

Our Boys and Girls BY AUNT BECKY

The Secret of the Silver Lake

By Henry Frith, Author of "Under Bayard's Banner," "For King and Queen," etc.

CHAPTER I.—A SUDDEN SUMMONS.—A VOYAGE AND A WRECK.—CAPTURED!

"I say, Stephen," said Ernest Belton to his eldest brother, "have you heard the news that father's had?"

"No," said Stephen, who was just then practising some new conjuring tricks in the school-room; "tell it at once: we have so seldom anything funny here."

"It is not very 'funny,'" replied his brother, as he watched the conjuring; "it is rather serious!"

"Father has not met with an accident? You don't mean that, Ernest?" he said gravely.

"No, no; we are all right. You remember Uncle Manton, who went out to New Zealand some time ago?"

"Yes, on some wild-goose chase, after a silver mine or a silver lake. What of him? Has he turned Maori?"

"No; but he has turned up some buried secret," said Ernest. "More than that, he has written to father to go out—what do you think of that, King?"

Stephen was often called "King" by his brothers and sisters, he being the oldest, and Stephen a king's name.

"And is father going? What shall we do here all by ourselves? This is serious, Ernest: you are right. Have you told Amy?"

"Amy is with father in the study. I don't think we shall be left behind, King!" was the joyful reply.

suggests, or remain in the Grange all winter? Stephen, you are the eldest: what do you say?"

"Let us go, father. We are getting rather moped. We hardly meet anyone. But we should all go."

"That is Ernest's opinion also," said Mr. Belton, smiling. "We can't do without our housekeeper," he continued, looking down at his little daughter, and kissing her fondly, as she nestled to his side.

"No, indeed!" exclaimed both lads. "We can't leave Amy. We should be quite desolate then!"

"The boys, you see, valued their sister, though they often teased her. She was, however, very active and good-tempered with them; so no wonder they were fond of her. She was never cross or petulant, and they loved her dearly."

"Then we shall decide to think of it," said Mr. Belton. "Let me see. The mail goes on Thursday. We have two clear days to consider the question. Uncle Manton will be delighted if we do go—and suppose we do find this mysterious lake! Eh?"

"Oh, that will be something like an adventure!" cried Ernest. "But how did uncle hear of the place?"

"From an old settler who had come to England. This man showed him a Maori tradition of a hidden cave and a silver lake, which legend he had translated; and, with his cousin Dick, Uncle Manton went out, after darling mother's death. Now you know as much as you need know. Run away, I want to think this over."

The children, thus dismissed, slowly quitted the room. It was in July, and the day was lovely, but very hot.

"What shall we do?" asked Stephen. "Let us get the Cyclopaedia and read all about New Zealand," suggested Amy, "I am not certain about it. It is not the same as Tasmania, is it?"

"Of course not!" Ernest cried. "Tasmania is Van Diemen's Land, the convict place—New Zealand is two islands. But I am not sure what kind of a place it is."

different tune some day." "All right, King—only if Amy says we shall go, I expect we shall, that's all!"

Two days passed, and Ernest's faith in Amy's prediction was quite justified. Before Wednesday night the family had determined to go abroad; and the Grange was advertised to be let within a few days after.

There is no need to tell you all about the preparations, the packing up, the "good-byes" to the cows, the pigs, the poultry, the dogs and the donkey. For several days all the animals had treats; and then one morning the Beltons quitted the old Grange and started for London, where they found the ship Kiwi, in which they had secured berths. All their heavy luggage had already been forwarded on board, so they had not much trouble.

The Kiwi was a fine trader, and was bound for New Plymouth. There were some other passengers on board, and a full cargo. The weather was fine, and everything tended to ensure a pleasant trip. All went well during the voyage until the Monday when land was sighted. On that evening some of the passengers had a service of thanksgiving in the cabin, and afterwards Mr. Belton and his children, except Robin, went on deck. The wind was fair: the night was clear.

"What is that bright light over there?" asked Amy. "Is it a light-house?"

"Yes," replied one of the ship's officers, "it is the Sandspit Beacon, down Nelson way."

"We shall soon be ashore, then," cried Ernest. "I hope not," laughed the mate. "Rather an unpleasant experience for all of us!"

"What! Going ashore unpleasant!" cried Stephen. "I don't want to be rude, Mr. Morgan, but I am awfully tired of this voyage!"

"No, I meant running ashore—not going ashore in the usual way," said the mate, smiling at the notion. "And this is New Zealand at last!" said Stephen. "Well, perhaps we shall enjoy it. Are we near Nelson?"

"I can't say," replied his father, "but we shall surely reach our port to-morrow; so Amy dear, and you too, my lads, had better turn in. It is past ten o'clock; to-morrow we may have a stiff breeze. I expect we are only about sixty or seventy miles from our destination."

The young people bade their father "good night" and went down below. In the saloon they stayed for a few minutes chatting, and Stephen said—

"I will just look after my traps, for we may reach Nelson very early. I want to see the place. Shall I call you, Amy?"

"Yes, please, King," she said; "quite early, before sunrise, mind!" They parted, and Mr. Belton paced the deck, thinking of his past and picturing the future. The red light of the beacon flashed in his eyes as he turned away to go down, when at that moment he received a shock which nearly sent him head foremost down the stairs to the cabin.

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had packed up a bundle for Amy, who was dressed and well wrapped up. All this time the Kiwi was bumping on the sands, and by degrees the sea rose and the wind got stronger. The motion of the vessel was very unpleasant, and made some people quite ill. "What shall we do, father?" asked Amy. "Shall we be lost? It will be terrible if we are wrecked; really wrecked!" "Yes, my dear, but we must have patience; help will come," replied her father. "But all day no help came. The boat with the second mate and the four men did not return. The wind became very boisterous, and the sea was high. At length, after another terribly anxious night, the captain told the sailors to get their boats launched. This was no easy task, and, unfortunately, two lives were lost; one passenger and a sailor fell into the rushing waves, and were drowned! There were three boats, into which fifteen of the crew and ten passengers were placed, with some provisions. The captain behaved very well, and so did the sailors. One boat was much smaller than the others, and in this Mr. Belton and his family, with two sailors, were safely put. They rowed away all together, very miserable, ill, and unhappy at such a commencement to their expedition. (To be continued.)

Dear Aunt Becky: I am very much interested in your corner. I often thought of writing before, but something always stopped me from doing so. I made my first Communion and was confirmed the last Sunday of September, 1906. I live in the country nine miles from church, and I go to a public school. I am in the senior fourth book. I am also very much interested in "Little Oddity"; everyone of us are just waiting for each week's paper to come; we just feel as though we knew Bonny just by reading about him. I think a composition would be very nice for a competition on anything you wish. Well, I must close now. Wishing to see lots of letters from this out. Your loving niece, MARY A. C. Vine, Feb. 16, 1907.

PUSSY AT SCHOOL.

One morning when 'twas mild and cool, Miss Pussy Cat ran off to school, To show the children just the way That kittens work and kittens play.

First she washed her face so neat, Then she scrubbed her tiny feet, For kittens are so clean, you know, To school they never dirty go.

Her nails and teeth she polished, too, For well this clever kitten knew If mousies went to that same school She'd be in need of every tool.

When once in school she silent sat, Like any model pussy cat, And when she had a word to say She'd gently raise her paw this way.

Her teacher thought her very bright, She studied hard with all her might, And when she said her "A, B, C," 'Twas a tongue quite new to me.

And when it came her time to read The children had to laugh indeed, For this is just exactly how She spoke our English: "Meow, meow, meow!"

She did not make one bit of noise, Like all the other girls and boys, For when her lessons got too deep Miss Pussy just went off to sleep.

This clever cat nevertheless Waked up the moment 'twas recess. She danced and jumped, and all declare She was the smartest scholar there. —Jeanette R. Murphy.

TOMMY'S WARM WEATHER.

Tommy's father owned an orange grove in the lake regions of Florida. One evening it seemed to be growing colder, and he made frequent trips to the thermometer on the piazza north of the house.

"I do hope it won't get down enough to do any damage," Tommy heard his father say, as he returned for the fourth or fifth time from the piazza.

"How does it get down, papa?" asked Tommy. Mr. Williams explained that the silver line inside was called mercury, and that when it got down to a certain point water would freeze, and if it kept going down great damage would be done.

After his father left Tommy went to the piazza and climbed up on a chair to see if the mercury was still going down. And then a bright idea came to him. When Mr. Williams returned to examine the thermometer once more it was gone.

"Oh, Tommy," he called, "where's the thermometer?" "It's all right, papa," answered Tommy gleefully, as he danced towards him. "That mercury thing's gone up ever so higher'n it was when you was here. It's just as nice and warm," and he led the way to the henhouse and drew out the thermometer from under a setting hen. Sure enough! The mercury had gone up ever so high, and it indicated such warm weather that father was obliged to turn away his face to laugh.

LITTLE AIDS TO MEMORY.

Two hundred bones you'd think enough To make a little chisp; Add forty more, and you will have The number to a rap.

Night red, morning gray, Sure to be a fine day; Night gray, morning red, Sends many shepherds back to bed.

Which should come first, the i or the e? A question which sorely puzzles me! The answer lies in this rule, you see— I before e, except after c.