

THE TWO THIMBLES.

A STORY FOR LITTLE FOLKS.

BY THE AUTHOR OF "A TRAP FOR A SUNBEAM."

WERE you ever in a carpenter's shed, little folks?—a large shed, with its piles of shavings, its strange, quaint-looking tools, its endless pieces of wood, of all shapes and sizes?—because if you ever were there, you know what it is to play in. What a mysterious awe hangs over the tools we must not touch, and therefore look at with longing eyes—What a delight to build houses there, with those pieces of wood, so much nicer than our own neat box of bricks at home—What fun the piling up shavings to "pretend" it's a bonfire; and the still greater delight of having the hammer and the nail-box, and driving a whole row into a piece of wood, with no earthly object but to make the same noise as the carpenter! Such pleasures as these were being thoroughly enjoyed by a little bright-eyed, dark-haired, gipsy-looking child, one warm summer afternoon, when I shall first introduce her to you. Her name is Jessie Hay; she is the second child of one Alfred Hay, the village carpenter; and, perhaps, it may be owned, his darling; for in spite of the never-ending scrapes into which she continually got, she was so merry, so clever, and so winning, that he could not help loving even while he scolded her. Mrs. Hay said her father spoilt her—but I don't quite think that; Mrs. Hay made the mistake too often made with children—she thought if a child was quiet and never worried her, it was good; but if, on the contrary, it was full of life and restlessness, it required constant correction. So it happened that the little meek-faced, quiet, unexcitable Lucy, Jessie's eldest sister, rarely incurred her mother's displeasure, whilst poor Jessie was in constant disgrace. Mrs. Hay had never been fond of children before she married; and though she had a natural love for her own, all their "little ways" irritated and vexed her. Exquisitely clean, neat, industrious, and remarkably quiet herself, the mess which children make was a source of real pain to her—the ringing of their fond, eager voices—the impatience to be heard and attended to, however much she was engaged herself—the spoiling of their clothes—the destruction of books and playthings—all combined to prevent her finding any pleasure in her children. She loved them with a tender, anxious love, which made her willing and desirous to spare them from pain or ill-usage; but she wished in her heart that she and her husband had shared their home alone—that the spotlessly clean cloth she loved to spread on the table was never soiled with dirty fingers and clumsy "upsets"; that the nicely-swept floor was never strewn with broken rubbish nor shreds of linen; in short, that she could sit down peacefully to enjoy the neat home she took such pains to keep so. Lucy being a naturally quiet, dull child—she had trained her to her notions of right and wrong, so that before her mother, Lucy was never in mischief, always neat and clean, and supposed by her, and all who visited the cottage, to be a model child; but Jessie—wild, restless, joyous Jessie—was her mother's perpetual torment, and, as I have said, constantly in disgrace. And let me pause a moment to address you, the "Young of the Household"—I who love you all, from the tiniest baby cradled in its mother's arms, to the sturdiest boy or girl among you—rich or poor, high or low—the lordly infant in his silks and laces, as well as the cottage child in its patched, and, it may be, dirty pinafore—let me tell you I can understand how it was that Mrs. Hay did not like children, and how it is that so many do not; how it is they are so glad to shut them up in their nurseries with their nurses, or turn them out in the streets to play—anywhere so they are rid of them—because you forget, most of you, the good old proverb, "Little children should be like old men's beards, seen but not heard." You should try to remember that there is a time to play and be merry and noisy; and a time to be silent and quiet; when you must be contented not to be noticed, nor engage attention; but to steal away in some little corner, and be so still

that no one shall know you are in the room; a time to cease the eager questionings, to rest the restless feet; so that it may be said of you, that, though always in the way, you are never out of the way.

Lucy Hay had learned this lesson, but unhappily she had only learned it to serve herself, not because it was right and good; and, moreover, it was not so much merit to her to be still as it would have been to Jessie, because it was no trouble to her. She liked to be quiet—she liked to listen to what other people said—and above all, she liked the sugar-plums and half-pence, and sweet words, her mother lavished on her for being "so good."

On the afternoon when I tell you Jessie was so happy in the carpenter's shed, Lucy was quietly seated in a corner of her mother's best room, listening to the conversation between her mother and a visitor who had just arrived. At last, her mother returned to her and said—

"Lucy, love, where is Jessie?—in mischief somewhere, I'll be bound!"

"I don't know, mother," answered Lucy, meekly. "I think I saw her going into father's shed."

"Into father's shed! She heard me say I wouldn't have her go there. I never saw such a naughty child in my life. I declare, Martha," continued the mother, addressing the visitor, "I don't know what to do with her; you'd never think the children were sisters, or had been brought up alike. Lucy's always quiet and good, and no trouble; but as to Jessie, she almost drives me distracted. Go and tell her to come here directly Lucy; she shall have bread and water for dinner, for not minding what's said to her."

Now do you know, Lucy knew well that Jessie was not in the room when her mother had said she did not like the children to go into the shed, and she had quite forgotten to tell her sister so; but, fearful of getting scolded herself for not mentioning it, she allowed her mother to believe Jessie was wilfully disobedient. She found Jessie very happy among the shavings, and, beckoning her out, said:—

"Oh! Jessie, Aunt Martha's here, and you're to come in; and mother said we were not to go into the shed any more, and I forgot to tell you. Don't say I forgot, Jessie dear—pry don't; mother will be so cross."

"All right," said Jessie, cheerfully, and throwing down her bundle of shavings, she ran into the house with her sister. Her hair hanging in rough, disordered masses about her face, with pieces of shavings sticking to her clothes, and her little brown hands anything but clean, Jessie certainly did not present a very elegant appearance; but the honest glance of her loving brown eyes won her aunt's heart at once, and the angry rebuke of her mother was interrupted quickly by Aunt Martha, who, taking the rough head kindly between her hands, said:—

"Don't scold the child, sister: we have all been children once; and this is a loving, honest face, that can't belong to a very naughty child, I think."

"She is a naughty child, Martha. What business had you in the shed, when I said you should go there no more?—it's not a place for girls. You should bide at home with your needlework, or your book, or something, quiet and steady. I shall never make anything of you, I fear."

Jessie made no answer, only still kept her steady gaze on her aunt's face, as though to discover if in truth she had found a friend.

"Your aunt's going to dine with us," exclaimed Mrs. Hay; "so go and make yourself tidy, Miss; though you'll only get bread and water for your dinner. Go on, Lucy dear, with your sister, though I don't know that you want doing much to—you're always tidy."

When the children had left the room, Aunt Martha made it a particular favor to herself that Jessie should be forgiven, and have her dinner with the rest; and as Aunt Martha was a favored individual—a rich relation—her request was granted, and poor little Jessie was permitted to partake of beef and pudding with the rest of the family.

Before Aunt Martha went away that night, she and Jessie were fast friends. She gave

each of her little nieces a silver thimble, and said that she hoped she should see them when she came again, and that they would show her some of the work they had done with them.

Jessie was very sorry to see her aunt go away, and called after her as she turned the corner of the street—"Do come again soon!"—for which she got nothing but an angry push from her mother, for her aunt was too far off to hear what she said.

Jessie and Lucy went to school in the village; and they would have been there today, only it was Saturday, which is always a holiday. On Monday morning they both started off, carrying their thimbles in their pockets, proud enough, as you may suppose, of having silver ones. They had some little way to walk, and Lucy kept taking hers out of her pocket and flourishing it about on her finger. Once or twice Jessie said—

"Take care, Lucy—you'll lose it." But Lucy only gave her some pert answer, and went on. At length she gave her finger one unlucky twist, and off flew the thimble; but where had it flown to?—that was the question: It was not to be seen anywhere. The road had just been repaired, and was full of stones—doubtless, it was among them. But if so, where would their search end?—not in time for them to get to school, certainly.

"You run on," said the good-natured Jessie, "and I'll stay and hunt. I don't mind a scolding so much as you do, and if I do lose my place in the class, I'll soon pick it up again."

"But I wanted to show my thimble directly I got into school," said Lucy, beginning to cry.

Jessie could not bear to hear her cry, so, taking her own thimble out of her pocket, she said—

"Take mine, then—they're both alike—and I can have yours when I find it. There, do run on, dear, and don't cry any more."

"Oh, thank you, dear, dear Jessie, you are so good," said Lucy, quickly leaving off crying; and, taking her sister's thimble, off she ran to school, whilst Jessie remained busily looking for the lost one.

It was a quiet little village, and but few persons were to be seen about it; but those few who did pass asked her what she was looking for, and some even helped her for a few minutes, but in vain; so, fearing certain disgrace at school if she did not soon make her appearance, she turned away, determining to have another search on her return. The village clock struck ten as she entered the school; she was received, of course, with an angry rebuke, an order to go to the bottom of the class, and the information that she was to be "kept in." She would not have cared for all that so much as if she had found the thimble; for the gratification it would have afforded her sister would have been her consolation. But now she had to tell her that it was not found, and the fact that she was to be "kept in" would prevent her having another search for it. At twelve o'clock Lucy went home without her, and Jessie remained to finish a task that had been set her, and which would at least take her half an hour. One or two children who lived a long way off had brought their dinners, and seeing them eat theirs made Jessie feel very hungry; but though they all good-naturedly offered her a piece she would not stop from her task to eat it. She got it done at last, and was permitted to go home.

Her mother saw her coming, and opened the door to her.

"You naughty child!" she said; "I'll take care and let your aunt know how well you have kept her pretty present—you careless little thing you! It's useless to give you anything, it's broken or lost directly; and now, do you think I'm going to give you any dinner, coming in just as it's half over?"

"Yes, yes, mother," said her father, "give the child some dinner; she didn't lose the thimble on purpose."

"Ah, Henry! that's the way you go on; I shall never do anything with her while you take her part;—come and eat your dinner then, as your father says so." But poor Jessie had flung herself down in one corner of the room, and was weeping bitterly; the scolding, the loss of her place at school, and her dinner, mattered nothing, but that her

sister, whom she had tried to serve, should have told an untruth about her, was hard indeed.

"Come, come, lassie," said her father, kindly; "don't take on so; eat your dinner—you did not mean to lose the thimble—Aunt will forgive you, I'll be bound."

But poor Jessie sobbed on—her little heart felt breaking—she could only say, "I can't eat any, dear father;" she would not say that Lucy had told an untruth. And so her father went out to work, and her mother cleared her untouched dinner away—and still poor Jessie sobbed in the corner. At length it was time to go to the afternoon school, and her mother told her, if she was not ashamed to be seen such a figure, she had better go off with her sister. Slowly rising and drying her eyes, and pulling down her bonnet and cloak from the peg, which she threw on certainly without the least regard to appearance, she followed Lucy out of the cottage.

"Jessie, dear," said Lucy, as soon as they were outside, "I am so sorry; I'll buy you some bull's eyes—I've got a penny."

Jessie must be excused for feeling so angry that she could not answer. Lucy went on—"Mother said, as soon as I went in, 'Where's Jessie?' and I said you were kept in for being late; and she said, 'What made you late?' and I said you stopped looking for the thimble. I didn't say your thimble; but she flew out directly, and said she'd beat you for losing it, and I was afraid then to say it was mine; and she asked directly for mine to put away, and kissed me for having got it safe, when I gave her yours, and I could not say anything, Jessie. I should die if mother was to scold me as she does you; but I'll run back and tell her now, Jessie, if you like."

Lucy had said this in an eager breathless manner, gazing earnestly with eyes filled with tears in her sister's face. Jessie's anger vanished at once, and she said, "No, Lucy I'm used to scolding; better me than you. Mother won't say any more if I go home with a cheerful face, and I shall be no worse off than before I had a thimble; keep mine and welcome, and let's forget it." And as she spoke these generous words, the little girl remembered the story in Holy Writ of him who was falsely accused, but came at last to great honour, heartily forgiving those who had injured him. And her step soon recovered its lightness, and her loving face its glandsome smiles; and her joyous laugh rang out the loudest as with the rest of her schoolmates she sauntered home that evening in the light of the setting sun.

A few weeks after, their Aunt Martha came again to see them; and, after some little conversation, requested to see the thimbles and the work that had been done with them.

"Oh, Jessie lost hers next day! a careless little thing; and Lucy asked me to take care of hers, so no work has been done with it—but I can show you Lucy's; and, unlocking a box, her mother produced the thimble. Aunt Martha looked at it all over, silently, for a moment; and then calling Jessie to her, said very kindly—

"Where did you lose your thimble, my dear?"

Poor Jessie looked first at her mother, then at Lucy, and then on the ground, before she replied; but finding they said nothing, she answered—

"It was lost in the street."

"And what were you doing with it in the street?"

"Lucy and I were going to school."

"Did you lose it out of your pocket, dear? tell me the truth."

But this was too much for Jessie, and with a trembling voice she said—

"Please don't ask me any more, dear Aunt Martha."

"There is no occasion to ask you any more, my dear little girl; I know it all. This is your thimble and the lost one is Lucy's. I marked them, in case of any dispute; there is the little cross I placed inside Jessie's; Anne," she continued, turning to the mother, who was looking from one to the other in amazement, but suddenly she exclaimed—

"Let me see the thimble a moment. It