* family," Ann said bravely.

"Neither have I," replied her uncle. "Don't you suppose you could take me on for your special family?"

"And let me be yours!" Ann spoke breathlessly. "Oh, Uncle Robert!"

Uncle Robert looked still more thoughtful.

"See here," he said, "you know in the

fall I'm going to live in an apartment of my own, where I can have all my old traps about. I don't suppose a little girl like you knows about keeping house for a bachelor like me."

"Oh, Uncle Robert, but I *do!*" Ann said imploringly. "Aunt Rachel's taught me lots of things, and Aunt Margaret and all of them."

"I'll wager they have," Uncle Robert spoke grimly. "Well, then, puss, how would this do? Suppose, when I bundle up my things to go, I just bundle you up and take you along to live with me and help make a home."

"Forever and ever?" whispered Ann.

"Forever and ever," said Uncle Robert. "And we'll hunt up my dog, Terry, and take him along for family, too. Then if I can get my old nurse,

Janey, to come and cook for us, we'll be all fixed, won't we?"

"But—I'm afraid you don't understand, Uncle Robert," sighed Ann. "Housekeeping and things cost money—quite a lot of money. You might not know that, you see!"

"Oh, money!" Uncle Robert waved his hands. "I've got oodles and oodles of *money!*"

Ann clasped her hands in silent bliss. Perhaps after all it could be true!

"And—sometimes will you call me—Nancy?" she whispered.

"If you'll call me 'Bob,' " laughed her uncle. "I've always wanted somebody in my family to call me 'Bob.' "

"I will, I will," cried Ann. "I'll do anything in this world you want me to Uncle—Bob."

Uncle Bob reached down and took her up on his lap. "You're a sweet little thing, Nancy," he said and held her close to him.

"YOU'RE A SWEET LITTLE THING, NANCY"

Snuggling into the curve of his big arms, Ann shut her eyes. Two slow tears trickled down in spite of her, but they were only tears of joy. "I guess it's the very biggest adventure there is, having a family," she said.

XIV

WHAT THEY ALL SAID

EVERYBODY was astonished when they heard of Uncle Robert's plans.

"The idea!" exclaimed Aunt Rachel. "What do *you* know about bringing up a child!"

"Ann doesn't need any bringing up—she's all brought up," said Uncle Robert a little grimly again.

"You don't know what a care and expense a child is," sighed Aunt Margaret.

"Oh, money!" said Uncle Robert again. "Besides, I'll bet you anything Ann saves me more than she costs me."

"THE IDEA!"

"She already owns a whole pig," chuckled Uncle John.

"Won't Ann come and see us any more? Oh, I *want* Ann to come and see us," cried Mary and Peggy and all the rest.

"Of course I will," Ann told them, "only now, when I go home from visiting, I'll go to my own family," and she smiled proudly at Uncle Robert.

Then she sat down and wrote a long letter to William about it.

"It's something like a book," William

wrote back across the city, "because he came from China and all that. It's a regular adventure, isn't it? I guess you'll be having lots of adventures now."

Ann looked up with shining eyes, "Why, I shouldn't wonder but that I would," she said. "Maybe—maybe I won't have to stay in just three places all my life, now."

"You won't if you live with me," said her uncle. "I'll probably pick you up some day and carry you back to China."

"Oh, oh!" cried Ann, clapping her hands. "Then *I* can be a ship with silver wings."

"A what?" questioned Uncle Robert.

"You know," Ann reminded him:

"If I were a ship with silver wings,
I'd fill myself full of the loveliest things,

And bring them over the wide blue seas
To all little girls without families."

"We will," declared Uncle Robert.

"Dear me, I'm so happy," sighed Ann. "Are you happy, Uncle—Bob?"

"I am, Nancy," Uncle Bob smiled.

"I must make a verse," said Ann, snuggling close to him.

"If I am happy and you are happy, too,
Then all my wishes are coming true."

"Amen," said Ann's family.

XV

CIRCUS DAYS

MAY came with a glad sureness of clear skies and blossoming trees. In Ann's heart there was a soft singing joy that matched the outside world. Even in the school-work that she already loved so well there was a new eagerness. How she worked over the bothersome arithmetic so that on the next report-card she might have an A in that subject also to show Uncle Robert. At playtime and in her talk with her classmates Ann felt that at last she was one of them. To be sure, she had not a father

or mother to talk about, but she had some one now whose special child she was, some one to whom she could take the beloved pictures and who would say: "Yes, that's your dad, Nancy,—he was a fine young chap, a manly, brave young chap"; or, "That's your mother, bless her, she was a sweet little thing like you, Nancy."

Aunt Rachel, too, seemed different, and although she indignantly whisked specks of tobacco from the newly-polished tables and expostulated continually about the mud tracked in on the hall-rugs, she really seemed glad that Uncle Robert had come. She was pleased when he praised her good housekeeping, and had Tillie produce from her kitchen things to eat that Ann had never before seen on her table.

"A man's eating's half his life," she said one day at the luncheon table, "and you never can tell what the other half is."

Uncle Robert laughed. "I never can tell myself these days," he said. "I *am* having a holiday! Oh! and what do you think! The circus is coming to town! I saw the posters this morning. Will you go to the circus with me, Rachel?"

Aunt Rachel met his mischievous glance imperturbably. "Circuses aren't much in my line," she said; "you seem to forget I've grown up."

"Dear me, dear me, that's too bad," murmured her brother. He turned to Ann, who was sitting with her spoon suspended, listening with both ears. "I don't suppose *you'd* care to go, Ann?"

Ann let the spoon fall to the table. "Oh, but I would," she cried. "I would *so*. I've never been to a circus in all my life!"

"Well, we must remedy that," responded her uncle heartily. "I always go to a circus when it comes."

"We were going last year," said Ann, quite trembling with excitement; "Uncle Ted was going to take Tom and Peggy and me, but Aunt Margaret said it cost too much, so we just went to see the parade."

"We'd better take Tom and Peggy along then, hadn't we?" suggested Uncle Robert. "And how about John's kiddies? Wouldn't they enjoy it? It comes on a Saturday, you know, so nobody would have to miss school."

"Mary? Oh, Mary would love the

circus! And Florence and little Jack!" exclaimed Ann.

"I'll drop a line to John this evening," said her uncle.

"Are you starting a kindergarten?" asked Aunt Rachel tartly.

"Well, a circus and children go together. Besides, I didn't bring them any presents when I came home. This will be a present from all over the world instead of from just China."

Ann sat with a beaming face. No more luncheon for her! "I can't believe I'm going to the circus," she said; "I can't *believe* it."

Each day that followed she looked for a letter to come from Fenly in answer to Uncle Robert's invitation. At last on Friday came a note from Uncle John.

He had waited to see how the work on the farm was going, he said, before answering, and found that he himself could bring the children on the noon train. Uncle John, too, wanted to see the circus!

"Good old John!" said Uncle Robert, and Ann hopped about with delight. How glad she would be to see her little country cousins! And Mary would be so funny. She would say such funny things and make them all laugh!

Ann and Uncle Robert went to the train to meet them, Ann radiant in her best school-dress and her precious pink sweater. Her quick eye saw Uncle John and the children as they alighted from the train, and she and Mary ran straight into each other's arms. They

all went to Aunt Margaret's for soup and sandwiches and cocoa, and then got an early start!

"Do you suppose you two men can manage all those children?" Aunt Margaret asked anxiously as she saw them off. "You ought to have a woman with you."

"Well, you said you didn't care to come," answered Uncle Robert.

"No—it's a fine chance for me to shop. There will be so few people in the stores to-day—everybody will be at the circus."

"And me, too—and me, too!" shouted little Tom.

His mother kissed him good-by. "Look out for Tommy—he's such an eel," she said.

"I will—I will," Ann called back as they all ran toward their trolley.

Uncle Robert said afterwards it was as much fun to watch the children's faces as it was to watch the circus itself. None of them had ever been to a performance, and, oh, how they did enjoy it all! They were so early at the circus-grounds that they went all around the animal-cages twice. Uncle Robert kept buying bags and bags of peanuts, but Ann, feeling that she was the mother of the party, declared against the lemonade and soft drinks that the younger children clamored for.

"It has stuff in that might make you sick, and then your mother would never let you come again," she warned them.

"You're an old granny, Ann,"

laughed Uncle Robert. "But come now, youngsters, it's almost time for this show to begin. We'd better find our seats. Are you all here? One, two, three, four, five, six. Fine, come along now!"

Perched on the middle benches, the children looked about with fresh enthusiasm. Ann saw a number of her schoolmates and waved gayly to them.

And then into the rings bounded several figures and the great show began. Mary said she did wish she had four pairs of eyes so she might miss nothing.

"Very different from when we were boys, John," said Uncle Robert—"one ring and a quarter's admittance!" "Everything in the world going five times as fast nowadays, so why wouldn't a circus?" answered his brother.

"I'm not *going* to be a policeman when I grow up," little Tom whispered to Ann; "I'm going to be a clown." Ann nodded. She herself felt a sudden longing to be the gay blue-tinseled figure flying up at that moment from the second ring.

But it was the beautiful white horse that pranced and danced that won Mary's heart.

"Couldn't we, *couldn't we,* buy one?" she implored her father.

"Not for a hundred years or more," he answered smiling. "A horse like that costs thousands of dollars."

"Well" said poor Mary, "that new horse of ours is real smart, Father. Just wait until I get home; I'm going to teach him tricks and tricks."

At last the performance was over, and

they found they could not delay long before starting home. Uncle John and the children were due at the station for a six-o'clock train.

Pressed by the hurrying crowd, little Peggy was frightened, but Uncle Robert tossed her up to his broad shoulder where she soon forgot her fear. Uncle John held Jack and Florence firmly by the hand, and the others kept close behind. And then, all of sudden, about midway out, Ann missed Tom. At her cry the little party came to a halt. All looked about through the surging crowds for a darting little figure, but saw no Tom.

"He was here just a moment ago, I'm sure," said Ann piteously.

"Confound that child! Why couldn't he stick with the rest of us?" Uncle

John exclaimed with unusual impatience, but Uncle Robert looked worried.

"Stand right here and wait for me," he said; "there must be a place here somewhere where they take lost children."

He hurried away, but was brought back by a shout from Uncle John. Following his pointing finger, they all looked and saw Tom—held high over the head of a prancing clown—Tom, laughing and shouting and all unconscious of the fright he had caused his relatives.

A PRANCING CLOWN

At their unmistakable gestures the clown bounded into their midst and delivered Tommy with a profound bow.

"Kiddie got lost so I thought I'd help him out a little—got a couple of my own," he said laughing.

How the uncles thanked him while the children gazed and gazed at him—a real circus clown right close to them!

And how tightly Ann held to Tom's hand all the rest of the way home. Aunt Margaret laughed a little and cried a little when she heard about it. "Mercy!" she said, "Think of what *might* have happened to you, Baby." But to Tom it was a real adventure, and he never tired of telling about the time he made friends with a circus clown.

XVI

A VISIT TO JANEY

"THE next thing on my program," said Uncle Robert one morning at the breakfast-table, "is to find dear old Janey."

"Janey!" exclaimed Aunt Rachel. "Why, I don't know just where Janey is now. I don't believe I've heard from her for several years."

"But I have," laughed her brother. "I had a letter from her last Christmas time. I usually send her a present, a little money or a trinket of some kind, and she never fails to write and thank

me. She's living with her daughter Maggie, and Maggie, from all accounts, has a husband and some children, so they must have a houseful."

"You're a curious person, Robert," said Aunt Rachel. "Why should you remember an old servant all these years?"

"She used to tell me stories," Uncle Robert stirred his coffee thoughtfully. "We always remember the people who tell us stories, don't we, Ann? And Janey's were such fascinating ones—about the river Clyde in Scotland near which she lived, and about the fairies that lived in the heather and played among the bluebells in the fields."

"Oh! and do you remember the stories?" Ann asked eagerly.

"I'll wager Janey does. Perhaps you'd like to go and see her with me this afternoon, Ann? Hurry home from school and we'll hunt her up together."

Ann looked doubtfully at Aunt Rachel.

"Would you need me for anything, Aunt Rachel?" she asked. "Any errands or anything?"

"No, you may as well go along. I'll take my rest and sew a bit on my napkins. I'll be glad of a quiet house," she added grimly.

Uncle Robert laughed. "I'll stand outside on my tiptoes and wait for you, Ann," he chuckled as the little girl hurried off to school.

She did find him waiting for her that afternoon, and with her hand clasped

in his, they sallied forth in search of the elderly Scotch woman who had helped care for Uncle Robert and Ann's own mother when they were children.

"However do you know the way?" asked Ann as they walked through parts of the town she had never before seen.

"I know this old town from end to end and from top to bottom. I used to wander about it when I was a boy, dreaming dreams about the old buildings and about the boats that came up the river. Perhaps that's what started me off to China. Dreams are great things. Sometimes if you dream one often enough and hard enough, you find yourself walking right into the midst of it."

"And then it isn't a dream any more,"

said Ann. "Just like you, Uncle Robert, I used to think of somebody liking me hard, and now it's real!"

Her uncle smiled down at her. "Let's hope dear old Janey will be real," he said. "The house must be somewhere about here. This is Asher Street —we must find number fifty-seven."

"Here it is," cried Ann quickly. "My, what a lot of children! Do you suppose they're all hers?"

They stopped in front of a small tidy house in the side yard of which eight or nine boys and girls were playing, going through curious movements and contortions—trying, Uncle Robert said, as nearly as he could see, to break their necks.

Ann watched them, laughing. "Why,

I believe they're playing circus," she exclaimed. "They must have been there, too!"

"I hope they live to see another one," laughed her relative. "I wonder if we have the right house."

"Oh! see that little girl looking out of the window at them," said Ann, still watching the children. "I wonder if she's sick." But Uncle Robert was knocking at the door, and in response it was presently opened by a rosy-cheeked woman who stared at them for a moment and then broke out into exclamations of pleasure.

"Why, it's Master Robert! Master Robert!" she cried, drawing them into the house.

Master Robert kissed her soundly upon both cheeks.

"Bless your heart, Janey," he said, "you look exactly the same! I just got home from heathen China and had to look you up. And I brought Annie's little girl along with me."

Janey drew Ann to her, and, tilting up her chin, looked long into the child's face. "Annie's wee lassie! Weel—weel— Yes, I can see a likeness. She's a bonny lass, Master Robert."

She beamed upon him anew, and, as he settled down for a talk with her, Ann wandered over to the window where the little girl was still sitting.

"Are you sick?" Ann asked in her friendly way. The child pointed to her legs over which a blanket had been flung.

"No, just lame," she said in a shy voice.

"CAN'T YOU WALK?"

"Can't you walk?" Ann queried again in a shocked voice.

"A little about the house, but I can't play—like them," she added, pointing to the boisterous children outside.

Ann smiled again at the antics of the crowd. "They're playing circus, aren't they?"

"Yes," said the little girl. "I couldn't go, you see, so they come here and do tricks. I like to see them."

"What's your name?" asked Ann.

"Nessie."

"Nessie? That's a pretty name. I

don't believe I ever heard that one before."

"It's Agnes, really," explained the lame child, "but Granny always calls me Nessie, for her sister in Scotland."

So the two children talked together until Uncle Robert rose to go.

"I must be getting back to business soon," he said. "I've had my holiday and am getting restless. I'm at the old house now, Janey, but if I find a little shack of my own, could you leave here and come and keep house for me?

"Ann's coming to keep me from becoming too much of a bachelor, and we want you for a third."

His old nurse's face brightened. "Aye, that I could, Master Robert, and thank ye for it. I've been doing days'

work lately, and it's no the work for me. But I feel I have to be earning my bit. Puir Maggie has the bairns and there's little Nessie. We're all a-saving for the doctor and her brace, but the dollars are slow a-coming, canny though we be."

"What's the matter with her?" asked Uncle Robert, looking kindly over at the little figure by the window.

"She was hurt a bit back," said Janey, stroking Ann's curly head, "and the bone dinna set right. The doctors say now that only guid treatment and a strong brace will right it, puir lassie."

"Will it—will it cost a great deal?" Ann questioned softly.

"A deal to puir folk, but we've near a half of it saved a'ready, and if her old granny can earn a bit now and then, she'll look after her bairn."

"You'll earn a bit if you feed me," laughed Uncle Robert. "I haven't forgotten the gruel you used to make."

"Ye always were a hearty laddie," answered his nurse, her rosy face crinkling into smiles. "Let me know when ye want me, Master Robert, and I'll be aready."

As they left the house Ann waved good-by to little Nessie. Her tender heart was full of pity for the little girl who was tied for months to come to a chair or a brace.

She told Aunt Rachel all about her that evening.

"I wish I had a lot of money. I'd give it to Nessie for her brace," she said.

"Money doesn't grow on trees—we all find that out," responded Aunt Rachel.

"I could offer what she needs to Janey," Uncle Robert said thoughtfully, "but I don't imagine they'd take it. Janey's as proud as can be, you know—always was."

Ann did not say any more. "They don't understand," she said to herself. "They've never been a little girl who couldn't run around."

She lay awake for a long time that night, thinking of the little lame girl.

"I believe if I had the money I could make them take it for Nessie," she thought; "but I haven't any money—I haven't anything, anything at all!"

Then like a flash came a thought. "Why, yes, I have—I've got my pig!" Ann almost laughed aloud in the darkness at the surprise and delight of it.

"Uncle John often sells his pigs to

other farmers, especially nice big mother-pigs that may have a lot of little pigs for the farmer. I'll write to Uncle John and explain it all, and ask him to sell the pig for me and send me the money. Then Nessie can start right away getting well."

Very timidly the next morning Ann unfolded her plan to Uncle Robert. He looked at her for a long time. "Blessed child that you are," he said. "If we explained to Janey that it was *your* plan for Nessie, I shouldn't wonder but that she'd take the money—at least until they can pay it back. But do you really want to sell your pig, Nancy?"

"Well—" Ann said slowly—"I love that pig. I *do love* that pig. I never had anything of my own before, but I've

got you now, Uncle Bob, and you're worth a hundred pigs!"

"I'll try to be," Uncle Robert spoke soberly but his eyes twinkled. "Go ahead, Nancy, then, and I'll back you."

Ann sat down that very night and wrote to Uncle John.

"I don't want to start a farm right away, anyhow," she told him after she had written the story of Nessie and her need. "And if it isn't too much trouble, Uncle John, could you sell my pig to some nice kind farmer and send me the money?"

She felt very happy when she had given Uncle Robert the letter to take out with him and mail, but by and by a feeling that she had lost something very dear come over her—her pig was no longer her pig!

She finished her lessons and then slowly took down the rhyme-book which had lain so long now upon the shelf. She would write a last verse to the black-and-white pig:

"Darling pig, I'll miss you so,
It grieves me sore to let you go,
It's for a little child, you know,
To straighten her leg and make it grow."

There were real tears in little Ann's eyes as she laid the old book away that night. But a week or so later there came a letter from Uncle John, and inside was a check for thirty dollars. Thirty dollars! Ann jumped for joy; it would be enough to pay for Nessie's brace!

To Ann's great surprise, Aunt Rachel offered to take the money to

Nessie. "As long as you've gone to all this trouble the child may as well have the benefit of it, and I'll see that she gets it," said Aunt Rachel with her head up. "If there's anybody can make Janey stand around, I can."

She came back without the money and with a softened expression on her face. "She's a nice little thing, that child, and I guess they're worthy. I hope they are for your sake, Ann. Your money's gone—are you sorry?"

"No," said Ann slowly. "I will shut my eyes and see Nessie running around all right, and I'll be glad, *glad*, GLAD!"

XVII

HOUSE-HUNTING

"ARE you really in earnest about this apartment idea?" Aunt Rachel asked her brother some days later. "There's no sense in it, you know—this is your house as well as mine, and there's no reason why you shouldn't stay in it."

"You're a dear, Rachel," said Uncle Robert, putting his hand affectionately over hers, "but I think I'll hunt up a little place of my own. I must be getting back to work soon, and when I'm engrossed in business my irregular hours and masculine habits would annoy you

terribly. I shall be as cozy as can be with Janey and Ann to take care of me."

"Oh, Ann!" Aunt Rachel shrugged her shoulders hopelessly. "Are you still determined to take that child along, Robert?"

"Yes, sir!" her brother said emphatically. "I have an idea nobody knows how to bring up a child like an old bachelor, and also that nobody can keep a man from being too much of an old bachelor like a growing child. Of course, you and Margaret will have to help me out about her clothes, and I'll probably have to send her to John every summer a bit to get fresh-aired, but I'll take a long turn at her."

"Well, then," said his practical sister, "my advice to you, if you are bent on an apartment, is to look up one now.

Most leases are signed in May, and you can get a better apartment at a lower price than if you waited until autumn."

"I believe you're right," agreed Uncle Robert. "You're a love, Rachel, if you *are* my sister. Could you—would you—come along and help me pick one out?"

"Take Margaret instead," said Aunt Rachel. "She knows more about prices and modern plumbing than I do. I've lived here all my life, and don't know much about these new places. If you could go on a Saturday afternoon, when Ted is home to look after the children, Margaret could get away."

"I'll stop around there this evening and ask her," said her brother heartily. "And Margaret will probably know the best real-estate man to approach, too."

He found Aunt Margaret very glad to help him. House-hunting and shopping were two things she knew how to do well, so, accordingly, the following Saturday afternoon she and Uncle Robert and Ann set out in the car the real-estate agent had brought to take them their rounds.

Ann, sitting very still in her corner, glowed with pleasure. How kind they had been to take her along! And to think they were going to hunt for the little home she and Uncle Robert were to share together! How good she would be! how she *would* try to help Janey and do everything she could for Uncle Bob!

All the time that Aunt Margaret was examining bathrooms and kitchenettes Ann was seeing a big chair in front of

the now empty fireplace where she and Uncle Bob would sit to tell stories, or—she was dreaming of a little dinner-table where she and Uncle Bob sat telling each other of the day just ending.

"How do *you* like them, Ann?" Uncle Robert pinched her cheek and woke her from her day-dreams.

"Oh, they're lovely," declared Ann, but Aunt Margaret shook her head.

"They're very disappointing, I think, for the prices they ask. Let's look at this one last place on the list, and then we'll have to go home and think them over."

They drove down into the older part of the town, where, however, a perfectly modern apartment house had been reared, five stories high, among the old-fashioned houses left standing. It was

a beautiful, splendidly equipped building with an unusual little English garden trailing behind it along the side street. About the garden was a neat brick wall that gave it a happy air of seclusion.

"Ha! this is something like," exclaimed Uncle Robert as they alighted. "I like the looks of this place, don't you, Margaret?"

"It looks very expensive," murmured his sister smiling.

The only apartment in the house for rent was indeed expensive, and it was unfurnished. "And," added Uncle Robert, "plenty of rooms, but all of them pretty small for a fellow of my size."

He looked a bit discouraged and Ann slipped her hand sympathetically into his. "Well, we don't have to decide

anything to-day," said Aunt Margaret, woman-fashion. "Suppose we go home now and try again sometime."

As they walked toward the car Ann tarried a moment to peep over the wall of the garden at the blossoming shrubs.

"Oh! what a cunning little house," she cried suddenly.

"OH, WHAT A CUNNING LITTLE HOUSE!"

At her exclamation the others stopped and came back to her.

In the corner of the garden stood a small low brick house, quaint and se-

cluded, and, to all appearances, closed for the summer.

"The janitor's house?" asked Aunt Margaret doubtfully.

"Oh, no, indeed!" replied the agent smiling. "That was built by the man who owns this apartment house. He meant to live there himself, but his wife preferred one of the apartments. He sold it later to a lady who is travelling abroad now for a couple of years."

"I don't suppose *that's* for rent, is it?" asked Uncle Robert. "By Jove, that just appeals to me!"

"Yes it *is* for rent for the time Miss Starr is away. But I thought you wanted an apartment. You said——"

"We thought we did, too," broke in Uncle Robert, "but they seem to be such pigeon-holes I'm not sure what I want."

"Oh!" cried Ann. "Couldn't we just go inside? it's *such* a cunning house!"

"Wait a moment," said the young agent, looking at her suddenly. He consulted his notebook. "My orders say, 'For rent to the right party—reference required—no children.' "

"Oh!" All the grown-up people looked at once at Ann. The little girl felt a big lump come into her throat. Here was a darling house, and one that Uncle Robert wanted, and he couldn't have it if she came to live with him.

"Just one little girl?" she faltered pleadingly. "No *boys*—just me!"

"No *children,*" the agent repeated friendly but firmly.

Ann swallowed hard. "You can have it, Uncle Bob," she said bravely, "I don't mind. I can live around like

I always have." But Uncle Bob squeezed her hand. "Oh, it wouldn't be any fun without you, Nancy," he said. "Likely we wouldn't like it inside anyhow—or perhaps the price wouldn't suit me. But," he said to the real-estate man, "now that we're right here, couldn't we go through the place?"

Seeing their interest, the agent led them along the little pathway and unlocked the door of the house. As he raised the shades inside the sunshine flooded a living-room that was delightful to look at. It was in tones of mellowest yellow and softest old gold, that, with the gleaming brass candlesticks and andirons, threw into relief the lovely old mahogany furniture and its blue and rose velours.

"What a charming room!" Aunt Margaret exclaimed involuntarily.

"A wonder—comfortable but beautiful," echoed her brother.

The upstairs rooms were likewise too attractive for hopeless house-hunters to view. A man's guest room of ample dimensions and fine plain furnishings! A smaller guest-room, evidently for a girl, its creamy simplicity adorned with flowery cretonnes.

Ann stood and gazed admiringly at this little room. She thought she had never seen anything quite so sweet.

Meanwhile her uncle and aunt went on to what was evidently the owner's bedroom, quaint and cool in blues and silver. "And real rosewood furniture," said Aunt Margaret feelingly. "She

must be a very wealthy woman, Robert, and one of exceptional good taste."

"Did you say she was an old maid?" Uncle Robert smilingly asked the agent, noting the gay orange cushion flung across the chaste blueness of the day-bed.

"Never saw her myself," replied the young fellow, "but it's a wonderful little home she has here."

"It just suits me," groaned Uncle Robert, "and you say the price is no more than the furnished apartments we've looked at? I wonder if there would be any use in my writing to the lady herself. Perhaps if she knew what a mouse Ann was, and what a fine housekeeper she is, she'd relent."

"Oh, do, Uncle Bob, oh, please do!" begged Ann to whom the whole house was like a fairy habitation.

"It wouldn't do any harm, sir," said the agent. "I'll get the address for you at the office on our way back."

"MISS MARY STARR,
C/O DUTTON & PINCKNEY,
NEW YORK CITY"

read Uncle Robert from the slip the agent handed to him. "Mary Starr! That's a nice name. Well, Miss Mary Starr, I shall write to you this very night, for I certainly do like your house."

"You will likely never hear from her," discouraged Aunt Rachel when she heard about it. "She probably doesn't care whether she rents the house or not." And indeed for a long time it seemed as though Aunt Rachel were right, but at last one day there came a letter with a foreign postmark.

Miss Starr, it said, had received Mr. Fairlee's letter. She would be happy to overlook the presence of Mr. Fairlee's young niece, provided she were, as he declared, not the usual careless modern child. She was writing by the same mail to her lawyers, who would look up Mr. Fairlee's references. If they proved satisfactory, as she was sure they would, her lawyers would notify the real-estate firm and authorize them to lease her property to Mr. Fairlee for two years at the stated rent.

Ann, breathless until the last word was read, gave a long sigh of relief and gladness. Later, when she really met the lady of the fairy house, she tried to tell her how she had felt when they received that letter. But that is a part of another story. This story of Ann is

nearly ended. In another month's time, after an interesting but a shorter than usual visit to the farm, our little Ann was settled with Uncle Bob and Janey in the new home, and here we shall leave her to succeeding years of new adventures and new happiness.

THE END