

Their First Call.

JESSIE and Tad and Prue happened to be in the sitting-room that afternoon when Mrs. Gifford and Mrs. Thorne were talking about the new minister and his wife.

"I haven't called on her yet," said Mrs. Gifford.

"Nor I," answered Mrs. Thorne. "I've had so much to do that I couldn't find time. Mrs. Torrey says she likes them very much."

"Likes who, mamma?" asked Jessie, not understanding what the conversation was about.

"The minister and his wife," answered her mother. "How did you say this sleeve ought to go, Mrs. Gifford? I can't get the hang of it, for some reason."

"Where do they live?" asked Jessie, who likes to know everything.

"Where the old minister did," answered her mother. "Don't ask any more questions now. Run away and play, please."

"I know where that is," said Prue. "I goed by there when I went to gramma's."

Jessie sat down on the door-step and looked thoughtful for as much as two minutes, then said to Prue.

"Let's go calling."

"Le's," said Prue concisely; ready for anything Jessie proposed.

"Yeth," leth do tallin'," said Tad, eagerly, fearful he might be ignored in the proposed expedition.

"I don't b'leeve mamma'd let you go," said Jessie. "It's a great long ways, and you'd get tired, wouldn't he, Prue?"

"Tourse he would," answered Prue.

"No, I wouldn't," said Tad. "Me doin' if 'ou do."

"I'll go and ask mamma about it," said Jessie. So she ran in and asked if Tad might go with them. It didn't occur to her that she hadn't told where she was going.

Mrs. Gifford was trying so hard to understand the difficult pattern before her that she hardly noticed what Jessie said.

"Yes, yes," she said, without thinking anything about what she was saying.

"And may we take our pa'sols?" asked Jessie, pausing at the door-way.

"Yes, yes! Do go away. I'm so bothered!" said her mother, unconscious of what she was giving assent to.

Jessie ran to the bedroom where her mother kept her parasols in the upper drawer of the bureau, and soon had possession of them. If there was anything she liked it was a parasol.

"Yes, mamma said you might go," she said to Tad, when she went down the steps, "and she said we might take these," displaying her parasols. "Ain't they just lovely!"

"Oh my!" exclaimed Prue, with sparkling eyes. "But Tad hain't got none. There's dest one for you an' me."

"Oh, Tad's a boy," said Jessie. "Boys never carry pa'sols."

It was a warm and dusty day. Every gust of wind that blew took up great handfuls of sand from the road and scattered it in clouds, and it seemed to the little travellers as if a good deal of it came into their eyes, for they began to smart, and then they rubbed them with their dusty hands. Then perspiration excited by the warmth of the day and the exertions of the walk made a kind of grimy paint of the dust, so that they resembled little mulatto children in which the color had been rather unevenly distributed, more than

anything else. Jessie led the way, with her parasol elevated as far as possible, entirely regardless of the sun which was beating in her face. She had a sun-bonnet, tilted as far back as the strings tied under her chin would admit. Prue was bareheaded and carried her parasol over her shoulder. Tad trudged behind with an old straw hat on the back of his head, through whose tattered crown his tow-colored hair stood up as if he was frightened, his face getting redder and redder with the exercise and the heat of the sun.

"I's oful dry," he gasped presently. "Leth not do 'tallin' any more."

"There!" exclaimed Jessie, "I knew you'd get tired. You'd ought to staid at home. Wouldn't he Prue?"

"Yes, I dess he had," puffed Prue; "I'm dry, too."

"I hear a brook," said Jessie. "We'll stop and get a drink."

They reached the stream pretty soon, and Jessie made a cup of a great leaf.

"Oh, that's dood, oful dood," said Prue with a long sigh of relief as the water went gurgling down her throat. "I never dot so dry anywhere's I does, I dess. Ain't it dood, Tad?"

"Yeth," answered Tad, taking long pulls at the leaf-cup. "It's doodest I ever thee?"

"Well, if you've got enough, we'd better go," said Jessie, and they went on.

The minister's wife was just putting the tea-things on the table when she happened to look out of the window, and saw three forlorn looking children struggling up the path.

"Oh, William!" she cried, "do come here. Such a laughable sight I haven't seen in many a day!"

Jessie was almost at the door, her parasol elevated to the last degree, her sunbonnet off, and dragged by one string. About half way to the gate was Prue, with her parasol over her shoulder in a most dejected way. Just coming through the gate was poor, weary little Tad, and all three were so begrimed with dust that it was hard to tell what the color under it might be; but wherever it broke through the coating of brown it was bright red.

Tap, tap, tap!

Mrs. Rainsford smoothed down her face decorously and opened the door.

"Good-day," said Jessie. "We come a calling. It's awful warm." And then she helped herself to the first chair that she came to and drew a great breath of weariness. Prue lifted two very heavy feet over the door sill, and looked about the room, but hadn't life enough left to say anything. Tad got as far as the steps, and there he gave out, with a comical little groan. The minister's wife lifted him into the house and put him into the big rocking-chair.

"Poor little fellow! You're all tired out aren't you?"

"Yeth," said Tad; "an' I'm tho hungry," with a longing look at the tea-table.

"I'm dest starved," said Prue. "I want some b'e'm butter."

"I guess we'll stay to supper," said Jessie. Then she added, as if fearful that the nature of the visit might be misunderstood,

"We come a callin'."

The minister and his wife looked at each other and laughed.

"They ran away, I presume," he said, lifting Tad to his knee. "What's your name, little man?"

"Tad," answered the little man. "I'se free yearth old."