BOYS AND GIRLS

When Mary Saw.

(George Ade, in 'Youth's Companion.')

The pavilion for the babies is built at the water's edge in Lincoln Park, Chicago. One end of it is on stilts which are knee-deep in the water of Lake Michigan. The pavilion has a roof but no side walls. Every breeze that ripples the endless blue of the lake is welcome. On a hot summer day dozens and dozens of hammocks are strung from post to post in the deep shade of the roof. The hammocks are full of babies.

The floor sprawls with them. Babies toddle about, colliding with one another, and sometimes they fall over on their backs and lie in contentment so that the nurses carrying medicine to the sick babies in the hammocks must step over them. White babies and black babies and some that prattle in German, or Polish, or Bohemian crowd together at the railing, where the slices of sunshine come in, and look with large eyes at the broad lake where the boats are tipping up and down.

The fresh-air pavilion was built by public subscriptions. The milk which the babies drink, the hammocks in which they lie and the clean frocks into which they are thrust, sometimes under protest, are provided by the people of Chicago. The sanitarium, as it is called sometimes, has a volunteer medical staff. Physicians and surgeons take time from their duties at the office buildings and give their services, free of charge, to the babies.

Thus Doctor Fielding, a specialist in diseases of the eye, roamed among the hammocks one day. In one hammock he found Mary Levenska, a year old and small for her age. He put out one finger, and the groping little hand closed around it.

'Can the baby see anything at all?' he asked.

Mrs. Levenska, who was sitting beside the hammock, looked up with a frightened smile.

'Yes,—a lamp,' she answered, in the doubtful manner of one who knows but little English.

'Always been the same—always blind?'

'Always just like—you see.'

She was a thin, sunburnt woman, with high cheek-bones, and her hair, which was parted with care, gathered itself in a tight wisp at the back of her head. A ragged shawl was thrown across one shoulder. Her print gown was faded but clean.

The baby held to the doctor's forefinger, and the doctor, looking at the baby, and not at the mother, asked many questions. He learned that the Levenskas lived in 'Alleytown,' a region shut off from cleanliness and light by the factories and warehouses along the sluggish north branch of the river. Mary's father was a day-laborer. He had been out of work for over a month. Mary had whimpered and cried among the stuffy bedclothes, and so the mother had brought her to the lake for fresh air and sleep.

The doctor knelt beside the hammock and lifted the pink lids. He nodded his head and said, 'Just as I thought.'

Mary's mother was watching him dumbly.

'You have no money?' he asked. 'You never took her to a doctor to have him lock at her eyes?' Mrs. Levenska shook her head. He smiled and said, 'I see.'

They were poor people, and therefore at his mercy. He told Mrs. Levenska to bring the baby to his office on Thursday afternoon at two o'clock. She promised.

Doctor Fielding spoke to the matron before he went away: 'I'm going to try and do something for that blind baby. I saw another case just like it, in Berlin.'

'Doctor Fielding, do you think—?'

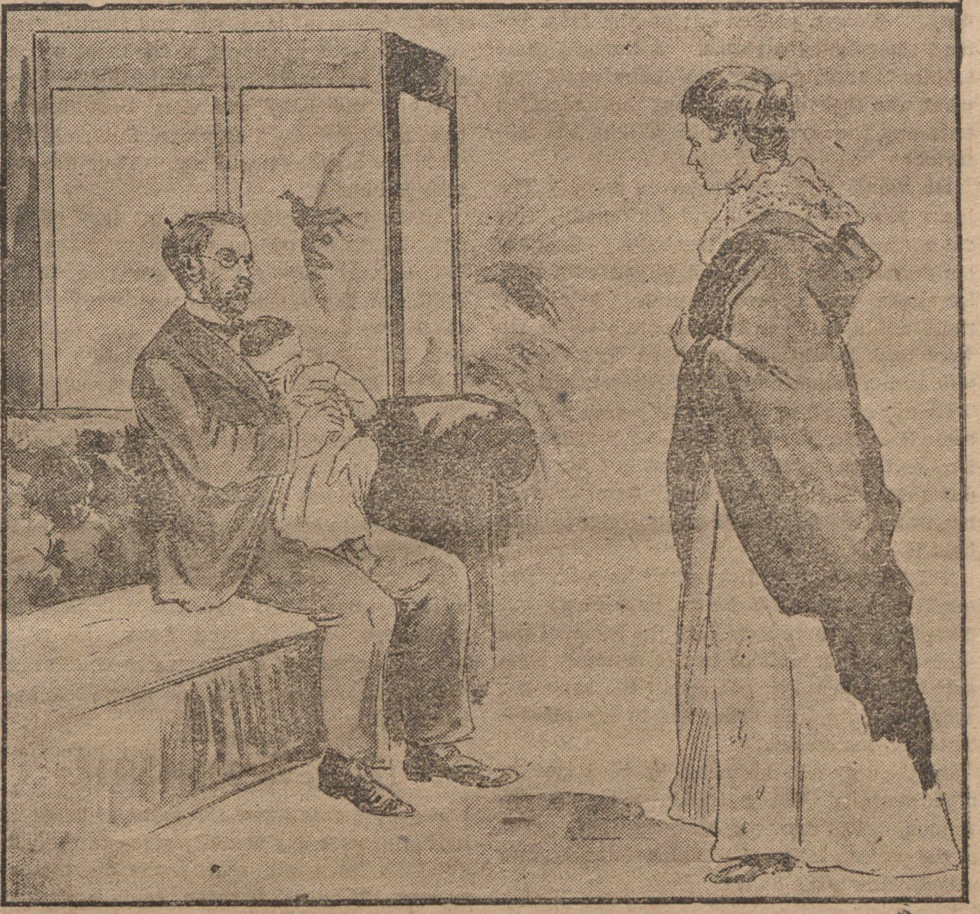
'I never make promises. There's a chance, however.'

The matron hurried to Mrs. Levenska, and told her to be sure to go to the doctor's office on Thursday. The doctor went home and told his wife about the blind baby.

'I've wanted a chance to experiment on a case of that kind,' he said.

Mrs. Fielding was seldom interested in her husband's work, but this time she insisted in being in the office when Mrs. Levenska came on Thursday afternoon. She took the blind baby in her arms, and began to blink at Mrs. Levenska.

'I told you not to come in here,' said the doctor. Then, for the first time, he told Mrs. Levenska that he was going to put the knife to the baby's eyes.



DOCTOR FIELDING SAT CODDLING THE BABY.

'I can't promise that it will do any good,' he said. 'Do you understand? Are you willing?'

Mrs. Levenska looked first at the doctor and then at his wife, and her lower lip trembled. Mrs. Fielding patted her on the shoulder.

'Keep her away from here,' said the doctor to his wife, and Mrs. Levenska was led away. Doctor Raymond had been waiting in the inner office. What happened in the back room is for books of surgery.

After an hour, Mrs. Levenska was brought back to the office. Doctor Fielding sat on the sofa coddling the baby, whose eyes were bound about with bandages.

'It's all right,' he whispered.

'Then you think—' began his wife.

'I don't know anything about that part of it. I can't tell yet. You see we haven't hurt the baby very much, Mrs. Levenska. Maybe we've done it some good. I hope so. But you must keep this baby in a dark room for ten days. Do you understand?'

Mrs. Levenska nodded eagerly. The doctor sat beside her, and told her over and over again how the bandages were to be changed. He warned her that she must not allow any strong light to fall on the baby's eyes.

'I'm afraid she doesn't understand,' said Doctor Raymond, nervously.

Doctor Fielding smiled at his younger associate and said, 'I'll risk it. She has more at stake than we have.'

Then Mrs. Levenska carried the baby back to 'Alleytown,' and Mrs. Fielding went to the fresh-air pavilion in the park to tell the matron of what had happened. The well-meaning matron confided the story to a newspaper reporter who came to the pavilion every day to gather stories about the children. The reporter put the story into a morning newspaper—of how Doctor Fielding had found Mary, of how he had performed the operation, of how the members of the staff at the fresh-air home were waiting in the hope that after the days had elapsed and the bandages had been removed, little Mary would see.

Doctor Fielding read the paper at breakfast. 'Now who did that?' he demanded. 'I don't like it. How do we know what the results are going to be? It was merely an experiment. Oh pshaw!' No wonder he was annoyed. He was an eye specialist, and they were trying to make him a hero.

That evening the letters began to come They came from town and country, and most of them were from women. The letters helped to distress Doctor Fielding, who counted himself a hard, matter-of-fact man. He believed in surgery, but not in sentiment.

'I have a baby of my own, and I can understand how thankful that mother must be for your kindness to her little one,' wrote one woman. In another letter it said, 'We are praying for the blind baby,' and there was an enclosure of two dollars for the Levenska family. Some of the letters were from little children. 'We read about the blind