

# PLEASANT HOURS

A PAPER FOR OUR YOUNG FOLK.

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## Cradle Song.

Sleep, baby, sleep!  
Thy father watches the sheep;  
Thy mother is shaking the dreamland tree,  
And down falls a sweet little dream on thee;  
Sleep, baby, sleep!

Sleep, baby, sleep!  
The larger stars are the sheep;  
The little stars are the lambs, I guess,  
And the fair moon is their shepherdess;  
Sleep, baby, sleep!  
—From the German.

## WHAT A TREE CAN DO.

There is a tree in Madagascar of which the natives make their houses. What of that? Well, it is not anything extraordinary, is it? We have several kinds of trees in this country, any one of which can be used for making houses, too.

But then it is principally of the leaves of this Madagascar tree that the houses are built, and that is odd. Indeed, before we have told all about this tree it will be seen that there are few trees in the world half so wonderful as it is.

When it is growing it looks like a gigantic palm-leaf fan. The trunk is bare to the top, from which the enormous leaves all spring. These leaves do not branch out in every direction, but stand up side by side, so that they form a half circle, and give the fan-like appearance.

It is the middle rib of the great leaf which is used for making walls and partitions. The ribs are twined together very much as willow is with us in basket-making. The part of the leaf which is left after taking the rib out is used for thatching the roof. Of course, such a house is not a very grand one.

The good tree has not done all it can yet, however. The native of Madagascar likes to have his house carpeted, and so he applies to this tree. He strips off the bark in one great piece, stretches it out, beats it with round stones, and dries it, and behold, a thick, soft carpet, as wide as four breadths of Brussels carpet, from twenty to thirty feet long! Still the good work of the tree is not exhausted. There comes a long, hot, and very dry season every year in that part of the world, and the wells refuse to give any water. Then the tree is ready, and the thankful man goes to it. With his spear he makes a hole at the base of one of the great leaves, and out spouts a stream of fresh, pure, and almost ice-cold water. Each leaf has about a quart of water to yield up, and no matter how hot or dry the weather, it never fails.

But even yet the good tree has a service to perform. When the dry season comes around, the houses naturally become dry too, and then they take fire very easily. Of course, there are no fire-engines there, nor any pumps even, and so a fire might easily spread and burn down a whole village, if there were not always at hand an extinguisher of some sort. There stands the tree, with its leaves charged with water; and when a fire occurs the men run and tear off the leaves, and beat the burning house. The water runs out, and the fire yields.

There, then, is a tree which gives to

man his house, his carpet, his fountain of pure water, and his fire extinguisher. The botanical name of this friend is *L'rontia speciosa*; the common name is "Traveller's tree"—and a foolish name it is, too, for it is more a tree for the native than for the traveller.

The Chinese are commencing to get rid of their dread of the surgeon's knife. Many who have had friends treated in the hospital come to the physician with great ideas of the foreign doctor's skill. They seem to think that an operation will relieve any disorder which the human body is heir to. They often ask to be operated on for bronchitis or asthma, and go away feeling disappointed because of failure in giving them the desired relief of the knife.

## CHINESE ANCESTRAL TABLETS.

Ancestral worship is one of the oldest forms of idolatry known in China. The ancestral tablets are about three inches wide and a foot high. They are usually made of wood and are often carved with a great deal of care. The Chinese believe that the souls of their dead relatives and friends enter into these tablets of wood and live in them for a long while. Chinese children are taught to bow before the ancestral tablets, and hold up their hands as if worshipping them.

On a Chinese boy's first birthday, a large sieve is placed on a table under the ancestral tablets. On the sieve are put some silver ornaments, scissors, pen and ink, books, a pair of money-scales, a boat, some tools, and so on. Then the

left the body cannot find the way. The incense is meant as a token of worship, for now the spirit has power to reward or punish those left behind.

One reason why the Chinese are so attentive to the spirits is because they believe that the dead have the same wants as the living. If the children offer food, and burn candles, incense and paper money, before the tablets of their parents, then, they are taught, the parents will be happy and well cared for in the spirit-world, and will bless their faithful sons and daughters in return. But if a family neglect the ancestral tablets, and make no prayer or offering to the dead, the unhappy spirits will be deserted, hated and made outcasts in the spirit-world; for since no one honours or cares for them on earth, they lose all respect and honour in their new home.

All that they will be able to do, in such an uncomfortable position, will be to bring trouble upon their negligent kindred, and this, it is supposed, they will certainly do, sending one misfortune after another upon the household. So you see, an ancestral tablet is a very important thing in a Chinese home, for all its ugliness.

## ALGERNON BRETT'S "EYE."

BY ELIZABETH CUMINGS.

Algernon Brett was English, and was always talking about the power of the human eye. But I must go back a little.

One bright morning we were all out on the veranda enjoying the sweetness of the Cherokee roses, when we were astonished to see old Alcide running—old Alcide who was usually as deliberate as the king of the snails. "Get a boat quick, somebody!" he panted. "Mr. Brett are suttin' in a nos' o' reeds, wid de 'gators round' him like he war makin' 'em a speech, an' he boat a-scatin' way off."

No time was lost in questioning. Our two best oarsmen pushed off to Algernon Brett's rescue. He sat, just as Alcide had said, in a nest of silver reeds. He had somehow upset his boat. "I didn't have much time," he admitted. "The minute I struck the water those vicious beggars were after me. I had only bird-shot, and my powder was wet. Once among the reeds, however, I held the reptiles at bay with my eye."

"Papa, don't you think the 'gators would have eaten him spite of his 'eye' if you and Mr. Tompkins had not got there just as you did?" asked our Nelly that evening.

"Possibly," admitted papa. "Our American alligator is not so savage a creature as the Asiatic and African crocodile, but in numbers they are not at all afraid of man."

"Aren't the 'gators in the bayou like the crocodiles of India?"

"No, dear. It is said that a few specimens of a species of crocodile have been found in Louisiana, and here in Southern Florida, but the alligator proper is another animal. Like the crocodile his nostrils, eyes, and ears have valves or lids he can close at will, but unlike the crocodile his canine teeth fit into pits in the upper jaw. He always has teeth growing, and sheds them once a year. Like the crocodile his chief weapon is his tail, and with it he strikes or drives his prey, be it fish, snake, or fowl, or Alcide's little pigs, into reach of his jaws. He differs from the crocodile in the shape and size of his head, and in having less webbing on his feet. Ugly as he is, his body is wonderfully adapted to its uses, and it is said that the destruction of this great reptile is being followed by an increase in venomous serpents, in Florida notably the red-headed moccasin and lig 'ack rattler. Crocodiles and alligators were among the first comers upon the earth. Job knew the creature and described him perfectly, for he says, 'His teeth are terrible round about.' And of his eyes he says, 'His eyes are like the eyelids of the morning.'"

"His eyes are beautiful," admitted Nelly. "I guess God gave a little beauty to every creature."



SCENE AT THE RUINS OF LUXOR, EGYPT.

## SCENE IN EGYPT.

This picture, with its large number of scantily clothed children, reminds us of the rhyme about the old woman who lived in a shoe, "who had so many children that she didn't know what to do." It does not cost much for housekeeping in Egypt. The climate is so fine that they do not need much shelter, and food grows so plentifully—several crops in a year—that living is very cheap. And it is well that it is so, for the people are very poor. The children are crowded into an old earthen oven. Beside it stands another ready for use. The ruins in the background are the most ancient in the world. They are situated on an island in the Nile where are also the ancient temples of Karnak and Thebes—"Hundred-gated Thebes," of which Homer sings. They are the most ancient and most famous and grandest ruins in the world.

A German optician has discovered that glass can be drilled as easily as wood if the drills are kept in mercury before use.

child, dressed in a new suit of clothes, is placed in the sieve among these various articles, and the Chinese believe that whatever he grasps first will show the business he will follow when he becomes a man.

The Chinese call these tablets "houses of the spirits." They believe that each person has three spirits. At death one of these goes into the eternal world, another goes to the grave with the body, and the third enters and lives in the tablet prepared for it. The characters written upon the tablet record the name and title of the deceased and the hour of birth and death. The spirit that lives in the tablet, they think, is able to do much for his living relatives. Indeed, the Chinese worship these spirits of the dead somewhat as they do idols, only they treat the spirits with much more respect than they do their gods, and seem to love and fear them more.

When a person dies in China, candles and incense-sticks are lighted by the mourners, and placed beside the body. The Chinese believe that the spirit-world is dark, and that, without the light of these candles, the spirit that has just