

OUR BOYS AND GIRLS

BY AUNT BECKY.

Dear Girls and Boys—

What is the matter? I thought I would never be able to get through my mail this week. But I am really afraid I have been forgotten. Hurry up, little girls, get your thinking caps on. Nut-gathering time is such a jolly season that I am sure you will have something to tell me about it, and notice the little squirrels laying in their winter stores. Let me hear from you all.

Your loving AUNT BECKY.

Dear Aunt Becky:

I have been reading the letters in the True Witness and was sorry to see none for quite a while. I live on a farm. We have eleven cows and six horses. I spent a very pleasant vacation of three weeks in Montreal. I have three aunts living there. I went to Huntingdon fair on the 8th of September and had a nice time. I will now finish, hoping to see my letter in print. I remain,

Your loving niece,

M. EDNA M.

Kensington, Que.

BASTING THREADS.

"I must have it—you know I must if I speak." The tone was very earnest, and Maudie Frost's face expressed even more than her words.

"Yes, dear, I know you haven't anything else that is suitable to wear, but I must go to your grandmother in spite of that. If she had not needed me very much she would never have sent a telegram," responded Mrs. Frost, who was hurriedly packing a traveling bag.

Maudie's frown was suddenly succeeded by a brighter expression as she exclaimed:

"I can do it myself! Wasn't I the best one in the sewing class last year? Why, of course I'll do it! There's all to-morrow afternoon free for those that take part in the entertainment, and as I'm not in the singing I can have my time here at home."

Mrs. Frost glanced doubtfully at the table where rested the skirt of Maudie's dress, all finished but the broad hem at the bottom.

"Would you measure the hem and baste it very carefully?"

Maudie laughed. "Why, I know just how to do it. I often basted the work for the younger girls."

"I know—but that was quite different. You must use fine thread, and fold it perfectly even before you begin to sew."

"I wish you'd trust me, mother. There comes the hack now. Here's your pocketbook. I hope you won't find grandma very ill. Yes, I'll tell father and Miriam and Louis all your messages. Now kiss me for 'em all."

"And remember," said Mrs. Frost, "to lay the skirt on the sewing-table flat and smooth, and baste it—"

Maudie laughed. She loved her mother dearly, but thought she was very old-fashioned in her methods.

"Just as if everything must be done by rule!" she said to herself.

Maudie was to recite at the entertainment on Wednesday evening, and this was Tuesday.

She knew very well that she ought to study and rehearse the poem over and over again, but she had a story-book to finish, and it was so easy to curl up in one corner and read!

There was no one in the house to say, "Come, Maudie, you ought to be studying your piece."

When Miriam, who taught in the high school, and Louis, who was a pupil there, came home, they were surprised to learn of the mother's departure.

"I'm sorry for dear grandma-mother and mother," said Miriam, "and sorry too for you, because there's no one to help you practice. You'll study it this evening, won't you?"

"Of course," responded Maudie. "You talk as if I always failed when I had anything to do."

"No, dear, not that; but you would if mother didn't keep urging you to study."

Louis groaned an affirmation. "No too!" said he. "Haven't I drilled that girl till I know every word of her recitation? I tell you, Maudie, while you don't exactly fail, you're shaky. You keep your loving friends in a state of terror until you leave the platform."

"Oh, thanks!" and Maudie bowed low to her brother, "hear the great

orator talk. I shall have the poem at my tongue's end, and my dress skirt hemmed before to-morrow night."

"Maudie!" exclaimed Miriam, "you must get Miss Freeman to do it, now mother has had to leave it."

"She cannot possibly do one stitch besides the waist—she told mamma so. And I don't want her to. What is the use of being the best hemmer in the class if I can't do my own things?"

"Wall," sighed Miriam, "you will have to-morrow afternoon. But you ought to have help in measuring and basting your hem. That's really the hardest part. I'm afraid it's a large contract, Maudie."

"She has one essential qualification, and that is a sublime self-confidence in her ability," said Louis, as he opened his Greek grammar.

It was half-past one o'clock the next afternoon when Maudie shut herself in her room. In a chair before her was the dainty skirt, and close by was the book in which was her recitation.

"It's all nonsense to think of going twice around this," she scoffed. "If I measure and pin the seams together, why, there it is! When it is done who will know the difference?"

With perfect confidence she measured, and pinned, and began the task. Her stitches were set with care, and as she held the hem over one small forefinger she repeated:

"Sail on, sail on, O ship of state! Sail on, O Union strong and great!"

determined to make the weak places sure and relieve her brother, for once, of all anxiety. She held herself bravely to the task, but it was more than four o'clock when she finally removed the pins and shook out her skirt triumphantly.

Then for the first time she noticed a strangely uneven appearance. The last two seams had refused to meet and she had drawn the material far from a straight line. She pulled and twisted, but the broad hem was still sadly wrinkled.

"It's all wrong! I never saw such a mess! What shall I do?" cried poor Maudie.

While she was still suffering a sort of panic, Amy Lawrence, her most intimate friend, ran in to see how she was getting along.

"I've spoiled it, Amy. I never can wear it in this world! Just look!" and she held up the result of her afternoon's work.

Amy's gentle voice was full of sympathy. "What does all it? Put it on, Maudie, and let me see if I can't pull it straight," she said.

But no, there were ugly wrinkles still.

"I never made a hem myself," Amy went on, "but I think you didn't start right. Did you lay it flat on a table and baste it?"

"No, I didn't lay it flat on a table and baste it. I pinned it on the soams, and I can't imagine why it didn't behave. How can I speak—my-piece—and" wailed Maudie.

"I think I know why it did it right away. She helps mamma sew, and she's very quick."

"But I don't believe anybody can do it before eight. It's four now, and Miriam will come and she'll have to see it."

"Perhaps we can send it to Mrs. Appleton before your sister comes," said Amy comfortingly. "She's got a boy in the high school, and I'll ask her to send him right up after it."

Away ran Amy, and a few minutes later Bridget announced, "A b'y in the kitchen waitin' for work to take to his mother."

This was joyful news to Maudie, but at that moment Miriam appeared.

"What's the trouble? What are you doing with your dress skirt?" she inquired.

"I didn't have good luck with the hem," Maudie faltered; "it wouldn't come straight, the best I could do, and I'm going to send it to a woman. The boy is waiting for it now."

Miriam had taken the skirt from the hands that were so eagerly folding it.

"Oh!" she exclaimed, sadly, "you didn't baste it."

"No, but I pinned it. It's the miserablest twisty cloth."

"But don't you see that if you had laid it on the sewing-table and basted it carefully it would have been all right? The best dressmakers use most basting threads. They know it saves a lot of trouble in the end."

She yielded the skirt to Maudie's impatient fingers.

Maudie bustled herself wrapping up

the dress. "Next time I'm going to baste and baste and baste!" she said.

"There is a great deal in starting right in whatever we do," answered her sister.

Maudie looked very pretty that night in her new organdie, as she stood upon the platform reciting her patriotic poem—without once faltering this time. But her sister smiled as she remembered the girl's failure as a seamstress.

Nevertheless there was another side to that experience.

THE ADVENTURES OF TOMMY.

Tommy was a bluejay I took from the nest before he was able to fly. He was too young to eat by himself, so I had to feed him. Whenever I appeared at the box in which he was kept, out of the nest he would pop like a jack-in-the-box, with his bill open to the widest extent, expecting me to drop something into it.

I fed him on cracker and eggs with a small stick. When he had enough he fell back into his nest and went to sleep. He was a great pet, and when old enough was allowed to run in the garden.

If anything frightened him he would hop up on the veranda and hide. When bed-time came Tommy was always to be found in his cage; but one night I forgot him until after dark, and when I went to look for him no Tommy was to be seen. Immediately there was consternation in the family. With lighted candles we searched in the 'by-ways and hedges' and in all his favorite hiding-places, but he could not be found. On the porch was a trellis work for a climbing cactus, and as I passed it I heard a faint chirp and on looking to see where it came from discovered the lost one roosting on one of the cross-bars. He had been sound asleep and the light had awakened him.

One day I heard a terrible commotion in the garden. Thinking a cat was killing Tommy I rushed out to find him fighting two blackbirds, who had a nest in a tree overhead. As Tom's wing was clipped, the blackbirds had the advantage, but he fought valiantly. He would rush at them, and peck them, screaming with all his might. Other blackbirds hearing the noise flew to the assistance of their friends and Tommy had to retire under a bush. The other birds then flew up in the tree and waited. When Tommy thought the coast was clear he ventured out, only to be attacked once more. This lasted nearly all the afternoon until Tommy managed to escape to the shelter of the porch, from which place of safety he scolded the enemy.

Some wild jays enticed Tommy away from home; he was gone nearly two days. When he failed to return the second day I thought it was time to hunt him up, so, armed with a choice morsel of raw meat, of which Tommy was very fond, I went in pursuit of the runaway. I passed several flocks of jays and called out "Tommy, Tommy," but no Tommy answered, so with a sad heart I turned my steps homeward.

A short distance from home I saw a forlorn-looking laybird, that seemed familiar, hunting for worms in the mud. I called to him, and as soon as he heard his name he hopped up on the fence and looked all around. I shook the meat at him and said "Come, Tommy," and the next minute he had flown into my hands. And wasn't he glad to get home! He was not used to hunting for his dinner, and was nearly starved.—Pets and Animals.

A MARCH IDYLL.

(From the Italia)

It was the last day of March. The signora, attended by her friends, was sitting in the cosy library. As she glanced down the columns of the evening paper this short announcement caught her eye: "For sale. The villa of the Count Soragna."

"Just what I have been wanting so long," she cried. "I will go to-morrow and look at the place."

"It has been for sale for five or six years at least," observed one of her friends. "It must be frightfully spider-weby by this time."

"A few spider webs are easily brushed away," replied the signora, who was already busy finding directions as to how to reach the Soragna villa.

"Yes, but the real point of my remark was that if no one has taken the house in that length of time it cannot be very desirable."

"I refuse to allow the point. I am sure that it is only jealousy on your part because you did not find the advertisement yourself," and the signora smiled triumphantly.

The next morning, among the rare travellers at the north station at Milan was a lady, tall and distinguished looking. She was evidently accustomed to admiration, for she did not appear to notice the glances universally bestowed upon her, and her whole attention seemed centered in the little guide book in her hand.

"Six months of country life, amid absolute silence," the signora thought, as she took her seat in the train.

The Villa Soragna was situated in the very midst of the Alpine foothills. There were no towns, scarcely even villages, nothing but woods and fields in the neighborhood. The signora had found her ideal at last.

Not that the signora was an enemy of mankind. On the contrary, she loved her fellow-creatures, sometimes in particular, but always in the abstract, as behoves all good Christians. But there were times when she felt an irresistible need to see people from a distance in order to love them more.

The almost empty train ran swiftly on its way, and the signora amused herself with the swift glimpses of the villas dotted here and there upon the road.

"I am sure that mine will not be like any of those," she said with a shrug of her beautiful shoulders. "If they were built by a machine they could not be more alike."

When the train stopped and the signora had descended from her compartment she turned to one of the three hucksters who pressed around her and asked:

"Can you take me to the Villa Soragna?"

"The Villa Soragna!" repeated one of the men, hesitating slightly, as if recalling something he had forgotten.

"Do you not know the way?" said the signora quickly.

Fruit-a-tives OR "FRUIT LIVER TABLETS" A pleasant liver laxative made from fruit with tonics added. Nature's remedy for constipation, headaches, biliousness, kidney and skin diseases. "I have had Liver Trouble for ten years, and tried different remedies but think Fruit-a-tives are the best. I cannot praise them too highly." At Druggists—50c. a box. Mrs. JOHN CLINE, Aylmer, Ont. Manufactured by FRUIT-A-TIVES Limited, Ottawa.

"Yes, indeed, Excellency, it is not very far."

"Very well! Let us start," and the signora hastened to take her seat in the rough country coach awaiting her.

"This is certainly the solitude for which I longed," she thought as the peasant drove slowly along the winding road. "I think I could love my fellow creatures very dearly if I were allowed to gaze at them from this remote corner of the world."

At length the wagon stopped before an iron gateway which opened upon a long avenue, leading to a long stone villa, surrounded by graceful trees.

"Is this the Villa Soragna?"

"The same," replied the driver, laconically.

As she spoke a man appeared at the gate.

"You wish to see some one at the villa?" he inquired, raising his hat politely.

The signora smiled in quick appreciation.

"The villa itself, please," she said. "Is it not for sale?"

The man looked at her closely, scrutinizingly, until the signora felt almost abashed. Then slowly opening the door, he said:

"Enter."

The carriage drove lumberingly up the beautiful avenue, shaded by tall Lombardy poplars, now faintly tinged with green. Seen closer, the villa was even more beautiful than from a distance, and the signora drew a long breath of pleasure as she murmured:

"How lovely it is here!"

As she stood on the threshold the stranger who had admitted her appeared again.

"If you will permit me, signora, I will serve as your guide," he said. "I am the steward."

The signora was conscious of a vague feeling of disappointment at the man's words. Surely, she thought, that air of birth and breeding belonged to some one of a higher station. He made her think of Titian's famous "Portrait of a Gentleman," which she had long admired in the Pitti Gallery.

"The proprietor does not live here?" she asked.

"The Count is absent," replied her companion, opening the door and standing aside for her to enter.

As the signora went from one beautiful room to another she was more and more delighted. The combined elegance and simplicity of the whole charmed her.

"The people who lived here," she thought, "must be different from others. The very steward shares the olden grace of manners that is so much a part of the building."

She encouraged him to talk, watching him with keen interest. No one of her acquaintances could speak with more charming wit or ease, and as they passed in the rectangular library he referred naturally and with intimate knowledge to the books upon the shelves.

The signora listened attentively. Then feeling as if she must awake somehow from the dream that seemed to hold her she said:

"I am more than satisfied with the villa. Will you please tell me what the Count's price is?"

The steward looked troubled.

"The last one who looked at it was told the price was \$500,000. But he was a common, coarse sort of man who talked about putting in a steam heating arrangement and electric lights. The Count would not have sold the place to him under any consideration."

The signora looked amused.

"Your Count is a proud gentleman," she said. "Somewhat original, is he not?"

"Yes, I do not deny it," said the young man. "But people who are original are not always wrong. Born here on the estate, which the Soragna have owned for centuries, attached to every corner and stone of the house, each room and each bit of furniture is a part of his heart."

"But, excuse me, why then—"

"I know what you would say. Why does the Count wish to sell his chateau? Because he is very poor. He has a very modest income, which, with the sale of the villa, would suffice for all his needs. He has wavered between sentiment and material

gains. How could he sell his home to a fat old lady with innumerable cages of parrots? He must find some one who would be worthy of his beautiful home."

The signora, touched keenly by the pathetic voice, said warmly:

"Poor Count Soragna!" Then she added, perplexed: "I should never have permitted myself before the Count for approval. Old maids, like myself, are surely barred."

The steward looked at her in surprise. It was his turn to wonder at her words. Surely so distinguished a woman would not have remained unmarried. But he said, quietly:

"After a certain number of deceptions the Count has discovered a plan which works very well. He himself acts as a guide for the visitors to the villa—"

The signora did not wait for him to continue. Turning with questioning eyes she cried:

"Then you are—"

"The Count Soragna, at your service."

If it was not a dream it was certainly like one. The signora, whose chief sin was not timidity, found herself for the first time in her life perhaps distinctly embarrassed. She must have shown it, for the Count hastened to say:

"I beg your pardon, a thousand of them; but there was no other method of determining the character of the aspirants to my villa. I love it so truly that I could not give it to any one who would not love it as I did."

"So you committed the penalty of springing an examination upon one unprepared?" said the signora, dryly.

"And do you think you know me now?" She smiled ironically.

"Not at all," said the Count, hearing gallantly to pick up a glove she had let fall. "To know a woman is always difficult; to affirm that you know her is imprudent. In my case, I merely bow in admiration."

"Bravo, Count Soragna!" and the signora held out her hand, smiling, this time with the smile of a woman who has found her master.

"May I take down the sign, 'For Sale'?" asked the Count as the lady made her way to the door.

The signora pretended to be busy fastening her glove and did not answer.

"May I take down 'No sign'?" she repeated the question humbly.

"What are the conditions?" but the signora did not lift her eyes from the refractory glove.

There was a moment's silence. Then the Count said softly:

"Only one. It is that the future owner of the villa will consent to become the Countess Soragna."

Whatever the signora may have expected, she certainly was not prepared for this. Consequently, being quite unable in five minutes to take both a villa and a husband, she continued to button and unbutton the glove. Just then the carriage drove heavily up to the door.

"I will come myself for the answer," cried the Count, seizing her hand.

For a moment they looked happily into each other's eyes.

"Au revoir," said the signora, gently.

A CATHOLIC OFFICER.

General Sir Montague Gerard, the British representative with the Russian troops in Manchuria, who died a few days ago, was a staunch Catholic and was held in high esteem by all who knew him. The body has been embalmed and forwarded to Ajaccio, where he belonged.

A YOUTHFUL PRELATE.

One of the youngest prelates in the world is Dr. DeBoismenu, M. S. H., Coadjutor Bishop of British Guiana, who resides at Port Leo, Yule Island, New Guinea. He is only 34 years of age, and was raised to the bishopric when in his 29th year. He was born in St. Malo, Brittany, of which province the DeBoismenu family is one of the oldest, and at the present time many of its members occupy prominent positions in the army and navy of France.