For the Boys and Girls

IN THE FIRE-FLIES' KINGDOM

BY IMOGENE H. SYKES.

"I have one beautiful rose on my bush, which I have saved to give you for the sick child," said Mrs. Drew to the minister's wife, as they left the shady porch and walked down the garden-path toward the flower-beds.

A pair of guilty eyes peeped after them from the screen of woodbine at one end of the porch, behind which was shrinking a little girl, who seemed afraid to venture after them.

"Oh, dear, she'll find it gone!" she ejaculated, in dismay, slipping down in the shade of the honeysuckle, and crouching deep in its fragrant leaves to hide herself.

"I wish I hadn't touched the old thing!" she cried, sulkily, only half-ashamed of what she had done. "But it was only one rose, and I wanted it to make rose-water for Beulah's party, and mother needn't have been so mean about refusing. Now, the minister's wife will know, and she'll tell the minister, and he'll preach a sermon at me about disobedience and stealing! As if taking one rose was stealing!"

She peeped out again as footsteps sounded near her, and saw her mother parting with her visitor at the garden-gate, with a sad look on her usually cheerful face.

A sudden pang struck the little girl's heart as she watched her turn off on a by-path leading from the porch, as if she wished to be alone with her own sad thoughts.

Jessie plucked the leaves from the vine with nervous fingers, and struggled with the good spirit that prompted her to run after her mother and confess her fault.

But a sense of shame held her back. She had done a mean thing, and her moral courage was not strong enough to let her confess it.

She was a brave child, and had a good deal of cool nerve, as was proven when the hay-rick fell over on her and she was covered under the hay for hours, with only a little breathing-place about as big as her hand, and when she was at last found and released from her perilous position, did not even cry or grow nervous.

But she had no bravery for this great danger she was placed in, no strength to resist the overwhelming feeling of shame that crushed her down without even a little breathing-place.

"I don't think it's so very wrong," she argued, making a pile of her leaves and idly filling the hole in the centre with the long tongues of the woodbine. "Only mother is so particular. She wants me to mind every little thing. She won't care tomorrow."

But still Jessie lingered in her hiding-place, and, despite her bravado, felt very sorry in her heart that she had so willfully pleased herself in tearing that deep red rose to pieces, and mixing it up in a glass dish with water and sugar, as a delectable beverage for her doll, but imbibed by herself in small sips and with much relish.

It was to have been sent to a sick boy in the village, and her mother had charged her not to touch it.

And she had taken it, despite the warning. She felt very miserable in her hiding-place, and wished her mother would find her, and make confession easy by putting her arm around her and questioning her gently.

But the evening lengthened, and no one came near her. The porch remained deserted, save for its one occupant, half-hidden in the woodbine, and a deep silence filled the air.

A tiny spark glistened suddenly under Jessie's fingers; another, another—here, there, on her hair, between her fingers, as she idly tore the leaves—until all at once she was surrounded by the golden light flashing in and out so rapidly.

Jessie looked at the fire-flies with a sudden thought, and a questioning awe in her face, as they flitted through the wire-screen above her, in and out the fragrant vine.

"Mother read in a little book translated from the German, the other day," she said, with a hushed voice, as one of the tiny creature's flashed through her fingers, as she held it up against the vine, "that fire-flies were lanterns in the hands of angels, who were looking for lost souls. I wonder if mine is lost for stealing mother's rose, and if these are angels hunting for it?"

The fire-flies came closer and closer around her, flying in her face, on her hair, and dropping down lightly on her dress, as she shrank back into the honeysuckle, as her sense of guilt made her afraid to meet the angels' eyes.

She looked up through the vine at the stars. They shone down serenely in her face, and, with the lovely hush of night now all around, filled her with a sense of great longing and sorrow.

Her head drooped back in its leafy nest, her hands clasped each other over the golden lamps in her lap, and as the sobs came half-uttered, as if a spell was holding them back, she murmured:

"Please, dear angels, are you looking for me?"

And she sank off into dreamland, or into the kingdom of the fire-flies, for they glittered over her sleeping face with a magic wand, and wafted her off into their mystic realms.

She was in a place of delicious fragrance, and a soft, white light filled the air and the cool, green plants that arose up to the dome of heaven, while the trickling murmur of water made a sweet rhythm with the sighing sound of the breeze.

Jessie looked about her in tremulous awe. Nothing was visible but the clear white light, through which passed a shadow now and then, like a soft cloud, and the lovely plants with their broad leaves growing upward into a shaded canopy.

She attempted to rise and then discovered that she was unable to move from the spot where she was lying, for her hands were bound together by a band of silvery light. And, stretched before her, like a barrier, was a screen of tiny sparks which, as they glistened and darkened, seemed to be shutting her out from the pure white inclosure beyond.

A heavy weight was upon her heart, and a burning brand seemed to burn deep into her brow.

Her eyes dared not meet the holy radiance of that magic circle from which she was shut out, and, as they sank down with bitter shame, the tears rushed into them quickly.

"What do you bring me?" asked a wondrous voice, so full of love and pity that Jessie started up to listen with trembling heart.

And, through the white radiance, flitted the shadow, growing more distinct each moment, until a white-robed figure, with wide-spread wings, hovered in the centre.

"A guilty soul," murmured a little glittering sound, like the tinkling of gold.

And the living screen glowed and darkened before the angel, with a swift mingling of light and shadow.

"Ah!" sighed the loving voice. "What is its sin?"

"Disobedience, theft and cowardice," murmured the fire-flies, sadly.

"And the sinner a little child!" cried the angel, with great sorrow, as the scintillating screen parted, and the white wings fluttered down beside Jessie.

"My child," said the tender voice, as a soft hand touched the burning brand on her forehead, "is the fruit of your sin still sweet to your willful lips?"

Then it seemed to Jessie as if a great dull weight fell away from her. She felt her spirit grow light and happy, and the dull weight fell away from her. She stood erect before the white-robed figure and held out her bound hands.

"Forgive me, dear angel!" she cried, pleadingly. "Oh, help me to find my soul, and I will try to keep it safe!"

And the fire-flies seemed to flash around her with a delighted gleam, and raise her up upon their tiny wings to receive the angel's kiss of pardon.

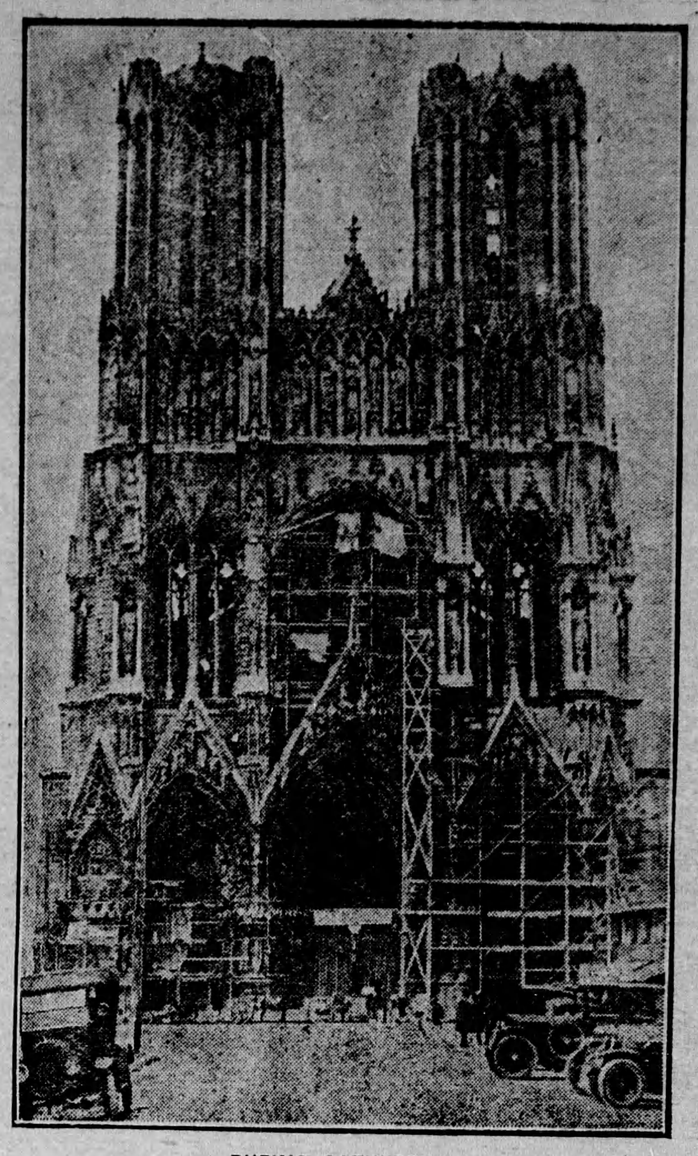
Jessie knew she had been dreaming as she sat up and rubbed her cramped arms, upon which her head had been resting, but the spirit of the dream was upon her with a holy calm, and as she stretched out her hands to the fire-flies gleaming in and out the woodbine, she murmured, penitently:

"Dear fire-flies, I will never go into your kingdom again as a wicked girl. And I know now that you do watch over us for the dear angels."

She saw her mother coming along the path in her white dress, and ran to her, joyously:

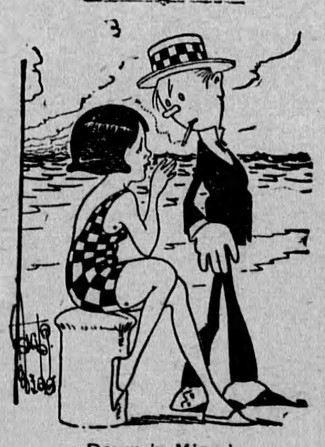
"Mamma, I am sorry I pained you," she said, bravely, holding tight to the dear hand as she confessed her fault.

Then she told her dream, and the influence of the pretty legend clung to her throughout her childhood, helping her to forbear from many a wrong act, lest the brand of her brow and the weight on her soul should shame her as it had done in the presence of the angel.



RHEIMS CATHEDRAL

Shelled by the Germans in the war, now being restored through the liberality of John D. Rockefeller, Sr., who has given the money to France for the purpose. The scaffolding is being erected around the building, which is one of the most historic and beautiful in Europe. It was the scene of the coronation of the King of France after the victory of Joan of Arc.



Down in Miami.

She—"Why do you smoke those awful cigarettes? Don't you know they slow up the heart action?"

He—"If they didn't, mine would be racing all the time down here at the shore."

Divers.

Bobby—"Pa, did people go swimming a lot in Bible times?"

Father—"I don't know. Why?"

Bobby—"Well, it says here that they died of divers diseases."

Who's Who in Music.

Chopin—1810-1849.

When Chopin was a boy, his beauty rare,
And genius won him homage everywhere.
Of Polish birth, his parents well to do,
Within a gentle atmosphere he grew.
Though long he lived upon a foreign strand,
His thoughts turned ever to his native land.
His sufferings filling his loving heart with woe,
And to this grief much of his work we owe.
Once at the piano, Chopin sat and played.
To his young schoolmates, listening, half afraid,
To the strange robber tale his fingers told;
How they all broke into a house for gold,
And when the deed was done ran far away
Into the woods to sleep until the day.
And while sweet chords described their slumber deep
His little friends fell, one by one, asleep.
Then Chopin, all, with lively chords awoke
The little sleepers, laughing at his joke.
Poor Chopin died at Paris ere his prime,
But left a name remembered for all time.

Charming Thought.

It was after dinner and the talk had turned to psychology. This disturbing question had just been put: "When does old age really begin?"

To establish a formula was proving rather difficult, when one lady, who did not look her years, found the following:

"To me, old age is always fifteen years older than I am."

Hatred.

Mother (scrubbing Johnny's ears)—"I certainly hate dirt."

Johnny—"I do, too, ma."

Mother—I'd never believe it! Why do you hate dirt?"

Johnny—"'Cause it make you wash me."

A SABBATH BY THE WAY

The Sabbath morn dawned bright. A mist went up from the stream. The whip-poor-will was silent, but now began the thrush, the mocher, the redbird, the robin and the wren. Breakfast was so sweet, with the dogwood around and the log meeting-house dreaming in the sun. Early enough—toward ten by the minister's big silver watch—appeared a woman, a slight, . . . person in a plain gray gown and gray close-fitting bonnet. She crossed the stream upon a log fixed well above the water and smoothed for walking, but without a handrail. When she saw the wagon she stopped for a moment, shading her eyes with her hand, then came on to the meetinghouse, the little green, and the Selkirks.

She was the first of the Scattergoods. Men, women and children, others presently appeared. Then came the Taverners, then the Carrys and the Waites. All were dressed without any pomp and in one color, but most neatly. All said "thee" and "friend" and "John" and "Jean" and 'Christina"; all had deliberation and gentleness; all were glad that the journeyers to the Shenando county should come to meeting.

They sat in the meetinghouse, the Selkirks and Stephen Trabue, the men with the men, the women with the women. Great quiet fell. The walls of the building were of round logs, the chinks between filled with mortar; above the beams rose a cavernous, shingled roof; the floor was wood, smoothed as it might be, the benches rude, without backs. The two heavy doors and the small windows stood open to the sunshine. It poured in, bestowing upon the interior gold bars and gold disks and gold dust. But the Quakers seemed to sit in silver—or maybe gold within and silver without. A plain silver and restful. The forest pressed around, the forest fragrance entered with the wandering airs, and also the song of birds and the ripple of the stream. But the Quakers sat without sound or movement, not preaching nor praying nor singing. The elder Selkirks and Trabue doubtless knew of that; they sat as quietly as their hosts. But Tam and Elizabeth had not understood. They waited for the minister, and when he did not appear . . . no one came to tell about it; no elder rose and took the situation in hand. Time went on. Nothing but quiet. Tam, for all the Thistlebrae training, fidgeted, drawing at last his father's attention, who bent to him and whispered. "This is their way. Sit still, and pray and sing within."

Tam subsided. He was used to abstraction of attention in kirk, and knew the way—though sometimes what his father was saying caught him. Now he went with promptness to that miraculous Valley before him, and then for alteration to the moor above Thistlebrae, to Rob and Wull and Jamie and Angus, the stone fort they had there, the curlews in the blue air above, and the two dogs, Dart and Dover. He sat quite contentedly, piling stones for the Wallace Tower.

Elizabeth drew the like information from her Aunt Kirstie. "No, nothing's happened. It's their way. They just sit still and try to hear God speaking. You do the same!" So Elizabeth sat still and tried for it. Like Tam she saw Thistlebrae, though she went elsewhere than to the moor and the building fortresses. Then she thought of the Valley to which they were going, and she also made it a child's paradise—only she hoped that the wolves would not howl at night. Several nights ago, waking, she had heard them, away in the forest, and had seen Stephen get up and throw a great branch upon the fire. She hoped there wouldn't be wolves—or rattlesnakes—or Indians. A bird was singing in an ash tree that pressed close to the window. He was singing because the Quakers wouldn't. In Thistlebrae they were singing,

O lord unto my prayer give ear,
My cry let come to thee—

A stream of light was flowing from the door through the meetinghouse. It struck on this side and on that where, like a doubled string of beads, sat without motion men and women. . . . They sat so still, held in that light.

In the meetinghouse the quietness continued. The Spirit moved no one to speak. The place grew peace, not gray peace but crystal peace. John Selkirk sat with folded hands. "Lord, Lord, in a New Land give us peace with freedom!" The redbird sang, the crystal peace flowed on.—Mary Johnston, in "The Great Valley."

At An Indian Railway Station.

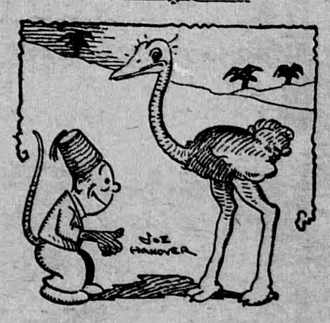
An Indian railway station is a naive mixture of the old and the new—civilization treading on the heels of superstition. In the big cities, such as Bombay, the stations themselves are a fairly good imitation of their London prototypes. In them you will find large ticket, telegraph and inquiry offices, bookstalls, electric luggage trucks, long platforms and refreshment rooms. So much for the framework.

The figures in the picture however, belong to an earlier day of traveling, when the children of Israel were marching through the desert to the promised land. Men of every caste and creed, with turbans of every shape and hue—Parsees in frock coats, cotton trousers, and shiny fish-shaped hats; erect Punjabi Mussulmans, walking with a swagger; soldiers in khaki wearing khaki turbans; white-clad "bearers" watching over their sahib's belongings like anxious hens over their brood; coolies staggering along with enormous loads balanced on their heads; a family squatting on the platform, and from its mother's arm two large black eyes set in a tiny brown face surveying the scene.

No one hurries; no one is impatient. It is doubtful whether the equivalent of the phrase "to catch a train" or "to miss your train" exists in the vernacular. In India you go to the "isteshun," and if you have just missed your train you squat on the platform and sleep, eat and exchange views with your neighbors until the appearance of another train. You are always sure of having neighbors, however small the station, because here a station is almost as much a social meeting place as a means of coming and going. In fact, many up-country stations at a first glance look like some sort of open-air hostel.

When the train arrives, innumerable hawkers collect like flies round the carriage window. A man with sticky sweetmeats in a wire cage balanced on his head, his wicker show stand tucked under his arm; a little Hindu boy with English magazines of doubtful age; men with trays of oranges, guavas, grapes, crying their wares in that ascending sing-song that trails off on a questioning note. At Jhansi a man sells dolls of all sizes; dressed in the gaudiest colors and braids, they sit tiffly on a tray poied on his head.

One particular scene will always remain with me. A gravel platform under the white hot glare of a noonday sun; scarlet flowers, and two white sleeping figures stretched out on the ground. A little boy is splashing under the pump. A tonga draws up outside the railings, and deposits its burden of veiled ladies. Like gayly plumed birds, in their green, red and yellow draperies, they flutter onto the platform and, with much jingling of bracelets and whispering, squat down in a circle. From the branch of a pipal tree is swinging a baby monkey, while its father, of wise and wizened face, sits at the trunk of the tree watching the train.



An Ostrich's Appetite.

Monk—"Let's go have a little lunch."

Ostrich—"I'm not hungry, I just ate a couple of kegs of nails."

For the Waste Basket.

A round piece of heavy paper or oil cloth placed in the bottom of a wicker or other open-mesh waste basket prevents the pencil shavings and other fine material from sifting through on the floor. This simple precaution saves many steps.

Nonsense.

"Whata's the use of saving $50?"

"None whatever. It's too little for a car and too much to give the wife."

REG'LAR FELLERS—By Gene Byrnes.

Selling Out to the Enemy.