# JILL'S RED BAG

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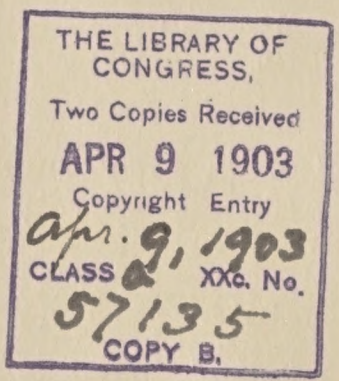


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# Jill's Red Bag

## I

### "WHAT CAN BE DONE WITH THEM?"

"OH, Jack! do let her go! I'll make you if you don't!"

"Get away! She's an early Christian, and I'm seeing if she's a real one."

"It's Sunday, and if she screams much louder, they'll hear in the drawing-room."

"It's a proper Sunday game, and I don't care for anybody in the drawing-room!"

When Jack was defiant, Jill knew it was a hopeless case.

She sat on the back of a cane chair, her feet beating a tattoo on its seat; and a twinkle of amusement succeeded the marked disapproval in her big blue eyes when Jack proceeded to stuff his victim's head into a pillow-case.

Six-year-old Winnie, or Bumps, as she was called, was always a ready subject for her brother's ingenious mischief. She worshipped

the ground he trod upon, and would promise to be all that he desired, until the experience of it proved too much for her endurance. She was at present gagged and bound with bedroom towels, antimacassars, and pocket-handkerchiefs combined. She had been rolled over and over on the floor, with Jack on the top of her, and now he announced in an offhand tone—

"She's going to be put into a sack and thrown into the river, and that will be the end of an early Christian."

"Where's the river?" asked Jill with interest.

"The bath-room, of course. Go and fill the bath."

Jill laughed, and started up to obey. The fun of such a prospect before her overcame her scruples. But in her haste she overbalanced herself, and came with a crash to the floor. Her screams united with Winnie's brought two people to the nursery, and the first one to open the door was a young man.

"Good gracious!" he ejaculated, "what a scene!"

He might well say so. The nursery floor was covered with a medley of furniture,

toys, and miscellaneous articles that clearly had no business there. In her fall Jill had caught hold of a tablecloth, and swept to the ground the remains of the nursery tea. Broken plates, a stream of milk, and bread and butter were mingled with the entangled bodies of the three children. Bumps had escaped from the pillow-case, but was rolling about screaming lustily; Jack was trying to extricate Jill out of the meshes of the broken chair, and a small terrier puppy was dancing to and fro, and worrying at everything in turn.

"Oh it's you, Captain Willoughby," said Jack, getting upon his feet. "It's a pretty mess, I'm afraid."

"You young scamp! I bet you are the originator of it! Your sister is wondering if the ceiling will withstand your onslaughts. Ah, here she is to speak for herself."

A pretty delicate-looking girl with dark hair and eyes and impulsive manner stood at the door.

"Oh, you children!" she exclaimed. "Where is nurse? And what are you doing? Don't you know you ought not to romp like this on Sunday?"

"Nurse is at her tea. She gave us ours too early."

Jill had struggled to her feet by this time, and was rubbing the back of her head ruefully.

Captain Willoughby was busy releasing Bumps from her bonds.

"It strikes me there has been a bit of bullying going on here," he said, eyeing Jack severely. "Is this the way you generally treat your small sister?"

"She likes it," asserted Jack eagerly. "On my honour she does—don't you, Bumps?"

"Yeth, I does!" sobbed his victim.

"Nurse has no business to leave you," said Mona Baron decisively, as she gave a sharp pull to the nursery bell. "Now, Jill, pick up some of these things at once. Why can't you keep Jack quiet? I don't know which is the worse of you. It is six of one and half-a-dozen of the other!"

She did not speak angrily, for these three pickles always afforded her considerable amusement. But she felt that a limit must be drawn somewhere, and when the nurse appeared, considerably ruffled by her sudden recall from the servants' hall, she was spoken to so sharply by

her young mistress that she gave notice on the spot.

Mona went back to the drawing-room with Captain Willoughby.

"That makes the fifth nurse we have had in ten months," she said. "What can be done with them? They are too small to go to school."

"Can't you get a governess?"

"I suppose I must try. But I was made so miserable myself as a small child by one, that I resolved never to give them the chance of such an experience. I must talk it over with Miss Webb."

The nursery party up-stairs soon calmed down. Nurse restored order, and set the three delinquents in separate corners of the room. Her tongue was a powerful one, and she did not spare them.

"I shall be thankful to get out of the house, for never in my life have I seen such bold, owdacious children, and no respectable woman would stand it. Your sister ought to look after you herself, and then she'd know what you were like. She dances out to all her gaieties with that lazy Miss Webb, who's in a field of

clover if any one is, and expects me to grind on in this four-walled room without a friend to keep me company. I would as soon be in prison, and I'm not going to stand it. And as for you, with your monkey tricks and your wicked ways, you want to be well whipped and placed in a reformatory. That's the place for the likes of you!"

No one dared speak. She talked on in the same strain for a good quarter of an hour, then dared them at the peril of their lives to move from their seats, and walked down to the servants' hall again.

"Sunday is a *dreadful* day," observed Jill plaintively. "I wonder what it was made for!"

"I s'pose God thought it would make people good," said Jack; "it may do grown-up people good, but it makes children dreadfully wicked!"

"Yes," assented Jill; "because there's nothing to do after church, and we're always shut up in this old nursery. When I grow up I shall live in a house without any doors, so that I can never be shut up anywhere!"

Jack looked across at his sister meditatively.

"Then what would you do when robbers came?"

"I'd run away, of course, stupid!"

"They'd soon catch you. We'll try it to-morrow. I'll be the robber, and you can leave all the doors open to give yourself a chance, and I'll give you five minutes' start."

"Me too!" exclaimed Bumps, removing her thumb from her mouth, which she had been contentedly sucking.

"Oh, you!" said her brother scornfully. "You can't even be an early Christian without screaming the house down! But you've done one good thing! Nurse is going, and a jolly good job too! Nurses are all rot!"

Jill shook her head doubtfully.

"We shall only have another worse than this one! I wish we could do without them, like the Clarkes. Their mother looks after them."

"That's because they're poor—George told me so."

"What's poor?" asked Bumps.

"It's having no money," explained Jill.

"But we haven't no money," argued Bumps.

"No, you little stupid, but Mona has. I heard nurse say she was an heiress, and that's

an awfully grand thing to be, it's next to being a princess in a fairy-book."

"Now we've sat still long enough," announced Jack with a yawn. "We'll have a kind of 'Puss in the Corner.' Our chairs will be the corners. We can easily get back to them before nurse comes."

"It's Sunday," objected Jill again.

"Here's Miss Webb!" shouted Jack.

A stout, pleasant-faced lady came into the room as he spoke, and saved the situation, for restless Jack could never stay quiet for long.

The little Barons could remember neither father nor mother. Their mother had died at Bumps' birth, their father a year after. He had married twice, and Mona was the daughter of his first wife. Miss Webb, a cousin of Mr. Baron's, had taken charge of the household after his death; but when Mona had finished her education she came home, and when she came of age and inherited a good bit of money, Miss Webb still stayed on as her chaperon.

The children were fond of Miss Webb, though they did not see much of her, and their faces brightened at her appearance.

"Your sister asked me to come and see if

order had been restored," she said, smiling. "Why, you are as quiet as mice! Now, why can't you always sit still like this?"

"We were just going to finish it," said Jill. "We've been here ages. Do you like Sunday, Miss Webb? We don't."

"I think I used to when I was a little girl," said Miss Webb, taking a seat by the nursery fire, and placing Bumps upon her lap.

Jack and Jill came to her side at once.

"Do tell us about it. What did you do?"

"My mother used to have me down-stairs in the drawing-room in the afternoon, and show me lovely pictures out of some books she had, and talk to me about them. I had no brothers and sisters, and I used to be allowed to dine with her and my father, and sometimes she sang to me. She had a beautiful voice, and she would play hymns for me to sing with her."

"Ah," said Jill, with a long-drawn breath and a wistful look in her eyes; "but then, you see, we haven't got a mother."

"But you have a nice kind sister," said Miss Webb, pity filling her heart for the children who had never realised a mother's love.

"Yes," said Jack; "Mona is very good, but

she's always out, and she does'nt make Sunday nice to us."

"May we thing hymns in the drawing-room?" asked Bumps eagerly.

"Yes," said Miss Webb on the impulse of the moment, "you shall. Nurse has made you tidy, so come along, just as you are."

Down two flights of stairs they scampered, delighted at the prospect of leaving the nursery. They found Mona leaning back in an easy-chair by the fire. A butler was removing the tea, and Captain Willoughby was standing, hat in hand, saying good-bye. Mona's other Sunday visitors had taken their leave. She looked up astonished when she saw the children.

"Now, what are you doing, Miss Webb?" she said, laughing. "Bringing them in their right minds to express contrition for their Sabbath-breaking?"

"No," said Miss Webb quietly. "They are going to sing some hymns. I thought you would like to play for them."

Mona elevated her eyebrows.

"Wish I could stay to join you," said Captain Willoughby, "but I've promised my

mother to take her to evening church. Au revoir!"

He departed. Mona got up from her seat and went to the piano. Then she twirled round on the music-stool and confronted Miss Webb.

"What new freak is this?" she asked, laughing.

Miss Webb looked at her gravely.

"We were wondering why Sundays should be such a trial," she said, "and Jill solved the problem. She said it was because they have no mother. I reminded them that they had you, and we finally bethought ourselves of hymn-singing down here."

Mona's laughing dimples faded away. She turned to the piano, her little sisters and brother clustered round her, and soon the sweet, childish voices were uplifted in song.

When bedtime came Bumps said ecstatically, "Thinging hymns in the drawn-room is nearly as nithe as thinging them in heaven!"

"When did you sing them there?" demanded Jack.

And Bumps replied promptly, "Before I wath a baby."

## II

### "WE'RE TO HAVE A GOVERNESS"

"MISS JILL, your sister wants to speak to you."

Jill was curled up on the nursery hearthrug, reading a story-book, and sucking peppermints. She had a slight cold, and had not accompanied Jack and Bumps in their daily walk with nurse. She jumped up with alacrity.

"Where is she, Annie? Not in the drawing-room?"

"No, in the library," answered the nursery-maid.

Jill dashed down-stairs, and burst open the library door very noisily. She drew back when she saw a strange young lady in earnest conversation with her sister; and she was conscious of a rough head of hair, a buttonless shoe that was being trodden under heel, and some very sticky fingers.

Mona turned round.

"This is one of them, Miss Falkner. Shake hands with this lady, Jill."

Jill kept her hands behind her back.

"They're sticky," she said, staring at Miss Falkner in wonder.

"Never mind," said Miss Falkner with a smile. "You are fond of peppermints, are you?"

Jill stared the harder, then she said—

"How did you know? Cook gave them to me. She said they were good for a cold."

"You do look a little object," said Mona, drawing Jill to her, and smoothing her hair as she spoke. "She is the eldest, Miss Falkner, then comes Jack, then Winnie. They are very backward for their ages, I am afraid, but you will remedy that."

Jill's blue eyes scanned Miss Falkner up and down. "Who was she?" she wondered.

"Can you read, dear?" asked Miss Falkner.

Jill nodded.

"And write?"

Another nod.

Mona gave her a little shake.

"Speak properly, Jill. Where are your man-

ners? You are like a little savage this afternoon. I am sure it is high time you had a governess to keep you in order."

Mona did not often speak so crossly.

Jill darted away from her with scarlet cheeks and flashing eyes. "Who is she? and what does she want?" she demanded passionately. "Is *she* a governess? Because, if she is, I hate her!"

Then flying out of the room she banged the door violently behind her, and raced up-stairs, never drawing breath till she reached the nursery. Here she flung herself down face foremost on the hearthrug, and when a little time later Jack and Bumps rushed in, they found her still muttering angrily to herself.

Jack at once flung himself on the top of her.

"You're in a tantrum! What have you been doing?"

Jill would not answer till she had extricated herself from his clutches. Then she sat up and tossed her long hair back from her flushed little face.

"We're to have a governess!"

"Hurray!" shouted Jack. "Good-bye to nurses, who are rotten rot!"

"And I've seen her," pursued Jill, shaking her head mournfully; "and I was rude to her, I told her I hated her, and she'll never forgive me. Mona was so cross, and then I was, and of course the governess will hate me back, and we'll fight from the very beginning!"

"What was she like?" demanded Jack.

"Like any other person," said Jill crossly.

"Is she coming to tea?" asked Bumps with round eyes.

Jill looked at her small sister scornfully.

"She's coming to breakfast, and dinner, and tea, for ever and ever; she's just like a nurse, only it will be lessons all day long, and punishments."

This depressing view had no effect on Jack.

"We can play truant," he suggested eagerly. "Boys do that when they go to school—at least in books they do. To be sure," he added thoughtfully, "they always come to a bad end and wish they hadn't, but before the end comes, it's jolly."

"Is truant a nice game?" asked Bumps.

Jill's brown eyes began to dance with mirth.

"So we will," she exclaimed. "We'll settle what to do at once. We must save up bits of

cake and biscuits, and anything else we can stuff in our pockets, for we must have food."

"But," objected Jack, looking thoughtful, "it's winter, and I think you can only be truants in summer. You always spend a day in the woods and have a kind of picnic, and you must be in the country to do it, and we're in a town."

"What does that matter?" said Jill impatiently. "We'll show how we can truant. I'll think of the most splendid things when I'm in bed to-night."

All her ill temper vanished. Jill's thoughts in bed were the admiration of her brother. His brain was a quick and busy one, but nothing to be compared to Jill's. He laid the foundation for many a mischievous scheme, but it was Jill who took it up and worked it out.

Bumps was at present a nonentity, but she was a sturdy little follower, and would as cheerfully have tried to walk a tight-rope as to eat her dinner, had she seen the others attempt it.

"When shall we start?" pursued Jack—"to-morrow?"

"I don't know when she's coming," Jill replied.

"I think we shall have to do lessons with her one day first," said Jack, "because we shan't be proper truants unless we do."

"Oh yes, and if it's a very wet day we won't go."

It was a great disappointment to them when Mona came into the nursery that evening and called them to her.

"A very nice lady named Miss Falkner is coming to live with us," she began.

"I know!" exclaimed Jack. "She's a governess. Is she coming to-night?"

"Oh dear, no, not for another month, when we go down to Willowlands."

The children's faces fell. Willowlands was their country home, and it was only shut up for three months in the winter. They liked London best, and were always sorry when their time came to leave it.

Mona watched their expressive faces.

"You must try to be very good till she comes," she said cheerfully. "The time will soon pass. Jill, what made you so naughty this afternoon? I was quite ashamed of you."

Jill got very red, and twisted her hands together, as was her habit when embarrassed.

Then she looked straight at her sister with a defiant sparkle in her eyes.

"Of course we don't like her," she said. "You've told us how you used to hate your governess, and we shall do it too."

"Oh dear!" said Mona with a smile and a groan. "I'm always so stupid when I talk to you. My governess was very different from Miss Falkner—she was a tall, grim, strict old thing, who never smiled. I've found you a very different kind of governess, and you will all love her, I feel sure."

"I wish she was coming now," said Jill gloomily.

"Why? What a queer child you are."

"It's only," explained Jack hastily, "we've settled to do something when she comes, and we don't like waiting."

"What is it?" asked Mona unsuspiciously.

"Oh, it's a secret," exclaimed Jill; "we aren't going to tell any one."

"I hope it isn't anything naughty. I wish you would try to be good. I can't think why you are always in mischief!"

She left them. Jill was up on the window-seat drumming her fingers on the pane.

"I wish," she said at length, "that the king would pass a law that for one day every child could do exactly what they liked, that they could be just as naughty as ever they wished to be. Why, there are crowds and crowds of things that I'm *longing* to do, only Mona would think it wicked!"

"And God would too," put in Jack, who in spite of his mischievous rollicking ways had occasional qualms of conscience.

Jill looked at him meditatively.

"I try and think God looks the other way sometimes when we're doing things. That's what I shall do when I have any children. I shall only look at them when they want me to! It's a pity this governess isn't coming soon; but we'll have plenty of time to save heaps of food for our truant day, and I'll think out some lovely things to do on it."

"I think," said Jack, "I'll keep the food in my play-box that locks up. Lumps of sugar will be a very good thing to save up."

"And treacle pudding," put in Bumps anxiously. She was only too eager to bring contributions to Jack's secret store. He kept his box in a corner of the nursery, and more than once

had to interfere when Bumps was eagerly putting all kinds of her favourite puddings into screws of paper and attempting to stuff them in with drier and more suitable food.

This hope of "playing truant" did much to comfort them in the dread of possible lessons and punishments. Jill's programme for "truant day" grew more glorious as time went on, and when her imagination sometimes failed before Bumps' eager and original questions, Jack came to her rescue and threw himself gallantly into the breach.

"What shall we do if there are no blackberries or nuts in the woods to eat, and a mad bull has eaten all our food, and the sun has dried up all the ponds and rivers so that we can get no water? Why, you stupid, of course we'll go up to a cottage like beggars, and they'll give us some food."

Bumps nodded contentedly.

"We'll be proper beggarth, with no shoeth and stockingth, and we'll have no hat, and I'll tear a 'normouth hole in my frock!"

The time seemed to pass very slowly, but the month wore away, and then came the move into the country.

For the first few days after their arrival the children ran wild. Nurse was too busy unpacking and arranging things to heed them, and their adventurous spirits led them into every kind of mischief.

Then Mona was appealed to, and she made short work of nurse's complaints.

"I don't care what they do as long as they don't hurt themselves. Miss Falkner is coming the end of the week, and then she will be entirely responsible for them."

And so, after a long and tiring journey, when Miss Falkner arrived at the house, this is what she saw in the hall—

Bumps seated in a large copper coal-scuttle, which was suspended by a rope from the stair-railings above. Her face, pinafore and hands were covered with black coal-dust, for the contents of the coal-scuttle had been hastily emptied into the hall fire-place, and Bumps had taken her place without a thought of consequences.

Jack, with red and hot cheeks, was sitting astride of the balustrade and trying vainly to haul up his heavy load, being in danger of overbalancing himself with his exertions, and Jill,

arrayed in all the coats and wraps that she could find, was ambling about on all fours making sudden rushes at the coal-scuttle, which was just high enough to swing over her head. All three children were screaming at the top of their voices, and when William the butler came forward to open the door, nothing that he could do or say seemed to have any result.

It was not till a very bright clear voice spoke that there was a sudden hush.

"Are these my little pupils?"

Jill threw off her disguise and stood upon her feet. Jack scrambled down from his post, and Bumps was the only one that continued her occupation. She swung helplessly to and fro, and puckered up her face as if she were meditating a weep.

"Take me down, Jack," she whined; "I'm thy!"

Miss Falkner lifted her down.

"Now, what game is this, I wonder?" she said. "It looks most interesting; do tell me."

"It's a princess being rescued from a dragon," said Jack eagerly. "And I'm the one who saves her; I'm the prince!"

Miss Falkner smiled, and her smile emboldened Jack still further.

"Everybody is out," he informed her; "Mona and Miss Webb have gone to a party. We've had our tea, and nurse has gone downstairs to have hers. She's going to-morrow, because you've come, and I'm jolly glad too! And if you make haste and have your tea, you can come back and be the old queen who has lost the princess. It's a jolly game. Jill and I made it up ourselves."

"I think I should like some tea very much," said Miss Falkner, following William up-stairs. "Won't you all come and talk to me while I have it?"

When Mona returned home just before dinner, she found the children clustering round their new governess in the school-room, whilst she related to them some childish reminiscence of her own. Their rapt attention proved she could interest them, and Mona said to Miss Webb triumphantly—

"I have succeeded at last in finding some one who will manage them."

Miss Webb shook her head doubtfully.

"Time will show," she said wisely.

## III

### THE GOLDEN CITY

ANOTHER Sunday. The children had been to the little village church in the morning, and now after their early dinner were discussing plans for the afternoon in the school-room. It was a lovely day. The French windows were open, and the green lawn, with its fringe of young larches and birches at the bottom of it, looked very inviting to the little ones.

This lawn was their special property. It was not so smoothly rolled and cared for as were the two on which Mona had her croquet and tennis, but then, when cricket and rounders were as often the order of the day as anything else, it was not to be expected that its turf would be as well preserved. It belonged to the children, and their little feet used it well.

"Shall we be naughty or good?" questioned Bumps anxiously.

Jill screwed up her mouth and nose impatiently.

"Shut up, Bumps; you shouldn't ask such silly questions. Jack and I are going to be what we like. I don't think we shall want you at all."

"Oh, she can come if she likes," said Jack, "we may want her. We're going to play a proper Sunday game—one out of the Bible."

Jill looked at her little sister meditatively.

"She would make a good Joseph!"

"Yes," cried Jack, cutting a caper; "and there's the rubbish-pit in the backyard, she could never climb up without a rope."

"But there's the coat of many colours," said Jill slowly; "we must have that."

There was silence. Bumps looked slightly uneasy.

"The rubbith-pit is very dirty, and I've got my bestest frock on," she ventured.

Jill turned upon her severely.

"You ought to be *thankful* to be Joseph, Bumps. He was an awfully good little boy, you can't do wrong if you play at being him. S'posing if we told you to be Cain, how would you like that?"

"There's my striped red-and-blue jersey," broke in Jack, "we'll dress her up in that."

"Yes, go and get it quick, and I've got some yellow ribbon that Mona gave me; we'll twist it round and round, and it will look splendid!"

It was unfortunate, from the children's point of view, that Miss Falkner should take it into her head to come into the room just when Bumps was being arrayed in her many-coloured garment. They had taken it for granted that she would retire to her room for a long afternoon nap, after the custom of their nurse.

Bumps was quite happy now. She stood on a chair with beaming pride, whilst Jill wound her yellow ribbon round and round the coloured jersey, till she looked like some fat wasp.

Jack with his hands in his pockets was watching the proceeding impatiently.

"Hurry up, Jill—and, I say! we haven't half talked it out. How shall we manage to dip it in blood, and who's to be old Jacob?"

Jill was never at a loss.

"I'll be Jacob. I can easily be him, and we'll get a can of water, and one of Mona's red paints—the oil ones in the tubes—I'll soon make some blood."

Then Miss Falkner spoke.

"I did not mean to leave you so long, chicks,

but I was looking in my box to see if I could find a story-book to read to you. I haven't been successful, but I thought we would all go out on the lawn and sit under the trees, and then I would tell you a story!"

The children's faces looked rather blank.

"We're having a game, thank you," said Jill slowly, striving to be polite.

"Why are you making Winnie such a guy? I think we must leave such games for week-days."

"Oh, but," said Jack eagerly, "this is a Sunday game; we're most partic'lar to play only Sunday games on Sunday. Mona likes us to."

But Miss Falkner showed a bold front.

"I cannot have it," she said decidedly; "take that jersey off, Winnie, and come out into the garden with me."

It was Miss Falkner's first Sunday. Her little pupils were still in awe of her, but their disappointment was great, and they followed her out into the garden with sullen, angry faces.

Yet when they were settled under a lime-tree with chairs and cushions, the sweet spring air and sunshine, and the singing of the birds, charmed their discontent away.

Miss Falkner could tell a story well, and they knew it. Bumps sat on a cushion at her feet, Jack lay on his back on the grass with another cushion tucked under his head, and Jill was curled up in a big wicker-chair sitting on her feet in true tailor fashion, as was her custom.

"Once upon a time," began Miss Falkner, "there lived two children who were orphans. They were a boy and a girl named Rufus and Cicely. They had no one to care for them and love them, for an old uncle with whom they lived could not bear children, and told them to keep out of his sight and way as much as possible. They used to spend most of their time out of doors, and would wander over the country day after day, taking their dinners in their pockets, and only coming home at bedtime. One day they went out feeling very unhappy. Their uncle had been very angry with them, and told them to be gone, and never come back again, for he was sick and tired of keeping them in his house. They walked on and on through a wood, and at last came out on the other side to the banks of a river which they had never seen before. Cicely was tired, so she sat down on the grass, and Rufus did the same. It was

very quiet, and they soon fell asleep, but after a time they awoke with a start. An old man with a kind face and a grey beard was speaking to them. He held a letter in his hand.

"'This is a letter for you, dear children, from a King who loves you, and wants you to come to Him in His Golden City.'

"'For us?' said Rufus; 'it must be a mistake. No one loves us, no one wants us.'

"'My Master does. Read His message.'

"Rufus took the letter. His name and Cicely's were written upon it. He opened it. In golden letters which shone like the sun was written—

"'Come unto Me. Those that seek Me early shall find Me. This is the way, walk ye in it.'"

Jill sharp eyes were lifted at once to her governess's face.

"That sounds like a text," she said.

Miss Falkner made no remark, but went on—

"Rufus read the letter through again and again.

"'What does it mean?' he asked. 'Where does this King live? Where is the way to Him?

We would like to go to Him if He wants us, would we not, Cicely?'

"'Oh, yes,' Cicely cried. 'Let us go at once. Show us the way.'

"The old man smiled.

"'Are you in earnest?' he asked. 'Do you really want to go to my Master? Then follow me. He has sent me to show you the way.'

"Then he led the children to the bank of the river, and told them to look across it. They saw on the other side a green hill with people walking up, and at the very top some glittering golden gates.

"'That is the Golden City,' he said gently. 'If you want real happiness it is to be found inside those gates; no pain, no unkindness, no disappointment ever finds its way there, and *no sin*.'

"He said these last words very solemnly.

"Rufus and Cicely began to feel uncomfortable.

"'We aren't altogether good,' they said.

"Then they looked about them with interest. They saw other children trying to cross the river; one boy was rowing himself across in a boat, another was building a bridge, some were

standing on the bank hesitating. One little girl and boy bravely jumped in and began wading through it.

"'They will be drowned,' exclaimed Cicely. 'How shall we get across? In a boat?'

"The old man shook his head.

"'It is the King's wish that all travellers shall arrive at His gates with spotlessly clean clothes. Look through this telescope and you will see what is written above the gates.'

"The children looked through eagerly, and Cicely spelled out: '"There shall in no wise enter into it anything that defileth."'

"'What does that mean?' she asked.

"'It means that no dust or dirt of any kind is allowed inside.'

"Rufus looked down at his boots and clothes, then at his sister's.

"'We are very muddy,' he said; 'how can we make ourselves clean?'

"'By plunging into this river and being washed,' the old man said. 'The King's Son made this river. It cost Him His life, but it was the only way travellers could be cleansed. Look up at that sign-post and read what it says.'

"Rufus read: '"Wash and be clean." "If I wash thee not, thou hast no part with Me."'

"'The river is the only true way to the Golden City,' the old man said. 'You will only be turned away at the gates if you arrive there without washing in the river. That boy you see building a bridge is very eager and earnest, but his clothes will be too travel-stained and dusty to allow him to enter the gates when he gets there. He has made a wrong start, and is trying to reach the Golden City in the wrong way.'

"'And the boy in the boat?' asked Rufus.

"'He is wrong too, he too has overlooked the first start of all. The King would never have placed the river there if He did not mean every one to go through it.'

"Then Rufus led Cicely down to the river.

"'We will go through,' he said. 'We want to be washed clean.'

"Cicely was rather frightened at first, but the river was not deep, and when they clambered up the other side, they found to their delight that their clothes were new and fresh and clean. Then they started walking up the hill.

"It was steep and stony, but they kept their

eyes fixed on the golden gates, and presently they found their old friend by their side again.

"Other people were climbing the hill, but many had never been through the river, and they were so dusty and shabby that their chance of entering the city was small indeed. Suddenly Cicely, who had been walking carelessly, stumbled and fell. She picked herself up, but her clean frock was soiled. She began to cry.

"'I can't keep myself clean,' she said; 'what shall I do?'

"The old man took hold of her hand and showed her a little stream running along by the side of the path.

"'It comes from the river,' he said, 'and is always close to you. You can wash in it whenever you get yourself dirty.'

"So Cicely dried her tears and quickly washed away her stain, and she went on happily with her brother. They walked with other children a part of the way; sometimes they found themselves alone; sometimes the path was rough, sometimes easy, and after a long, long time they reached the Golden City. It was a happy day for them then. They were tired, but they forgot their troubles when they

saw the lovely gates. Two shining angels stood by the entrance, and they only let those in who had been washed in the river. They were the only ones who arrived in clean clothes. The others sadly turned away. Then Rufus and Cicely saw the King Himself. He came to meet them, and His look and smile was wonderful. I cannot tell you what He said, but He put His hands upon their heads and blessed them, and they followed Him up the golden street."

Miss Falkner paused. There was a short silence, then Bumps remarked reflectively—

"That was Jesus; no one puts their hands on children's heads and blesses them except Him!"

"It's a sort of parable, isn't it?" asked Jack. "I don't like parables, they make me feel so muddled. I love the *Pilgrim's Progress* if nobody tries to explain it. But it gets so mixed up when they do, that it's quite spoilt!"

"Would you like me to explain my story?" asked Miss Falkner gently.

"No," said Jack promptly.

"Yes," said Jill, in the same tone.

"We ought to be all journeying to the Gold-

en City every day," said Miss Falkner. "I have only told you about the start, because I wanted you to make the right beginning. Perhaps some of you have started, have you?"

The children made no answer. Jill uncurled her feet, and her big questioning eyes were fixed intently upon her governess.

"I haven't started," she said abruptly.

"The King wants you qnite as much as He wanted Rufus and Cicely," Miss Falkner said softly; "He wants all three of you."

"But where's the river?" asked Jack.

"Jesus Christ is the Water of Life, His blood that He shed will wash you whiter than snow. You must go to Him and ask Him to cleanse you, and then you will be able to start on your journey."

"I like journeys," announced Bumps, only dimly understanding the allegory, "partic'ly when we have thandwiches."

Jack rolled over on the grass.

"It will be a first-rate game," he said, rising to his feet; "I think better than Joseph!"

Then he caught sight of an early butterfly, and in a moment was off across the lawn in pursuit of it.

The little party broke up. Bumps trotted after Jack, but Jill betook herself to their hammock. Here she swung herself to and fro wrapped in deep meditation. The Golden City had entranced her. For the first time in her little life she began to long to be good, and later on that day, after she had been put to bed, Miss Falkner heard her murmur in her sleep—

"I'll start to-morrow!"

## IV

### "LET'S BE TRUANTS!"

BUT to-morrow found her with different intentions. She awoke at six o'clock, the birds were singing, and the sun was streaming through the yellow blinds, bathing the room in golden light.

Jill and Bumps slept in a room leading out of Miss Falkner's, Jack had a small room across the passage. Softly Jill stole out of bed and peeped out of the window. It was a morning that would tempt any one out of doors. She saw a bright blue sky and sunny meadows. The fresh green trees, the spring flowers, the sweet scents of early morning all seemed to say, "Come out and enjoy us!"

Jill's cheeks grew rosy at a thought that flashed through her brain.

She opened the door softly and crossed the passage. Turning the handle of Jack's door she whispered, "Jack! Are you awake?"

Jack sprang up at once.

"Of course I am. What do you want?"

"Let's be truants to-day."

"Oh, jolly! When? How?"

Jill came in and sat on the bottom of the bed.

"We must go before breakfast, or we shan't be able to get away without being seen. Miss Falkner sends Bumps and me down at half-past seven, and breakfast isn't ready till eight, so we shan't be missed. You get the food ready and dress as quick as you can."

"And where shall we go?"

"Anywhere. What does it matter? I'll go back and wake up Bumps and tell her."

Jill crept back to her room, and Bumps, a sleepy fat bundle, was shaken into consciousness.

When she understood she was delighted, and was full of fuss and importance at once.

"I'll take my best china mug on the mantelpiece to get some water from a thtream; and do you think I might take a umblella, because it might come on a thunderstorm; and shall I take my thpade and bucket I took to the thea?"

"Hush," whispered Jill; "you'll wake Miss Falkner. You needn't take anything, you little stupid! Keep quiet, and do what I tell you."

Bumps was not crushed. She kept up an incessant stream of shrill whispers till Jill refused to respond, and then she confided the whole plan of action to a beloved rag doll that she always took to bed with her.

It was hard to keep the secret from Miss Falkner, who always helped them to dress, but at last they were dismissed, and scampered down-stairs. Jill had quietly conveyed their hats and boots into the passage before-hand, so they had no difficulty in getting themselves ready for their day out.

Jack joined them in the hall below. One of the maids noticed them but thought they were going into the garden, which indeed they did, though they did not stay there.

"We will walk along the road till we come to a nice field," said Jill, who was taking the head.

"And now we've really begun to truant!" said Bumps importantly; "but please don't go so fatht!"

"Hurrah!" shouted Jack, throwing his cap into the air and catching it; "we're going to do no horrid lessons to-day!"

They tramped along, Bumps getting hot and

breathless with her eager resolve to keep pace with the others.

"My legs is so short!" she panted ruefully; "pleath let me hold your hand, Jill."

Jill seized hold of her impatiently.

"You must be quick, Bumps, or else they'll find out we've gone, and run after us. Now, Jack, let us go across this field, it leads down to the river, and no one will find us there because the trees are so thick."

The grass was wet, but that was a trifle. Buttercups were already springing up in the meadow; larks were rising in the air singing their morning hymn of praise, and the children broke into a run. Not a shadow fell on their spirits, they felt exhilarated by the fresh morning breeze.

They reached the river and then began to think of breakfast. Jack with great pride produced his store. It was rather a fragmentary one. Two or three figs, some bits of cake and one orange were divided into three equal portions. The novelty of such a breakfast compensated for the quantity and quality. But when Bumps announced she was thirsty they looked rather dismayed.

"You must drink from the river," said Jill.

"But I might thwallow some fishes," objected Bumps, "and I've no cup."

"Then you must wait till we go home. You can't be thirsty early in the morning."

Bumps heaved a sigh, and looked at the river meditatively.

"It would be nithe to take off shoes and stockings, and go through it like the children Miss Falkner told us of."

"Oh yes, we will," cried Jack. "We'll play at going to the Golden City."

Jill looked grave.

"I meant to start really to-day," she said, "but it's no good now, because we're doing a wicked thing to play truant, and you have to be good when you're walking to the Golden City. I mean to be double good to-morrow to make up."

Jack was already pulling off his shoes and stockings; his sisters quickly followed his example, and for half-an-hour or so they had a delightful time in paddling about. It is true that Bumps fell with a splash once, grazing her hands and knees against the stones and soaking her dress and pinafore, but Bumps' tumbles

were so frequent that they passed unnoticed. When they were tired of this pastime they crossed two or three more fields and then climbed up into some steep woods. They were very hot and tired when they reached the top, and sat down to rest.

"We've done nothing exciting yet," complained Jill. "I thought truants always met with lovely adventures."

"Let's have our dinner," suggested Jack, "I'm sure it's time." So again Jack's hoard was brought out, and more bits of cake and biscuits and miscellaneous scraps were divided round.

"I wonder what Miss Falkner is doing," said Jack, "do you think she's hunting for us?"

"Oh, don't think of her. Come on, we must make some adventures. This is very dull."

"We'll all climb a tree," said Jack, "and pretend we're Charles II. hiding in an oak."

Bumps looked a little anxious, but Jill eagerly assented. A suitable tree was found, and up went nimble Jack, followed by Jill, who was quite as good a climber as he was.

Bumps tried her best, but failed entirely, so she sat down on the grass and cried.

Jill took pity on her, and came down to assist her. With the greatest difficulty she was hoisted up, but when she was comfortably settled on a big branch her little face shone with pride and contentment.

"It's my legs again," she said, looking down upon them with pity, "they is so short and—and inconven'ent!"

"Hush!" cried Jack; "here's a wild beast coming, look out! Oh, look, look, it's a deer!"

It was indeed a stag, that had wandered out of a private park near. The children had never seen one so close before.

Their movements startled the timid animal, he threw his head up, scented and then saw them, and in a moment he had dashed away through the bushes. In another moment Jack and Jill were down on the ground racing after him.

Bumps again was left behind, and she lifted up her voice and wept a second time.

"I can't get down! Oh, Jill, come back! Take me down! I'm frightened!"

But no Jill came back, and poor Bumps sobbed away, clinging hold of the branch with her hot little hands and regarding the

distance down to the ground with terrified eyes.

It seemed hours to her before any one passed her way, and then suddenly a young man with a gun across his shoulder and a couple of dogs came into sight.

"Man! man!" cried Bumps frantically. "I'm left behind. Come and take me down, oh, please take me down."

He started and looked up at her in astonishment, then a smile crossed his lips.

"A baby in a tree! How on earth did a small mite like you perch yourself up there?"

"I've been lefted!" sobbed Bumps. "They've run away and I'm lotht!"

The young man laughed, then sprang up the tree, and in another minute Bumps stood on firm ground once again.

"Thank you," she said prettily, her face wreathed in smiles. "Now pleath help me find Jack and Jill."

"Oh heavens!" ejaculated the young man; "that I refuse to do. I'm in a hurry. If you come along with me I will put you in the road again, and then you will soon find your way home."

Bumps trotted after him quite reassured, talking fast all the time.

"We're having a truant-day, and I've got to stay out till tea-time—Jill thaid so. It is such a long day, and I'd like to go back to Miss Falkner—she's our governess. She takes me in her lap, and I like her. Does your gun go off? Are you killing any one? Jack likes guns. I don't! Jill and him have runned after a deer with horns. I'm thorry I couldn't run after it too. But I think I'll go home by myself, I'm tired of being a truant."

She talked on to her new acquaintance till they reached the road, then he came to a standstill.

"Now where do you live? Can you find your way home?"

Bumps looked about her, then put one finger in her mouth and considered.

"I don't know this road, I'm afraid," she said slowly.

"Where do you live, child?" the young man asked impatiently.

"I live at home," said Bumps with dignity.

"What is your name? Your mother's or father's name?"

"Oh, they went to heaven *years* ago, we never talks about them. My name is Winnie, but I'm called Bumps."

"And your other name?"

"Winnie Baron."

The young man whistled slowly.

"I see light at last. I know your sister, Miss Baron. You have just come down from London. I'll see you home."

He seemed as anxious now to accompany Bumps back as he had been before to get rid of her.

She was perfectly content to follow him.

"You're a keeper, I expect," she said presently. "We've got two, and I'm dreadfully frightened of Andrew, he is tho croth, he won't let us go into his wood at all. But Barker is very nithe. He has a little boy who tumbled on the fender and had to have his forehead thewn up with needle and cotton! Fanthy that! And he has the cotton in him now!"

Half-an-hour afterwards Bumps and her friend were at the hall door, and Mona came hastily forward to meet him,

"Oh, Bumps, how naughty! We have been

looking for you everywhere! Where are the others?"

Then as the young man raised his hat and stepped forward, Mona held out her hand.

"Sir Henry Talbot, is it not? I met you, I think, at Mrs. Archer's the other day. How very kind of you to take pity on my small sister. Do come in. We are just going to have lunch."

"I thought he was a keeper," said Bumps, staring at her sister gravely. "Do you know him, Mona?"

"Run along up-stairs to Miss Falkner. She has been out all the morning looking for you. I hope she will punish you all. You deserve it."

Mona turned sharply away into the drawing-room, and Sir Henry followed her willingly.

Bumps toiled up-stairs, feeling sore-footed and heavy-hearted. What would Jack and Jill say if their day was spoilt because of her? And what would Miss Falkner say? Great tears filled her blue eyes, but she opened the school-room door and walked in bravely.

Miss Falkner met her with a smile of relief.

"Oh, Bumps, where have you been?"

Bumps ran to her and buried her head in her lap.

"I'm thorry," she sobbed. "We were truants, but I've come back, and the others are lotht!"

"Where did you leave them? It was very naughty to go away as you did. Now tell me all about it."

Bumps tried to check her tears.

"I'll never do it again," she said. "They left me up a tree, and I oughtn't to have come back at all. Jill thaid we motht thtay out till tea-time. She'll be angry, and Jack too."

"Where are Jack and Jill?"

"I don't know. They ran away after a deer and never came back; and I waited till a man came by, and he broughted me home."

No more could be got out of Bumps, who began crying again. Miss Falkner saw she was tired and hungry, so she wisely said no more, but gave her some dinner, and then made her lie down on her bed, where she soon fell fast asleep.

Meanwhile Jack and Jill were hunting high and low for Bumps. They pursued the deer with such zeal that they missed their path in the wood, and could not find their tree again.

"Oh, let us leave off looking," said Jack,

impatiently, "we shall lose all our day, Bumps is sure to find her way home."

"We can't leave her," said Jill. "She's always a bother when we bring her out. I wish we had left her behind."

But they continued their search. And at last they found the object of it, but no Bumps. Jack climbed up the tree and they shouted till they made the wood ring again, but no answer came.

"She's gone home," said Jack decisively. "We'll just enjoy ourselves without her."

"I think being truants is very dull," admitted Jill.

"I'm not enjoying myself a bit as I thought I should. We have no adventures, and nothing has happened."

"We've lost Bumps."

"Yes, so we have. But that isn't fun to us. It's only fun to the one lost. She may be having heaps and heaps of adventures!"

"What shall we do now?"

"Oh, there's nothing to do but just walk on and see what comes."

Nothing did come. They walked right through the wood, which was a small one, and

then got over a hedge into a field. Here they met a small boy carrying a milk-can.

Jill stopped him. "I'm dreadfully thirsty," she said. "Could you give me a drink?"

"Go to your mammy!" the small boy said rudely.

Jill was hot tempered. The scornful tone enraged her. She flew at the boy like a small whirlwind and knocked him down. Over went the can of milk, and the boy stood up at once to fight. Jack pushed Jill aside.

"I'll settle him! I'll teach him manners!" he cried.

Jill climbed a gate-post to watch results. It was not Jack's first fight, and she felt confident that he would come off victorious. She cheered him on lustily, and longed to be in the fray herself. But the small boy proved to be a better pugilist than Jack, and Jill was filled with dismay when she saw Jack thrown violently to the ground, his opponent sitting on his chest triumphantly.

"Will 'ee have some more?"

"Get up," said Jack sullenly.

"Not till 'ee pays me thruppence for that there milk."

Jill dived into her pocket and threw three coppers at the boy.

"I shall tell Mona, and she'll have you punished for fighting us, you wicked boy!"

The victor laughed, slung his can over his shoulder, and ran off. Jack raised himself from the ground with difficulty.

"He's given my head such a bump on the ground," he said, "that I feel quite queer."

"Your nose is bleeding, and oh! you'll have such a black eye! And your shirt is torn, and your collar bursted away!"

"Shut up," growled Jack; "he was like a bullet to hit. I believe he must have a wooden boy. Let's find a stream of water, and then I can wash my face!"

They went into another field and found a stream. When Jack had put himself tidy he said slowly—

"Do you know I think we'd better go home. It isn't going to be much fun to-day, I can see. We ought to have had heaps of adventures, and we haven't had one."

"All right! It must be nearly tea-time. I do hope Bumps is all right!"

They trudged home. Jill would not acknowl-

edge that the day had been a failure, but then she had not been vanquished in a fight. Jack had, and his spirit as well as his body was sore in consequence.

It was four o'clock when they reached home. They stole softly up-stairs, but were met by Miss Falkner on the top landing.

She looked at them in silence, then she said—

"I hope you have both enjoyed your day."

Jack shuffled into his room and shut his door without a word.

"Is Bumps home?" Jill asked in a shame-faced way.

"Yes, quite tired out, poor mite. If you put yourself tidy, Jill, I will have tea earlier. You look as if you want it."

Not a word of blame or reproach!

Jill went into her bedroom with a little lump in her throat.

"I haven't really enjoyed myself," she said, as she gazed at her untidy little self in the glass. "I think it would have been much better if I had started for the Golden City this morning, instead of playing truant."

# VI

## "A VERY SOLEMN VOW!"

IT was Miss Falkner's custom to read the Bible every morning before she began lessons with the children.

She did not choose long chapters, but with a few words at the end tried to make them interesting to her little pupils.

One morning the subject was Jacob's flight from home. Jill was keenly interested in it.

"What did Jacob mean by giving a tenth to God?" she asked after reading in her turn the last verse of the chapter.

Miss Falkner explained it.

"You see," she said, after telling them of the Jewish custom, "all the money that we have really comes from God. And those of us who are trying to be His servants feel we are given it to use for Him. But even so it is nice to put apart a tenth to use especially for His work down here. A tenth means a penny out of every ten, or a shilling out of every ten, or a

pound out of every ten, just as we have it given to us."

Jill's mouth and eyes were open wide.

"And if you have only nine pennies?" she asked.

Miss Falkner smiled.

"Wait till you have ten," she said.

"And what must you do with the tenth?" asked Jack; "put it into the plate at the church?"

"Not always. I think it is nice to keep a little bag or box. A great many people keep a missionary-box and put their tenth in that. Sometimes you can buy something for very poor people. There are such lots of ways of spending money for God. Now we must begin lessons."

The Bibles were shut up, but the seed was sown. That afternoon, when lessons were over, the children ran out into the garden to play.

Jill's face was full of earnest resolve.

"Let's come into the plantation," she said, "I've a lovely plan in my head; only first we must look about for some big stones."

The plantation was a fir-tree one, and edged one side of the garden. Fortune seemed in

Jill's favour, for near the plantation was an old stone wall which had been partially removed.

"Now," said the little leader, "we must carry some of these right into the middle of the plantation. Into a dark corner where no one will see us."

"What for?" asked Jack.

He never obeyed unquestioningly.

"I'll tell you in a minute. I think perhaps we ought to have three heaps of stones, only it will take so long. No, one will do, and we must all three share it."

They set to work, found a corner under a tall old pine, and soon had a very respectable heap of stones collected together.

Then Jill volunteered her explanation.

"Of course, Jack, if you don't want to, you needn't, and Bumps needn't either, but I'm going to do it. This is going to be a kind of Jacob's pillar. I've been thinking of it a lot, and I'm going to do what Jacob did."

"Run away from home?" asked Jack, his eyes lighting up with eagerness.

"No, of course not. I'm going to give a tenth of my money to God, and I must have a proper place to do it in."

"Oh," said Jack, his face falling a little; "and you want me to do it too."

"You ought to," Jill said severely.

"I will if Jack does," said Bumps in her breathless way, "I have five pennies!"

"You see me do it first," said Jill; "and then you can make up your mind. It's a very solemn vow, so I must have the stones properly put."

"Yes," said Jack suddenly, "and there was the oil, you know. Jacob had some oil, it's no good without it."

"Bumps must go and ask cook for some; she'll always give her anything."

Away ran Bumps. Jack began to take a keener interest in it.

"Are you going to get very good, Jill?" he asked, looking at his sister critically.

"No," said Jill, "I'm quite sure, however much I want to be good, I shall always be *very* wicked. But, Jack, I've quite made up my mind to walk to the Golden City; I began the day before yesterday."

"Have you been through the river?" asked Jack in an awed whisper.

"I'm not going to talk about it," said Jill.

"Miss Falkner helped me when I was in bed to start right. I'm not *quite* sure about the road, but I think I'm on it. And anyhow I'm quite determined to give a tenth. Now here comes Bumps. Hooray! She's got the oil!" Jill capered with delight, then checked herself. "I'm going to be properly solemn," she said, "for it isn't a game at all, it's a—a—vow!"

She arranged the stones a little more carefully.

"This will have to stay just as it is for years and years and years, in fact for ever," Jill announced. "When I'm an old woman with a stick and a cap I shall be led out here by all my great-grandchildren, and I shall look back and remember this day."

"That sounds lovely," said Jack admiringly. "Do begin, here's the oil!"

Jill took the bottle, but first she marshalled Jack and Bumps to a respectful distance from her altar.

"You can look on, because it will be your turns next, and there must be no laughing, because I'm in awful earnest. I've brought my Bible out to say the words properly. I shall take some of the oil, and leave you the rest."

Very gravely and deliberately Jill poured the oil on the top stone, then holding her Bible in both hands for an instant, she looked up into the blue sky above her, and then in a clear, distinct voice she read—

"And this stone which I have set for a pillar shall be God's house; and of all that Thou shalt give me I will surely give the tenth unto Thee."

There was a dead silence for a minute, then she turned to her witnesses.

"Say 'Amen,'" she commanded.

The "Amen" was fervently and loudly uttered.

Jill walked away and sat down under a tree.

"Don't speak to me," she said; "after a vow you must be quite quiet for five minutes. Now, Jack, it's your turn; you know what to do."

Jack looked a little frightened.

"It's like service in church," he confided to Bumps; "are you going to do it, Bumps?"

"Oh, yeth, I'll do it," assented Bumps cheerfully, "if you does."

"I suppose I'd better."

Jack walked up to the stones and took up

the bottle. He poured some oil out, then followed Jill's example and read the verse out as bravely and loudly as he could.

Jill and Bumps uttered an emphatic "Amen," and Jack came back to his tree and sat down, heaving a great sigh of relief as he did so.

"Go on, Bumps," he muttered.

Bumps trotted up to the stones, then looked helplessly round.

"I don't know what next," she said.

"Pour out some oil."

"It's a fat cork—oh! ah! it's thpilt itthelf down my pinny!"

Jill dashed up to her.

"You always spoil everything, you little stupid! Here! give the bottle to me, why, there's hardly any left! Now take it and pour it out properly, and don't keep talking so; be solemn!"

Bumps looked agitated.

"The Bible, Jill! Find the place quick! Oh, I shall never be ready! And Bible words is so hard to read. I'm 'fraid I shall never do it prop'ly. And you said the verth like thaying your prayers. Hadn't I better kneel down to make it more proper to God?"

Bumps was earnestly trying to do her best. Jill found the verse, and left her.

"You can kneel down if you like. It is a Bible prayer, of course, but you must do it by yourself. It's a vow to God, that's what it is."

Bumps knelt down, holding the Bible devoutly in her little fat hands. She read the verse haltingly, but her whole soul was in it, and she rose from her feet triumphant.

"I've never," she confided to Jack, "thpoken to God out of doors before. He is sure to have heard me, isn't He? Did I do it quite proper, do you think?"

Jack assured her she had managed it quite satisfactorily.

Then the three children stood and looked at each other.

"The next thing," announced Jill, "is to divide our money into tens. We have done the vow, but that's only the beginning. And we mustn't tell anybody about this place, and the stones mustn't be touched, and we must call it what Jacob did—Bethel!"

"Let's put it up somewhere," said Jack.

"Yes," said Jill eagerly; "we will get a board like a trespassers' board, and chalk it

with that lovely piece of white chalk you have in your paint-box."

"But where shall we get a board?"

"Sam will make us one."

Sam was the house-carpenter who was always at work on the premises. The children loved him, for he made them many a little trifle, and he was always ready for a chat.

They marched off at once to find him, and came across him taking some planks out of his wood-shed.

Their want was soon made known. Jill was always emphatic and clear in her utterances.

"A proper trespassers' board, Sam, like you put up in the pheasant-covers last week, and I should like you to paint, 'Trespassers will be prosecuted,' to keep people away, only you must leave room for the name on the top."

"Let him paint the name too," suggested Jack, "it would look better than chalk."

Jill looked doubtfully at Sam.

"Could you paint the word 'Bethel,' Sam? I'll tell you how to spell it."

Sam grinned.

"I reckon I could, missy. You show me where you want it put, and I'll do the job!"

"But you promise on your honour you won't tell, because it's a great secret, and we don't want any one to know where it is."

"I'll be as dumb as a dog," said Sam. "Show me the spot, and be sharp, missy, for I'm extra busy to-day!"

The children led him into the plantation.

He smiled when he saw the heap of stones.

"So this here is a Bethel, is it?"

"I don't believe Jacob put up a trespassers' board," said Jack with a knowing shake of his head; "it will look very funny, Jill."

"It's to be done," said Jill. "I won't have people coming, and making fun, and pulling our stones about, and if they do come, I shall prosecute them!"

Bumps looked at her sister in awe.

"Will you thend them to prison?" she asked.

"But what is it for?" asked Sam, peering on the stones and seeing the marks of the oil; "be you going to make a sacrifice?"

"No," said Jill solemnly; "you never laugh at us, Sam, so I'll tell you; and if you like to join us you shall. It's a vow we've made to God. You can read about it in your Bible if

you like. We're going to be like Jacob, and give God a tenth of our money."

Sam scratched his head.

"I'll make the board, missy, but I can't promise to jine you."

"Well, make it as quick as you can, and if you read about Jacob like Miss Falkner and us, you'll want to do it too!"

Sam did not respond, but he promised to make the board, and the children, hearing their tea-bell ring, ran off to the house.

They did not tell Miss Falkner of their afternoon's performance, though Bumps was sadly wanting to do so. After tea their governess sat down to write a letter, and told them to amuse themselves quietly.

Jill gathered her forces into a corner of the room.

"Now then," she said; "have you got your money?"

"Yes," replied Jack, shaking out his pockets; "here is all mine, but it's precious little! Here's a threepenny bit and a sixpence and two pennies. How am I to get a tenth out of it? It's as bad as sums."

Jill took the money spread it out on the floor,

and then sat down in front of it to consider it, with a face as grave as a judge's.

"You have eleven pennies," she said; "take one away, and that leaves ten; take a penny out of that, and that's your tenth."

Jack looked completely puzzled.

"And what am I do with the first penny that I take away?" he asked.

"You must keep that to go on for another ten pennies," said Jill with a knitted brow. "I'm sure that will be right, and the nine-pence you can spend any day you like."

"I'll spend it to-morrow, I think. I want a kite that I saw in the shop in the village, and I believe it costs about that. What am I to do with my tenth?"

"Keep it in a box or bag. Miss Falkner told you that. Now, Bumps, what have you got?"

"Five pennies," said Bumps importantly.

"You can't give a tenth then," said Jill, "for you haven't got one."

Bumps looked ready to cry.

"I'm alwayth being left out," she said; "do pleath make it come right. Can't I give one penny?"

A brilliant idea struck Jack.

"Change it into halfpennies, and she'll have ten!" he said.

Jill and Bumps both brightened up.

"Yes, Bumps, that will be the thing; you must put a halfpenny by, and that will be your tenth. I have two halfpennies you can have instead of your penny."

It needed a good deal of explaining to Bumps before she was completely satisfied. When that was done Jill produced her own purse. She was the richest of the three, for she owned three shillings and sixpence, but how to get a tenth out of it was a puzzle.

Miss Falkner, hearing their eager, excited voices, came to the rescue, and showed Jill that fourpence was the tenth of forty pence, and the two over would go towards the next tenth. Then she delighted her small pupils by producing a pretty scarlet flannel bag which she gave them as a "Tenth" bag. Their united coins rattled in, and though it was only fivepence-halfpenny, they felt as proud of it as if it had been five pounds.

"It's a beginning," said Jill to her governess as she was tucking her up in bed that night.

"That's two beginnings I've made since you came here."

Miss Falkner's eyes glistened as she bent over her.

"My little Jill, I shall pray that God may never let you go back from these beginnings, as you call them. Ask Him to help you, dear. It is easier sometimes to make a beginning than go steadily on."

"Yes," said Jill sleepily; 'but that's because the Golden City is such a long way off!"

## VI

### "GOD'S CABBAGES"

SAM was as good as his word. Before a week was out a minute board was erected by the children's heap of stones.

Big white letters confronted any passerby—

"BETHEL.

TRESPASSERS WILL BE PROSECUTED."

And Jill made a point of visiting the spot at least once a day, to be sure that it was left unmolested.

"I'm coming to tea with you, Sam, soon," she announced one afternoon, as she sat on a gate swinging herself to and fro and watching the carpenter repairing a fence.

Sam lived alone with his old father, in a rose-covered cottage, at the corner of the village.

Sam was devoted to roses, and his little front garden was given up to their cultivation.

The back one was in his father's charge, and he grew cabbages.

"Father will be pleased to see you, missy, and so shall I," was Sam's quiet response.

"Then you must invite me properly, and ask me to-morrow, for Mona is going to take Miss Falkner out for a drive. And then we have tea with Annie. I hate my tea poured out by a schoolroom-maid!"

Jill's little nose was tilted scornfully in the air.

"Aye," said Sam smiling; "to-morrow will suit first-rate, missy. Father and me presents our duty, and will be pleased if you will favour us with your company to tea to-morrow at five o'clock."

This was the usual formula, and Jill clapped her hands in delight; then she said with becoming gravity—

"I shall be very pleased to come, Sam. Tell Mr. Stone I'll favour him."

Then she ran into the house, and told Jack and Bumps where she was going.

They were inclined to be cross at first, but Jack soon recovered himself.

"We'll do quite well without you. I shall

play at Sinbad the Sailor, and Bumps is going to be my Old Man of the Sea. Annie likes to join sometimes, and we'll have our tea in the garden. She likes that, for the gardener has a cup of tea with us."

Miss Falkner heard of the invitation, but raised no objection, so punctually at five o'clock the next evening Jill walked into Sam Stone's cottage.

He and his father were expecting her. The tiny kitchen was in perfect order, and looked spotlessly clean.

The table was laid for tea; and a boiled egg for Jill, besides some watercress and currant buns, gave it quite a festive air.

Old Mr. Stone looked delighted to see her. He was a tall, active old man, with a long grey beard, and had always plenty to say for himself.

"'Tis a pleasure to see you, missy. Come right in, an' sit comfortable on my poor wife's rocking-cheer. 'Twas the last thing she sat in afore she died, an' I see her in it now a gaspin' an' chokin', an' smilin' up at me so sadly like. 'Jim,' she sez, 'tis the Lord that did give me to yer, an' 'tis the Lord that do be

goin' to take me away from yer. Thank Him,' she sez, 'for all His mercies!' An' I sez to her, 'Jenny, my heart can't thank if my lips can, an' I'd rather say nothin' just now to the Almighty. Jenny, she were always so properly religious!"

"And are you properly religious too, Mr. Stone?" questioned Jill as she took her seat at the table, and commenced with great pride and solemnity to pour out tea. She was always given the post of honour, behind the big flowered tin tea-tray, and much enjoyed the responsibilities of her position.

The old man shook his head.

"I fear I be a very improper Christian," he said.

"I wonder," said Jill reflectively, "whether your wife gave a tenth to God. Miss Falkner thinks all proper good people do."

"What be that, missy?"

"It's what Jacob did, you know, and we're going to try to do it. Don't you remember his vow? 'Of all that Thou shalt give me, I will surely give the tenth unto Thee.'"

Old Mr. Stone nodded his head.

"My fayther did allays give a little to our

rector; that be it missy, that be it. 'Tis the beginning of it you have told of!"

"Do tell me," said Jill eagerly. "Do you think we could give our tenth to our rector?"

Sam and his father both tried then to give Jill a dissertation on tithes. She hardly grasped it, but child-like returned pertinaciously to her business in hand.

"I want Sam to join us. I'm sure he has a lot of money. I hear it jingle in his pocket. And won't you too, Mr. Stone? If you will, you can come to our 'Bethel' and do it quite properly."

"I tell missy we be hard-workin' people, that be scarcely able to feed ourselves," said Sam.

"But a tenth isn't much," argued Jill. "Out of forty pennies you only have to give four. How much do you get from Mona, Sam?"

"A pound a week," answered Sam stolidly.

"Now, how many tens are in that, I wonder," Jill went on with interest; "you see, Sam, Miss Falkner says God sends us everything, so it does seem rather mean never to give anything back, doesn't it?"

"I reckon," said Mr. Stone looking at his son with a twinkle in his eye, "that two shillin'

be a tenth o' Sam's money, not to speak of his other odd jobs that he do get in an' out."

"We should be on the way to the House, missy, if I did give away such a bit as that!"

"Oh, no, you wouldn't, for God just sends it back, Miss Falkner says in other kind of ways. Only He is pleased if we think of Him."

"If I were a rich man," said old Mr. Stone, "I'd give the Almighty a tenth. 'Tis a cryin' shame the rich be so grudgin' wi' their wealth; but we poor humble folk be not expected to do such things!"

"Haven't you got anything to give God, Mr. Stone?"

"Nothin' at all," responded the old man with a sigh. "Sam do take care of his old father, an' I sells my cabbages an' helps all I can; but since Christmas twelvemonth the rheumaty pains in my innerds be so cruel bad, that I be creepin' on to church-yard slow and sure."

A little gloom seemed to have fallen on the tea-party. Then Jill started another subject.

"When are you going to be married, Sam?"

Sam threw up his head and laughed aloud. He was a confirmed old bachelor and did not,

as he expressed it, "like the ways of women."

"Ah, missy, I'll wait till you set the example."

"Oh, but I don't mean to marry at all. I shall be like Mona. Cook told Annie the other day that Mona was going to marry Captain Willoughby and I told Mona, and she was very angry and then she laughed and said that cook had already married her to over a dozen people. I don't quite know what she meant—but I think you ought to marry, Sam, and cook thinks so too. She says a house isn't a home without a woman!"

Sam laughed again.

"A woman, missy, is an ork'ard customer to deal with. There is smiles, 'tis true, but then there's tears, an' I can't abide 'em! An' there's a great chatteration, and there's a spendin', not so much in pots an' pans an' good wholesome food, but in ribbons an' silks an' finery. An' many a maid turns her man to drink, from her contrary tempers. Best be wi'out them, I say, an' so do faythe r."

They talked away till tea was over, and then Jill accompanied old Mr. Stone into the back garden.

He pointed out to her row after row of his fine cabbages.

"One hundred and fifty-two, missy, an' all sowed from seed, an' I've tended 'em like chillen."

Jill walked up and down amongst the cabbages with a thoughtful air. Suddenly she stood still, seized with an inspiration.

"Mr. Stone, you've got cabbages! The text says, 'Of all that Thou shalt give me, I will surely give the tenth unto Thee.' You must give a tenth of your cabbages to God. Oh, do, won't you? And then you can join us. How many tens have you got? Let us go through, and mark every tenth cabbage off for God. That's the way to do it. How shall we mark them? Will Sam let us have some of that red worsted he ties up his roses with? I'll ask him. Just wait a minute. I know how to do it!"

Jill flew into the house breathless and excited without waiting for the old man's reply. She returned triumphant with her ball of red wool. "Sam thinks it will be very nice. I told him. And you know, Mr. Stone, God did give the cabbages to you. He made them grow, you didn't!"

The old man looked at her queerly. Then he fetched his pipe out of his pocket and began to smoke.

"Them cabbages fetch three-halfpence each in the market, and cheap at the price," he said.

Jill marched along the first row until she arrived at the tenth cabbage, then she broke off a piece of her red wool and tied it through one of the leaves.

"There, Mr. Stone, that's God's cabbage. Now, I'll go on to the next, and then you'll know how many you will have to give."

"What am I to do wi' 'em, missy. Take 'em to church?"

Jill sat down on an old wheelbarrow to consider. "Why," she said presently with a beaming smile, "when you take up a cabbage with a piece of red wool on it, you must sell it for God, and put the money in a little bag, and then give it to the poor."

"P'raps," said the old man with a chuckle, "it will find its way back into my pocket, for I'm a very poor old body, very poor indeed!"

"You're making a joke of it," said Jill, flushing a deep red. "I mean a real starving person, when I talk of the poor. Would you

rather give it to the collection in church, Mr. Stone?"

"Aye p'raps that would be the best way to work it."

So taking that as a promise Jill set to work with a will, and before she left that evening she had marked off fifteen cabbages, the tenth of the old man's property.

"And now if you really like to give them, will you come to-morrow to 'Bethel' and do your vow?"

Mr. Stone wavered, but finally Jill won him over, and he promised to be outside the fir plantation the very next day.

Jack and Bumps were full of interest when Jill told them of her evening's work. It did much towards solacing Bumps, who had a bruised head and a badly grazed knee, but wounds were generally her lot after an hour or two alone with Jack.

"I wath the old man of the thea," she explained to Jill, "and I couldn't thtick on. Jack jumped and rolled and kicked me up in the air to get me off, and I had to try to be on all the time. It wath very differcult!"

She was rather doubtful about the cabbages.

"I thought it wath to be money. God really does make money and give it to us, but does He make cabbages? I thought they growed of theirselves."

"How do you think God makes money?" Jack asked.

Bumps thought hard for a minute.

"I 'spect He just drops pennies and shillings into the ground when no one is looking, and then lets us find them. I know they does come from under the earth, becauth Miss Falkner told me."

Jill tried to explain that cabbages brought in money, and it was the money for them that would be the tenth and after a time Bumps was satisfied.

They were all present the next day when old Mr. Stone was initiated into the mysteries of Bethel. But he shook his head sternly at the heap of stones.

"No no, that there altar is idol'try, that is what it be. The chapel folk would turn me out if I went for to forget myself in such a heathen-like way! Pour oil on it? Indeed no, missy. That be like the cannibal heathen who

offer up sacrifices and living bodies, an' such like."

"But Jacob did," argued Jill. "We've kept most particular to the Bible."

"Ah, well, Jacob had to answer to the Almighty for it, an' I won't be his judge. But I'm a chapel man myself, though I favours the church on occasions. I'll say the words, missy, an' then you must let me go. My poor wife used to give to charity an' such like. I remember her handin' a penny out of the windy to a tramp one day. I could do with a deal more religion, I owns, for though I thinks little, I knows I ought to thank my Maker more for His mercy an' goodness. An' He is kindly welcome to my cabbages—them that be marked with red wool. So now, missy, where be the book?"

The Bible was put into his hand, and the verse pointed out, but he would only repeat the last part of it.

The children chorused "Amen," and then he was led away, but his words left an uncomfortable feeling behind.

"Is it like the heathens to have a heap of stones, I wonder?" said Jill, sitting down on

the grass and looking at the pile very affectionately.

"It's all rubbish!" said Jack. "Jacob wouldn't have done a wicked thing, when he was making a vow to God."

"Arth Miss Falkner," was Bumps' suggestion. But Jill would not agree to this.

"It's a secret," she said; "we mustn't tell everybody. I think I'm rather sorry I brought Mr. Stone here. Sam didn't think it wicked."

"Isn't Sam going to join?"

"He won't just yet. He says he wants to think it over."

Then she jumped up. "Come along, let us have a game of hide-and-seek."

Away they scampered, making the garden ring with their shouts, and "Bethel" was forgotten for the time.

# VII

## THE TRESPASSER

A FEW days afterwards Miss Falkner took Jack and Jill out for a drive in a low pony-chaise that was their special property.

Mona came out on the doorstep to see them start.

"I'm so glad you can drive, Miss Falkner," she said, "for I shall have no fears about the children with you as driver. The grooms can't be trusted. They give the reins to them, and Jack upset the whole concern just before you came."

"I used to drive as a tiny child," said Miss Falkner with heightened colour. "I have not done so lately, but one never loses the art."

Mona looked at her curiously. She began to feel a great interest in this young girl, who had so quietly taken the reins in the school-room and was slowly but surely influencing the young turbulent spirits in it.

The children were giving their pony sugar.

Mona looked at them, then she laid her hand gently on Miss Falkner's arm.

"Some day you will tell me about yourself and your home," she said.

The quick tears sprang to the young governess's eyes. She felt as she stood there that the girl who spoke to her had all that the world could give her. She had as yet been untouched by the storms of life, and on her proud young face there were lines of discontent and restlessness that would never be effaced till she had learnt some of life's lessons, and perhaps been through the school of suffering.

They were very nearly the same age, were two blocks of stone, ordained for a building above; yet though one was cut and chiselled already, the other bore no impress of the Master's hand.

But the sympathetic touch and words struck a chord in Miss Falkner's heart. She forgot from that time that Mona Baron was her employer, she thought of her only as a girl who might need help.

"Now where shall we go, children?" she asked, as they drove down the sweet-smelling lime avenue into the high road.

"Oh, do drive up to Chilton Common," cried Jack; "there are such a lot of rabbits there, and we can see the sea from it."

So to Chilton Common they went. It was about four miles off, and at first sight looked a dreary expanse of wild moorland. As they crossed it, they caught the salt scent of the sea, and soon came to a cluster of poor-looking cottages, but beyond them in the distance was the unmistakable blue line of the ocean, and the children seemed delighted.

"I wish we lived by the sea," said Jill. "I like to be on the very outside edge of the earth."

"Why?" inquired Jack.

Jill seldom gave reasons for her likes and dislikes.

"Because I do," she returned sharply.

"Oh, look, Miss Falkner, there's our rector, Mr. Errington. He has a lot of people round him. P'raps he's preaching!"

Mr. Errington caught sight of them and smiled at the children, who were great favourites of his. Then he came forward.

"My horse has gone very lame," he explained.

"I am thinking of leaving him here at the blacksmith's and walking home."

"Can we give you a lift?" asked Miss Falkner.

"That will be very good of you. I shall be grateful for my wife will be expecting me and will be anxious."

"Jill thought you were preaching," said Jack. "Wasn't she silly? As if you'd preach on a weekday!"

"I wish I had been," said Mr. Errington with a smile.

Then he turned to Miss Falkner.

"These are my parishioners," he said, "and not one of them comes to church. They're just like heathen. It looks a God-forsaken place, does it not?"

"It seems a strange place to see cottages," said Miss Falkner. "How do they earn their living?"

"By peat-cutting, and working in a quarry a mile off. The blacksmith is unable to walk far, or I really think I should see him at church sometimes. The rest are totally indifferent to their soul's welfare. I am longing to build a little mission-room and come over and have a

service for them, but it would cost money, and I have none to spare at present."

"It is a pity," said Miss Falkner gently. "One wonders sometimes if money drifted into the right channels whether this dense ignorance would be overcome. At my old home there was a district very like this. My father's curate was indefatigable in trying to raise money, and he eventually succeeded. It was a great success, for the people came to the mission church and sent their children to school. But he—" her voice faltered a little, "overworked himself, took cold and died, and my father followed him. The present rector does not care for the mission-room. He thinks they ought to come to church, and they don't do it."

Mr. Errington nodded with perfect comprehension.

"Of course not. It would want a good deal of zeal to walk eight miles after a week's hard work. Our English labourer will not do it."

They talked on, and much of the conversation was above the children's heads, but Jill was a sharp child, and she was already evolving a plan in her head, which had the effect of taking her to the Rectory the next day.

Mrs. Errington was a great invalid. When she was told that "Miss Jill Baron" wanted to see her, she said to her husband, who was overlooking some accounts with her:

"My dear Robert, we ought not to be disturbed. Shall we say we are engaged?"

"No," said Mr. Errington, leaning back in his chair wth a laugh; "I am dazed with figures. Let us be refreshed by one of the fresh things in this world. There is nothing like a child for relieving one of care."

Jill was ushered in, flushed and excited. She could hardly wait to shake hands.

"Jack and Bumps are willing, and so I've come with it," she said. "It's to help to build that church on the common. Miss Falkner said we might, and I've brought it in our bag."

She put a scarlet flannel bag on the table, and went on—

"You see we haven't begun very long, so there's only a little to start with; but we shall always be putting in, because we often get presents, and I've spoken to Mr. Stone, and we've counted that his fifteen cabbages will bring him one shilling and tenpence halfpenny,

and he says that had better be given to you too."

It seemed incoherent, but Mrs. Errington gently drew the explanation out of the child, and though Jill did not divulge the spot of their "Bethel," her account interested the rector and his wife greatly.

"It will be money well spent," Mr. Errington said, "for it will be the means of telling those poor folk of the love of the Saviour."

"And you will have the honour, Jill dear, of starting the collection," said Mrs. Errington.

"It's a pity," said Jill with knitted brows, "that you can't get every one to give you their tenth."

"I don't think there are many people who do give their tenth," said the rector.

"Miss Falkner gives all hers to the Church Missionary Society," Jill went on; "but Jack and Bumps and me thought we'd like to see where our money went."

"Wise little woman!"

Then Mr. Errington emptied the bag, and delighted Jill by giving her a formal receipt for it, and entering the sum in an account book.

She ran away quite happy, waving her scarlet bag in the air, and wishing with all her heart that birthdays and Christmas, and all such occasions for receiving presents, would come every day.

"Mona is going to have a party," announced Jack one day soon after this. "I went into the drawing-room to give Miss Webb her pencil that I picked up, and she and Mona were talking about it. It is to be next Wednesday."

The children were just beginning their afternoon lessons; and Jill was washing her slate preparatory to doing a sum.

"How jolly!" she cried. "I hope she'll let us come to it. When is it to be? Is it a dinner party?"

"No, a garden party It's going to be a very grand one. There's a band coming, and a tent for fruit and ices, and there will be tennis and croquet, and bowls and——"

"Now, Jack," said Miss Falkner quietly, "that is enough. Lessons now, and talk after."

It was hard to obey, but Jack put a restraint upon himself, and when lessons were

over Jill determined to get no more news second-hand.

"Come on, Bumps. I'm going to ask Mona about it."

The little girls found their sister in her bedroom, getting ready for a drive.

"We've come to ask about the party," said Jill, who always went straight to the point. "We can come into it, can't we?"

Mona laughed, then she sat down in an easy-chair and took Bumps upon her lap.

"I hardly ever see you now," she said; "Miss Falkner keeps you all in such order. Why, Bumps, you are growing quite heavy."

"Yeth," assented Bumps, "I thmashed Polly's head by stepping on it. She's my thecond betht wax-doll, Mona!"

"You'll let us come to the party?" asked Jill persuasively.

"Yes, if you behave nicely. There may be two other children coming. Little Indian nieces of Mrs. Moxon's."

"Heathens?" questioned Jill.

Mona laughed merrily.

"Good gracious, no! What a ridiculous child you are."

Jill coloured up at once.

"I like boys better than girls," she said in her stubborn tone. "I know I shan't like them."

"You must be civil and kind to them, or else I shall send you back to the school-room. But perhaps that will be no punishment. I think you must have altered your mind about governesses, Jill."

"Yes," said Jill in a different tone. "But Miss Falkner is not like a governess. She's very fond of us, she says so!"

"Extraordinary! You don't say so!"

Mona laughed again, then put Bumps off her lap.

"Now run away, small people, and remember if you appear in the garden on Wednesday, you must be in the cleanest frocks and the sweetest tempers. Otherwise you must make yourselves scarce."

"Like the children walking to the Golden City," said Bumps trotting after Jill.

Jill looked down at her with troubled eyes.

"Sometimes I wonder where I am," she said, moved by the impulse of the moment to confide in her little sister. "I don't believe I get

on very fast. I'm always losing my temper, and that means dirtying my frock."

"And then you have to wash it," said Bumps cheerfully.

"Yes," said Jill, with a light in her eyes; "I can do that, at least I can ask to have it done, but—" and here she relapsed into gloom again. "I sometimes wonder if it is ever clean for more than a minute!"

Wednesday came, and the three children sadly tried Miss Falkner's patience at lessons.

She closed books at last, and sent them out into the garden to play before their early dinner. They longed to go into Mona's portion of the grounds, but the head gardener kept them back. Tents were being erected; servants bustled about, and Mona herself, with Miss Webb and one or two gentlemen, seemed to be superintending everything herself.

At four o'clock Jill and Bumps, arrayed in their best white frocks, were down on the front lawn awaiting the arrival of guests. Miss Falkner in a pretty grey dress and hat stood talking to Miss Webb under the trees, and Mona, looking radiant in her youth and loveliness, dressed like her little sisters in pure white,

with a spray of delicate pink roses in her breast, was talking and laughing with a few of her house guests. Jack presently came up to his sister. He was dressed in his white sailor-suit, and looked stiff and uncomfortable.

"Oh, Jill, I say, do let's get out of this. It's so dull and proper. You and Bumps look like the china figures on the school-room mantelpiece."

"Yes," said Jill; "it is very dull. Where shall we go?"

"Let us see how Bethel is getting on."

So the three made their way to the fir plantation, but met with several interruptions on the way. Jack chased a fowl which had escaped from the poultry-yard. Bumps would insist on stopping to watch the peregrinations of two frogs in some long grass, and Jill had a talk with Sam, who was cutting down a young tree. As they trod softly on the brown pine-needles underfoot Jack startled his sisters by a shrill whisper.

"Look! there's a trespasser!"

Jill pressed eagerly forward. A tall broad-shouldered man in clerical clothes was standing reading the board. Then instead of turning

away, he went up to the pile of stones, and bending down was in the act of lifting one of them out of its place to look at it, when Jill's indignant voice arrested him.

"You're a trespasser! We shall prosecute you!"

He turned round in astonishment, and his stern, rugged features were transformed by a smile, when he saw the daintily-dressed children before him.

"Is this your property?" he asked.

Jill was like a little bantam-cock.

"Every bit of it is ours, of course it is. You must have seen the board; we ain't going to allow any trespassers here."

"You'll have to be prothecuted!" cried Bumps breathlessly.

"Yes, Jill said she'd prosecute," said Jack, looking first at the stranger and then at his sister, as if measuring in his mind's eye their respective sizes.

"What is to be done with me?" asked the stranger with an amused look.

Jack and Jill put their heads together, and consulted in hurried whispers as to the best course to take.

Then Jill spoke very emphatically.

"We shall have to prosecute you, because you didn't care for our board. You saw it and you were going to move our stones. Jack and I think if you will walk between us and promise not to escape, we will go down to the policeman at our gate. Mona is having a grand party and he's here now, for we saw him. He'll tell us what to do."

"I think," said the trespasser, trying to look grave, "that you might fine me. Magistrates do that to some trespassers."

Jill did not understand this, but she was too proud to confess it.

"No, you must come to the policeman," she said. So presently skirting the tennis lawn the little procession passed. Jack and Jill marched on either side of him, Bumps walked behind.

"I can catch hold of his coat if he runs away," she said.

It was unfortunate for the children's plan that Mona should intercept them.

She moved from a shady tree on the lawn, and accompanied by two gentlemen confronted them.

A slight flush rose to her cheek when she saw the prisoner, and her voice faltered slightly.

"Mr. Arnold? I have not seen you for so many years that I hardly recognised you at first. You must be staying with Lady Crane; though she mentioned your name to me I never connected it with *you*. I am very glad to see you."

Her tone was more nervous than cordial. She introduced the other gentlemen with her to him. "Sir Henry Talbot. Captain Willoughby." Then she added lightly—

"I might have known I would find you in the children's company. I remember how fond you were of all small people."

"He's our prisoner," said Jack importantly, "and we're taking him to the policeman."

"A trethpather," put in Bumps excitedly.

"Yes, we're going to prosecute him," said Jill gravely.

Mona laughed, but Mr. Arnold looked grave enough as he said:

"Yes, I plead guilty, but I appeal to the present company that I should be let off a term of imprisonment by paying a fine."

"What does he mean?" asked Jill confi-

dentially, addressing Captain Willoughby, who was always the children's friend.

"He means he'll pay down some money if you make him. What has he been doing?"

"He has been trespassing in our most private place. There's a board up, so there was no excuse."

"I think if he pays us some money we'll let him off," said Jack.

Mr. Arnold held out five shillings.

"It's a first offence," he said. "I'll never do it again."

"What shall we do with it?" asked Jill, taking the money and fingering it dubiously.

Mona had walked on with Sir Henry Talbot.

"Why," said Jack "we'll put it in our bag."

Jill's whole face brightened.

"Thank you," she said. "We'll forgive you then."

"You mercenary little wretches," said Captain Willoughby. "Is this a new game by which you fleece every stranger?"

"The money isn't for us!" said Jill indignantly. "It's for a kind of church."

Mr. Arnold looked at her, and gave one of his rare smiles again.

"I must hear about it," he said. "I should like to know where my fine will go."

He certainly knew how to gain children's confidences. Before very long on a garden seat Jill was telling him about it all, even about their cherished "Bethel."

She was rapidly making the trespasser into a friend.

"I am most interested," he said; "I am going back to a big manufacturing town soon, and I think I must try and get some of my boys and girls to put aside a tenth."

"Have you any little boys and girls of your own?" asked Jill.

"I am not a father," Mr. Arnold replied, "but I have all sorts and kinds of boys and girls who I consider belong to me. Little crossing-sweepers, and errand-boys, and miners, and school-boys, and factory-girls. And I have a few like you who enjoy plenty from their Heavenly Father."

"Did you know Mona long ago?" asked Jill.

"I knew her," said Mr. Arnold slowly, as his gaze travelled to a white-gowned figure in the distance, "when she was about as big as

you, and we used to spend all our holidays together till we grew up. You ask your sister to tell you of our prank in the church tower with old Solomon Disher!"

"Oh, do tell me."

He shook his head. He saw Mona coming towards them again and he rose to meet her.

A few words that then passed between them puzzled Jill.

"Well, Mr. Arnold, tell me your news. I suppose you have never changed your opinion since we last met."

"No, I never have."

His eyes and mouth were stern as he spoke.

Mona looked at him thoughtfully, then as she met his gaze, she laughed lightly.

"Your spirit is still ruling your body. I can see that. And I suppose you would say that my body is still ruling my spirit. I think it is. I always told you I should take the easy path."

Mr. Arnold glanced at her, then he looked at the gay company on the flowered lawns, his ear caught the lively strains of the band, and his gaze wandered to the beautiful sloping hills and woods that formed a background to the

charming old English house that was her property.

"A noble patrimony," he said in a low clear voice. "I would it did not belong to those who lay up treasure for themselves and are not rich toward God."

A crimson flush mounted to Mona's fair cheeks.

"Seven years ago," she said "we parted because of your unreasonable severity. Have we met to do the same this afternoon?"

A smile came to his lips.

"I hope not. I have lived and learnt to judge less harshly; but my aim is still the same. I hope my standard has not been lowered."

Mona shrugged her shoulders, then deliberately walked away from him.

Jill looked after her astonished.

"You have made Mona cross, Mr. Arnold."

"I am afraid I have," he said humbly. "Shall we come over to the tea tent?"

Jill was only too delighted.

## VIII

### "I MUST LOVE FIRST, BEFORE I CAN GIVE"

BUT Jill lost her friend in the tent. Several ladies took possession of him, and Miss Falkner told her to come with her and speak to two little girls who were standing outside. They were evidently twins. Both had white delicate faces and long fair hair reaching almost to their waists.

Jill was much astonished when she heard they were the "Indian nieces."

"Why do they call you Indians?" she asked them abruptly, as Miss Falkner having left them they walked across the lawn towards the band.

"We are not Indians," one of the little girls said indignantly. "We have been living in India and came to England last month. Mother and father are still out there."

"Oh," said Jill in a relieved tone: "I was afraid you would be half black. Mona told me you were coming. What do you do in India?"

Their tongues were loosened, they poured

out such a volley of "ride through bazaars," "tiffins," "ayahs," "dobies," "punkahs," "rupees," "gymkanas," and other unknown words and terms that Jill grew quite bewildered.

She questioned them eagerly and was quite impressed with all the strange things they had seen and heard.

"What kind of things do you do?" they asked in their turn. "It seems so dull to us in England, but that's because we are shut up in a school-room with a governess."

"We're never dull," said Jill warmly. "Never! And we're always doing new things every day. Do you see Jack and Bumps anywhere?"

"Who are they? Is Bumps a dog? What a funny name!"

"She's my little sister; we've always called her Bumps because she tumbles about and hurts herself so. They've gone off together somewhere. Now if we find them you'll see the sort of things we do. Whenever Jack and Bumps are missing, they are always up to something!"

Jill commenced a rapid and thorough search

for her brother and sister. Miss Falkner was also looking for them, but it was a long time before their search was successful. At last coming to a small artificial lake which was tenanted by some wild waterfowl and white swans, they heard a commotion, and found Jack and Bumps very busy indeed.

Bumps was sitting in a wheelbarrow to which were harnessed with yards of tape and ribbon, two of the swans. It had been a difficult task, to judge from the children's heated, dirty faces. The birds were screeching and fluttering their wings, nearly choking themselves in their efforts to free themselves.

Jack was pushing the wheelbarrow behind, trying to follow the lead of the distressed and angry birds. Bumps, elated by her position, was brandishing a small whip and trying to manage her reins, which seemed a difficult matter.

How they had got hold of the swans at all was a wonder, but Jack's white suit was covered with green slime and soaked with water.

"I'm Snow White," called out Bumps, "but these thtupid thwans won't go prop'ly!"

Miss Falkner said very little, but what she said had the effect of bringing Jack to his senses.

"Well," she said; "you have shortened your happy day by this! What a pity! You evidently were tired of the party. We will go straight back to the school-room and stay there for the rest of the day."

In two minutes she had liberated the unhappy swans and was marching Jack and Bumps—one on each side of her—back to the house. The little girls watched them, half in amusement half in pity.

"That's what I say," said Rose, one of the twins, "a governess spoils every bit of fun!"

"Miss Falkner doesn't," said Jill loyally, "but Jack does sometimes go too far. He nearly hung Bumps the other day. He was pretending to do it, but he got the rope too tight round her neck. She was a Royalist and he was Oliver Cromwell. We had had it in our lesson that day. He said he really felt she was his enemy, and he would have to get rid of her! Miss Falkner was very angry. She is very quiet when she is angry, but she's very nice. I love her!"

Then with a quick change of thought, Jill said—

"Do you get a lot of money? Have you pocket-money?"

"Yes, we have sixpence a week each, but it doesn't seem a great lot."

"Wouldn't you like to give your tenth to God? You can easily, if you like. I'll tell you how it's done."

The little girls looked at Jill completely puzzled, but she had a wonderful way of compelling attention and interest, and before she separated from them that afternoon they had promised to think over the matter, and let her know what they could do.

"You see," said Norah, the other twin, "we haven't very much money to spare. We want every penny of it. We're always wanting to buy things."

"Yes, but God wants it most," said Jill, "and it's such a very little He wants; only one penny out of tenpence, that's all it is. And if you saw the poor people out on Chilton Common, who have no church and who look so dirty and wicked, you'd like to give some money to help them."

"Are you good?" asked Rose looking at her curiously.

"No, I'm awfully wicked," said Jill with conviction, "but giving your money away doesn't make you good. I wish it did."

There was nothing to say to this. They parted excellent friends, but Rose said to Norah afterwards, "She's rather a nice girl, but I feel if I was with her she would make me do a thing whether I liked it or not."

"It's the way she talks," said Norah; "she gets so excited over it. I never heard of a tenth before, did you?"

"No, never. I wonder if Aunt Mary gives it, I will ask her."

Jill had a word or two again with Mr. Arnold before he left. He came up to wish her sister good-bye when she was standing by her side.

"Good-bye, Miss Baron. I am off to my work again to-morrow, so shall not see you again for some time."

Mona looked up at him a little wistfully, then spoke in her most airy manner—

"Good-bye, it is not likely we shall often

meet; my path is not yours, as you are so fond of inferring."

He looked at her in silence, then his hand fell rather heavily on Jill's shoulder.

"I think of you," he said, "as you were at this age. This little sister of yours has discovered that she is a steward—help her when she grows up, as you were never helped, to preserve her childish faith and integrity. It is required in stewards that a man may be found faithful!"

Then turning to Jill he said—

"Good-bye, little friend. I am not sorry that I trespassed this afternoon, for I am going away happier than when I came."

"And you don't mind us keeping your five shillings?"

"I shall like to think of it reposing in that scarlet bag you told me about!"

He went, and Mona turned sharply upon Jill—

"Run away, child, to Miss Falkner. It is getting late, you have been here long enough."

Jill obeyed, wondering why her sister spoke so crossly.

It was a few days after this that Jill dis-

covered two more trespassers in the vicinity of Bethel.

She was by herself, and did not feel quite so ready to arrest them when they proved to be Mona and Captain Willoughby.

They had been wandering through the plantation, and Captain Willoughby's voice was very low and earnest when the sudden appearance of Jill startled and disconcerted him.

"You can't come any further, I'm afraid," said Jill barring the way; "for you'll be trespassing."

Mona looked at her in amusement.

"Whose wood is this? Yours or mine?" she asked.

"This corner is ours," answered Jill firmly, "No one used it before we did."

"But what have you been using it for?" inquired Mona.

Jill looked a little rebellious. Captain Willoughby seized hold of her.

"You are the little trespasser, not us, I fancy," he said. "Now then I have got you. Come along, and don't pull away from me unless you want a sore wrist."

So Jill was dragged captive before her board and pile of stones.

Mona looked at it curiously.

"Now what on earth does it mean, Jill? Explain."

"You're trespassers both of you," said Jill stubbornly. "It's got to do with *us,* and we are the ones that know about it."

"The mighty *US!*" said Captain Willoughby, who loved to tease her sometimes.

But Mona stopped him, and drew Jill's hand out of his very gently.

"Never mind, Jill dear. We will own ourselves trespassers if you will explain this. What does 'Bethel' mean? It is a Bible word, is it not?"

Jill was quickly appeased. When Mona spoke to her kindly she was ready to tell her anything.

"It is a secret place, and a religious one," she said.

"Of course it comes out of the Bible, and it's not idolatry, though Sam's father says it is."

"I know!" said Captain Willoughby. "It's an altar, and you offer sacrifices on it."

"No, we don't," said Jill indignantly, "we wouldn't be so wicked!"

"But the good people in the Bible always offered sacrifices," argued the young Captain.

Jill looked at him thoughtfully.

"Well, we don't," she said.

"What do you do?" asked her sister. "This is a kind of altar, isn't it?"

"It is a kind of one," admitted Jill, "though Jacob did not call it an altar. He made a heap of stones and called it Bethel, and so we've done it too."

"Oh, I see," said Captain Willoughby. "This is Jacob's heap of stones. Isn't one of them in the King's coronation chair, by the bye?"

"But what use is this to you?" asked Mona, wanting to get to the bottom of it.

"It has to do with our vow," said Jill, speaking fast and earnestly. "We have done what Jacob did, we've told God we'll give Him our tenth. 'Of all that Thou shalt give me, I will surely give a tenth unto Thee.' That's the vow. And if anybody wants to make it I shall let them come here and make it, and they won't be trespassers any longer."

"That's a grand inducement," murmured the Captain, "but what does your tenth consist of, Jill? Sweets and currant-buns, and dolls, and picture-books? I should like the system explained."

"It's the tenth of our money, of course," said Jill, "I thought everybody knew that."

Mona was silent. She was looking a little troubled. Then she turned suddenly to Jill—

"Is this where you brought Mr. Arnold the other day?"

"I found him here," said Jill. "He was a trespasser. That's why he gave me five shillings."

"What have you done with it?"

"I've put it into our bag. Miss Falkner made us a red bag and all our tenth goes into it, and then I take it to Mr. Errington, and he's going to build a mission church on Chilton Common with it!"

Mona gasped, then she began to laugh.

"Hopeful Mr. Errington! I admire his ambition, but I fancy many years will roll by before that church is built!"

"I knew you would laugh," said Jill reproachfully.

"Well," said Mona, looking first at Jill and then at her pile of stones, "I always did say you children had the bump of invention. But I, with Mr. Arnold, will plead guilty of the charge of trespassing; and you must do the same, Captain Willoughby. What will you fine us, Jill? Five shillings? I think we cannot escape with less than that."

"Be merciful," pleaded Captain Willoughby. "If I had known this visit of ours would have entailed such a loss to my pocket, I would have kept a long way off from it!"

Jill looked perplexed.

"I don't want to get money out of people," she said, "but you really are trespassers, and it will be lovely for our bag!"

Mona took her purse out of her pocket, and put half a sovereign into her little sister's hand.

"There!" she said. "Run away and put that into your bag. It is for a good object. Now, Captain Willoughby, we must go back to the house. I promised to drive with Miss Webb at four o'clock, and it is that already."

Jill turned over the gold coin in amazement and delight. She thanked her sister effusively.

"I knew our bag would get on, I was sure it would," she said; and then she scampered back to the school-room, where Miss Falkner was teaching Jack how to arrange his stamps geographically in his stamp album, and Bumps was looking admiringly on.

"Look!" she cried. "Mona has given this to me for our bag! Isn't it perfectly lovely."

She got plenty of sympathy from the school-room party. Miss Falkner had heard at last about "Bethel," but she had respected Jill's wish about it, and had never been there.

That evening when the children were in bed she sat by the open school-room window. Her thoughts were not sad ones, though she had had much in her life to make her sad. And when a slender figure in a black lace gown came across the dusky lawn and spoke to her, it was the young heiress's face that looked weary and troubled, not the governess's.

Miss Falkner looked up brightly.

"Isn't it a delicious evening?"

"Is it? Yes, I suppose so. I wish I enjoyed things as you do, Miss Falkner."

There was a little silence.

Then Mona sat on the low window-ledge and put her light shawl over her shoulders.

"I must have some one to talk to to-night, or I feel I shall go crazy, and I have come out of doors to get away from Miss Webb, because she is so cross with me."

Miss Falkner looked her sympathy but said nothing.

"Jill has altered a chapter in my life to-day, and I don't know whether I am glad or sorry."

"I hope she has done good, not harm," said Miss Falkner.

"From your standpoint—yes. From mine —I'm not so sure. I was about to yield to persuasion, when she interrupted us, but after her interruption, I—well I altered my mind. What a lot of bother one's memory gives one!"

"Sometimes it does."

Mona moved in her seat restlessly.

"Seven years ago, Miss Falkner, I quarrelled with some one that I liked very much. It was about a certain subject. It is strange that this week the same person and the identical subject have both cropped up again."

"I should say," said Miss Falkner, "that the coincident has occurred for a purpose."

"Yes, I knew you would say that." Then after a pause she said—

"Do you believe that prosperity is good or bad for one?"

"I think if we regard our wealth as a trust it will be good for us," said Miss Falkner.

Mona laughed a little bitterly.

"Of course. It is the same old story. People can't give because it's right to give. I hate being forced."

"No," said Miss Falkner gently. "It is only when we love the One to whom our wealth belongs that we love to give it back to Him."

"Then," said Mona, "I must love first, before I can give."

She rose, then looked a little wistfully at the young governess.

"Sometimes I wish I could change places with you," she said, and before Miss Falkner could make any reply she slipped away.

# IX

## TRYING TO BE "DOUBLE GOOD"

"ARE you going away?"

It was Jack who spoke, and who stood at the door of Captain Willoughby's room, looking at the half-filled portmanteaus, and the general chaos of a man's quarters when he is on the point of departure. It was before breakfast, and being a rainy morning, Jack was wandering about the passages seeking for some occupation.

Captain Willoughby looked up from his employment. He was vainly trying to strap a Gladstone bag, and was muttering imprecations under his breath.

"Now then, young shaver, what do you want? You children are always turning up when you aren't desired. I have to thank your small sister yesterday for an interruption which proved disastrous!"

Jack edged himself in, and climbed up to the iron foot-rail of the bed, where he sat swinging his legs.

"Why are you going?"

"You didn't really think I had taken up

my quarters here for good and all, did you?"

Captain Willoughby's tone was distinctly irritable.

"You needn't be waxy," said Jack cheekily. "There's one thing! I know you'll be back again before long!"

"Shall I?" said the Captain, giving a vicious tug to his straps. "I shall volunteer to go out to India with the next draft; I'm sick of England."

"Do tell me why you're so cross," said Jack earnestly, clasping his hands round his knees.

Captain Willoughby had finished his task. He sat down upon his bag with a sigh of relief.

"There! I shall leave my man to do the rest. The world is an utter failure, Jack, that's what it is!"

"Is it?" said Jack innocently.

"Yes," went on Captain Willoughby. "And it's the women who are at the bottom of it. They're all the same—unstable, uncertain, fickle, false, their moods change from day to day; they make you believe in them, and take you in all round, and then are quite surprised to see that you are taken aback by their complete change of tone and mind. It's a bad thing, my boy, to spend too much time with

women. Remember that when you grow up. You will rue the day you made their acquaintance."

This dissertation was perfectly incomprehensible to Jack. He stared at the Captain with open eyes and mouth. Then he slipped down from his perch.

"I'm sorry you're so put out," he said. "I suppose you're cross because you have to go away."

Then he slipped out of the room, and confided to Jill that Captain Willoughby was awfully cross with everybody in the world, and that she had better keep out of his way.

The children with their governess occasionally lunched in the dining-room, when there were no visitors.

Jack looked around on this particular day before he commenced to eat.

"There are five women," he announced; "and I'm the only man. It's a bad lookout for me!"

"Why?" asked Mona, who had been sitting at the head of the table rather *distrait* and silent.

"Because," said Jack slowly, "Captain Willoughby told me this morning that it is a bad thing to spend too much time with women."

Mona's cheeks flushed a deep crimson. Miss Webb glared at Jack through her pince-nez, and then Mona laughed outright.

"I'm afraid your lot is cast amongst women for the present, Jack. When you are Captain Willoughby's age, I advise you to be careful how you cultivate their society."

"Mona!" said Miss Webb warningly.

"Oh yes," said Mona; "I mean it. And if a woman, Jack, gets tired of your company, and doesn't like the idea of spending all her life with you, take yourself off like a man, and don't be talking over your grievances with everybody you come across!"

Jack said no more. His sister's words were like Captain Willoughby's, beyond his comprehension.

Jill's walk to the Golden City was a very halting one. When she was put to bed at night she generally reviewed her path through the day, and sometimes Bumps was favoured with her confidences.

"I've had an *awful* day," she admitted one night after a series of misdemeanours and punishments. "I meant to go as straight as—as a ruler, and I've gone all crooked. I always mean to behave, but things happen to make me forget!"

"Yeth," said Bumps a little virtuously. "You forgot when you dressed up the black cat in Annie's cap and apron that she alwayth goes in the coal cellar when she's frightened. And when Annie is croth, she's horrid! When you locked her up here becauth she said she'd tell Miss Falkner, I knew she'd bang at the door till she brought everybody up-stairs. I tolded you tho."

"Well," said Jill, sighing; "when Miss Falkner gave me a column of spelling to learn as a punishment, I did mean to do it; but when I saw Sam pass through the garden, I just forgot all about it, and all I thought was that this was the day he got his money, and I must ask him again about his tenth—of course that was another crooked turn I took; and when Miss Falkner said she couldn't trust me I think Satan came up behind and pushed me down as hard as he could. For I don't remember what I called her! I only know I was in a passion."

"You called her a beatht!" said Bumps in a shocked tone; "and Jack and I heard you, and Jack said he wouldn't never have called her that!"

"And then I threw the spelling-book in the fire, and then I was sent to bed," pursued Jill

mournfully. "I wonder, Bumps, if you can make up for one bad day in the next. You see, if I was sent to walk two miles along a road, and I only did a little bit of a mile, and the rest of the time I went into crooked lanes and got myself into scrapes, I think the next day if I ran hard all day, and never stopped to sit down one minute, perhaps I could do the two miles I didn't do the day before, and two more besides."

"Two and two make four," said Bumps complacently. "Will you try to-morrow, Jill?"

"I think I will," said Jill. "I don't want to lose a day if I can help it."

The next morning she remembered her resolve, and she added a silent petition to her morning prayer—

"Oh God, please help me to run hard and very straight to-day. Keep me from tumbling, and let me make up for yesterday, for Jesus Christ's sake. Amen."

"Jill is going to be very, *very* good to-day," said Bumps confidentially to Jack.

"Is she?" said Jack with interest. "Then I'll ask her to give me those stamps Captain Willoughby gave her the other day."

Jill was taken aback by this request.

"They are mine, Jack. You know I'm beginning to collect them."

"Yes, but it will be unkind if you don't give them to me, because I want them. You should try to please others before yourself, that's what Miss Falkner says."

Jill did not see this.

"I thought you were going to be double good to-day," said crafty Jack.

"Yes," said Jill slowly; "but if you take them it will be unkind and selfish of you."

"But I'm not trying to be good to-day like you," argued Jack, quite unabashed.

"But I shall be making it easy for you to be wicked; I shall be helping you to do an unkind thing."

They were in the thick of their argument when Miss Falkner came into the room, so they dropped it. Lessons were started, and progressed very smoothly. At twelve o'clock, when they were dismissed, Jill came to Jack, and put the stamps into his hand.

"There they are," she said; "but I wouldn't be you for *anything!*"

"I've helped you to be good," said Jack with the greatest satisfaction as he sat down at the school-room table and began to stick the stamps into his album at once.

Jill ran out into the garden.

"Come and thwing me!" cried Bumps.

"I can't, Bumps, I must try to do something wonderfully good."

"What will you do?" asked Bumps curiously.

"I don't know; I think I will get the Bible and find out."

As quick in action as in thought, Jill darted into the house and soon returned with her Bible in her hand. For some minutes she turned over the leaves of it unsuccessfully, then an under-gardener passed her.

Now this young man was a local chapel preacher, and Jill had heard some of the servants call him "a shining light." She looked up at him inquiringly.

"Tom," she said, "what is the very goodest thing to do when you want to be really good?"

Tom scratched his head.

"'Tis God's Word will tell 'ee, Miss Jill. There be that sayin' of Apostle James—'Pure religion an' undefiled is to visit the widows and fatherless in their affliction, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world.' 'Tisn't many that get beyond that!"

"Thank you," said Jill in delight. "Please

show me the verse in case I may forget it."

So Tom took her Bible in his hand and found it for her, then went on his way; and Jill began to formulate her plans with great rapidity.

"'Unspotted from the world' means, of course, not to tumble down and dirty my frock on the way to the Golden City. That I'm trying to do hard, but I haven't visited any widows, and I know there are two or three in the village. That will be a lovely way of doing good. I will go at once."

But alas for Jill! Mona was calling her to come and pick some flowers for her.

For a minute she thought of running away, then her conscience told her—

"That will not be running in a straight road," and she reluctantly obeyed her sister's call, and picked flowers till the bell rang for the school-room dinner.

She was not free from lessons till four o'clock. Then, without saying a word to any one, she put on her hat and ran out of the house and down the long drive as fast as her legs could carry her. She knew one old widow by sight, but she had never been inside her cottage. She was rather shunned by her neigh-

bours, as she was a very dirty, thriftless woman, and earned her living by collecting rags and bones.

Jill knocked at her door eagerly and breathlessly.

The old woman poked her head out and looked at her crossly.

"What do 'ee want?"

"I've come to visit you."

"Don't want no visits from plaguey children!"

The door was banged in her face.

Poor Jill retired discomfited. Then she thought of another widow who had lately lost her husband, a very respectable farmer. She lived at a farm some distance off, but distance was no detriment to Jill's purpose.

Away she went; across fields and down lanes; getting more tired and heated every step she took.

She found the young woman at her washtub.

"May I come in and visit you?" asked Jill meekly.

"Come in and welcome, miss. I think you be one of the little ladies belongin' to Miss Baron?"

"Yes, I am," said Jill, seating herself on

a low stool with a sigh of relief. "I'm glad you will let me come in. Old Mrs. Jonas wouldn't!"

"That old cat! Why, miss! you be never tryin' to visit her?"

"I'm visiting all the widows I can find to-day," said Jill solemnly. "The Bible tells me to."

Young Mrs. Drake put her apron to her eyes.

"Aye, dearie me! My poor, dear husban'! To think that I be called a widder along wi' that old good-for-nothin' Mrs. Jonas! Oh, 'tis a cruel, wicked world, and hard on me that has allays done me duty an' attended church reg'lar!"

"Don't cry, please," said Jill, only dimly understanding the drift of her words. "You can't help being a widow, you know. That's why I've come to see you. And I've come to see your children too, because it says the 'fatherless!'——"

But at this Mrs. Drake began to sob afresh, and so violently that Jill felt quite alarmed.

"So they be! 'Fatherless.' An' only last Wednesday three weeks he were a dandlin' of 'em on his knee. Oh, 'tis hard, 'tis cruel hard on a poor, single woman!"

A hard-featured woman put her head in at the door.

"Why, Polly, what be 'ee makin' such a moan over?"

Then seeing Jill, she stepped forward.

Mrs. Drake sobbed the louder.

"Little miss have been mindin' me that I'm a lone widder, and my chillen fatherless. So they be, the poor critturs, but 'tis hard to have it thrown up agen me. Ah, my poor, dear husban'! Oh, Jim, Jim! why did 'ee leave me?"

She began to beat her hands to and fro, and seemed to be hysterically inclined.

"Run away," said the hard-featured woman. "You won't do no good here, missy. Poor soul! she has been well-nigh distracted, and I were hopin' she were gettin' over the worst of it, and now she be so bad as ever!"

Jill crept out of the house feeling her visit had been a failure.

As she gained the high road again, she met Sir Henry Talbot, whom Bumps still called the "keeper."

He was very good to the children, and stopped directly he saw her.

"Hulloo!" he said. "Are you having another truant day? Are you all alone?"

"I'm not truanting," said Jill. "I've been looking for widows. Do you know any, Sir Henry?"

He laughed.

"I do. Now, what the dickens do you want widows for? Tell me, and I'll help you."

Jill hesitated.

"You won't laugh at me?"

"On my honour, no."

"I'm trying to be double good to-day, so I'm visiting them, like the Bible says we must."

Sir Henry did not laugh. He only stood and looked at her.

"And what do you say to them when you see them?"

"That's the difficult part," said Jill. "I don't quite know what to say. I've been to one widow, and she wouldn't let me in, and I've been to another and made her cry."

"And now you're looking for a third. Well, I will help you. Do you see that big house behind the trees over there? A widow lives there, and her name is Mrs. Beresford. Go and see her, and make her cry if you can."

"But I don't want to make them cry," said Jill. "Will she like to see me?"

"I should think she would. I should, if I were a widow."

"Has she any children? I want to visit some fatherless."

"Happy thought! Come home and have some tea with me. I'm a fatherless creature. My father died when I was an infant."

"I think," said Jill slowly, "the Bible means poor widows and fatherless. You aren't in affliction, are you?"

"No," said Sir Henry. "I can hardly say I am."

"Then thank you very much, but I shall have to look for some really poor people."

And nothing that he could say would induce her to accompany him home.

She plodded back to the village, but before she reached it, she came upon a little party of tramps who had drawn up their pony and cart by the roadside, and were eating their evening meal.

They were not prepossessing in appearance. Two women, both of whom seemed careworn and down-trodden, four children, ragged and dirty, and a sullen, bad-tempered looking man. Jill looked at them with interest. One of the women had a rusty piece of crape on her bonnet. It was that which prompted Jill to speak.

"Are you a widow?" she asked.

The woman stared at her, but the elder one

of the two gave her a nudge, then answered for her.

"Yes, little lady, she be, indeed; lost her por husban' a few weeks ago, an' leaves 'er with three chillen under four year. 'Ave you a copper, miss, to give 'er? for she be on her way to the 'ouse."

"I'm afraid I haven't any money," said Jill, "but I'll sit down and talk to her. It's what I came out to do—to visit widows."

The man eyed Jill up and down in a way that she did not much like, but she was a fearless child, and was so full of the part she meant to play that she did not think of anything else.

"I suppose you are in affliction," she said, gazing sympathetically into the woman's face. "I'm so sorry for you. Do tell me which are your little children."

The woman looked at Jill with dull, curious eyes. She indicated her little ones by a backward movement of her thumb.

"And what house are you going to?" asked Jill.

"There be only one 'ouse for the likes o' me," the woman responded bitterly; then she turned her head to watch the approach of a carriage.

Jill enticed one of the small children to come

to her. She heard a carriage pass, but did not look up, then she was startled by her name being called, and sprang to her feet.

Mona was calling her, for it was she and Miss Webb who were driving by.

Mona's disgust was great at seeing a party of the lowest class of tramps sitting by the roadside, and her little sister in the midst of them. She spoke very sharply—

"Come here at once, Jill! What do you mean by disgracing yourself and us so?"

Jill turned to the woman politely.

"I'm sorry I have to go," she said. "Good-bye."

She insisted on shaking hands, then came up to the carriage-door, looking a little defiant.

"Get in at once, and we will drive home. How is it, Miss Webb, that even with this immaculate Miss Falkner these children are for ever getting into scrapes?"

Jill climbed into the carriage, feeling very uncomfortable under her sister's scrutiny. She was conscious that she was very heated and untidy; Mona's fresh daintiness made her feel her own deficiency in neatness.

"Give me an explanation of this at once, you naughty child," said Mona peremptorily.

Jill's eyes flashed.

"I'm not naughty," she said indignantly; "I've—I've been visiting widows."

Miss Webb scented amusement. She sat up straight, and tapped Jill's knee with her pince-nez.

"That's very interesting," she said. "Of course, visiting widows is not a sin. But who told you to do it? And why did you pick out a family of tramps to work off your energy upon?"

Jill shut her mouth firmly. She keenly resented Miss Webb's tone of ridicule, and determined to say no more.

Mona gave her a long lecture upon the dangers to which she had exposed herself in making friends with tramps, and when they reached home she was delivered over to her governess with a sharp injunction to punish her for running away, and keep her in the school-room for the rest of the evening.

"So that's what I get for trying to be double good!" said poor Jill when she was in bed that night. "I never will try it again!"

"Perhaps," said Bumps with wisdom beyond her years, "it wasn't quite the right way to be it!"

# X

## A PAPER CHASE

SAM STONE did not hold out very long. Jill pursued him everywhere, and was never tired of dilating on his selfishness and greediness, in refusing to give up a tenth of his weekly wage.

She was beside herself with delight one day, when he came to her with a two-shilling piece.

"That be my portion for that there scarlet bag, missy," he said. "I'll stick to it for a bit an' give it reg'lar every week, but if-so-be that I be wantin' of it, well I must have it. That's all I can say, an' I hope fayther won't miss his comforts through it!"

"You must *never* go back from it," said Jill looking up at him solemnly. "It's a vow! You can't break a vow, it's a much more solemn thing than a promise!"

"But I don't mean to make no vow!" said Sam.

That would not suit Jill at all. She talked away to him, and finally threatened that she

would get Miss Falkner to come and see him and explain it to him.

"She'll make you see you ought to do it."

"I'll do my best, missy, but 'tis the prayer you say I must make, stumps me. I've been a-looking through the chapter, an' Jacob he spoke up very certain-like about the Lord being his God. I don't set up to be a religious man myself, and I don't want to make no promises that I bain't a-goin' to keep!"

Jill insisted upon getting her Bible and reading the verses through to him.

"Jacob doesn't promise anything wonderful, Sam. He only says if God will be good to him and take care of him, he will make Him his God, and give his tenth to Him. Why the Lord is your God, Sam, isn't He?"

"I don't know what the words mean rightly," said Sam dubiously.

"They just mean that you must belong to God, and He will belong to you. You do belong to Him already, Sam, you know you do!"

"I bain't so sure."

"Oh, Sam! God made you, and keeps you alive every day, and Miss Falkner says it isn't only what God does for us, but Jesus died for us, so that ought to make us belong to Him doubly sure!"

"Well," said Sam after long thought, "I'll come to 'Bethel' to-morrow."

So the next day saw him go through the little ceremony with great feeling and earnestness of purpose, though the effort cost him a good deal.

"I've done it faythe r," he said when he went home, "I've tooken the vow for good and all. I thought it were a kind o' game when Miss Jill first brought it up, but I've been readin' the Bible, an' it do seem very plain, an'—an'—well—we do be ungrateful creatures to the good God!"

The scarlet bag grew heavy with coppers as time went on. Norah and Rose Beecher came over to tea one day, and were persuaded to join "Our Tenth Society!"

Jill got to calling it grandly the "O.T.S." and soon had the satisfaction of enrolling Annie the school-room maid as one of its members.

Then came talk of summer holidays. Mona came into the school-room one evening to consult with Miss Falkner about it.

"I suppose you must go home?" she asked. "You would not be able to take the children to the seaside?"

"I am afraid not," said Miss Falkner. "I

have a mother who lives quite alone, and who looks for me to come to her whenever I can."

"Ah," said Mona with a little sigh. "You have something that I have not."

Then she added in a different tone—

"I don't know what to do with the children. They play such pranks, and they're too old for nurses. Jack and Jill are quite beyond them."

Miss Falkner could offer no suggestion. Mona went on—

"Miss Webb has offered to look after them, but I want her to come abroad with me, and she cannot do both."

"I suppose you will have to leave them here for their holidays?"

"I see the look in your eyes, Miss Falkner! You think me a selfish wretch for letting my claims on Miss Webb come first. Perhaps you are like Mrs. Errington, who at once saw a solution out of the difficulty. 'Take them to some comfortable farmhouse and look after them yourself!' I told her I should be worn out in twenty-four hours. I often wonder how you can stand it!"

"It is my life-work," said Miss Falkner quietly. "But I am so fond of children that they do not tire me."

"Well," said Mona giving an impatient sigh,

"my life-work at present is to amuse myself. I find it hard work sometimes. But as you won't make it easy for me to carry off Miss Webb I suppose I must leave her behind."

And so it was settled. Miss Webb resigned herself to her fate. Mona went to some of her numerous friends, and Miss Falkner took her departure.

The children hovered about her as she packed the day before she went, and hindered rather than helped her.

"Just tell me what your mother and your home is like," said Jill. "I'm going to shut my eyes and pretend I see you. Make yourself saying 'How do you do,' to her."

Miss Falkner smiled.

"Shut your eyes then. A narrow street, and a terrace of small houses with little balconies above. A cab stops at the door, and a young woman—shall I call her?—hurries up the narrow steps. Some one has been watching at the door. A gentle, sweet-faced woman with a bright smile and tired body, comes forward to greet her. Then she takes her to a little upstairs drawing-room, which is full of sweet-smelling flowers, and a canary bird and a big tabby cat—both the best of friends—are also waiting to greet the home-comer. Tea is wait-

ing. A little rosy-cheeked maid brings the kettle in. The windows are open, but the small balcony is full of flowers, and the scent and sight of them makes one forget the narrow, dingy street outside. Can you see my home, Jill? Can you see me sitting down by my mother's side, and saying, 'No more lessons, and no more children for six weeks'?"

"Yes," said Jill with tightly closed eyes, "I can see you; but, oh, Miss Falkner," and here she flung her arms round her governess's neck as she was stooping to put some things in her travelling trunk, "promise on your word and honour that you'll come back to us!"

"Indeed I hope to do so, dear."

"And don't, *don't* like your mother better than us!"

Miss Falkner could not help laughing. When the very thought of her mother brought a light to her eye and a lump in her throat; when the anticipation of her mother's kiss and greeting was now the first waking thought, how could she explain to a motherless child the strong tie between an only daughter and her mother!

"You must be a good child, Jill, whilst I am away. Let me find you when I come back steadily going forward towards the Golden City. God will help you, darling."

Jill nodded soberly.

"And we'll go on filling our bag. And perhaps the mission church will be built by the time you come back."

Miss Falkner did not damp her hopes. She parted with her little pupils with sincere regret. Bumps sobbed audibly when she wished her good-bye, and Jill crept up to her room to have her weep out in secret. Jack appeared stolidly unconcerned, but when the carriage had taken Miss Falkner away, he went straight to the stables, a forbidden resort.

"Here, Stokes," he called out to one of the grooms, "I've come out here because it's so beastly dull, and I don't care who finds me here; for there isn't a person left in the house that I care about at all!"

For the first few days the children missed their governess very much, then the delights of the holidays took full possession of them. Miss Webb was valiantly trying to do her duty. She took them for drives and for picnics in the woods. She went into the nearest town and bought them outdoor games and story-books; and if she saw them safely to bed at the end of the day without any serious mishap having taken place, she heaved a sigh of relief and said—

"One more day got through safely!"

Jack was her greatest trial. Jill was really trying to be good, but Jack's spirits were hard to restrain, and whatever he did, and wherever he went, Bumps was sure to follow.

One afternoon after their early dinner, Miss Webb retired to her room with a headache. It was a hot, sultry day in August. She left her charges playing a game of cricket on their lawn, and hoped they would stay there till tea-time.

Jill was the first one to give up cricket.

"I'm going to write a letter to Miss Falkner," she said. "You go on playing without me."

"Bumps can't bowl," complained Jack; "she throws the ball up into the sky as if she's aiming at the sun."

"I'll bat," suggested Bumps cheerfully.

"Yes, and I'll put you out, first bowl. There you are, you little stupid!"

Bumps stared blankly at her wicket, then at Jack.

"What shall we do next?" she inquired.

"We'll have a paper chase," suggested Jack, who was never at a loss.

"And where shall we get the paper?" asked Bumps in great glee at the prospect.

"Oh, come on into the house. We'll find it somewhere."

Jack was not particular where he got his paper. Miss Webb's waste-paper basket was first seized, then *The Times* of the day before and sundry magazines in the drawing-room, then the library was invaded and various papers and circulars abstracted from the writing-table.

"I shall be hare, of course," said Jack as he sat down on the floor with Bumps, and rapidly began to tear his various papers to pieces. "You must give me ten minutes' start, Bumps, by the clock, and then you must follow the paper, and never stop till you catch me up."

"You won't go twenty miles away?" said Bumps very anxiously.

"Of course I won't! And get Jill to come with you. It will be much greater fun if she comes."

Tearing the papers up kept them quiet for a good half-hour, and then Jack started, first taking off his jacket, and making Bumps promise on her honour not to look which way he went.

She waited her ten minutes and then went to Jill.

"Jill, do come and be the other hound. Jack

has gone, and oh! he has gone through the thtable, I thee the paper!"

Bumps was too excited to wait. Jill was lying flat on the grass and hardly turned her head. She murmured, "It's too hot," and went on with her writing.

The afternoon wore on. Miss Webb was roused by the tea-bell and went down-stairs congratulating herself upon the quiet behaviour of the children. She found Jill deep in a story-book.

"Where are the others?" she asked.

"Paper-chasing," said Jill. "Aren't they stupid, this hot afternoon?"

"But I hope they have not gone far?"

"I don't know. The last time I did it, I was the hare, and I climbed a wall, and fell through a greenhouse the other side, and I was ill for three weeks; the gardener said I might have killed myself."

This was hardly comforting. Miss Webb looked anxiously out of the window.

"If they do not come soon, we must go and look for them. I hope they have not gone outside the grounds!"

"Oh, they mayn't be back till bed-time," said Jill.

"You ought not to have let Bumps go,"

said Miss Webb sharply. "She is far too small. You ought to have looked after her better!"

Jill did not appear moved in the slightest. She ate her tea and wondered at Miss Webb's concern; but as time went on, and there was no sign of the hare or hound, she began to share Miss Webb's anxiety.

"I'll go and look for them."

Out she ran, and Annie was made to accompany her. They followed the paper down the drive out into the road and across two fields, then it went through a farm-yard up into a loft, down again, and out at a small back gate. The farmer's wife came out and said she had seen both the children, for Bumps had tumbled down in the yard and grazed her knees.

"An' I took her in, an' gave her a piece of plaster, but she were dead set on following the young gentleman."

After going up the lane and going through another field, Annie said she could go no further.

"'Tis getting dark, and they'll most like be home by this time. Come back, Miss Jill. Master Jack ought to be ashamed of himself leading us this chase!"

So they turned back, but when they came

in they found that Miss Webb had ordered the gardeners and grooms all out, for they had not returned.

Jill's bed-time came. It grew quite dark, and then at last voices were heard in the hall and Miss Webb rushed out. It was Bumps in the arms of a big farmer.

"I found her in a ditch," he said; "my mare shied as I were-a-drivin' home, and I seed somethin' white by the roadside, and then I seed it were a child. She have hurt her foot, poor little 'un. She must have falled a-tryin' to get over a fence above!"

"Is she dead?" cried Jill, pressing forward, for Bumps hung a limp and apparently lifeless bundle over the farmer's arm.

"Bless 'ee, no! Her be faint an' exhausted, but put her to bed an' she'll be all right in the mornin'. Leastwise if her foot be not injured!"

So poor Bumps was put to bed, and her little swollen foot bathed and bandaged, and after a good deal of petting and feeding, she was able to look up and speak.

"It wath my short legs," she said sadly, and somehow or other this old excuse of hers, which was always brought forward when she had failed to do what the others did, brought

the tears as well as a smile to Miss Webb's face. Not a word of blame or reproach was uttered. But when she had dropped into a sound sleep, Miss Webb left her, and her thoughts were now centred on the missing Jack.

The gardeners and grooms failed to trace him, and returned to the house between ten and eleven that night without having found any sign of him. Miss Webb passed a sleepless night, and early in the morning the search was continued.

But Jill was the first in the field. She got up at six o'clock, and with determination in her small face, she trotted off following the paper track.

Over the same ground as the day before she went, but now in the sunshine it was a different matter, and though in some places the paper had disappeared, her sharp eyes tracked it out again, and she went on with renewed vigour.

At last she came to a standstill. The paper was to be seen close to a private plantation. And then it went no further. Jill climbed a low fence in spite of a board with "Trespassers will be prosecuted," and looked in every direction for signs of more paper. But none did she find.

"I'll go through the plantation," she said to

herself, "and see where it leads, for I believe that Jack must have come to an end of his paper."

She followed a little beaten track; and presently with joy saw lying in a bush a white cotton pillow-case. It had been missing from Jack's bed the night before and was the bag he carried his paper in. Jill took it up and found it—as she expected—empty. Then she pressed forward, and at last came to the other end of the plantation. A deep and rather wide stream ran between it and a green field, in which there were several horses grazing. She looked down at the stream, then taking off her shoes and stockings she boldly splashed across. She was in the act of putting her stockings on again, when a gruff voice startled her.

"Now here's another of 'em!"

Looking up she encountered the gaze of a stout, red-faced old gentleman.

"Have you seen Jack?" she asked eagerly.

He shook his fist at her.

"Didn't you see my board?" he shouted. "How dare you come on in the face of it, and disturb my birds! If it isn't poachers, it's children now-a-days. I hate 'em both!"

"I'm very sorry," said Jill; "but please

where is Jack. He has been away all night, and we can't find him."

"If that impudent boy I caught and thrashed yesterday was Jack, you had better follow him, and if you aren't quick about it you'll get what he got!"

He brandished his stick so fiercely, that Jill fled in terror across the field. Out of a white gate and down a lane she ran, and never stopped till she reached a small cottage. Here she pulled up and breathlessly asked a woman if she had seen her brother.

"Were he a small boy with flannel shirt and trousers, and a straw hat? Then yestere'en 'bout seven o'clock, he came runnin' down the road an' Mike the tinker were in front with his old cart. I seed the boy speak to 'im, and then up he climbed, and away they drove, and I'm afeered that Mike was the worse for drink."

"Where does Mike live?" asked Jill with a sinking heart.

"About four mile from here, but he were a-goin' on his rounds, and his next stopping-place was at Thornton."

Thornton was the nearest town. Jill knew it well, but it was beyond her walking powers.

"I can't think why he hasn't come home,"

she said half crying. "I don't know what to do."

"Here's some un comin'," said the woman shading her eyes with her hand. "'Tis a man on a hoss."

Jill looked down the road, and when the rider drew near, she saw to her intense delight that it was Sir Henry Talbot.

He stopped his horse directly he saw her.

"What!" he said; "another of you straying. Are you still looking for widows?"

"Oh no," Jill cried; "I'm looking for Jack. He is lost, and I've come out to find him, and a drunk tinker has driven him away!"

Sir Henry nodded gravely.

"I know all about it," he said; "I've sent Jack home in my carriage."

Jill's face brightened at once.

"Oh, I am so glad; why didn't he come home?"

"He couldn't very well. I was driving home last night from a dinner party between twelve and one, and I came upon the tinker and Jack under the cart and horse by the old bridge. It's a wonder they hadn't fallen into the river. The tinker had his ribs broken, and Jack a nasty cut on the head, but my housekeeper plastered him up, and he's quite himself this morning.

What scamps you are! How are you going to get home? I think you had better come up on my horse. He'll carry us both."

So in a very short time Jill returned triumphantly to the house riding in front of Sir Henry.

Miss Webb saw them from a window and hurried out.

"How can I thank you, Sir Henry? He has arrived safe and sound. I feel I shall be a white-haired old lady by the time Mona comes back. And now you've brought Jill home. I do feel so grateful."

"But I haven't been lost," said Jill in an aggrieved tone.

And then she ran indoors to find Jack.

## XI

### A DONKEY RIDE

BOTH Jack and Bumps were on the sick-list for the next few days. Bumps had sprained her foot, and Jack's cut on his head was a deep and painful one.

When he recovered, he told his adventures to his sisters with much relish; but for once Jill took Bumps' part, and told Jack he had treated her very badly.

"You ought to have stopped when your paper came to an end, and come back to her. How could she follow you, especially when you drove in a cart? It wasn't fair."

"It was that old brute's fault. He nearly broke his stick over my shoulders. I'll pay him back when I get a chance. I've got the marks now. I can feel them. I couldn't walk home, I was so hurt. So I told Mike to drive me into Thornton, and then I was going to our butcher, I knew he would take me home."

"That was rather clever of you," admitted Jill, "but did you forget all about Bumps?"

"Oh, I knew she would never come on so

far. If you'd been with her it would have been all right. And I thought you were. I told her to bring you; so it was really all your fault."

This was turning the tables upon Jill.

"I suppose," she said slowly, "I ought to have looked after her."

But Bumps breathlessly protested:

"I wath all right. I runned ever so fatht. And I thaw the paper, and never wath frightened of the cowth, and I would have catched him, Jill, I really would, only I couldn't get over the palings, and my legs thtuck where they oughtn't to, and then I tumbled on my head and—and——"

Bumps came to a stop; then she added piteously, "I'll do better next time, Jack. I really will."

And Jack replied with a patronising air. "Oh yes, you'll do, when you grow bigger."

"Mona is coming back, children," said Miss Webb one morning as she opened her letters at the breakfast-table. "She does not say why she is coming home so much sooner than she intended, but I suppose she will tell us. She will be here this afternoon."

The children were delighted. Mona was a constant source of interest and admiration to

them. When she was in the house, there was a stir and bustle; the very servants seemed to go asleep in her absence.

Miss Webb had tea out upon the lawn that afternoon, and when Mona arrived, she seemed struck with the children's orderly dress and behaviour, and the quiet peacefulness of the old garden.

"There is no place like home after all," she said as she sat in a low wicker-chair with Bumps on her lap.

Miss Webb looked at her with keen eyes.

"You are tired and worried about something," she said. "Didn't you enjoy your visit?"

"Very much till yesterday," and Mona gave a little shiver. Then she bent her lips, and touched Bumps' golden head with them caressingly.

"I had a full programme," she said with a little laugh. "The Tambourne Races to-day, the Regatta to-morrow, and Lady Donald's ball next Monday, followed by her village theatricals and concert. There was an awfully nice girl staying with us. Maud Crichton was her name. She used to come into my room every night to have a chat, and I was going to bring her back here to stay with me. She was

rather seedy a few days ago, and we thought it a heavy cold. Only last night she was sitting up with me, and though her head was very bad, we were making wonderful plans. This morning she was covered with a thick rash. I heard she had almost been light-headed in the night. The doctor came and pronounced it scarlet fever. Of course there was a general stampede. I'm terrified lest she should have infected me. What do you think, Miss Webb?"

Miss Webb looked grave, then quietly took Bumps off Mona's lap and sent her indoors, telling the others to follow.

"You don't think of the children," she said a little reproachfully.

"The children? Good gracious! You're taking it for granted I am going to get it! Why, Miss Webb, it drives me frantic to think I may! What can I do? Shall I send for a doctor for some preventive?"

Miss Webb saw the girl was thoroughly frightened and unstrung, so she spoke very quietly.

"You are not a weak, hysterical girl, Mona. Do for pity's sake control yourself. It is not very likely you will take it; but if you did, there are many things worse than scarlet fever. What makes you so frightened?"

"Oh," said Mona, covering her face with her hands, "I might die. It is so awful to think about it. And wasn't it strange, Miss Webb, we had a sermon last Sunday with the gruesome text: 'Prepare to meet thy God.' Now don't let us talk any more about it. Give me another cup of tea. I call it ridiculous to send the children away."

Mona pulled herself together with an effort. After that one revelation of her frightened soul, she did not touch upon the subject again, but Miss Webb watched her anxiously, and would not let the children be much with her. A week afterwards, Mona was taken ill with the disease she so much dreaded. Her extreme nervousness about herself did not help her. Miss Webb promptly telegraphed to Miss Falkner —"Scarlet fever in house. Can you take children to seaside?"

And though Miss Falkner had only had a month's holiday, instead of six weeks, she replied at once—

"Certainly, will return to-morrow."

"It's rather exciting!" said Jack to Jill as they stood at the school-room window watching for the arrival of their governess. "I don't want Mona to be ill, but I'm jolly glad we're going to the seaside."

"I'm glad Miss Falkner is coming with us, but I rather think I'd like to have scarlet fever. It must be so nice to have the doctor and a nurse, and jellies and beef-tea, and everybody fussing over you."

The arrival of the carriage stopped further discussion, and in another moment all three children were flinging themselves upon their governess, nearly choking her with their eager embraces.

They went the next day to a small seaside place about three miles from Chilton Common. There was a nice sandy beach, a row of lodging-houses, a stone pier and fishing-wharf; and the children were perfectly content with their lot. Annie came with them, and their landlady knew them well, for it was not the first time they had been there.

"Miss Falkner, can't we go and see Chilton Common one day?" asked Jill, soon after they had arrived.

"Why, you funny child!" said Miss Falkner, smiling. "The only reason you liked to go to Chilton Common was because you could see the sea in the distance; and now you are actually at the sea, you want to go to the Common."

"Ah!" said Jill, "but I want to find the

place where our mission-room is going to be."

"I forgot that," admitted Miss Falkner. "But it is too far for you to walk, Jill. We must wait till we get home, I think, and then we can drive there."

So Jill tried to be patient, and she was very fond of mounting a small hill close to the town where she could get a fine view of the Common, and one day Miss Falkner found her there, shaking her red bag wildly in the air at it.

"There!" she was saying, "do you see the place you are going to build upon! The fatter you get, the better for Chilton Common!"

They heard from Miss Webb, but her letters always smelt of carbolic, and Miss Falkner burnt them directly she had read them. Mona was very ill, and one morning Miss Falkner got a letter that rather startled her. It was as usual from Miss Webb.

"DEAR MISS FALKNER,

"I remember you told me that you were not afraid of scarlet fever, having had it a few years ago. Would you be afraid of coming to Mona? She is crying out for you incessantly day and night, and I do not think it is mere

delirium. She says you would help her to get well, and the poor girl seems in terror lest she should not do so. Dr. Forbes says if her mind could be eased, there would be more chance of her recovery. Leave the children with Annie. I am sure they will be good when they know that Mona needs you. And nothing seems to matter in comparison with Mona's life. If you feel you can come, come at once."

Miss Falkner went straight to her room and put up a few things in a portmanteau. She called Jill to her, and told her about the letter.

"I am going to trust you, Jill, to keep the others out of mischief, and ask God, dear, to make your sister better, if it is His will."

Jill looked rather blank at the news.

"You are always leaving us now," she said; "and Jack won't do what I tell him. He never would. Mona has got Miss Webb, she doesn't want you too!"

This was much Annie's opinion.

"Miss Baron doesn't ever think of anybody but herself," she confided to Mrs. Pratt the landlady. "If she took a fancy to see one of the children she'd never think of the risk to them, but she'd insist upon them coming to her. She's a nice young lady to speak to, but she's

always had her own way, and poor Miss Falkner must go to help nurse her now!"

When Miss Falkner came softly into the sick-room, she was shocked at the change in Mona.

She lay with crimson cheeks and parched dry lips upon her pillows, restlessly turning her head to and fro; her beautiful hair had all been cut off; her eyes were thick and vacant; her voice husky and indistinct.

A gleam of recognition lit up her face as Miss Falkner stooped over her and spoke to her.

"Is it Miss Falkner? You are good, you know how to pray. I am not ready to die. Pray for me. It is cruel to take my life so soon, and he will keep preaching 'Prepare to meet Thy God.' Do stop him. Of course it is Cecil Arnold; I laughed at him, but I knew I was wrong and he was right. I can't prepare. I don't know how to. And why should I give up a tenth of my money—even little Jill is laughing at me—she and Cecil Arnold putting their heads together, and he won't look at me, he doesn't care for me any more. Oh, if only you will help me!"

This and much more in the same strain she poured forth.

Miss Falkner soothed her for the time, and the next day when she was lying weak and exhausted, but fully conscious, she spoke again.

"Do you think I shall get over this, Miss Falkner!"

"I think—I hope you will," said Miss Falkner brightly. "I am praying that you may."

"I know I have lived only for pleasure, but if, oh, if God spares my life, I will give Him some of my money. It has worried me so. Even the children are giving now more than I do."

"There is something God wants more than your money," said Miss Falkner gently. "It is of more value to Him than that."

"What is it? Oh, if I get well I will give it. Life is everything to me."

"It is your soul."

The words were spoken in a soft whisper, and there was silence in the room for some time after that.

At last Mona put her wasted hand out.

"I will give it to Him, if He spares my life."

* * * * *

"Jack, Mona is going to get well. Miss Webb has written to tell us so. Oh, do let us do something jolly to-day."

"We'll have a donkey ride. There's a man just come along the road with four of them. Come on!"

But, alas! When purses were produced, only eightpence could be collected, and the donkey man shook his head.

"I wish," said Jack discontentedly, "that we needn't always be giving to the Bag."

Jill got hot and indignant at once.

"You greedy, wicked boy, after your vow too. Remember Ananias and Sapphira!"

"But they took the money; I haven't."

"No, but you're almost wishing to!"

"I'm not," said Jack sullenly.

"What's the matter, my boy?" asked an old lady, who was sitting on a sheltered seat on the beach, and who had overheard a part of this conversation.

"We want a donkey ride," said Jack bluntly; "and we haven't got enough money."

The old lady quietly drew out a rusty black bag from her pocket.

"I used to like donkey rides when I was a little girl," she said, "so I'll treat you to one. Where would you like to go?"

The children could hardly believe their ears. But Jill's one thought came uppermost at once.

"To Chilton Common," she said. "Oh! we should love to go there."

The old lady spoke to the man.

"Where is your nurse?" she said. "Will she like you to go so far?"

"Oh, Annie won't mind. We always play out here till dinner-time."

So in a few minutes, four donkeys were going at a steady trot towards Chilton Common; the man himself riding on one of them. It seemed a long way to the children, but Jill enlivened the way by telling the man about their tenth bag, and the room that they hoped to build on the Common.

"You might help if you like," she suggested. "You could give a tenth out of what the lady is going to give you this morning. It's going to be a tenth room or church, because it's going to be built out of our tenths."

"Don't believe in parsons or churches," said the man emphatically.

"Do you mean you don't like them?" questioned Jill. "Don't you go to church yourself?"

"Never been inside a church since I were a Sunday-school brat."

"Oh! that sounds dreadful!" said Jill, eyeing him with severity.

"Fact!" said the donkey man, giving Jill's donkey a vicious whack with his stick, and making her start off at a gallop. But Jill could stick to her donkey and to her point at the same time.

"Well, if you don't want to go to church, other people do; and they can't do it on Chilton Common. You wait till we get there, and then you will see what it is like! And I'm sure you would like to give God some of your money, wouldn't you? You must get a lot of money by your donkeys. *Everybody* likes to ride on donkeys!"

"I'm a poor man, an' has a hard job to get my vittles," was the response. "Let rich folk build churches and such like. Let 'em throw away their money on such foolery, but a hard-workin' man has better to do with his'n."

"But," argued Jill, who from her long discussion with Sam was quite prepared for these sentiments, "you aren't as poor as we are. If no one gives me a present I get threepence a week, but it doesn't matter how little you have, the first ten pennies you get, you put one aside for God. Now do, won't you? You really ought to, for God gives you your donkeys and your money. Supposing if your donkeys broke their legs, or you broke yours! Then you

wouldn't be able to get any money. And if God takes care of you and your donkeys every day, I expect He's very disappointed that you don't give Him a little money!"

This and much more Jill eagerly poured forth, and at last her driver took refuge in silent chuckles and shakes of his head. He would not be drawn out any more. They arrived in due time on the Common. It was a lovely day, and a few women came out on their doorsteps to watch the little cavalcade.

The children dismounted, and began earnestly disputing about the best site for the mission-room. Jill took into her confidence one of the women who seemed greatly interested.

"You see," she said, "Mr. Errington and us are going to build a church here when we can get enough money. Where would you like it put?"

"We bain't church-goers," said the woman laughing.

"No, but you will be when you get a church."

"Now," said the donkey man, getting bolder when he saw he would be supported by a majority; "will 'ee tell us, little miss, what good a church does 'ee?"

He raised his voice, and several lads and women drew near to listen.

Jill climbed back on her donkey. She did not like the look of the rough boys, but she bravely held her ground.

"It's a place where you can hear about Jesus," she said reverently, "and where you can ask Him what you want. Miss Falkner says He is always there to meet you."

"And what good do He do?" asked a lad with a mocking laugh.

"He helps you to set out, and keep on going to the Golden City," said Jill, looking at him with shocked disapproval. "You wait till you get your church, and Mr. Errington comes out to tell you all about it. You'll wish when you hear about it, that you'd been told *hundreds* of years ago!"

There was loud laughter, but one of the women came forward and looked at Jill somewhat wistfully.

"Your Golden City reminds me of a hymn I used to sing in Sunday school," she said. "It began, 'Jeroos'lem the golden'!"

"Yes, I know it," said Jill, nodding; "and when you get your church I'll ask Mr. Errington to let you have that hymn every Sunday if you like."

"Shall we have hymn singin'?" questioned a boy, with a white face and dark shock of hair. "Who'll do the moosic?"

"Mr. Errington will do it *all,*" said Jill with proud emphasis. "And when the church is open, I shall come over, and Jack, and Bumps, and Miss Falkner. And we'll be in our Sunday clothes, and you will be in yours, and the church will be *crammed!* And there'll be lots of music and singing, and we shall all enjoy it awfully! And after it's over"—here her imagination ran away with her—"we'll all shake hands, and say how glad we are, and then we'll have flags waving and bells ringing, and a lovely tea which we'll sit down to all together, with cakes and buns, and tea in urns, like a schoolfeast!"

Jack, who had been listening in silence, broke in now with enthusiasm.

"And then we'll have three cheers for the King, and three cheers for Mr. Errington, and three cheers for our red bag that got the money, and we'll finish up with a bonfire and fireworks!"

Jill pulled out her red bag which she had stuffed into her pocket, and wildly waved it in the air.

"Hurray for Chilton Common Church!"

she cried, and the children and rough lads round joined in her cheer with a hearty good-will.

"Now," she said, relapsing from enthusiasm to business, "where would you like us to build it?"

There was a little silence. Some of the women went indoors. The group thinned. Jack looked round wisely.

"I think we'll let Mr. Errington choose the place," he said. "I'm sure it's time to go back."

"Well," said Jill, turning to the blacksmith, who had left his forge and had come out to know what the cheers were about, "I've told you what is going to happen, and if you like to give a tenth of your money and give it to God, I will take it and put it in my red bag and give it to Mr. Errington."

The blacksmith put his hand in his pocket and brought out sixpence.

"There be my mite towards it," he said. "I always did say a parson up here would be the thing!"

Jill thanked him profusely, dropped the sixpence in her bag, and the children rode away, followed for a short distance by a screaming crowd of small boys and girls.

# XII

## THE BISHOP AND THE GEESE

WHEN they reached the beach again the old lady was just in the act of departing for her lunch. She cheerfully paid the donkey man, but Jill was watching the transaction anxiously, and pursued the man to the end of the beach, where she held an earnest conversation with him.

"Jill is trying to make him give up his tenth," said Jack confidentially to the old lady. "I don't think she'll do it."

"What do you mean, child?"

Explanation followed, and with Bumps' eager and breathless interruptions, the old lady got quite mystified.

"Why do you keep talking about a tenth?" she said.

"Because it's a tenth that God expects from everybody," said Jack. "I suppose you give yours to somebody to look after, don't you?"

"I don't give a tenth of my money away at all," said the lady snappishly. "That is an old Jewish law. Thank goodness, we are not Jews, but Christians."

"But Miss Falkner told us it wasn't only meant for Jews," argued Jack. "She says everybody who gets money from God ought to give back some to Him."

"Yeth," nodded Bumps; "and becauth we can't send it up to heaven, Miss Falkner thaid we could thpend it on good things for God down on the earth, and we would be very happy if you gave us your money for our bag, wouldn't we, Jack?"

Jack was not a good beggar. He got hot and red.

"We don't ask people for money," he said; "but if they like to give us their tenth we should be pleased."

"Jill asks," said Bumps. "She asks everybody!"

"Oh, dear!" said the old lady, "here she comes running back! I must go. There, my boy, there's a coin for your bag!"

She put a sovereign into Jack's hand.

"Is it your tenth?" he asked wonderingly; "what a lot of money you must have! Thank you very much!"

But the old lady was gone, and strangely enough the children never saw her again.

"Have you got any money from the donkey man?" asked Jack.

"Yes," said Jill in quiet triumph. "He gave me sixpence. I don't know whether it was quite a tenth, but he seemed very pleased to do it—at least he got pleased. He said he had never done such a good thing in his life, and he hoped that it would be remembered. I told him God wouldn't forget it, for He can't forget anything. And he told me he only lives a mile from Chilton Common, and when the church is built I'm to let him know, and he will come and see it. He's a nice man!"

Then Jack opened his hand, and let her see what he had got. Jill screamed in ecstacy; the red bag was produced, and when both coins were safely deposited, they ran indoors to their dinner, feeling they had had an eventful morning.

The days passed slowly. There were days when everything went wrong, when Jill, as well as Jack and Bumps, was seized with the spirit of mischief and naughtiness. She was very repentant when the day was over, but Annie did not understand her moods, and was not so long-suffering as Miss Falkner.

"It's no good leading me such a life all day, and then thinking you make it all right by saying you're sorry," she said with great severity. "You're all talk, Miss Jill! pretending to be

so good with your bag of money, and making Miss Bumps as wicked as yourself when you choose! I've no belief in them that talks good, and acts wicked!"

Jill's passionate temper was aroused at once.

"I don't pretend, and I don't talk good! And I hate you, Annie! It's you that make us wicked! Miss Falkner never does! I'll run away, and go straight home, and catch the scarlet fever! I won't stay with you!"

Annie laughed scornfully.

"Words again! You want a piece clipped out of your saucy tongue, Miss Jill!"

Jill was sitting up in bed. With all her strength she flung her pillow in Annie's face.

Annie caught it, and marched out of the room with it.

"You naughty, impudent child! I shall take it right away to punish you. You can sleep without it to-night!"

Jill buried her burning cheeks in her bolster, and began to cry.

Bumps sat up and ruefully regarded her.

"Never mind, Jill. Annie is horrid. Oh, pleath don't cry!"

"It's no good," sobbed poor Jill. "Annie doesn't mean me to finish off being wicked. She tries to make me go on for ever. Nobody

understands but Miss Falkner. It's no use to try to be good again. I shall have to go on being in disgrace. I've gone miles away from my path to the Golden City to-day, and just when I'm trying to find my way back again, Annie pushes me away. I shall give it up altogether. I shall throw my red bag in the sea to-morrow, and shall give no more tenths to God. I shall be as wicked as I possibly can. I'm meant to be wicked!"

"Oh, dear!" sighed Bumps, in despair. "You do want Miss Falkner, Jill."

"Of course I do," said Jill, angrily. "How can I be good without her?"

"I wonder," said Bumps, "if God would do instead!"

There was silence. Bumps sometimes—baby though she was—had the rare faculty of hitting the nail straight on the head.

Jill stopped her weeping and began to think.

"I think," she said, after a few minutes' silence, "I'll just tell God all about it. I'd like to tell Him how nasty Annie is!"

Better thoughts soon stole into her angry little heart.

"There's one thing," she said presently, startling Bumps out of her first sleep; "God knows the proper truth about me. He knows

I am sorry that I was tiresome to-day! Annie doesn't believe me, but He will. And He knows I don't pretend to be good!"

"Yeth," assented Bumps, drowsily; "He knowth it!"

Jill dropped asleep comforted.

The long time was over at last. Mona recovered and went away for change of air; the house was cleaned and re-papered, and one day Miss Falkner arrived to take them home.

"We almost like lessons now," said Jack. "We've had such long holidays."

But when lessons began the children found them irksome. They had become thoroughly unsettled, and accustomed to careless, unpunctual ways. Miss Falkner's regular routine fretted and chafed them. She found she needed all her patience to bring them and keep them under her control.

"I think," Jill said to Jack, one day, and her face was thoughtful as she spoke, "that no one can be properly good till they are twenty. I wonder how old Miss Falkner is."

"She's just as old as Mona," said Jack. "I heard Mona tell Miss Webb so."

"How funny! But she's not a bit like Mona."

"No. Miss Webb said to Mona when she

told her, 'You are a child beside her, Mona.' Now, what did she mean by that?"

Jill pondered.

"Miss Falkner looks older. And I expect being good makes you old. Miss Falkner is *very* good. I'm sure when I try to be very good, and make you and Bumps good too, I feel—I feel a hundred years old!'

"I don't think children are meant to be *very* good," said Jack. "People always talk of us as if we're wicked. P'raps we ought to be good on Sundays."

"If we're walking to the Golden City, we ought to be good every day," said Jill decidedly.

Jack shook his curly head.

"I've thought of a lovely game I'm going to make Bumps play at."

"What?" asked Jill in an eager tone.

"Why you know the story that comes in our reading-books about the geese who saved Rome by cackling when the enemy was creeping up. I'm going to be the enemy, and Bumps and you must be asleep."

"But where?" asked Jill. "It was on the top of a high hill."

"Yes," nodded Jack; "but I've thought it out. There's the church tower. We'll do it

to-morrow afternoon, and we'll take the geese up first."

"That will be splendid," said Jill; "only how will you do it? Remember the swans! I think if we can get hold of their food, and hold it out to them, they'll follow us, but how will you climb up to the tower?"

"Tom Sanders has done it. He told me he did, and I'm longing to try. You climb the yew tree first, and then get on to the ivy. Then you get in at the belfry window. He got out again and went up by the lightning-conductor, but I thought the geese would see me climbing in at the window and then they'll cackle—and of course I shan't be able to come on any further."

"But supposing they don't cackle?"

"Well, that's the game—to see if they do! If they don't, I shall know Roman history tells lies. Because, of course, these geese are just the same as those were."

"These are English geese!" Jill said doubtfully.

Jack was undaunted. He was a true little Briton.

"Then they must be better than Roman geese, and they'll cackle twice as loud, and be double as fierce!"

So the next afternoon when lessons were over, instead of playing in the garden, the three children stole quietly off to the farmyard.

The prospect was so exciting that even Jill had no qualms of conscience. Jack had persuaded one of the farm lads who looked after the geese to save him a dish of their food. Armed with a big dish he boldly went up to the biggest gander, who greedily put his head into it at once. It was the signal for all the others to follow suit. Then Jack, holding the dish, ran out of the farmyard; and to the children's delight, away strode the flock of geese after him, stretching out their necks and shrieking in protest. Jill and Bumps followed behind with switches to drive them along. Unfortunately, the fowls joined the chase, and two small black pigs escaped out of the yard and with squeals of delight raced into the flower-garden. Out into the lane the little procession went, and the geese behaved very well. Occasionally one or two would dive into a ditch after frogs, which delayed progress, but with Jill and Bumps chasing them behind, and Jack enticing them in front, they at last reached the churchyard, which was not very far away. The door of the tower was found open, and the

geese were with a little difficulty driven in. But when Jill turned and shut the door a pandemonium ensued. The frightened birds screamed, and beat their wings against each other. As to making them mount the spiral stone steps, it seemed an impossibility. When Jack caught hold of the gander and tried to hoist him up, he turned and pecked at his hand so viciously that it began to bleed. Bumps got frightened, and crept into an empty oak chest. Jill coaxed and beat the birds by turns, and geese and children shrieked at the top of their voices, till the old tower echoed and re-echoed with the noise.

But Jack and Jill never gave up any cherished plan very easily.

By perseverance, and with much toil and persuasion, they got two young geese to the top. Their wings were strong and they flew most of the way. With these two birds they were forced to be content. Poor Bumps was forgotten, and the gander and his tribe were so furious at being entrapped in such a manner, that they shrieked and fought like furies. Bumps felt if she showed herself amongst them she would literally be torn to pieces, so she lay still in her chest, her little heart panting and throbbing with fright.

Presently she heard voices in the church, and in a few minutes the belfry door was flung open.

Mr. Errington had been entertaining his bishop that day, and had brought him and a party of ladies to look at a beautiful old screen in the church. Their consternation and amazement was considerable when the flock of angry geese confronted them. The ladies beat a hasty retreat behind the yew tree, and the bishop spoke sternly to the vicar, though there was a twinkle in his eye.

"Is this usual, Errington? Is the belfry your poultry-yard?"

And poor Mr. Errington was so utterly astonished that he could not utter a sound.

Away waddled the geese down the churchyard path, and then Bumps lifted up her voice, and her little body too, thereby causing a second alarm.

"Pleath it's only me," she explained, climbing out of her retreat. "The geeth were so angry, I wath quite frightened!"

"Are you a little goose girl?" asked the bishop, bending over her, and putting his hand under her chin.

"No," said Bumps, feeling distinctly aggrieved; "I'm not a gooth at all. It's a

game, only the thtupid geeth won't play properly!"

"I am afraid my lord," said Mr. Errington, recovering his presence of mind, "that some young people have been making free of this belfry without my knowledge."

Then turning to Bumps he said, "Where are your brother and sister? I fancy they are the culprits."

"They're upstairs," said Bumps, tears filling her blue eyes, which she vainly struggled to keep back. "They're playing the game without me. They always does when I get left behind. The geeth wouldn't go up-stairs, but Jack and Jill made two of them go."

"And what game are you playing?" asked the bishop gently.

"It's something about Rome and geeth that have to cackle, and an enemy. Jack is the enemy; he is climbing up outthide, and the top is Rome, and the geeth have to wake Jill and me up. But I've never been athleep, and it's all no good!"

Tears dropped on her white pinafore.

The bishop looked more amused than angry. He turned to Mr. Errington—

"They say that some of our churches lead to Rome, Errington, but these youngsters have

been early in discovering it. I should like to go up to Rome, I think. Will you lead the way?"

So Mr. Errington obeyed, and the ladies rustled after them, taking Bumps with them. When they came out on top, two geese were being held down forcibly by a very hot and dirty little boy and girl.

"Stop your cackling, you brutes!" Jack was screaming. "I want you to stop till I come up! They're no good, Jill, if they go on like this, and they'll be flying over the tower next. What shall we do? Let us tie their legs!"

"Jack!"

Mr. Errington's tone was so sternly indignant that the boy started and let go of his goose, which flew frantically between the bishop's legs, knocked Bumps down, and finally took a header down the the belfry stairs.

"What do you mean by this? How dare you use this church for such a purpose? Isn't your garden large enough for your games?"

"We haven't got a tower," mumbled Jack.

Jill broke in eagerly, "Please Mr. Errington don't be angry. We haven't been into the church. We wouldn't think of playing games

in there. We didn't think you'd mind up here, and it is a history game."

"It seems to me," said the bishop, looking at Mr. Errington with a twinkle in his eye, "that you have some scamps amongst your parishioners as well as examples. I have been hearing"—here the bishop turned to Jack and Jill—"of some good little children that I think you would do well to imitate. You might expend some of your superfluous zeal on following their example. These children are steadily putting by a tenth of all their money, and persuading many of their friends to do the same, with the object of building a mission-room in a neglected neighbourhood!"

Jack and Jill looked at the bishop with open eyes and mouth.

"But that's *us!*" gasped Jill.

There was a moment's silence. Then the bishop's sense of humour overcame him and he laughed loud, the ladies joining him, only Mr. Errington preserving his gravity.

As he descended the stairs again, he said to the vicar, "One lives and learns, Errington. I had forgotten the complex natures of children."

## XIII

### MONA'S TENTH

IT seemed a long time to the children before Mona returned, and their first sight of her was a distinct shock to them.

She came back with a closely-cropped head, and a white face, looking so fragile that Bumps confided to Jack that she thought "Mona must be nearly dying."

But her voice and laugh reassured them.

They wondered when they saw her kiss Miss Falkner.

"Do you like her very much?" asked Jack.

"*Very* much," said Mona promptly. "She came to me when I wanted her, and it was through her that I got well again!"

"But hadn't you any doctors?"

"Miss Falkner was my doctor."

This sounded puzzling, but Mona astonished them still more by things she said and did. She came into the school-room while the Bible-reading was going on and asked Miss Falkner questions about it, as if she were one of her pupils. She started having family prayers;

and then one afternoon Jill found her trespassing again in the vicinity of "Bethel."

"I think I must join your Tenth Society, Jill. Tell me what you do."

Jill's face flushed crimson with delight.

"Will you? Do you mean it really? And will you put your tenth into the red bag?"

Mona appeared to be considering.

"My tenth will be a big affair by the side of yours, Jill. What does the red bag do with your money?"

"I take it to Mr. Errington every fortnight. He keeps the money. It's for Chilton Common, you know. They do want a church there dreadfully."

"I think I must have a little talk with Mr. Errington about it."

"But you will help us to fill our bag, won't you?"

"I dare say I shall."

Mona was looking away through the pines rather dreamily as she spoke. Jill brought her back to the subject in hand.

"And will you join us now? Properly? You will, won't you? And say the vow by our stones like Jacob? Let me just go and tell Jack and Bumps. They would love to hear you."

But Mona caught hold of her as she was flying off.

"No, Jill. Grown-up people have different ways to children. It isn't a game to me, and it means a great deal more than you could imagine. But I like your quaint idea of raising a little Bethel under the pines here, and if you leave me quite alone, I will take the vow in the same place that you did. More you cannot expect from me."

"But somebody ought to hear you," objected Jill. "I am sure it's more proper to have people looking on."

"God will hear me. Did Jacob have people near him?"

Jill was speechless. Then obediently she walked away, and waited for her sister at the entrance to the wood. When Mona joined her there was a soft radiancy about her face that made her look very beautiful.

"Oh, Jill," she said, "a tenth seems such a miserable portion to offer back. How shall I ever pay the debt of all the past wasted years?"

"And when will you divide your money?" asked Jill. "Do let me see you do it. And if it's too difficult, Miss Falkner is very good at sums. She'll do it for you."

"I shall go and see Mr. Errington this afternoon. You must be patient, Jill. All in good time."

The next day the children were walking out in the village with Miss Falkner when they met the vicar.

He beamed when he saw them.

"Have you heard the good news?" he said. "Miss Baron did not bind me to secrecy. Perhaps she has told you herself?"

"I think I know," said Jill, nodding wisely.

"I have written to a builder, an old friend of mine, and asked him to come over at once and talk it out with me. Now the money is forthcoming we shall soon have the mission-room."

"What!" cried Jill. "Have you got enough money to build it?"

"Indeed I have. And we'll have it up in no time."

"I wonder how the people will like it," said Miss Falkner meditatively.

Mr. Errington looked quickly at her.

"A month ago I should have had heart-sinkings on that point. But I assure you it is their chief topic at present when I go over to them. I fancy sometimes they expect it to bring to them more temporal than spiritual

food; but it is owing to a visit from these small people that their antagonism has vanished."

"But who—how have you got the money, Mr. Errington?" inquired Jack.

"Ask your sister. She may enlighten you."

"It is Mona's tenth!" exclaimed Jill, capering up and down in delight. "How soon will it be built, Mr. Errington, next week?"

Mr. Errington laughed as he went his way.

"Oh, you young people! So hot and impatient, so quick to resolve and carry out. I wish I could instill some of your spirits into the sluggish natures that I have to deal with!"

The children could do little else but talk of Chilton Common all that day.

"And now," said Jack, "if all the money is got for the church, where is our tenth money to go to?"

"I think it will be some time before everything will be bought," said Miss Falkner. "You must remember there will be lots of things wanted inside the mission-room; seats —hassocks, perhaps—lamps, and all kinds of other articles. Mr. Errington will like to get your money for some time to come, I am sure."

"And there are always the heathen to send it to," said Jill. "They never come to an end,

do they, Miss Faulkner? You send your money to them always, don't you?"

"Yes," Miss Falkner replied. "I feel more drawn towards them. At home here in England there are so many to teach and help the ignorant ones. Out abroad there are millions still out of reach of help and Christianity."

Jill looked grave.

"And how much money does it take exactly to make a heathen a Christian, Miss Falkner?"

Miss Falkner smiled.

"I can't tell you, Jill. There is the cost of a missionary going out; he or she are the means, with God's help, of converting a heathen. But every little helps."

"Mr. Errington says the Chilton Common people are heathen!"

"Yes, dear, he means they are living without any thought of God."

"But we did that before you came to us. Really and truly, Miss Falkner, we never thought about God at all. And I'm afraid I didn't want to. You see no one had told us about the Golden City. And I didn't know that Jesus loved us so, and would help us, and keep on forgiving us."

Jill's face was earnest and sweet. Her governess stooped and kissed her.

"But you know about it now, dear, and you must try to help others who are still ignorant."

Jill nodded, then ran away to play.

Autumn came, and then winter. Mr. Errington's energy never flagged; and it was a happy day for the children when the foundation-stone was laid for the mission-room on Chilton Common.

Mona was asked to lay it, but for some time she hesitated, and suggested that Jill should do it instead. Jill flatly refused, and Miss Falkner encouraged her in her refusal.

"I do not hold with children being placed in prominent positions," she said to Mona when they were talking the matter over. "Jill is a clever child, and wants to be repressed rather than pushed forward. I am glad to see she has the good sense to be shy of such a ceremony."

"But I am such a beginner," said Mona humbly. "I have never gone in for good works, and lots of my friends—even Miss Webb—think that my illness has left my brain a little weak and queer."

"Your friends could not think laying a foundation-stone queer conduct. And if they do, what does it matter?"

The children were having their talk about it round the school-room fire.

"I shouldn't like to lay a foundation-stone," said Jack. "Fancy, if you put it a little crooked, then the whole place would tumble down! Sam told me so."

"I should love to build it all," said Jill. "Sticking bricks and stones into clay or wet stuff is lovely! But I couldn't do it with a lot of people and clergymen looking on. I hate people staring!"

"Is it the very bottomest thtone of all?" questioned Bumps with big eyes.

"Of course, stupid!" said Jack. "Do you think it would be the top one?"

"I asked Mr. Errington what it was going to be called," said Jill. "He says he doesn't want exactly a church there, because he wants to give them tea and magic lanterns in the winter, so it's a mission-room, and do you know what he says we can call it? The Bethel Mission-room."

Jack and Bumps set up a cheer at once.

"It's called after our stones," went on Jill proudly. "Mr. Errington said it had been built by tenths. And he told me the meaning of Bethel, which I didn't know before."

"What does it mean?"

"The house of God."

There was silence for a minute, then Jack said slowly—

"But our place under the pines isn't that."

"I like to think it is sometimes," said Jill quietly.

The day came at last for the ceremony of laying the foundation-stone. Even Miss Webb, who viewed most of Mona's proceedings now with raised eyebrows, entered into the spirit of it with real heartiness.

When they drove out to the desolate spot all the inhabitants of the Common were there, and Jack and Jill walked amongst them, greeting them as old friends.

Mona performed her part very gracefully.

Mr. Errington had a good many friends present, but none enjoyed it all so much as the children.

"This is only the very beginning of it," Jill confided to a rough specimen of girlhood, who had been making depreciatory remarks, after the service was over. "You wait till your room is built, then you'll see."

"What shall us see? A parson in a pulpit?"

"You'll see the way to the Golden City," Jill said enthusiastically. "And Mr. Erring-

ton will be always telling you about it till you all set out and go. And he'll give you teas and magic lanterns. I wish I lived here to see the workmen build it. I should come and watch them every day, and make them hurry."

As they drove home in the carriage with Mona they heard a startling bit of news.

It was Miss Webb who began talking of the room.

"Mr. Errington is quite down at leaving. He told me it is only his wife's health that takes him. He hopes to hurry on the building —but I doubt if it will be finished before the New Year. It is strange that as soon as he gets his desire about this wild bit of his parish that he should have to leave it."

"Is Mr. Errington going away?" asked Jill breathlessly.

Mona looked at her gravely as she answered—

"Yes, I suppose you can all know it now. You can't be as sorry as I am. I was just getting to like him so."

Miss Webb gave a little laugh.

"It wasn't so long ago that you used to vote him a bore, my dear. There are plenty of clergy. We must hope for one as good."

"But," cried Jill, "he can't go away. Who

is to take our bag every Saturday? And the room is for him to preach in. Oh, how dreadful of him to go!"

"Lady Crane has the gift of the living, has she not?" said Miss Webb, addressing Mona.

"Yes, I believe so," said Mona listlessly.

"Perhaps she may give it to Cecil Arnold. He is her nephew!"

A rich colour came into Mona's cheeks.

"Oh, no," she said confusedly. "Why should she? Besides, he would never leave his work in the north."

Miss Webb nodded her head knowingly.

"Wait and see, my dear; wait and see!"

It was a great blow to the children, and as soon as lessons were over the next morning Jack and Jill ran off to the Vicarage as hard as they could go.

Mrs. Errington received them; her husband was out.

"We don't know what to do," Jill said breathlessly. "If Mr. Errington goes away, we can't get on at all. Do beg him not to. Why does he go?"

"My dear child, we are both very loth to leave, but circumstances are against us. I have been told by the doctors that I shall never be better here. If we take this other living

offered to us, I may be able to help Mr. Errington instead of being a constant source of anxiety to him."

"It's the bag," Jill said; "it's the bag I am thinking of. I can't bring it to a strange clergyman. I hate strangers! It's too bad of you!"

Jill actually began to cry.

"You see," explained Jack, "some people laugh at us. Now Mr. Errington never did. He understood from the very beginning. Mona used to laugh, but she doesn't now. Miss Webb always does. She told Jill she was a Mrs. Judas, for she kept the bag. Mona scolded her. And Sir Henry Talbot always teases us. He asks if we have taken up any more trespassers. They think themselves very funny, but we don't think them funny, we hate them when they talk so."

"I am sure no clergyman would laugh at you," said Mrs. Errington gently. "We will tell our successor all about you, and he will be only too glad to help you in every way he can."

"But what will you tell him about us?" asked Jill, drying her eyes. "You won't tell him of our scrapes, will you? Say that we always mean to be good, it's just accidents happening when we aren't. And tell him he has

just to take the money and use it for God, and ask no questions. Because, when the room is built our money will still be going on. We shall never stop, you know. We're not like Sam's father. He says his cabbages are done, and he can't grow any more in the winter. But I know he has got some turnips, and I'm going to talk to him about them. Oh, I do wish you weren't going away!"

It was the general wish in the village, and there was great concern amongst all Mr. Errington's parishioners. His church was never so full as during the two months before his departure, and as Bumps pathetically remarked—

"There'll be no one like him in church ever again. There never are twos of anybody, except twins, and Mr. Errington isn't a twin."

## XIV

### "YOU AND YOUR RED BAG ARE AT THE BOTTOM OF IT ALL!"

MONA was looking out of the drawing-room window one fine bright frosty afternoon, when she saw Jill tearing out of the stable-yard with the large carriage-whip in her hand.

Her face was almost as red as her Tam o' Shanter, and Mona exclaimed to Miss Webb—

"I wonder what is the matter! Jill is in one of her tempers. I hope she is not going to wreak vengeance on any human being."

"Oh, let her alone," said Miss Webb. "She must have an explosion now and then, for the way she bottles up her spirits now is marvellous. Miss Falkner seems to have no complaint to find with any of them. It is not natural."

Mona laughed lightly, but putting on a wrap she slipped out of the house and crossed the lawn. Angry voices led her to the pine wood. There before the trespassers' board she found

Jill brandishing her whip with fury in her face. Jack was by her side, armed with a stout stick; and Bumps, well in the rear, was picking up fir cones, and throwing them wildly at everybody.

Two workmen were the aggressors; the pile of stones was scattered on the ground, and they seemed to be enjoying the children's wrath.

"Who put those stones up?" Jill was screaming. "*I* did, and you're thieves to touch them!"

"But they comed from that there wall," argued the younger of the men; "and us have orders to build it up. 'Twasn't business of yours to take them stones from the wall. Back they shall go, or my name isn't Jim Hall!"

"You dare to touch one!" shouted Jack. "Come on and try, we're ready for you!"

"You're trespassers and thieves!" cried Jill. "Come on! I have my whip ready!"

It was at this juncture Mona stepped up. Directly she appeared, Jill dashed forward.

"Look at these men, they've pulled down our stones! They did it on purpose! They saw the board and they laughed at it. They are cheeking us now."

"Hush!" said Mona. Then turning to the men she asked very quietly, "Are you working for me?"

The elder touched his cap.

"Yes, ma'am—leastways for Mr. Courtney."

"What did Mr. Courtney tell you to do?"

"To make good that there stone wall, ma'am."

"Then why are you here?"

"We thought best to take what stones we could from here?"

"That was quite unnecessary. You had better put together that pile that you have destroyed. I will wait here till you have done it."

But Jill objected.

"They shan't touch one of them with their dirty hands! I will do it myself. Oh, Mona, it's a shame of them! They deserve a good thrashing. If I were a man I would give it to them!"

Mona put her hand on Jill's shoulder.

"Gently, dear! I am sorry about it, but they did not understand. If you don't want them here they can return to their work!"

"I never wish to see them again," was the vehement retort. "I—I—feel like Elijah. I

should like to call down fire from heaven to burn them up!"

Jill's passion was great. Mona wisely said nothing till the workmen had disappeared, then she remarked—

"When you have put your pile of stones straight, Jill, you can run and find Sam for me. I will tell him to make a little fence round this, and then you will have no more trespassers."

She walked away, for she judged rightly that work would soon subdue Jill's excitement. The idea of the fence delighted the children, and they set to work with a will.

"Nobody dared to touch Jacob's stones, I know," said Jill; who could not quite get over the act of sacrilege, as she considered it.

"Well," observed Jack, "the Bible mightn't tell about it, you see. He had no fence."

"I know it was always there," persisted Jill, "because Miss Falkner told me that Jacob went back there after, and made a proper altar."

"Yes," said Jack triumphantly; "because the other one had been knocked down. Of course he did."

Jill pondered, as she tried to build up the stones in a tidy form.

"Then," she said, "we must have a proper altar, and I'll get some of the mortar that those horrid men are using for their wall. We'll wait till they have gone to their tea, and then we'll do it."

A resolve once taken by Jill was generally carried out. The three children came in to their school-room tea triumphant.

"We've been building," announced Bumps, "and the thtones are all thtucked together!"

"And Sam is going to make a fence round, and no one will be let in!" added Jack:

"And if the clergyman that's coming isn't nice, I've thought of a lovely plan for our bag; but it's a secret, and I'll tell you, Miss Falkner, to-night when I'm in bed!"

Miss Falkner asked for an explanation of these fragmentary sentences, and her little pupils gradually enlightened her.

When Jill was in bed, she made her governess stoop down, and putting her arms round her neck, whispered—

"I've left a hole amongst the stones at the back, and I can cover it up by fixing in a loose stone. So I thought my red bag would go in beautifully, and then it would really be taken care of by God Himself. It couldn't be in a nicer place, could it? It would be like the ark

in the tabernacle—in a holy place. And I'm not going to tell Bumps or Jack. Jack tells Bumps everything, and Bumps tells everybody else!"

Miss Falkner looked rather doubtful over the wisdom of this, but Jill seemed in such delight over the idea that she had not the heart to damp her spirits.

But before leaving her, she said very gently—

"How has your walk been to-day, Jill? A few stumbles, I am afraid."

"Yes," whispered Jill. "I've told God I was sorry, only I was what the Bible calls 'righteously angry.' I would like to have called down fire from heaven upon those men. I told Mona so."

"But Jill, that was not 'righteous' at all. The men made a mistake. You should have spoken gently to them."

"No," said Jill, "they meant to do it, and they laughed at it, and I believe Sam's father is as bad. Since his cabbages are gone, he won't pay up his tenth, and he says we have a heathen altar!"

Jill's cheeks began to get hot and red. Miss Falkner stooped down and kissed her.

"If your Bethel is going to make you get

angry—if it makes you trip and stumble on your way to the Golden City, it had better be destroyed at once."

Jill looked up with big eyes.

"Oh, Miss Falkner! How can you?"

"You mustn't make an idol of it, Jill, or you will be the heathen. You grieve Jesus Christ by your hot temper. Perhaps you think more of your 'Bethel' than you do of Him!"

"I'm afraid I did to-day," acknowledged Jill with shame.

Then when her governess had left her, she put down her hot cheek upon the pillow, and murmured, "I'm afraid it wasn't 'righteous' anger after all."

The Christmas holidays came and went. Mona was much more with her little brother and sisters in Miss Falkner's absence. Every morning she came into the school-room, and had the Bible-reading with them. They got into many scrapes in their leisure moments, but on the whole were far better behaved than formerly. In the beginning of the New Year the "Bethel Mission-room" was opened. Perhaps to the inhabitants of Chilton Common it lacked a little of the excitement and gaiety with which it had been painted by Jack and Jill; but it was a very enjoyable day to all, and a sit-

down tea was given to young and old, at which, of course, Jill was very much to the fore.

Mr. Errington left very soon afterwards, and for two months his successor was not known.

Then one afternoon, when the children were roasting chestnuts over the school-room fire, and Miss Falkner was writing a letter to her mother, Mona appeared at the door.

"I want to introduce our new vicar," she said very quietly.

The children jumped up from the hearth-rug in the greatest state of excitement.

"Why!" exclaimed Jill, as a tall broad-shouldered figure followed their sister into the room, "it's the trespasser!"

"Yes, I am afraid it is," said Mr. Arnold in his deep and hearty voice. "But we parted friends, did we not?"

"I should think we did just! Why we would rather have you as our clergyman than any one else in the whole world!"

"Come! That's satisfactory. I did not think I would have so warm a welcome!"

"Do you like chestnuts?" asked Jack, holding out a charred one between two grubby fingers.

"Don't I?"

In a moment Mr. Arnold was down on the rug like a school-boy, and the children's tongues went fast. Mona looked on smiling; then she said to Miss Falkner—

"What is the fascination of roasting chestnuts, I wonder. Why do all children love it so? You burn your fingers and the chestnuts, eat more ashes than anything else, and scorch your face to pieces!"

"I think it is the love of cooking them," said Miss Falkner.

"It is the danger and difficulty surrounding the undertaking," said Mr. Arnold, rescuing two chestnuts that had rolled over into the fire. "Difficulties stimulate children, they do not deter them."

"I wish," said Mona thoughtfully, "they always stimulated me."

Mr. Arnold looked at her, but Jill broke in impetuously.

"Do you know about the Bethel Mission-room, Mr. Arnold? Will you go there on Sunday and preach to the people?"

He nodded.

"Yes, I have heard all about it from Mr. Errington, also about a certain red bag."

"Ah!" exclaimed Jack; "Jill has hidden that bag away somewhere since Mr. Errington

went. I say it isn't fair, and Bumps and I aren't going to give her any more money till she tells us where it is."

"Yeth," echoed Bumps, "and we've looked everywhere, and Jill says, she won't give it to another clergyman unleth he is nith!"

"Am I nice?" asked Mr. Arnold, with one of his sudden smiles.

Jill looked at him gravely.

"I will bring it to you every Saturday," she said, "even if there's only a few half-pennies. But Sam gives us two shillings, and Annie threepence, and Norah and Rose give us some when we see them, so sometimes we have quite a lot. Only you'll tell us what you're going to do with it, won't you?"

"Indeed, I will. We will have a long talk about it."

"And how are all your boys and girls?" asked Jill.

Mr. Arnold's face shadowed instantly. He was looking ill and careworn; it was only in talking to the children that his face lightened up.

"Ah," he said; "my poor people! Don't remind me of them. Nothing but the doctor's orders would have made me leave them."

Then speaking to Miss Falkner, he said—

"I have been ill, otherwise you would not have seen me here. As it is, I fear I shall not find sufficient scope for my energies!"

"You have over a thousand in your parish," said Mona, "and Chilton Common and other outlying districts in addition. I should think there was scope enough for one man's energies, especially as that man has already had a serious breakdown. Now come and have some tea. Miss Webb will wonder what we are doing."

Mona carried him off, and the children did not see him again for some time.

"Miss Falkner," asked Jill one day, "why doesn't Miss Webb like Mr. Arnold? She doesn't, you know."

"Nonsense, Jill, you mustn't have such fancies."

"But it isn't fancy. I was looking at *Punch* in the drawing-room window seat yesterday, and Miss Webb said to Mona, 'Well, all I can say is, that I wish Cecil Arnold had rather gone to Timbuctoo than come here.' And Mona said, 'Nonsense!' like you said just now, and Miss Webb said, 'I see the end. I shouldn't have been afraid a year ago.' And then she

said she was sorry for poor Sir Henry Talbot. Now what did she mean, Miss Falkner? What is the end going to be?"

"You shouldn't listen to grown-up people's talk, Jill."

"But I couldn't help hearing."

"Then you should never repeat what you hear."

Jill subsided.

Mr. Arnold delighted Jill's heart a few Sundays after his arrival by taking for his text the words: "Then the people rejoiced, for that they offered willingly, because with perfect heart they offered willingly to the Lord.

"But who am I, and what is my people, that we should be able to offer so willingly after this sort, for all things come of Thee and of Thine own have we given Thee."

He spoke of the different things people received from God, and how very few of them they offered back, and then in plain and simple words he touched upon the system of tenth-giving.

"There is not a little boy or girl in this church, however poor; there is not a landed proprietor, however rich, who cannot side by side give this small portion of what they receive to the service of God. The poorest labourer

can spare a tenth; he will be blessed in giving it, and joy will be his portion."

And then he astonished his congregation by saying he would be in his vestry every Saturday evening from six to eight, to accept the tenths of any of his parishioners who liked to bring them to him.

There was great discussion amongst his congregation afterwards.

"I have no patience with these new-fangled notions," said Miss Webb. "Cecil always did ride a hobby, and this money question is utterly ridiculous. We are not Jews, thank goodness!"

"I think he is right," said Mona quietly.

"Oh, of course you do, my dear. He will be able to twist you round his little finger now."

Mona was silent. Jill burst in opportunely—

"I shall take my red bag every Saturday to him, Mona. I wonder if anybody else will be there."

"You and your red bag are at the bottom of it all I do believe, Jill!" said Miss Webb laughing. "This wonderful Bethel of yours is turning every one crazy!"

Jill did not like to be laughed at. She walked on with dignity, and did not mention the subject again.

## XV

### "WORN OUT IN A GOOD SERVICE"

LESSONS and play were the daily routine now. The children kept out of scrapes wonderfully. Perhaps it was Miss Falkner's quick interference before real harm was done, or perhaps it was as she liked to hope, her pupils were getting more considerate of other people's feelings.

"It is their lively imagination, and their passion for acting out what they hear or read, that works such mischief," Miss Falkner said to Mona one day when they were talking over the children. "They are reckless of consequences. Future results are never taken into consideration."

She said this when she had just stopped Jack from lighting a fire in the loft.

He was a prisoner in hiding, he informed her, and he was going to cook himself a meal. Bumps had been foraging for him, and had brought him a raw piece of bacon.

"I was going to be most careful," he informed her. "Of course I wouldn't light the

hay. I pushed it all away, and had got quite an empty corner!"

But one day the children's energies were turned in another direction. They were all devoted to Mr. Arnold, and as he lived alone with an old housekeeper who was really fond of children, they very often found their way over to the vicarage. Sometimes he invited them to tea with him, and it was when they returned one evening from this dissipation that they announced in the drawing-room—

"We are going to get Mr. Arnold a wife!"

Miss Webb exploded with laughter. She was reading the newspaper over the fire. Mona was consulting with Miss Falkner at a table near about a certain girls' club in the village that she wished to start. She turned with a look of horror at the speaker, who of course was Jill; Miss Falkner was too accustomed to her pupils' speeches to be surprised.

"Yes," put in Jack. "There ought to be a Mrs. Arnold, like Mrs. Errington; we told him so!"

"To make his tea," said Bumps breathlessly, "and knit his thocks!"

"And have a pretty drawing-room and flowers," said Jill. "He doesn't sit in the drawing-room like Mr. Errington did. He sits in his

study, and there ought to be a Mrs. Arnold to help him in the village."

"And what are your vicar's opinions on this important subject?" asked Miss Webb.

"We've told him we'll get him one. We know more people than he does, and we know just the sort he wants. She must be just like Mrs. Errington, only not an invalid."

"And we aren't going to tell," said Jack wisely, "but we've picked out somebody."

"Yeth, and we're going to thend her to Mr. Arnold to-morrow!" burst forth Bumps excitedly.

Miss Webb threw up her hands in mock astonishment.

"Really! You don't mean it! And when is the wedding going to be?"

Mona here interposed.

"Jill, you are old enough to know better. You must not go to the vicarage at all, if you talk such nonsense."

"It isn't nonsense!" Jill said indignantly. "Mr. Arnold wants a wife, he said he did; and we're going to find one for him."

She rushed out of the room like a small whirlwind.

"Who is the happy lady, Jack?" asked Miss Webb inquisitively.

Jack was silent.

"Miss Falkner, you will have to assert your authority and stop this," said Mona, half laughing, yet half vexed.

"Let's tell, Jack," said Bumps, who loved giving information.

But Jack shook his head.

"We didn't even tell Mr. Arnold; we said we would send him some one to-morrow."

"And have you told her her fate?" asked Miss Webb.

"Jill is going to see Miss Grant in the morning," said Jack with dignity, and not perceiving he had let the cat out of the bag.

Miss Webb began to laugh afresh, and even Mona smiled. Miss Grant was a lady between fifty and sixty who was an indefatigable parish worker, but whose strong will and love of interference had always been a sore trial to her vicar.

"You think she'll make him a good wife?" Miss Webb said, trying to draw the children out.

"She's just the sort to make tea," said Jack, "and she'll be much more help to him than Mrs. Errington would be, or any one else."

"I think you will have to keep certain small

people hard at lessons to-morrow, Miss Falkner. This proposed visit must be nipped in the bud."

Miss Falkner took her charges off to the school-room and presently Jill appeared.

She seemed to have forgotten the subject under discussion, for she was full of a plan she had talked over with Mr. Arnold of supporting a children's cot in the local hospital.

"And my bag will begin it, like it did the Bethel Room. Don't you think it lovely?"

Just before the children went to bed, Miss Falkner picked up an old copy-book on the floor of Jill's bedroom. She did not often look at her scribblings, but the first words startled her:

"DEAR MISS GRANT,"—

She read on, with an anxious face, yet with a keen sense of humour—

"We've been having tea with Mr. Arnold. We think you had better be his wife. He has not anybody to do things like Mrs. Errington did, and we told him we would find a wife for him. We said we would send her to-morrow. He wants a wife, and so he will expect you. Please tell him you came from us. And have

your wedding-day very soon, because we shall all come and see you married. Mr. Arnold told us we could do this, so it is not wrong.

"Your affectionate friend,

"JILL BARON.

"P.S.—Jack and Bumps and I chose you, and we know Mr. Arnold will be pleased."

"Jill," said Miss Falkner sharply, "what is this?"

"Oh," said Jill unconcernedly, "it's a copy of a letter I sent Miss Grant. I wanted to do it neatly, so I wrote it in there first."

"But you have never sent it?"

"Yes, I did. Annie was going out, and she took it to the post."

"But Jill, that was very naughty."

"Why?"

"You know why. Your sister was very vexed at your talking about such things. I don't know what she will say now. You must come and tell her what you have done."

"Oh, I can't; please don't make me—Miss Webb will laugh. It isn't naughty. We simply *love* Mr. Arnold. And why shouldn't he have a wife as well as Mr. Errington? He didn't mind us doing it."

"He never told you to write to Miss Grant."

"No, because it was only afterwards that we thought of her."

Miss Falkner, in spite of her entreaties, took her straight to Mona, who was in her bedroom dressing for dinner.

"I have brought Jill to tell you what she has done, as I think you ought to know."

And then Miss Falkner left the little delinquent, who stood copy-book in hand with hanging head before her eldest sister.

"It's—it's a letter I've sent to Miss Grant," said Jill.

Mona took the copy-book from her.

"Oh, Jill!" she exclaimed in real distress. "This is really very naughty of you. You may make a great deal of mischief, and annoy Miss Grant extremely. I don't know how we can put it straight."

"I don't see what I've done wrong," said Jill stubbornly.

"Little girls have no business to interfere with grown-up people. I don't know what Miss Grant will think; I must see Miss Falkner. Ask her to come here, and you had better go straight to bed."

"It's always the way," Jill confided to Bumps when they were both in bed that evening; "everything I do turns out wrong. Chil-

dren can't be kind to grown-up people. It's no good to try. They won't let them. And Mr. Arnold will never have a wife, if he doesn't have Miss Grant. There's no one else like her."

"But you sent her a letter," said Bumps comfortingly.

"Yes, but Mona is going to do something dreadful to-morrow. I know she is."

As a matter of fact Mona did nothing. She felt powerless to act. Miss Webb counselled silence. She seemed to be enjoying the whole thing; Miss Falkner spent nearly an hour in bringing Jill to reason, but she repented of some of her words when they happened to meet Mr. Arnold in their morning walk. Jill flew to him at once.

"Oh, I'm so sorry. I really did it for the best. I told Miss Grant to go to you, but Miss Falkner says I oughtn't to have anything to do with husbands and wives. She says Miss Grant will be made uncomfortable and so will you; and I wouldn't make you uncomfortable for *worlds!*"

Mr. Arnold looked at first as if he did not know what she was talking about; then he began to laugh, and his laugh was so infectious that Miss Falkner could not help joining him.

Jill eagerly continued to explain—

"Hasn't she been to you? Then perhaps it is all right. I'll never try to find a wife for you again. Miss Falkner says wives can't be found like we thought, and she says God is the only one that can find one for you."

Mr. Arnold looked perfectly coolly into Miss Falkner's face.

"Thank you." he said. "I believe in that too. My little friends were too anxious on my behalf. And as to Miss Grant, I wish her a more suitable partner than myself, Jill. Is your sister in? I want to ask her about a parish matter."

He left them, and crossed the pine wood to reach the house, but he never got there, for he saw Mona leaning against the new wooden fence looking with dreamy, wistful eyes at the children's "Bethel," and he went straight to her.

The scent of the pines, the pale blue sky behind them, and the quiet sacredness of the spot rested and soothed Mona's soul. She turned at the sound of his footsteps, but never changed her position; when he looked into her face he found her eyes were full of tears.

"I come here when life is difficult," she said, trying to speak lightly. "I have been thinking over Christ's words, 'How hardly shall they

that have riches enter into the kingdom of God.' I long sometimes to ease myself of the burden and responsibility of my money, by casting it to the winds. Can you advise me? I want to be a faithful steward. What shall I do?"

Cecil Arnold's opportunity had come.

It was some days before the children knew the result of that interview. They were all three tidying up their "Bethel," which Miss Webb said now reminded her of a small churchyard, when they saw their sister and Mr. Arnold slowly approach them.

They were close to the fence before they noticed the children, then Mona started, a rich colour came into her cheeks and she tried to withdraw her hand from Mr. Arnold's arm. He held it fast, and said to her with a twinkle in his eye—

"Allow me to receive my congratulations. I must enlighten them."

"Two trespassers again, Jill!" he called out. "May we come inside your gate?"

"Yes," said Jill, stopping in her feat of brushing dead leaves away; "you and Mona aren't trespassers, for you belong to our Tenth Society, and you don't laugh at our 'Bethel.'"

"Laugh at it?" said Mona tremulously. "I shall bless it all my days!"

Then Mr. Arnold spoke, and his voice was hushed and reverent, though there was a glad light in his eye.

"I thought you children would like to know whom God has graciously given to me as a wife."

"Why it's Mona!"

Surprise and delight were in the children's faces.

Jill exclaimed—"I never should have thought of Mona. She doesn't seem like a clergyman's wife, but it's awfully nice."

"Why don't I please you?" Mona asked. "Not good enough, I know."

"Well, I think you're too smiling and—and too young."

Mr. Arnold laughed.

"And I am too old and grave. But, Jill, as a boy and girl we promised to marry each other, so we are only keeping our promise."

"Why have you been so long before you did it?" asked Jill with interest.

That question remained unanswered.

Jack and Jill were full of excitement and curiosity. Bumps was the only one who seemed disappointed.

"We can't never find a wife for him now, he hath found hithelf one!" she lamented.

She and Jill were standing by their lodge gate next day when they saw Miss Grant coming along. For one moment Jill thought of flight, then she bravely stood her ground. They had been bowling their hoops along, and were a little breathless with their run. Miss Grant looked at them severely, then came across the road to them.

"Jill," she said, "what do you mean by writing me such a letter? Who told you to do it? I am surprised that a little girl of your age should act so forwardly!"

Jill got crimson at once.

"It was all a mistake, please," she said, "and I'm sorry you got it. We were trying hard to find Mr. Arnold a wife."

"Who put you up to it?" demanded Miss Grant. "I consider it a grave insult, and I was thinking of seeing your sister about the matter. She and your governess don't know how to keep you in order."

"No one put me up to it," replied Jill eagerly. "I made a mistake, and it's a good thing you didn't go to him. Please forget it."

"Yeth," put in Bumps with an emphatic nod of the head, "he didn't want you after all, becauth he has got Mona."

Miss Grant beat a hasty retreat. She never mentioned the subject again.

On the following Sunday Jill went to the vestry to hand in her bag. She had not been the only one who had responded to the vicar's invitation, for several of the villagers had appeared, and though their offerings were small, they were willing ones. She stood waiting whilst the village shopkeeper and a farmer's wife were taking their tenth out of their well-worn purses. Then a voice behind her startled her. It was Sam's father.

"Eh, Miss Jill, here I be after you and your bag agen!"

"Oh, Mr. Stone, what have you got? I'm so glad you haven't given up!"

"I did have a mind to, as 'ee knows, but parson here do seem so set on it that I've been lookin' through some savin's o' mine."

Mr. Arnold said good-night to the two women, and turned to the old man.

"Are you bringing your money to *me*, Stone?" he asked quietly.

"Yes, sir, that I be—'ee do talk so convinceable that I be quite worried till I have done it."

"You must take it back again. I am only here to take my Master's money."

Old Mr. Stone rubbed his head.

"I see yer meanin'. In course I bring it to the A'mighty. 'Twas a mere mistake in speech."

The old man counted out of a canvas bag, to the astonishment of Jill and his vicar, five pounds in silver.

He moved a step nearer and spoke in a low, mysterious tone—

"Fifty pun have I laid by for death and burial, and the rest to Sam, but never a penny have I laid by for the God that brought me into the world, and that be soon going to take me out. The little lass hammered away till I gave her my cabbages, then I said 'No more,' for I kep' thinkin' o' these savin's, that no mortal body do know on. But, parson, your words be hot and uncomfortable, and las' night I lay thinkin' o' this here vestry an' Miss Jill's red bag. 'Twasn't the sermon, nor yet the bag, nor you and Miss Jill put together, but 'twas God that spoked to me in the night.

"'I have loved 'ee,' He kep' sayin', 'I have loved 'ee, Tummas, I have loved 'ee.' An' then came that there tex' 'ee preached on last Sunday, 'Lovest thou Me?' and I were fair broken down. I knowed what the Lord did want. The tenth o' my savin's! And bless

God, I knows He loves me, and 'tis that has brought me!"

"Thank God," breathed Mr. Arnold, stretching out his hand and taking Thomas Stone's hard, horny one in his. "I take this gladly, and thank you in my Master's name."

When the old man had gone Jill drew near. She held out her bag a little sorrowfully—

"It has only three shillings and a half-penny in it," she said; "and two shillings are from Sam, and threepence from Annie. I'm afraid our money is very, very little."

"Never mind," said Mr. Arnold cheerfully, seeing her downcast face, "God does not expect more from you at present."

Jill sighed.

"And my bag is wearing out," she said mournfully, "and Miss Falkner has no more red flannel; she thinks a bag can be made of anything, but I like my old one. It has great holes, and as fast as I mend them they tear out again."

"Poor little bag!" said Mr. Arnold, taking it in his hand. "It is worn out in a good service. Will you let me have it, Jill? I should like to hang it up in the vestry here, so that I can look at it sometimes. What is this tape on it? Something written on it."

"I did that," said Jill, her face in a glow of delight at Mr. Arnold's words.

He read out slowly—

"Of Thine own have we given Thee."

The letters were crooked and uneven. He smiled at Jill, then hung the little bag up on a nail.

She looked at it proudly. All sorrow for its uselessness had gone.

"It looks lovely up there!" she said. "And I don't mind now having a new one."

"But don't have a new motto, Jill. Keep that to the end of your life—'Of Thine own have we given Thee.'"

Jill nodded, and then she ran away home.