

"GOTTER."

BY MARY E. VANDYNE.

"Who is Gotter?"

This is the question I asked myself quite a dozen times on the day of my arrival, and I kept on asking myself—well, until I found out.

We were all at breakfast. Harry named him first. We were lingering over the tea and muffins, chatting about this thing and that before the day's work began, when he suddenly looked at the clock. It marked half-past eight.

"Oh dear! Gotter!" he exclaimed, and then I saw the young gentleman spring up, seize the hat and overcoat that hung on the rack, and presently there stood a hearty, healthy school-boy, with a load of books on his arms, ready to start.

"Oh, yes; Gotter!" was echoed by two other voices, and soon Harry had two companions, his brother Robert, and little Edith, all bonneted, cloaked, and ready for another day's struggle with the troubles of learning. They were a merry group as they started off.

"Who is Gotter?" I said to myself, wondering, and half expected to see some sturdy fellow-school-boy, who owned that extraordinary name, join the group as they passed the gate.

The conversation went on briskly. We older ones discussed politics, the news of the day, the last new book, and several other subjects, when all of a sudden I heard the word again. This time it was from the head of the house.

"Well, I shall have Gotter after me if I don't move directly," and another raid was made upon the hat rack for a hat and overcoat.

"Yes, he'll be after us all, if we don't bestir ourselves soon," my hostess replied, and there was a general move from the table.

"Ah! Gotter is then an expected guest," I thought. "Things must be made ready for his appearance."

But Gotter did not appear.

The day wore on. We took our usual occupations—reading, writing, sewing, for the day was a stormy one, and there was no going out. The next time I heard him mentioned was in the evening.

"Isabel," said her mother to the fair young daughter of the house, "some of those seams on Bertha's new dress could be easily run this evening. There is none too much time left if we are to have it done by Sunday."

"Oh, dear mamma, I do so want to practise. The evening is no time for sewing," and she moved slowly toward the piano.

"Gotter," said her mother, with a smile. It was only one word, but I noticed that Isabel smiled too, and soon four pairs of fingers were working hard at the little frock for the youngest daughter of the house.

"Well," thought I, "what can Gotter have to do with a baby's frock?" But immediately the idea came. "Oh, Gotter is some distinguished guest. Even the little one of the family must look her best when he arrives. That is very natural."

But the next day and the next passed. I heard Gotter's name frequently, and always in connection with something to be done. But no Gotter arrived. I was very glad, for we were a very happy household all together, and I could not help feeling that our peace and comfort might be very much disturbed by having this important personage about, whom every member of the family seemed to value so highly. It was indeed quite a relief to my mind when, on Saturday morning, Harry jumped up from the table, and announced:

"Well, Gotter's got to git to-day. I won't have him around, anyhow. It's Saturday, and he sha'n't show his face."

This certainly seemed a little disrespectful toward one of whom his parents and all seemed to think so much, but at the same time I felt quite sure that I too should be just as comfortable without the presence of Gotter.

To my immense surprise his mother answered, "I don't know about that, my son. See those paths outside. The snow-storm last night has blocked them up, and I really think that Gotter will insist upon having them shovelled out."

"Oh, mamma!" Harry did look so disappointed. It was a hard task to set the school-boy at on this holiday morning, after

a long week's hard work. It could not be finished before noon, and all this splendid winter morning that could be devoted to sleighing, snow-balling, tobogganing, and other such delights, would be lost.

"Well, Harry"—and I could see that there was a good deal of sympathy with the boy's woe-begone face in the mother's voice—"it is too bad, my son, but I don't see that there is any one else to do the work. Bridget cannot, papa must go to his office, and the rest of us are weak women and children. I am sorry, but you will have to settle it with Gotter."

Harry hesitated a few moments, and I could see that there was a struggle going on in his mind. But right conquered, for pretty soon I saw great shovelfuls of snow flying about the garden, where a stout, healthy, good-natured boy was making havoc among the drifts.

Or stop! Was he afraid of Gotter? What would Gotter have done to him? This mysterious individual, who ruled the household, was he dreadfully severe? Clearly anything might be expected of Gotter, a person who interfered with and controlled every little matter, even the slightest occurrence in the household, and whose absence did not prevent him from holding a tight rein, and mixing his will up with the most insignificant affairs.

At last I became quite impatient to see Gotter. He would be well worth studying after all I had heard about him. He certainly must be the strangest character in existence, and, like all curiosities, interesting even though odious. Finally, the day came when I felt quite sure that my curiosity was going to be gratified. Gotter was coming. I should see him.

Harry and Edith had been talking about their Missionary Band. It was a society of young people in the neighborhood who had been working for the good cause for a long time. Of late a new interest had been given to their plans. One of their number, a young man who had grown up among them, had been recently ordained to the ministry, and had decided to spend his life upon the shores of Africa teaching the poor natives there the wondrous truths of our Christian religion. The young people had been very eager helping him to get ready to go, and now, as the last thing, they were to make up a purse for him, to pay his passage out and help him establish himself there. The question was how much should each give.

"How much shall you give, Edith?"

"I don't know, Harry. I haven't made up my mind. We can do as we like."

"Yes, fortunately. Gotter has nothing to do with this matter."

"I am not so sure, my dears." This came in a very low, gentle tone from their mother.

"Why, mamma?"

"How can he have?" from Harry.

"Nothing has been said about any fixed sum, and there are so many things I want this summer. If I give any large sum, good-by to my new row-boat."

"All right, Harry," said his mother, gently. "Gotter may not seem to you to have anything to do with the matter now, but by to-morrow he will certainly be here; at least I feel sure he will. You watch and see if he does not arrive before the time set for the meeting."

Ah! Gotter was coming. The time was nearly here. I was so glad. Really, my curiosity was consuming me. I could not stand it much longer.

All the morning of the following day I waited for the traveller to arrive. But the hours sped on; he did not come. Finally one o'clock arrived.

Then it was that I heard a light footstep on the stairs, and presently, as he reached the landing, I heard his mother call him into her room.

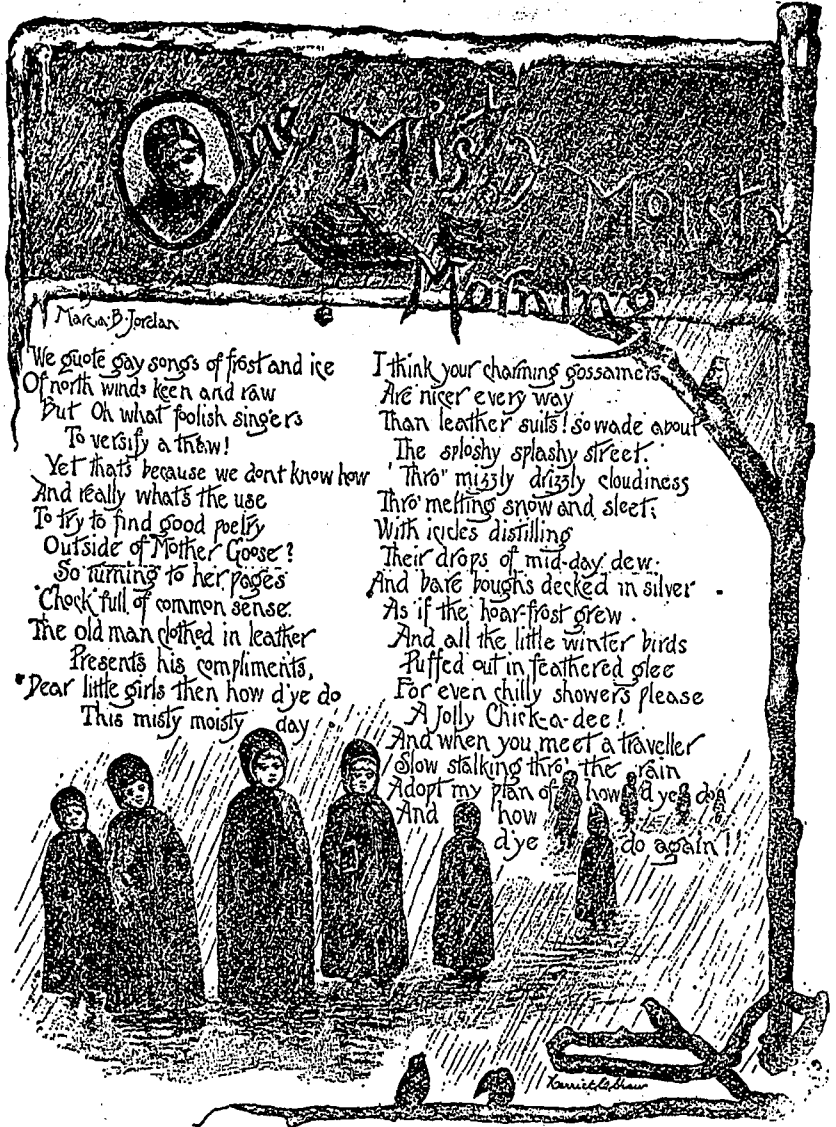
"Well, Harry?"

"What, mother?"

"Did Gotter come?"

"Yes, he came."

"What!" I exclaimed to myself. "Is everybody crazy? Not a person of any kind, save the milkman and grocer's boy, has been to this house to-day to my certain knowledge, and yet here this boy tells his mother, that Gotter, the great Gotter, the mysterious potentate that rules the house, that every one bows down to and yields before, has actually arrived, and is somewhere about the domicile. Yet nobody has seen him; nobody has spoken to him;



March Jordan
We quote gay songs of frost and ice
Of north winds keen and raw
But Oh what Polish singers
To versify a thaw!
Yet that's because we don't know how
And really what's the use
To try to find good poetry
Outside of Mother Goose?
So turning to her pages
Check full of common sense.
The old man clothed in leather
Presents his compliments,
*Dear little girls then how d'ye do
This misty moisty day.

I think your charming gossamers
Are nicer every way
Than leather suits! so wade about
The splashy splashy street.
Thro' mizzly drizzly cloudiness
Thro' melting snow and sleet.
With icicles distilling
Their drops of mid-day dew.
And bare boughs decked in silver
As if the hoar-frost grew.
And all the little winter birds
Puffed out in feathered glee
For even chilly showers please
A Jolly Chick-a-dee!

And when you meet a traveller
Slow stalking thro' the rain
Adopt my plan of how d'ye do
And how d'ye do again!

no attention has been paid to his coming; with no one except Harry shows the least cognizance of the fact! It's amazing. It's inexplicable!"

It was at this moment that I heard Harry say: "Yes, mother. Of course I'm the oldest member now; Jack is going, and I've got to take his place. I've got to set an example. If I don't give and give liberally, and practice some self-denial in order to do it, how can I expect anything of the others? Of course I've got to do my duty, and I shall just give the whole price of that row-boat."

"Ah, my son, I thought Gotter would arrive."

This was too much. I could not stand it any longer. I made up my mind at once that I must know who Gotter really was and know it now. Never before had I been so puzzled about anybody or anything. As soon as I heard Harry's big boots clattering down the stairs I went to my hostess's room.

"Mary," I said, calling my old friend by her first time, "who is Gotter?"

"What?" she asked, while her eyes sparkled with fun. "You don't tell me you don't know who Gotter is?"

"Yes, I do tell you so," I cried; "and if you don't enlighten me now, I can't begin to describe to you what dreadful lengths my curiosity will lead me to. Ever since I have been in your house I have heard of no one else. No deed is done, nothing is discussed or thought about, but Gotter. Gotter requires this, and insists upon that. He rules everybody, and controls everything. Who is he, what is he, that he governs a whole household where he never appears?"

"Ah! we should do poorly without Gotter," said my old friend, shaking her matronly-like head.

"Probably," I said, with a good deal of sarcasm, "see how constantly you allude to him."

"Did you hear Harry's last remark before he went out?" She asked, suddenly, with what seemed to my impatience a good deal of irrelevance. "He mentioned Gotter's real true name certainly three or four times. Did you not hear it?"

"No, I did not," I cried. "I heard only the one name, the one that puzzled me so that I believe I shall become quite ill if my curiosity is not gratified."

"Well, I shall have to tell you." With a very much amused air she began: "After I was married and settled cozily here in my home, with my brood of little ones around me, I naturally began, as I hope all mothers do, to think how I might best train them up to habits of well-doing and integrity, and how to teach them that the first, the most important, the great business of life, in fact, was to do their duty toward God and man, and never to swerve from the straight line taught by our Heavenly Father in his holy book."

"Ah, yes; but what has this to do with Gotter?"

"Have patience. I very soon found, as I fancy most parents do, that among my little flock, if the right thing was to be done at all times and under all circumstances, there had to be no small amount of stern command and strict enforcement of the rules and regulations set down. There was a good deal of attempted appeal from a great many of the laws that Henry, my husband, and myself thought were wise and good for the government of our little kingdom. And a great many of these appeals came from little lips in that common phrase, which I fancy all children use, however careful parents and teachers try to expunge the word from their vocabulary. 'Mamma, have I got to?' 'Papa, please, have I got to?' 'Mamma, must I? Oh, need I? Have I got to?'"

"Aha! I think I am beginning to see now."

"Yes, I fancy you are."

"And 'got to' pronounced by little lips was 'gotter,' and 'gotter,' very soon became 'Gotter' with a capital G, and he became the ruling spirit of the household."

"Yes, you have unravelled the whole mystery."

You can imagine how I laughed, and how my friend laughed with me, when I told her how puzzled I had been, and what wild flights my imagination had taken in accounting for this wonderful Gotter, and settling who he might be, and what his characteristics were.

But could a household, or could any of us, I ask you all, have a better ruler than "Gotter"—only another name for that sense of duty, that quick response to its call, that ready, cheerful obedience to just authority, based upon a careful study of the laws of God?—Harper's Young People.