

Children's Department.

The Children of the Mountain.

"Tell us a story," said two little girls, whom I will call Bell and Bessie; "and please let it be about something which really happened."

This was how it came about that, sitting by the bright fire, and listening to the keen wintry wind blowing outside the comfortable house, I told my little friends the history of some mountain children who lived in Westmoreland nearly eighty years ago. Their house must have been a pretty place in summer, when the sun shone on those hills and valleys, and upon the little tinkling streamlets which people in those northern counties call "becks." But in winter it was a very lonesome spot, and often when the snow fell fast the mountain children were shut within for weeks, because the walks which led to the town were quite impassable.

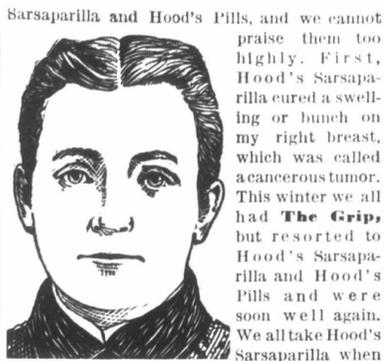
Shops are not plentiful among the hills; eighty years ago there were even fewer than there are now, and if ever a sale took place at any farm or cottage, people walked for miles and miles to attend it, in the hope of finding some article they happened to want.

It was to a sale like this that the father and mother of the children of our story set forth one bright winter's morning. The sky was so clear that there seemed no fear of bad weather, and little Agnes, though only nine years old, was so womanly and careful, that it was quite certain the six younger boys and girls would be safe in her charge.

All went well while daylight lasted; but towards evening a thick mist settled over the hills, little flakes of snow began to fall, and the children felt anxious and troubled because their parents had not returned before dark.

Agnes gave out the supper of milk and oatmeal porridge, which she could make quite cleverly, and thus passed the time at first; but bye-and-bye the wind whistled mournfully, the snow fell faster and faster, and though the

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clock had struck hour after hour, no welcome step or voice was heard at the door.

Their hearts grew very sad, but the "little mother" did her best to cheer the rest; she put the twin babies to sleep in their cradle, heard the others their prayers before they went to bed, and last of all laid down herself, trusting in the care of her Father in heaven.

Morning came, but it brought no father and mother to the mountain home. Even then brave Agnes did not lose hope, but tried to believe that the snow had kept them from starting on their journey, but now with daylight they would set forth.

She would have gone down to the town to ask news, but a glance from the window showed that the road would be impassable to one so small as she; and besides, she could not well have left her little family.

Once more then the desolate children knelt down to say the simple prayers their mother had taught them, and then Agnes wound up the clock and made the porridge. It was snowing so fast that she was afraid the path to the peat-stack would soon be blocked up, as she remembered seeing it in other winters; so taking the little brothers next her own age, she carried in enough to last for fuel during a week.

Next this thoughtful child of nine years milked the cow, and scrambling into the loft got down some hay for the poor animal. Even when all these duties were done there was no sign of the parents' return, and when night came it was a very sorrowful and frightened little group that gathered weeping round the peat-fire.

The third day found them still sadder; but Agnes kept them round the hearth, saying the prayers they knew by turns aloud, and begging God to take care of the dear absent father and mother and bring them safely home.

By the next morning the snow was over, and the wind had changed. Agnes could bear her anxiety no longer, but charging the younger ones to be very good and not get into danger, she set off to the distant town. At the first house she came to, the weary child knocked and asked news

of her missing parents; the people knew them well, and were sure that they had started homewards on the evening of the sale, and before the snow fell.

The news soon spread, and sixty of the Westmoreland men went out in search of their lost friends, but all was in vain. At last some dogs were used, and these left the mountain path and led the way to a deep ravine; alas! for those poor children, there lay father and mother quite dead. The poor mother was wrapped in the husband's great-coat, and it is supposed he had gone a few steps forward to find the path when he fell over the precipice.

There was no snow when that funeral procession wended its way to the burial ground; the sun shone as if spring had come again.

The farm-folk in the neighbourhood were all offering a home for one or other of the orphan children, money came in for them from all parts of England, sufficient to bring them up in comfort; but neither friends nor money could make up to them for the good parents they had lost.

Queen Charlotte and her daughters were greatly touched by the mountain child's tender motherliness, and sent a handsome donation for the benefit of the orphans. The twins were kept together, one of the girls was taken by the poet Wordsworth's family, and Agnes and her brothers found comfortable homes among their parent's friends.

And Agnes, the child who in her trouble had placed her trust in God, grew to be a pious and a useful woman, and in time gathered boys and girls of her own about her knee, to whom she sometimes told the old sad story of the mountain snow-storm.

Friends and No Friends.

I can't tell how it is, Mr. Dobbin, but I honestly believe that in the whole world there is not a soul that cares one bit about me. I've no friends at all. You are always the one to be petted and called loving names, while nobody takes any notice of me. Only yesterday, when little Joe came into the scullery and we popped our heads through the partition window, the child gave you all the bread, and me never a bit. I must say I felt it rather hard that all the good things should come to you, and that I should never have any of them; and a tear fell from Dapple's eyes as he spoke.

Dobbin was a wise old horse, who had learned a great deal during his long and useful life. He very well knew that there was a very good reason for what Dapple had been saying; but in his reply he was anxious to put the truth in the kindest way. And a good thing it would be if we all tried to follow old Dobbin's good example.

"Dapple," said he, "you're a young fellow and I'm an old one, and I have learned by bitter experience in the past some things which you, perhaps, haven't had a chance of learning yet. Once, when my master was riding me, I heard him say to a friend of his that if you bring a smiling face to a glass, you meet a smile. And I am quite sure that friendliness must begin with ourselves, if we are to have friends and keep them. If you take for granted that everybody hates you, and if you show them that you do, then no one will have the courage to be friendly. Now when little Joe comes to-morrow to pay us a visit, if you, instead of putting

your ears back, and showing your teeth, as you always do, will put them forward, and stretch out your nose to be stroked, you will be petted and caressed and fed to your heart's content. 'Twasn't likely the child would touch you, when you looked cross enough to bite him; he couldn't tell you were not cross, but only unhappy. But only try to be friendly, and see how quickly you will make friendships."

"Well, I daresay you may be right," replied Dapple; "anyway, I'll do my best not to be disagreeable, and we will see what comes of it."

The next day little Joe came in as usual, and passing by Dapple, began to pet old Dobbin. But Dapple, remembering his lesson of the previous evening, put his ears well forward, stretched out his long sleek neck, and came as near Joe's little hand as he could without frightening the child.

"Poor Dapple! See, he wants a pat and a bit too, Joey!" said Betsy the dairymaid, who had just come in. "Give him some bread, dear, and stroke him and kiss his pretty face, for he wants to make friends with you."

And as the child stooped forward to obey, Dapple kissed his little master in return, and gave a low whinny of delight, which being interpreted meant, "I see and understand it all now. He that would have friends must show himself friendly."

Fred's Birthday.

It was Fred's birthday. He was ten years old, and he could hardly sleep all the night before for thinking about the day when it would need two figures to write his age. He was up early; but the first thing he saw showed him that somebody had been up earlier. There on his little table lay a parcel which had certainly not been there the previous night. It was addressed to Fred himself in a large hand. His fingers trembled with eagerness as he untied the package. There lay two beautifully bound books. He knew what they were, for his mamma had long promised them to

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