The old Oak Tree in the Church-yard.

The Surprise;

OR,

BLANCHE AND HER FRIENDS.

BY

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The Surprise.

CHAPTER I.

THE OAK TREE.

ONE bright, still summer day, a group of children were playing about the steps of a village church. Perhaps, children, it was the very village where you live; but no matter about that: all young people love to play; and these had spent the whole afternoon together, flying from one

game to another, and making all the air musical with merry laughs.

The robins thought this laughter was the children's song to *them;* for robins don't know but what children were created on purpose to make the world look lively for their little birdships, as they sit dreaming in their shady nests.

So the robins twittered back songs as much like the children's as they could make them; and the tall pine trees in the churchyard waved and waved against the sky like paint brushes, soaking up the sunshine; and passing it down to the children, made their faces glow again, and their hearts leap delightedly.

Beside the church stood an oak tree that spread her branches far and

wide; and such ancient, knotted, mossy branches perhaps you never saw: they had grown so brittle with age, that the wind had broken them in places; and the lightning had made great scars along the trunk.

But the tree came out new every spring, with a garment of beautiful, fresh, green leaves, that covered up all her losses, and made a shelter for many little birds who built their nests, hatched their young, dozed, sang, made dainty meals from bugs and flies, and altogether had splendid times, hidden away there in the shade.

CHAPTER II.

THE STRANGER.

UNDER this fine old tree the children seated themselves to rest a while, and were beginning to tell each other stories, when they espied a stranger watching them from the church steps. It was a young man who seemed to be walking for pleasure; and who, when he found that the children had observed his presence, went towards them, and sat down in the grass: in such an easy way, and with such a pleasant, smiling face, the

young folks did not feel afraid of him in the least.

He asked them to go on with their stories, and not mind his presence; but though not exactly afraid, they were a little shy at first, and only looked at each other and at him, without speaking a word.

"At least you'll tell me your name, and what is in that basket on your arm," he said to little Blanche Ellis, who was looking up into his face.

"Blanchie," she answered, "and that is Elise, my sister, and the rest are Minnie, and Libby, and Alice."

"And what's in your basket?"

"The rest have flowers; but I picked up these pretty acorns — look! how many!" and she opened the cover.

"Why, that is just what I came in search of," said the stranger. "I thought it would be pleasant to have such a noble tree as this, growing near the house in which I live; and these acorns, you know, will change into oaks if we wait long enough."

"But won't you have to wait a long, long while?" asked Blanche. "When I was born, my father planted an acorn, and it's a little bit of a slim tree, not much taller than I am now."

"I must be patient, then, as my father was, when he planted the seed from which the very oak above us grew: he went to heaven long ago, and his body lies under that gray stone, with the weeping willow over it; but his son and the children,

whom he used to love so well, enjoy and bless him for the tree."

Elise had run across to the willow tree, and came back saying, "The name on the stone is Harris: I could hardly read, it was so filled up with moss."

"Then we know your name!" exclaimed Blanche; "and I'm so glad you want acorns, for you shall have mine: see! here are more;" and she began emptying her pocket into the stranger's hand.

"Thank you, dear; but I only want one or two, and I shall christen my tree 'Blanche;' and when I get to be an old, white-haired grandfather, with children playing about me, I shall point to the monstrous knotted limbs, and the great iron-strong trunk, and

the thousands of shining leaves, and tell how they were all folded up with a dozen more like them, in a little girl's pocket, once. These acorns grew last year; but I think they will take root."

"*Won't* that be a nice story? Do you suppose they'll believe it?" asked Blanche, clapping her hands with delight. "There's my sister 'Leedy can tell beautiful stories when we are alone together; but none so funny as yours: she was right in the midst of one when you came."

"Come, then, 'Leedy," said the stranger, "will you not be generous to me like Blanche? Where did you find those little flowers? — what are they? — so delicate and lovely!"

"Anemones, the very last of the

spring," said Elise, unfastening from her bosom and timidly handing them to the new comer.

"'Leedy always finds the prettiest flowers," whispered Blanche, "and tells the prettiest stories: don't you like her? I do," she rattled on. "Come 'Leedy, finish about the oak tree."

CHAPTER III.

'LEEDY'S STORY.

"I WAS only saying," began Elise, "that those acorns were just like the oak tree's children, clinging on every stem, like great babies afraid to leave their mother; but I suppose the tree thinks they are the most obedient children in the world, and that our fathers and mothers are very careless to let us run off here alone."

"How would you like to have such an anxious mother, Blanche?" asked

the stranger. "I dare say the old tree thinks that, after all, it is not of so much importance what becomes of you; for all mothers think their children more wonderful than any others; and these acorns she scatters about the churchyard might spring into noble trees; and after the church here has crumbled to dust, and her own trunk fallen, she thinks how grandly they will stand up in the daylight — her glorious children!"

"I mean to put back my acorns!" exclaimed Blanche. "I didn't know it would disappoint any body if I dug out their meat and made them into cups and saucers for my doll."

"The poor tree is disappointed every year," said the gentleman; "for eighty summers she has built

up the self-same hopes, and eighty autumns has planted her children all about her; and, thinking them safe, has prepared to take her winter nap; but a drove of pigs have come in and eaten them, or some old starved donkey has munched them with his broken teeth, or else they have rotted on the ground."

Just then, there came up a wind which stirred the oak till she waved all her boughs, and rattled her leaves overhead; and Blanche thought it seemed as though she were begging them to leave her children alone.

"I should not be surprised if that were exactly what she is trying to say," answered Henry, — for that was the gentleman's name; "but I shall take a great deal better care of them

than she knows how — plant, and water, and fence the young trees round; so that, of all the children she watched so tenderly, perhaps the only ones that come to any good, will be these I am taking from her.

"You must remember, Blanche, that when your pleasures, and things you value very much, are taken away, and it seems hard to give them up, they are only taken for a little while; and you may find them again, some day, changed from poor little seeds into great spreading trees, that will shelter you from the sun."

"Is that the end of your story?" asked Blanche. "The last of it sounded just like what the minister says at church; only I know what you are talking about, and I never know

any thing except the words, when he is preaching. But I have thought of a beautiful story, if you want to hear it, about burying my bantam last summer: don't you remember it, 'Leedy?"

"Yes indeed! but Henry does not want to hear about such things: he would only laugh at us, as brother Frank did."

"I *know* that Henry will not laugh at us," said the little girl. "Would you, after 'Leedy gave you all her flowers, and I gave those acorns that will make such great trees?"

"Not for the world; and I long to know about your pet."

CHAPTER IV.

BLANCHE'S STORY.

WELL, the bantam died; and she was a real beauty — white as snow; and she had the queerest long, white pantalets, all made of feathers; and was so tame that 'Leedy and I could catch her any time. And she would eat corn or crumbs out of our hand: sometimes she picked too hard; I suppose she didn't mean to, but it hurt me so that I would drop all the corn and run away.

"There was a rooster, too, and he

was just like her, only taller, and not quite so cunning; he has a comb on his head and all round his neck, red as my coral beads; he is alive now, and struts about the yard, but I think he misses Banty, she was such a dear little thing.

"One morning I went out to the door with some crumbs for her. I called and called, but she didn't come: so I went into the hen house, and there she was, dead as she could be, with her head all on one side! Wasn't it too bad?

"We felt so sorry, that our man, John, said he would bury her and put a stone over the grave. So we made ready for the funeral.

"We went to school in the morning, and told Minnie, and Libby, and Alice

Little Blanche finding the dead Bantam in the Hen-house. Page 20.

about it; they knew Banty — so they wanted to come; and that afternoon we were so busy dressing up our dolls in mourning! for we thought somebody ought to wear black.

"Then we formed a procession: first, John went with his spade, and Banty under his arm; then Elise carried the rooster, with a black veil over his face; Minnie held our Maltese kitten, with a long, black scarf around her neck; and then Alice came with Spy — that's the puppy; and I held a dove and a rabbit; every one with something black over it; but I'll tell you the best of all: our great Newfoundland dog, that's black all over, followed on of his own accord; and it seemed just as if he was in mourning naturally.

"Then John dug the grave, and Alice tolled the great dinner bell; and when I lifted the rooster's veil, so that he could look at poor Banty once more, don't you think he crowed, standing in 'Leedy's hand!"

"Now, 'Leedy," said Alice, when Blanche had finished her story, "you must tell us that dream you had about fairies the other day;" and Henry said, "If it is half as interesting as what Blanche has told, I should like to hear it." So Elise began.

CHAPTER V.

'LEEDY'S DREAM.

BLANCHIE and I were walking in the wood back of aunt Dora's house. It's a beautiful place, full of great trees, and queer berries, and all kinds of bushes and leaves; there are places where the moss is so soft, and green, and thick, it is just like a bed; and others where the grass grows long and pale, because it is always in the shade, and the blades are very slender and delicate.

"We came to one of these grassy

spots, that had large pine trees standing close around it, and only an opening like a window at the top, to let the blue sky look in. The fresh grass and the pines, that kept stirring all the time, had such a pleasant smell, and made a sound like singing — only the little birds in the boughs sang louder and more clearly; you should have heard them tweet, and twitter, and trill: sometimes Blanchie can sing ever so much like them.

"We had been picking partridge berries, — you know they are bright red, like coral beads, — and I strung them into a necklace and bracelets for Blanche, and made her a wreath out of wild honeysuckle flowers; and she made me the prettiest one out of

nothing but grass. Aunt Dora said it was a beauty.

"But Blanchie was tired; and while I was fastening on her wreath, she fell asleep by my side. I laid her softly on the grass; and it seemed as if the sky, away up there above the tall pines, was watching over her; and as if the pines were fanning her warm face, and singing songs to her so sweet and low, that only she could hear them in her dreams.

"A little brown sparrow hopped down out of her nest and looked at us; first with one eye, and then the other: such little, round, bright eyes! and then she snapped at a fly, and flew away with it in her mouth.

"I suppose I fell asleep; for I leaned back in the grass to see if I could find

the sparrow again, up in the pine boughs. The grass felt so cool to my hot cheeks, that I laid them close to it; and the first thing I knew, it seemed as if there were fairies all around me.

CHAPTER VI.

THE FAIRIES.

THEY crept up out of the grass; they hopped from the pine trees, just as the sparrow had done; they came sliding down on the sunbeams, sometimes whirling over and over as they fell, but always alighting safely. Often they would rest on the tip of a grass blade, and hang there lightly as snow flakes, and swing.

The little creatures were all dressed up in flowers; not made into wreaths,

as we wear them, but sewed into real gowns and aprons.

"The tallest fairy looked like a little queen; her skirt was made of a bright blue gentian, the long fringe trailing on the ground; and her waist was of buttercup petals, smooth as satin; her collar was part of a white jasmine blossom; and her handkerchief was a rose leaf.

"Around the queen were six soldiers dressed in cardinal flowers, with great helmets of monkshood, and quivers full of pine leaves for arrows, and hatchets made of beetles' legs, all sharpened like a saw.

"Some of the other fairies wore lily leaves for skirts, and mantles of violet; some had tippets made from the yellow fur of a bee; one had a

robe of pink rose leaves quilted together, and bordered with delicate green moss.

"One wore leaves of a japonica, that stood out like brocade, and were spangled all over with gold and purple from a butterfly's wing; and she wore a jaunty cap of Chinese primrose, and little heath bells in her ears.

"The gentlemen fairies wore darker flowers; all except a few, who were real dandies, and had cloaks of magnolia or tulip leaves, and vests of blue forget-me-not, or of nasturtion or poppy.

"The soberer ones wore dark-red piony leaves, or white and lead-colored hollyhocks; their swords were made of grass blades, so heavy and stiff they almost weighed the little things down.

"You would not wonder that there

are so many spider webs on a summer morning, if you could see how many the fairies need; how useful they are — I mean they seemed to be in my dream.

"They used them, in different sizes, for skip ropes, and swings, and to fasten their tents, and harness their horses, and sew their delicate flower-dresses together.

"I could not imagine what they were about, when they all began treading the grass down in a little circle, and only left standing one tall, stout straw; but soon they unrolled a beautiful great spider web, and taking it by the edges, flew up into the air to shake it smooth; then stretched it over the straw into a tent, which they tied tight on every side to grass roots.

"They sprinkled the floor with moss, and made beds of velvet rose leaves, and tied together violets for pillows, and hung up some lily-of-the-valley bells for the little women to ring if they wanted help; then the gentlemen fairies rode away and left them to their nap; only one or two servants staid at the door, with great fans made of butterfly wings, to drive off bugs and flies."

CHAPTER VII.

THE FAIRIES' RIDE.

SUCH horses as the fairy men had! some were flies, and some were beetles; one hopped off on a tiny toad, and one scrambled up on the back of a bird, and clung to her neck while she flew out of sight, far up above the pines. Some of them had chosen grasshoppers; but they jolted their riders well with their long, stiff legs and funny hops. One went gliding off on the back of a little striped snake; and one or two sat on

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a broad, green lily leaf, and floated in the brook.

"A few sleepy ones lagged behind; some of these rolled themselves in cool plantain leaves, and soon began to snore; some climbed into empty birds' nests, and lay there rocking in the breeze, the leaves all fluttering round them, and the mosquitos blowing their trumpets, but not biting, for I suppose they dont like the taste of fairy flesh; and some, dancing about till they were wide awake, perched themselves on the rail fence that runs through the wood, and began to fasten buttons on their curious little vests, and darn up rents in their velvet cloaks.

"Pretty soon I heard a great trampling over the grass, and back the riders

came, in the greatest glee, singing and laughing, and their cheeks as red as cherries in the sun.

"They all had wreaths of grass on their heads, such as Blanchie had made for me, only their heads were so small that the wreaths looked like parasols, and made the prettiest little shadows dance round them on the grass."

"But how can you remember all these little things, Elise?" interrupted Henry; "and how came you to notice sunbeams and shadows, and to think that the sky was looking down to see Blanche?"

"O, aunt Dora walks with us very often, and she points out ever so many things I never noticed before, and tells us we must always be looking to find what is beautiful and curious. No

matter how many questions we ask, she is never tired of answering them; but my story is almost finished; may I go on?"

"O, yes; I am delighted with it," said Henry; "and we needn't ask Blanche, for here she sits, with her eyes wide open, waiting to hear about the fairy people."

Blanche did not answer a word, but kept her eyes fixed on Elise, who proceeded.

CHAPTER VIII.

WHAT THE FAIRIES BROUGHT HOME.

BEHIND every one of the fairy riders was a saddle bag made of stout leaves, and filled with whatever he had discovered in the wood.

"One had his bag crowded with mosquitos; he had stunned them with a blow of his beetle hatchet, and crumpled them, legs, and wings, and all together. As he pulled them out, the fairy ladies exclaimed how fat they were, and told how they would boil them into a delicious soup.

"One had, he said, some beautiful emeralds, which he had shaken off from a rose leaf; but when he came to pour them out upon a mushroom that stood before the tent, the silly fellow found they were only drops of dew, which had looked green because they rested on the leaf. The fairies had a good laugh over his mistake.

"One had brought some butterfly down, crimson, purple, bright brown, and silver and gold. This, he said, he would weave into a furry cape for the fairy he loved best. One had nipped off the honeyed ends of some flower tubes; one had brought drops of fragrant pitch from the pines; one had gathered the pollen out of roses and lilies, for spice; one had brought some wintergreen berries; and the queer

little fellow who rode on a toad, had sawed off the stem of a pitcher-plant that was full of dew, and tried to bring it home; but the toad, in scrambling through the grass, had spilled almost every drop; and besides, had bruised the fairy's mantle, scratched his face, and almost shaken him off.

"While they were talking, and showing their treasures, one of the fairy girls — a lovely creature in a violet-colored robe — had picked a buttercup, stitched the leaves nicely together, and torn out the stamens; so it looked like a beautiful golden bowl.

"She filled this with dew almost to the brim, cooled it with some flakes of snow that one of the fairies had found in a cave, and sweetened it with honey; for one of them had brought

home the bag of a bee; then she sprinkled in a little rose dust to flavor it, and stirred it with the spicy, honeyed pistil of an orange blosom.

"The bowl was passed around, and all the fairies drank. Just as one of the little men was bringing it to me, I awoke and found myself lying all alone with Blanchie in the wood; her honeysuckle wreath had not faded, only on one side the flowers were crushed, where she had slept on them; we picked up our berries and flowers, and I hurried home to tell aunt Dora my dream."

CHAPTER IX.

AUNT DORA.

UT who is this aunt Dora you talk so much about?" asked Henry.

"O, I can tell," exclaimed Blanch; "she is mother's sister; she is real kind, and beautiful, too, and she tells the nicest stories, funny as they can be; sometimes they make you laugh, and sometimes cry."

"Yes, we think every thing of aunt Dora," said Elise; "and I know one thing, I am sorry enough that she is going to be married this summer."

"Why, don't you like the gentleman she has chosen?" asked Henry, suddenly.

"I don't know him; and he will not care for us, nothing but little girls; for he is a minister, the new minister who is going to preach in this very church. I know that when aunt Dora is with him, we shall feel afraid, and perhaps he will send us away."

"But some ministers are very fond of children, and are always glad to have them near," said Henry. "I would not feel troubled until I had seen this new uncle, if I were you. And now, Blanchie, you must give me a kiss, for I am going home."

"O, I'll give you twenty," said Blanche; "but see, I have made you a wreath of grass, just like the one

'Leedy wore in the wood; let me put it on your head, and perhaps it'll make you have fairy dreams."

"Why, how funny a man would look in a wreath!" laughed Elise; but Henry stooped while the little girl fastened her wreath about his brown, curly hair, and whispered to him, "I love you better than any one else in the world, except aunt Dora, and mother, and father, and 'Leedy."

Henry picked up his straw hat, but did not put it on until he was out of sight; he kept looking back and bowing to Blanchie, and the last she saw of him, the wind was blowing his hair away from the high, white forehead, and tangling it in among the grass, as he disappeared.

Elise and Blanche went home, talk-

ing all the way about their new acquaintance, and wondering if he had come to live in the village, and if they should ever meet him when they went to walk.

Blanche said she should look into the churchyard the very next morning, on her way to school; but Elise told her that they must take care and not be troublesome, as he might not always feel like talking with them.

But Blanchie seemed to think that the churchyard was the stranger's home, and to feel as sure of finding him there, as of finding the buttercups and dandelions, and the old oak tree.

All that afternoon she watched the sky, and wondered if the next day would be pleasant. Then she would run to the garden, and look over and

over again at her flowers, to see if the buds would be open by another day; for she meant to gather a beautiful bunch, and give them—to whom do you suppose?

CHAPTER X.

BLANCHIE'S GARDEN.

THE last visit aunt Dora made, she had persuaded Mrs. Ellis to give her children a piece of ground in her garden, and seeds and plants, and to let them take care of it themselves, and gather flowers whenever they chose.

In the spring the gardener would dig and rake it for them, and he taught them how to plant seeds; and how to tell which were weeds and which flowers, after they came up. Elise

learned very fast, but Blanche was apt to pull up her asters and balsams, and leave nice little patches of sorrel, purslain, and pigweed.

All around this garden they had a border of box, like a little hedge; and it ran across the middle, so as to divide Blanchie's from 'Leedy's part. Sometimes the gardener would give them a gillyflower, or a rose in full bloom, from the greenhouse; then they would dig a place with their trowels, and sink the pot in the earth, till it looked as if it had grown there all summer long.

'Leedy's garden looked very much like her mother's; the plants grew in pretty bunches, and some of them were fastened up with neat little frames or sticks. She had one tall

carnation, with bright red spicy flowers; from this she picked as many as twenty blossoms during the summer; and they looked beautifully in vases, or in the bouquets she gave away.

Then Elise had some delicate little German forget-me-nots, with flowers not more than large enough to make a wreath for a doll; and she had evening primroses, that do not blossom until almost dark; and then the buds burst all at once, and they look like beautiful great white butterflies scattered over the garden.

But Blanche's garden was a funny place; she wanted to have so many different things in it, and she changed her mind so many times in the day.

There was a bunch of millet for her

canary bird, and a patch of chickweed; and there were tall blades of corn, which Blanchie was fond of parching in winter time; and a great staring sunflower, for Banty and the other hens. They love to tear out the fat ripe seeds, and nothing pleased Blanche so much as to scatter these handfuls, and watch the chickens scampering here and there, and treading on each other's toes, to pick them up.

In one corner she had a hill of potatoes for a poor old man who used to work in her father's garden; he had grown too old and sick to do it any more, and he lived all alone by himself, in a black old tumble-down house; his name was Eli, and he loved Blanche dearly.

She had plenty of caraways, because she liked them in seed-cakes, and thought they would taste better coming out of her own garden. There was a melon vine, too, which came up of itself; and Blanche was on the point of throwing it away for a weed, when the gardener told her to wait a little while.

It kept running and running along the ground, and had beautiful striped leaves; one morning she found a bud, and this opened into a handsome flower, yellow as gold.

Very soon the flower wilted, and Blanche was so disappointed that she wanted again to pull up the whole vine; but the gardener kept saying, "Only wait, and you'll have a nice melon yet."

Surely enough, there came one, at first as large as a nut; but it grew every day; so fast, that Blanche used often to measure it with her apron, and make a deep crease where the measure ended, so as to find the next day how much larger her melon had become; but somehow, when the next day came, the crease was always gone.

She tried to have one border of flowers; and in a corner of her garden John had planted some candy-tuft, in a great D, because that stands for Dora; but she had not many besides her rosebush and gillyflower.

Sometimes, when Blanche was walking home from school, she would pick all the gay flowers she could find, hurry down to her garden and set their stems into the ground, as if they were

growing; but of course these quickly wilted in the sun, as they had not any roots; and then such dismal looking things you never saw, with the brown, faded leaves and buds.

CHAPTER XI.

BLANCHE IN THE GREENHOUSE.

BLANCHE was very fond of flowers. It delighted her to stay in the greenhouse, wandering about wherever the gardener went, watching him work, and asking all kinds of questions about all kinds of things.

There were vines trained all over the glass, and hanging from these, great bunches of white and purple grapes, as sweet and juicy as they conld be, Blanche knew, for she had

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often eaten them; and there were light passion-flower vines, covered with tendrils and rich purple flowers; and oleanders, looking like bunches of bright pink roses; and orange trees, full of fragrant blossoms, and ripe yellow fruit.

There was one plant which she admired very much, it was so curious; if her dress brushed it as she ran past, drops of honey would shake out from every flower; then she would stand and watch till another drop would come creeping into each nectary, as bright and clear as dew; this had a long name, that Blanche could never remember; so I don't think there is any use in telling it to you; it is, I believe, one kind of honeysuckle.

Another strange thing was a sensi

tive plant, with wide branches full of delicate little leaves, which spread out on every side, as if they enjoyed the sunshine; but whenever any one touched the branches, these leaves would close so fast together you could hardly pick them apart again with a pin.

The gardener was growing old, and had the rheumatism so much that his back had become stiff, and it was hard for him to stoop very often; so Blanche would stand beside him, and pick up, one by one, the tiny flower pots, when he was transplanting seeds or cuttings.

This was a little thing for her to do, but a great help to him; and Blanche was such a loving little soul, that it was pleasure enough for her to make any one happy; she did not ask any other reward.

But often the gardener would think how kind she was to leave her play for the sake of pleasing him; so he would pick her whatever she wanted most among his flowers.

One day he gave her the largest, sweetest bunch of grapes; he made her pick off one or two to see how nice they were, so ripe you could see every seed through the clear skin; then he picked some beautiful tea-roses, and some cunning little pink monthly roses, and heliotropes, and pinks.

Blanche thought she had never seen a prettier, brighter bouquet, and was going home to ask her mother if she might not invite Libby and Alice to come and share it with her.

She thought, as she hurried along the garden walk, that if her mother

said "yes," they could bring their dolls, have a kind of a doll party, and spread out her little China tea set; and what do you suppose she meant to have for supper? Grapes and caraway seeds!

CHAPTER XII.

OLD ELI.

HER mother stood in the doorway, dressed for a walk: Blanche showed her flowers, and asked eagerly if she might do as she wished.

Mrs. Ellis thought a moment, and then said, "Perhaps so. I cannot tell yet. Put your flowers in water, and we will take a little walk; by the time we come home I shall have made up my mind."

Blanche was always delighted to go with her mother, and flew away to do

as she was bid; she danced down the avenue, opened the gate, and waited till her mother came; then off again, as if the wind were blowing her. She ran back at last, with her hands full of ripe blackberries and buttercups; but Mrs. Ellis said, —

"We are going to see a poor old sick man; don't you want to carry them to him?"

Blanche was delighted, and could hardly wait until they reached Eli's door. When they went in, she waited until her mother had spoken, then went to the bed side with her flowers, and poured the berries out of her little hand, all stained with their juice, into the hand of the sick man which was pale and wrinkled, and almost as cold as if he were dead.

He thanked her, and told how much he loved flowers, and how often he had seen her digging in her little garden; then he put the berries, one by one, into his mouth, and smacked his lips, told how sweet they were, and how he could almost taste the sunshine that had ripened them.

Blanche watched him, her eyes sparkling with joy; then she whispered to her mother a moment, the door opened, and away she ran towards home.

Mrs. Ellis and Eli were talking together so busily about his sickness, and some clothes she was having made for him, that they hardly missed Blanche; until the latch rattled, kept rattling, — for she was not tall enough to open it, — and her mother arose to let her in.

She was out of breath, she had run so fast; her cheeks were red as roses; and her curly hair was flying all about the brim of her straw hat; she had, folded up in the very leaves the gardener cut for her to take them home in, her bunch of grapes; and she had brought besides all her flowers.

You never saw any one as pleased as old Eli when she gave them to him; he looked at each of the flowers separately, and held up both of his hands, and even the tears rolled down his old, withered cheeks.

Blanche asked her mother what he could be crying about, and couldn't very well understand why a person should cry because he was happy.

But old Eli had not many friends, and was so poor that he lived on the

simplest food. There was nothing in his house except what he really needed; crockery cups and saucers, and chairs he had made himself; so you may judge how glad he was of the flowers, which were beautiful enough to ornament a palace, and the delicious, juicy grapes.

CHAPTER XIII.

BLANCHE AND THE OLD MAN.

AFTER this visit, Blanche went to see Eli almost every day; and he grew so fond of her that he would listen for hours, expecting her, and, when he heard those little quick footsteps approaching, would hobble over to open the door, and look so pleased, and listen so eagerly to all the little girl could tell him.

Eli had made a nice little cricket on purpose for Blanche; had stuffed and covered it with a piece of bright,

blue leather, which some one had given him.

So, after she had shown him the things her mother had sent, and the flowers she had picked up on the way, she would sit down at the old man's feet, and tell him about her pets and her garden, and all about things in the greenhouse, and her studies at school.

If Blanche had not behaved well, and had been punished at home, she always told Eli; because he was sure to be sorry for her, and tell her not to be discouraged, but try again, and see if she could not do better.

When she had a present of a new book, or received a little note from aunt Dora, she would take them to him, though he could not read a word.

Elise would read the note to her until she knew it by heart, so she could tell every thing it said; and there was often a message for him; when there was, he felt so pleased that he made Blanche say it over two or three times.

He often told her how glad she ought to be that she could go to school, and learn to read and write, and to do many other things.

So that when she grew old, if she should be poor, and obliged to live all by herself, she need not be lonely, but could read and think.

Sometimes Blanche and Elise would go together to the old man's house; and while she was playing with her doll, her older sister would read aloud, out of the Bible, or one of their own story books.

Eli liked the Bible best; but he knew that the stories were more interesting to them. For this reason he would often ask for one, when all the while he was longing to hear the good book, which told about the beautiful heaven that would very soon be his home.

You see by this, that no one is so weak and poor but he can give up something, and do something to make others happy. I have known people who were strong and rich, and said they would like to make every one as comfortable as themselves, only they didn't know how.

The trouble was, they were not willing, like Eli, to give up their own wishes for the sake of others.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE RAINY DAY.

NOW we will go back to the day when Blanche and Elise were resting under the oak in the churchyard; and the strange gentleman they liked so much, sat down on the grass to talk with them.

Blanche, as I told you, wandered about the house all the rest of that afternoon; wondering if it would be fair to-morrow, and laying plans in case she should see Henry again: you may judge of her disappointment when

she awoke the next morning, and found that it rained fast.

Her mother seemed pleased; for she said it was pleasant to have a quiet, rainy day now and then: one could read and sew, without any danger of interruption. She was cutting out some work, and Elise was seated at her desk, to write a long letter to aunt Dora; but poor Blanche did not feel like reading, and even grew tired of her dolls.

She went from window to window, and could only see heavy, lead-colored clouds in the sky, and her bantam paddling about in the rain; his smooth, white feathers all rough and muddy. She thought of the gardener working among his beautiful flowers, and wished she had wings like a bird,

that she might fly to the greenhouse, and make him a call.

Then she thought of old Eli, how he would sit alone all day, with his hands folded; no pleasant sunshine to brighten up his little room, no Elise to read to him, no Blanche to tell him stories. She felt glad that 'Leedy had stopped on her way home, the day before, to leave him some of the flowers they gathered in the wood: he could look at their delicate leaves, and think of the good God who is willing to take so much pains with those tiny things; and yet who loves each of his children better than a great many flowers.

Then Blanche went to the table where her mother was sitting, and watched her measure, and pin the pat-

terns down, and cut out the cloth for her father's shirts; and then baste them nicely together, and make each into a little roll, ready for the seamstress.

On the table lay a piece of cloth that was like cotton on one side, but on the other soft and warm as wool. This was cotton-flannel, Mrs. Ellis said, and made very comfortable clothes.

"How I do wish Eli could have a shirt from it! Why won't you make him one, mother?" asked Blanche.

"I cannot, because I have so much work to do," answered her mother; "what a pity it is that the old man has not some friend who has plenty of time, and is willing to work for him!"

"O, I have time, and no one else *can* be more willing," said Blanche. "Pray let me try, mother — you shall see how nicely I'll sew!"

"But if you begin it, my dear, you must finish all the plain sewing; and there are a great many seams: you must promise not to leave one of them."

"Not a single one; only let me begin."

CHAPTER XV.

BLANCHE AT WORK.

BLANCHE sewed away bravely for half an hour, hardly speaking a word; then she began to look over her work, and count the seams, and wonder how many more she must do; at last she laid it down, and went to look out of the window.

So she idled away a whole hour; but her mother said nothing; for she knew that little girls, who are not accustomed to work, are easily tired when they at-

tempt it; and she was willing to have Blanche rest a while.

But when she came back to stand by the table again, and sigh, and wish it wouldn't rain, and that she had something to amuse her, Mrs. Ellis asked if she had finished the shirt.

"Why, no, indeed, mother; and I'm so sick of the old thing, I do wish you had never cut it out. My thread tangled and kept breaking, and my hands grew so warm, that the needles bent; and see this spot where I pricked my finger, and it bled; and see these great gobbly places. O, dear!" and she threw it down again impatiently. "It is worse even than my dolls. I thought they were troublesome enough."

"But, Blanchie, your dolls do not need to be dressed: they are just as well without it; for they are only made of cloth and sawdust; they do not have cold hands and feet, and poor old aching bones, like Eli."

"No, mother; and after I have worked for them, they cannot look pleased about it, and be so happy that it makes me happy too, as poor old Eli does."

Just then Elise came into the room; and when Blanche told her what she was doing, said she would help a little while. So the sisters sat near together, and the way their needles flew! They took stints; and though 'Leedy always finished first, Blanche did not care; for she said it was only because she was younger than Elise.

Now and then she pricked her finger, or looked up with a sorrowful face, because a knot had come in her thread; but Elise would untangle it, and before very long they came to the end of the last seam.

Blanchie's little hands were never so cramped before — the fingers fairly ached; and she wondered if Eli's felt any worse when he had the rheumatism.

Mrs. Ellis was so pleased with her children's industry, that she left her own work, in order to finish off the shirt; so that Blanche could carry it to Eli the very next day.

She told them that, if the old man was willing, they might have a little party at his house; might take their supper in a basket, and invite Minnie

and Libby to go with them. They felt sure Eli would be as delighted as they were themselves with the plan, and went to bed thinking that, after all, it is not so bad to have, now and then, a rainy day.

CHAPTER XVI.

ELI'S PARTY.

THE next morning, bright and early, Blanche was at the window, looking up at the sky; which was clear and blue as though there had never been such a thing as a cloud.

The trees all shone in the sun, their leaves were washed so clean from dust; and the grass hung heavy with glittering rain drops.

The bantam came in sight, as clean as though he had just been washed; he clapped his wings and crowed, at

the sight of Blanche. Then a thrush fluttered out from a bush, and flew far, far up into the sky; singing so charmingly, singing the same notes over and over again, as if he were saying, "O, I am glad, glad, glad! and I mean to tell it till the air is full of my joy, and every one who hears it will be glad as I!"

Blanche wished that she could fill the whole world with music and gladness, once, like the thrush; she thought, "At least, we can sing to old Eli this afternoon, fill his little room with music, and make him feel as glad as we."

It was Wednesday, and school would only keep half a day; so they had plenty of time. Elise washed the breakfast cups, so that Biddy could make them some cake; and Blanche

ran down to her friend the gardener, and told him her mother wished for a handsome bouquet, to stand in the centre of the table.

While he was arranging the flowers, she went to Eli's house, tapped on the window, and laughed at his surprise because she came so early. He was very much pleased at the thought of their visit, and that was all Blanche could wait to hear; but the old man called her back to ask if he could invite one friend of his own.

She thought it would be very funny if he could not ask whom he chose to his own house.

Mrs. Ellis told Blanche that if she did not learn her lesson well that morning, she would be obliged to keep her at home in the afternoon; and

Blanche studied hard, as you may suppose; but never a lesson was so difficult, she thought; the letters seemed to change into cups and saucers, and flowers, and dolls' faces, but she said every word correctly at last.

I cannot tell you half they enjoyed in their party. Mrs. Ellis was not afraid to trust her children with Eli, she knew him to be such a good old man; and she wanted them, besides, to learn that the best and easiest way of being happy ourselves, is to make others happy.

They played games — Puss in the Corner, Hunt the Slipper, and ever so many more which Eli had never seen, and which amused him greatly. He was too lame to run about with them; but sat in his great chair, and watched

their play as eagerly as though he were a child himself.

He asked Elise to stand up on a stool, and take down a long, black box, which lay on the closet shelf. It was covered with dust; for Eli said it had not been opened for ten years; but he took out of it a violin, and after a little tuning and scraping, began to play all kinds of merry tunes.

Blanche was delighted: she thought this music better than the thrush's song, and asked him why he had never played to her before.

"O," said Eli, "I had forgotten all about my violin, and was too sick and low-spirited to play if I had remembered it; but this afternoon I feel like a young man again, and now I must see

Old Eli playing on the Violin. Page 80.

more than a wrinkled skin, and apparently dead.

By watching this from day to day, you would find it grow drier, harder, and darker, until it was like a shell of brown — dark, and almost as hard as a chestnut shell.

But touch it with your finger, and you will find it moves a little — quivers as though it were hurt. It has no eyes, no mouth or feet, is only a roll with strange-looking marks about the head, like ears: these marks, in time, will change to wings.

To go back to the cocoons: when silk is to be made from them, they are taken from the frames, the loose silk torn off, and then gathered into baskets. At Mr. Ellis's cocoonery the

worms often made heaps of these balls, higher than Blanche's head.

They are then baked in an oven. This destroys the chrysalis inside, which is the brown thing I have described to you, — all that is left of the worm; — then they are thrown into hot water, reeled, and woven into silk fit for dresses after it has been dyed; or else for sewing silk.

But if the cocoons are not baked, and a few are usually kept for eggs, you will find that, before long, one end begins to grow wet and look dark; and then you will see two little feather-like feelers come out; and at last what went in a great worm, will creep forth a pure white miller!

These millers do not eat any thing; they are picked off from the cocoons,

and placed upon sheets of clean paper, which they cover all over with the tiny eggs I told you about at first; then they fold their beautiful white wings and die.

Blanche lives in America, you know, and this is the way silk worms are raised by Americans; but in China and other warm countries, they are not all kept in houses: they live in the open air, upon trees, like our caterpillars, and spin their cocoons among the boughs; though the finest kinds of silk are always raised under shelter.

When you look at your own silk gown or gay bonnet ribbon, you must think of the poor little worms which worked so hard, and even died, in order that you might be finely dressed.

And you must think whether *you*

ever did half as much as this for the comfort and happiness of others: you would not want, I am sure, to be outdone by a mere worm!

CHAPTER XXI.

BLANCHIE'S ACCIDENT.

THE rooms in the cocoonery were made with trap doors in the floor; and Mrs. Ellis had told Blanche that when one of these had been left open, she must go to another room; for in playing near it, she might easily fall and injure herself.

But Blanche had never seen the worms wind their cocoons; and the only room in which they were beginning, had three trap doors wide open. She thought there could be no

harm for once; she would be very careful, and only remain a little while; so she walked on from frame to frame, hardly seeing where she went, until something upon her neck startled her.

She knew that silk worms never bite, but this took hold closely, and moved from side to side; then she felt threads go across, and all at once thought it might be a spider.

It was a silk worm, which had chosen Blanchie's white neck for a frame, and was beginning to make his cocoon.

The little girl put her hand there, felt his cold back, started, and fell.

She did not know any more until she awoke in the cellar of the cocoonery; where it was damp and cold, and

filled with a disagreeable odor, from the withered mulberry leaves and dead worms.

Only a little light came in through the trap door above; she tried to call, but was so frightened and so faint that she could not speak a word. She heard John saying that Mrs. Ellis had sent him for Blanche; it was long past her school hour; but she could not answer.

Then a man came with a great basket of dead leaves, which he began to throw through the trap door. Blanche thought that she would be buried, and never see her mother and Elise again. She thought how poor old Eli would miss her; and about the visit to Henry; and dear aunt Dora, who loved her so well.

The man had stopped for some purpose; he came again with the leaves; one or two fell upon Blanchie's face. She thought how horrible it would be to have the door shut, and be left there alive, with all those dead worms, and rats, perhaps, running over her.

She heard John say, "It's a great load: let me help you lift it."

"Yes," said the man; "but it's a deep cellar; 'twould take many a load like this to fill it up: only look down."

John looked; saw Blanche's pale face away down there in the dark; and in another second had jumped through the doorway, and stood beside her.

She was very cold, and her eyes were shut, for she had fainted again.

John thought her dead, and called for the man to open the outer door and let him bring her above.

A pitiful sight she was, when he took her into the sunshine again; her muslin dress was torn and soiled; her hair was wet with blood; and her face as white as marble.

In this state she was carried home; and such a stir and fright as there was in the house in consequence!

Blanche, though, like other children, she was sometimes disobedient, was yet a very gentle and loving child, and had many friends; all of whom were surprised and shocked when they heard the news. She felt her mother's tears falling upon her face, as she bent over her; and she heard John telling Biddy how he found her in the cellar; then

the gardener came running in to see if there was any hope, for he thought the world of Blanche; and as for poor old Eli, they dared not tell him: his heart would have broken at the thought of losing his pet.

When, at last, Blanche could speak, she tried to ask her mother to forgive her disobedience; but Mrs. Ellis told her not to think of that, she had suffered more than enough for punishment; and the good mother kissed her, and told her to try and sleep.

But just then the physician came. He bandaged Blanchie's head, and said that the wound was not very deep; but one of her legs had been broken by the fall, and it would be a great while before she could run about again.

The little girl suffered dreadfully while the limb was dressed; but she did not complain, for though no one had told her so, she knew that it was all her own fault; and it made her feel even worse, to see all about her so gentle and kind.

Her mother staid with her that night; and though she still suffered, it was beautiful to feel those tender arms about her, and know that she was yet to live on earth with her dear friends. Before morning Blanche fell into a quiet sleep.

CHAPTER XXII.

BLANCHE'S PRESENTS.

IT was very hard, in the long summer days, to be shut up in one room; and not even able to walk across that. Blanche had never kept quiet so long before since she first learned to walk.

Sometimes the tears would come into her eyes, when Elise bid her good by before going to school; and afterwards, when she watched her sister skipping along through thes unshine, stopping now

and then, to pick a berry or flower, or to kiss her hand to Blanche.

But Blanchie had a great deal to amuse her; every one seemed kind and thoughtful, never tired of doing for the invalid. The truth is, that when she was well, Blanche had been kind and thoughtful, never tired of doing for others; and now she was in trouble, they remembered it.

You must not forget this, your own turn may come to need friends; and if you have none, think whether it is not your own fault.

'Leedy seldom came from school without something for Blanche; the boys wrote her little pieces of poetry, or at least rhymes, and sent apples and sugar-plums; and the girls sent notes, and pretty or droll pictures

which they had drawn upon paper; even the teacher wrote her a note, and sent a bunch of flowers.

Then the gardener came every morning to see Blanche, and to bring her some beautiful flower, or a rich ripe peach or pear, that had been picked off from the sunny side of the tree, and was all yellow and rosy without, and honey-sweet within.

And John, the man, would knock at her door to say that old Eli had sent his love, and hoped Miss Blanche was better to-day, and asked her to accept a little present he had made.

So John would take from his pocket a set of garden tools, carved from wood; or a queer little man or dog, which Eli had cut with his penknife; and Blanche, who even while she was

sick and suffering, remembered that others too had pains and wants, would divide her fruits and flowers with the poor old man.

When John went to carry them, she would watch from the window until he was out of sight; and think how pleased Eli would be, and fancy she could see him holding up his hands and exclaiming over them; and her own share would taste better, because she had been generous; for every mouthful she ate, Blanche could think Eli's pear or peach must have tasted just so juicy and sweet.

Aunt Dora sent a beautiful great doll, with two or three sets of clothes, that fastened with hooks and buttons, like a grown-up person's; and could be as easily changed. It even had a

night gown and night cap; and it had a hood and cloak for every day, and a bonnet and mantilla for great occasions.

Aunt Dora wrote too, almost every day, and told how much she would like to be with her little niece; and she told little stories about the farm, and woods, and garden, the squirrels and birds; and about the chickens that Blanche had seen when they were tiny things just hatched from the egg, and now had grown to great hens with chickens of their own.

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CHAPTER XXIII.

WATCHING THE BIRDS.

BLANCHE'S greatest amusement, during her lameness, was in sitting by the window, and watching the thousand little things that happen out of doors.

The window of her mother's room looked into the garden; and an elm tree grew near the house, shading it from the sun; out from the window was a little balcony; and when the day was warm and clear, Mr. Ellis would lift her into this pleasant, shady place, where

she could see every thing that went on in the garden and avenue; and could look across through the boughs to where the mountains rose against the sky, and the beautiful river at their foot lay shining in the sun.

She would watch the fat robins trotting along the path; half a dozen young ones, with speckled breasts, trotting after them; eating whatever they could find, and making clumsy attempts to fly; but so fat that they very often fell fluttering back among the bushes.

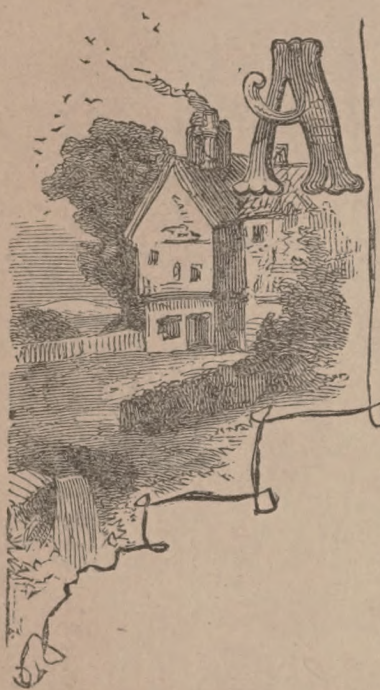
A honeysuckle had climbed from the bank below, and twined itself all about the balcony; this was covered with flowers; and O, such beautiful little humming-birds as came whirring and buzzing about it, curling their feet

given up the promised walk, when he found that she could not make one of the party.

But Henry was called away by some business, and obliged to remain for several weeks; and the gardener had one of his rheumatic attacks; and John had so much to do in the greenhouse, in consequence, that he could not spare time for visiting. Blanche longed to go herself and find how her friend was prospering. Every chance that she had, she still sent him fruit; and her mantelpiece was covered with his presents, — the queer little wooden toys.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE LAST VISIT TO ELI.



A FEW days after the thunder storm, Blanche heard to her great joy, that Henry had come home; Elise had seen him in the street; he was driving, but stopped to inquire after Blanche.

And that very afternoon came a note, inviting both the sisters to his house; asking them to bring their friends, the other little girls he had seen in the churchyard.

Mrs. Ellis said that Elise should go,

because the gentleman had been so polite; but she felt it would be too much trouble for him to have Blanche, who was still very helpless; and as she could not play about with the other children, might need too much attention.

Poor Blanchie! If there was a place in the world where she would have delighted to go, it was Henry's house; and she knew he would arrange so many things for their amusement, and enjoy their plays so much himself, it was very hard to stay at home.

She could not help shedding a few tears while her sister was dressing for the party; though 'Leedy promised to remember every thing that happened,

and tell her about it; and to repeat every story that was told.

This was not like seeing and hearing for herself; and a few months earlier, I am afraid Blanche would have been very impatient and unwilling to obey her mother; but now she had been sick so long, that she had learned to give up many pleasures.

She knew by her mother's constant tender care, how much she loved her; and that when she refused any request it was for the good of her little girl, and not for her own pleasure.

Blanche tried to play with her doll, but the tears would come into her eyes and fall upon the dresses, as she put them on; so she took up some bright-colored worsted, and began to knit a pair of wristlets for Eli.

She was working away quite busily upon these, when the door opened, and who should come in but Henry!

He had no thought, he said, of leaving Blanche out of his party; and had come for her in his own chaise, and would promise to take the best care in the world that no accident should happen, if Mrs. Ellis would only allow her to go.

Blanche did not say a word, but looked up in her mother's face so wistfully, and she had been so good and patient about staying at home; and Henry laughed so merrily at the thought of her being troublesome, that the mother gave her consent.

She was quickly dressed in a little clean white wrapper, and a blue ribbon round her waist; then Henry lifted

her in his own arms to the door, where his chaise stood ready; and went quite slowly that she might not be tired with the drive.

Before Blanche guessed what he was doing, he had turned into the lane which led to Eli's house, and stopped before the door.

The old man came limping out into the sunshine, and they were overjoyed to see each other; he looked into Blanche's pale, but happy face, and great tears rolled over his own; for you know Eli was very apt to cry when he felt happy.

Henry lifted the seat of his chaise, and drew forth a paper of cookies and some mellow pears; he laughed as he said, "There, you see Blanche has not come without bringing you some-

thing, Eli!" but she leaned forward to whisper, "He brought them himself."

As the chaise turned away, she looked out to see the old man as he stood there in the sunshine, with the white hair blowing about his forehead in the breeze; with the peaceful smile and the poor, tired hands folded quietly.

She always remembered him with that quiet, peaceful look upon his face; for she never saw Eli again. The gardener went into his house the next morning, and he lay there dead; beside him the Bible, which he loved to keep near, although he could not read a word; his knife, and an unfinished plaything, which he had been making for Blanche.

Eli had often said that whenever God was willing to take him out of his poverty, and weakness, and ignorance; out of the earth where he was only a trouble to himself and to all his friends, he should be grateful; and so glad, that Blanche must not feel sorry for his loss. She must think of the beautiful heaven, where he had gone, and think of him as young again, active and happy; no longer alone, but with his wife and children about him.

She kept the unfinished plaything and wristlet a great many years; and when she thought of Eli, it was always pleasant to remember that she did all she could, to make him comfortable while he lived on earth.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE FIRST VISIT TO HENRY.

LITTLE thinking of the great change which would come to their old friend so soon, Henry drove on; they soon came within sight of a pleasant brown house among the trees, and here he stopped.

Blanche had gone past the place before, and hardly knew it now, it was so much improved; trees had been planted, fences repaired, the house newly painted, piazzas and summer houses built.

Elise and the other children ran out to meet them. The pleasant lady who stood at the door, was, Henry said, his mother; she seemed as glad to see them, as himself; and while he had driven after Blanche, had taken them to the side of the house, where a swing was fastened into the branches of a great elm tree; there they were swinging when they heard the sound of wheels, and went to see if Blanche had arrived.

Henry told them to keep on their sun bonnets, for he had no thought of shutting them up in the house that pleasant afternoon; so they went out into the grove, with which they were delighted, because it was so much like aunt Dora's woods.

At the edge of this grove was a

shady place on the lawn, where they could have all kinds of games; and there was a white tent with something inside, — they could not tell what, because the curtains were all down.

Between two pine trees a hammock was swung. Perhaps you have never seen one of these beds; instead of standing upon legs, like those in our chambers, they hang by ropes from the wall, or from branches of the trees; and when they are out of doors they swing with a pleasant motion, which lulls any one to sleep.

Henry wanted Blanche to try and see how she liked his hammock; so he lifted her into it, and said that now she was like a little bird in her nest; and had better stay there and rest a while, for she had taken a long ride,

and was not strong enough yet to bear much fatigue.

She was willing enough to stay, and have the pine boughs rock and sing to her with such a pleasant sound; she lay there watching the children play below, and looking up to catch glimpses of the sky, which now and then was visible through the deep green.

She saw too, flies floating about in the air; and wondered why they kept hovering in one place, and did not go somewhere, as she would if she had wings; and the young birds in a nest kept peeping out at her, and calling to their mother, who came very soon, with a good large berry in her mouth, which she divided among her ravenous

children. In the midst of this watching, Blanche fell fast asleep.

While she slept, Henry took the other girls to walk about his grounds. It was too far for Blanche to go, and he left his mother seated in a garden chair with her work, to watch and be ready to call them when she awoke.

They went to the barn, which was built, if you ever heard of such a thing, upon tin pans; this is a fashion which some country farmers have, of keeping the rats from their grain; they build first piles of stone, four or five on each side of the barn, turn a pan upside down on the top of each pile, and above all this raise the building.

If the rats run up the stones, they cannot creep over the slippery sides of

the tin; and have to seek other quarters.

They looked every where; into the grain chests, and harness room, and hay loft; and into the stalls where the horse and cow stood, the latter with a calf almost as large as herself.

In the pigeon house, they found some of the prettiest white doves, so tame that they would stand upon Henry's finger, and peck at the oats in his hand; some had fan tails and strutted about like turkeys, but they seemed so vain, that it spoiled all their beauty.

In the yard stood a pair of oxen, beautiful great creatures, as sleek and glossy as squirrels, and with large, soft eyes. They were fastened into a cart, and Henry told the girls to jump in, he would give them a ride; so they

were drawn about under the trees a while, and then he said they should see his ducks and geese.

So walking beside the oxen, "hawing" and "geeing" like any farmer, he drove on through a path where the trees almost met overhead; stopping sometimes that they might pick the ripe pears from the trees, for the cart lifted them so high that they could do it easily.

Then they beheld a pond, with willows growing about it, and the ducks and geese sailing in every direction.

"It almost makes me wish that I was a goose," said Minnie, upon which Henry went to a little house among the willows, and drew forth a little painted boat, saying, "If we are not

geese, we can have a sail as well as they."

So he rowed them to the other side, and the sun was so hot that they did not care to go farther; then called for his man to take the oxen back, and they walked home through the garden.

He told each to pick a bouquet to carry home; and went about with his knife, cutting off tough and thorny stems which they could not manage. His dog had followed them up from the boat; it was a large Newfoundland, very handsome and knowing; Henry put all their flowers into a basket, and the dog walked quietly beside them, with this in his mouth.

A gentleman, passing through the garden, took a flower from the basket,

to see what Prince would say; he dropped the rest in an instant, seized the gentleman's coat, and would not let him go, until he had given up the flower again.

When they reached the grove, there lay Blanche still fast asleep; but the sound of their voices soon awoke her, and she would not believe that her eyes had closed, and she had not been all the while watching the flies and the waving boughs, until they told her how far they had been.

There were seats made of moss, for the other girls; and there was a little easy chair for Blanche. They were hardly seated, when Henry opened the curtains of the tent; and there stood a table set with berries and cream, apples, pears, nuts, cake, ice cream, and

more good things than I can remember now.

He said that Elise and he should be waiters, and the rest company; so they passed the refreshments upon little trays; and after they had eaten enough, Henry's mother folded a paper of cakes for each to carry home.

Then they sang a great many songs; and Blanche told about the afternoon at Eli's, and how she wished he were there now with his violin. Upon this, Henry went to the house for his flute; and though he could not play for them to dance, he could accompany their songs; his mother was delighted with the music.

While singing, they arranged the flowers, and made each other wreaths of oak and maple leaves; they even

dressed up the old lady's cap with sprays of the tiny partridge vine, and some starry little white flowers they had found in the wood.

It was so long since Blanche had gone from home, that every thing looked new and doubly beautiful to her; the trees had a fresher green, the sky a clearer blue, the flowers grew nearer together, and had lovelier tints; and the birds sang louder and more joyously.

She only wished that Eli could share the pleasure with them; and did not know how soon the good old man was going to a home where there are clearer skies and sweeter music.

But through the trees, they could see the sun sinking lower and lower in the west; and as they went towards

the house, they saw Mr. Ellis's carriage, which had been sent for Blanche, standing at the door.

Henry told the rest to go home with the man, instead; and said he would take Blanche in his own chaise, which was easiest. They were soon home, and he was not satisfied until he had placed Blanche safely in her chair, by the window of her mother's room.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE NEW MINISTER.

BLANCHE, after a while, grew able to walk about the house with a crutch; and then was well enough to go sometimes to school and church. The summer was drawing to a close, and she did not care how soon it went; for she longed to have another come, when she could walk and run about as much as she chose.

And best of all, in the autumn aunt Dora was coming to make her mother

a visit; and, when she came, there were always good times, if only she wouldn't marry that dreadful minister!

Blanche sat thinking about this many a time. Her book or doll would lie unnoticed, while she wondered if something might not happen to the minister; if the cars couldn't run off from the track and kill him; or if he could not die in his bed some day, like Eli, and leave aunt Dora to marry somebody else.

Cannot you think whom she would have chosen?

It was wrong in her to have such thoughts about the poor minister whom she had never seen; but she loved Henry so much, and thought him the only person in the world half good enough for her dear aunt Dora.

And then it would be so pleasant to spend her holiday afternoons with them both; to sail herself on the pond, and play with the doves, and look at the oxen Elise had told her so much about. I am afraid Blanche was a little selfish in her wish, this time.

Aunt Dora came, and was as good and beautiful as ever; and as ready to give up her own wishes and plans for the sake of others. Blanche talked a great deal about Eli, and then about Henry; and she couldn't help telling aunt Dora how she did wish that he could marry her, instead of the minister.

Aunt Dora laughed and blushed, and told her she didn't know what she was talking about; and that she felt very sure the minister would love both Elise

and Blanche, because they were so dear to her.

The next morning was Sunday; and Blanche wanted so much to go to church with her aunt, that Mrs. Ellis consented. They went early, because they were obliged to walk slowly; and as the bell had not begun to ring when they reached the church, they strolled about in the churchyard; and seated themselves to rest under the oak tree, where Henry had made a settee of branches and roots.

As Blanche was showing it to aunt Dora, and talking about him, who should come in sight but Henry himself!

He shook hands with them cordially; saying, "I do not need an introduc-

tion to Blanchie's aunt, I have heard of her so often."

Blanche looked up in aunt Dora's face, and saw the cheeks grow very red: she thought, perhaps, this was because she remembered their conversation in the morning; and while they talked together, she limped along to church.

"Have you come to hear the new minister, who will preach for the first time?" Blanche asked, at which Henry laughed, and aunt Dora's face grew red again.

Blanche understood all when, as the minister arose and began to read a hymn, she looked up and beheld Henry in the pulpit! She looked at aunt Dora, and at Elise, and her mother, and longed for church to be over, that

she might hear why they had kept the secret so long.

Mrs. Ellis knew, from the first, that Henry and aunt Dora's minister were the same; but she wanted to teach her children how foolish it is to dislike persons before one has ever seen them.

That autumn they were married; and a great many pleasant visits, a great many sails and drives the children had, with aunt Dora and uncle Henry.

THE END.