

STORIES
POETRY

The Inglenook

SKETCHES
TRAVEL

THE FORTUNES OF THE CEILING FAMILY.

By Grace Willis.

Benny lay in his white bed looking dreamingly at the ceiling, when Uncle Phil seated himself on the bed and gave the boy's hand a squeeze.

"I can't ever decide, Uncle Phil," said Benny, "just what relation the fisherman is to the rest of my family. Do you think you could help me?"

A myriad of hairlike lines spread themselves upon the ceiling; the plaster was certainly much cracked. To the eyes of the sick child on the bed the lines appeared themselves into forms and faces. There was one pinched, sharp-featured face, with hair drawn tightly up to a small knot, that might be that of a hard-worked farmer's daughter; he called her Jane. Over in one corner of the ceiling huddled a flock of sheep. Benny called the ceiling people his "farm family." Near the sheep was a dim outline of the farmer's wife, not very distinct to be sure, and Benny was not much interested in her, but she helped to fill in the story. In the farther right-hand corner was such a splendid hill for coasting, and yet no sleds ever appeared. Neither was there a farmer, and Benny imagined the farmer must have to work very hard and that he kept the boys out in the field working, too, and that was the reason he never came into view, and that the boys never had time to slide down hill.

An old man with a crooked back formed another dim picture; that was the Grandfather. And he was evidently walking toward what looked like a chimney corner, and never got there. Benny often felt tired for him, poor old man.

But the most perplexing of all was the fisherman, with his shaggy hair and eye-brows. He turned his back on them all, though not very far from Jane, and appeared to be absorbed in his pipe.

"He doesn't seem to belong to the family at all," complained Benny, "and he doesn't seem to be interested in them. I can't make out who he is."

Uncle Phil looked at him with a critical eye. He had been to an art school and he liked pictures.

"What makes you think he is a fisherman? Perhaps he is the missing farmer."

"Oh, no, I'm sure he is a fisherman. I knew it the first time I saw him."

"Perhaps he comes to see Jane and wants to marry her."

"Why, Uncle Phil, he never even looks at her."

"Perhaps he is bashful, and hasn't gotten up his courage yet to talk to her."

"Well, he's dreadful slow. He's been there a long, long time."

"Your family seem in need of a friend to help them out, Benjamin Barrows. They're overworked, and bashful, and the boys never get out on that hill to coast. Maybe we can mend their fortunes a little."

"What do you mean, Uncle Phil?"

"Why-er, do something to help them along, you know. I might be a rich uncle and make them a present of a thousand dollars, so life would be easier for them. Jane, now, needs something to chirk her up, don't you think so? And the fisherman certainly is rather frowzy and ragged."

"How could you do it?" asked Benny, turning his big, wondering eyes toward those twinkling so near him.

"You wait and see."

If Benny had had eyes that could see and ears that could hear through floors and partitions, he might have seen his uncle sitting in the library that afternoon talking to his older sister Fanny,

Benny's mother, about mending the fortunes of the Ceiling Family, and he might have heard her say: "Why, yes, I don't care. The room will be done over again in the spring anyway, and it will relieve his mind, won't it, the dear child,—and amuse him."

One morning bright and early the birds woke Benny, singing outside his window, and as he opened his eyes slowly, they lighted on the ceiling. It looked—could it be—He rubbed his eyes and looked harder. 'Twas really and truly so! There were boys coasting down that hill,—four of them! Quickly he looked for the fisherman. His whiskers were trimmed; he seemed sleek and prosperous, and—yes, sir—he was looking out of the corner of one eye at Jane!

Wide awake now and bubbling with laughter and delight, Benny's eyes almost tumbled over to Jane in their haste to see if anything had happened to her. It had, sure enough. The sharp, thin features had softened and rounded; there was a ribbon or some other fancy fixing around her neck, and Jane was actually smiling!

"Uncle Phil!"

That jolly soul must have lain awake all night listening for that very call, for Benny had but just had time to discover the grandfather comfortably seated in his new arm-chair, when his call was answered in person. Uncle Phil crept into bed with Benny.

"How did you do it?" demanded Benny, happily.

"Gave them a thousand dollars."

"Oh, yes, I remember." Benny was pleased with the fancy. "I know where the fisherman went first thing when you gave him his share,—to the barber shop, didn't he?"

"He surely did. And do you know where Jane went?"

"To the dry-goods store. Isn't she pretty though? She looks lots younger."

"Nothing like a little appreciation to make folks look young and happy," said Uncle Phil. "How do you like the farm now?"

"Where? where?"

Uncle Phil pointed. Directly over Benny's head stood the fattest, jolliest farmer imaginable, fairly beaming with good nature, and waving his hand to his wife on the other side of the ceiling. Benny looked over to the dull little farm mother. She, too, had brightened up, and seemed to have arisen and to be going to meet her husband.

"Well, I am awful glad," smiled Benny, happily. "They made me feel kind of troubled, you know, Uncle Phil, because nothing fitted. I guess they think a lot of you."

"Yes, they seemed to. The fisherman there was so tickled he promised me he would throw away his old pipe. I told him Jane didn't like tobacco smoke; makes her cough, you know."

A long time Benny lay there and thought of his family. Uncle Phil had nearly fallen asleep, when Benny said, "Do you know, I think the fisherman and Jane are going to get married very soon, and I'd like to build them a house. I was thinking we could take the old chimney-corner and use some more lines, and if you kind of squint, you know, you can make a house out of it real nice. Can't you see it?"

Everybody who came to the house after that had to be taken to Benny's room to hear all about the mended fortunes of the happy Ceiling family. Somehow or other it seemed to help the boy who had their welfare so at heart to get well, and before Uncle Phil left for Europe for a year of study, Benny was up and about, his healthy, happy self once more.

In the spring, when the rooms were redecorated and Benny sat down in his

room to look up at the clean, white ceiling from whence the family had vanished, he wrote to his far-away uncle:

"Dear Uncle Phil: The farmer and his wife and their boys, and the grandfather and the fisherman and Jane his wife—the whole family—have gone to Europe for a pleasure trip. What do you think of that! If you see any of them over there please give them by best love. I shouldn't wonder but what they'd like it so well over there they'd never come back."

And they never did.

"KING BABY."

Very lovely is the confidence of child-hood. We do well to speak of "King baby," for the right by which a child shall rule, is a diviner, sweeter right and sanctity than ever was accorded to kings. It is the malleable right, the royal prerogative, of every child to come into this world assured that its coming will set joybells of the heart a-tingling.

Ere that child came to earth, God stooped to take into His arms the tiny image of Himself, to breathe between the little lips the breath of His own life, to set upon the baby brow the kiss of which dreaming children think when suddenly they smile in their sleep. Then with maternal tenderness He laid the little dower like form in the hands of an angel, kneeling to receive the precious burden.

Out of God's hands, and the hands of God's angels in Heaven, thou shalt pass into the care of God's angels on earth. Thou shalt enter the world speeded of God, and tended by the hands of God's dear women, even as when thou leavest it, God's dear women shall tend thee to the last, and God and His Son, thy Saviour, shall wait to welcome thy return.

Go forth, little one, and may thy coming make glad the hearts of women and men, for I have sent thee. I am with thee. Go! — Coalsdon Kernahan in A World Without a Child.

ON HEAVEN.

"If I could be out of physical pain," said a lifelong invalid, "I would ask no other heaven." "If I could be in a place where I might know that my husband never could be killed on the train!" cried one of the gentle "worriers" whose capacity for suffering is neither understood or respected by the sanguine. "If I could take my children to a world where every time I hear a croupy cough my heart did not stand still with terror," urged another, "that would be heaven for me." The mulatto girl who burst into joyful tears at first sight of a marble bust of herself, "because it was white," had a glimpse of her heaven before its time.

"Heaven must be like any other form of happiness, only 'more so,'" said a thoughtful man. "And the conditions of happiness are three: A clean conscience, something to do, and some one to love." — (Elizabeth Stuart Phelps, in Harper's Bazaar.

At Glasgow University Mr. Donald C. B. Gordon, Glasserton Manse, Wigtownshire, has been awarded the Dow-anhill first prize of £100 for "Excellence in the Art of Oratory and Declamation, and in the practice of a defined and pleasing Delivery, and in reading the Scriptures."