

## THE LITTLE FOLK.

## Effie's Hymn.

BY JENNIE M. BINGHAM.

Things had come to a crisis at the Bennetts. Not that it was anything very new for things to come to a crisis, but it wasn't any easier on that account. Mamma Bennett was sick again, and lay on the bed with a very pale anxious face, and Effie had actually caught her crying. Doary mo! It was just dreadful to have one's mother cry. It meant that a crisis had come sure enough.

And their breakfast had been just mush, "seasoned with salt." No butter or molasses to make their breakfast table interesting and attractive to a forlorn little girl.

Effie sat swinging her foot off the low steps, and thinking and thinking what a disagreeable thing it was to have a mother that would get sick and a father that would go off and stay away long, long whiles, and then would come home very cross and very tired—so tired that he would lie and sleep day after day.

Effie was a little girl and didn't know much about the world, but she was quite sure some little girls didn't have so many trials as she and Mollie and her little brother Bob. She saw some at the mission Sunday school who looked as though they didn't have cold mush for breakfast, and as though their fathers cared when their dresses were worn out and their shoes grew shabby. Some day she would be grown up and then she would earn money to buy medicine for mother and good breakfasts and pretty dresses; and "Effie, Effie!" broke in Mollie, "don't you wish you'd a hand organ little girl, and then folks would give you pennies, and you could buy an orange? I love an orange."

Effie's face brightened, but soon dropped again.

"If we was rich, we'd do that; but O my! hand organs cost lots o' money. More'n you could hold in yer two hands, Mollie Bennett. I heard Jim say so."

Mollie sighed heavily, and Effie sighed, too.

"Oh, dear!" said Mollie, "I'm sick o' playing graveyard in the sawdust."

"Let's play dolls," suggested Effie, who never could bear to have Mollie get low-spirited and cross. Mollie had a twisted foot, and could never play tag nor jump the rope, and Effie was a very considerate older sister.

"I hate to play dolls," snapped Mollie, "'cause my doll never has new clothes."

"Let's sing," said Effie. "Let's sing my hymn what we learned in Sunday school. Let's play we's grand ladies singing before folks and we'll take turns on the verses."

The low, rickety steps became the platform for the singers right speedily, and little Mollie hobbled up and made her bow. She sang in a sweet voice that somehow sounded very sad and pathetic:

"I think, when I read that sweet story of old,  
When Jesus was here among men,  
How he called little children as lambs to his fold,  
I should like to have been with him then."

It was Effie's turn next, and she began on the second verse:

"I wish that his hands had been placed on my head,  
And that his arms had been thrown around me."

and then she stopped suddenly, and looked very excited. "Oh! Oh!" she said, "I've the ght of something lovely—just too lovely."

"Is it something good to eat?" asked Mollie, hurriedly. Her pale cheeks flushed quickly, and her eyes shone. Effie was always thinking up good things.

"No, not 'zactly," said Effie, looking perplexed; "and—and we'd have to take Bobby with us, I'm afraid, to keep him out o' mischief, and he don't know any of it, 'cept the first verse, and he will sing it—I fink when I read the sweet 'tory of old'—not a bit plain."

"Where? where? On a stage, like grand people?"

"No, just 'round the streets. One street after another, where folks look kind and as if they wouldn't set their dogs on us, we'll stop and sing my hymn; and then maybe they'd give us pennies if we sung it real good, and they liked it, and we didn't bother them."

"Goody! goody!" shouted Mollie, jumping up and down, and clapping her hands. "Let's go. Come, Bobby."

Bobby was always ready to go, for that matter. Effie looked him over and shook her head doubtfully.

"Bobby, do you s'pose you'll 'member to hold your feet out o' sight, 'cause the holes show dreadful, and will you leave your hat to home 'cause it's so ragged?"

Bobby promised dutifully.

"And, Bobby, you mustn't sing only just the first verse—just the first, 'cause it's the only one you know. Here to home sister

let you sing on it when we sung the others, but you mustn't this time, when it's for other folks. Now promise."

And Bobby promised, and actually left his beloved hat at home. "If we got some money," Effie whispered to Mollie, "we'll get him an orange."

They wandered on down the street, and soon they came in front of a nice big store with a good many men sitting around inside. There wasn't any big dog anywhere about, and so Effie halted, with Mollie on one side and Bobby on the other. She was dreadfully scared at first, and perhaps would have run away without the song, but Mollie had started the tune,

"I think when I read that sweet story of old,"

and Bobby was using his privilege lustily on this verse. They were the sweet voices of children singing a Christian hymn, and it rose above the clink of glass and tongues, and hushed the discordant sounds within.

"Hear that!" said the men, and they moved up toward the door. Strange sort of music for such a crowd! Coarse faces, bloated faces. On the next stanza Bobby forgot, and sang away as at his first verse, in spite of Effie's twitches at his arm. But it didn't put them out a bit, and his "sweet 'tory of old" rang out above the rest—the sweetest story ever told—"How he called little children as lambs to the fold." No wonder the audience grew interested and quiet. The voices of the children sank low and soft on the last verse—

"In that beautiful place he has gone to prepare,  
For all who are washed and forgiven;  
And many dear children are gathering there,  
"For of such is the kingdom of heaven,""

The hymn was finished, and they were going away, and nobody offered to give them pennies. Effie was disappointed—oh! so disappointed she almost wanted to cry. It was hard enough to plan a campaign and stand up before all those young men and sing, and now the fun was all gone. It was downright drudgery now. And Mollie—poor Mollie, hobbling down the stop with her twisted foot—couldn't understand why the program should end so, and looked up at Effie wonderingly. Bobby only clasped his hand in Effie's and said, coakingly: "Now, I want an orange."

Far back of the others in the saloon was a man who sat with his hat pulled down to his eyes. He didn't seem to hear the sweet hymn, but he did; bless you; yes, every word. He knew the voices and guessed why they had come. He heard the comments of the men, interspersed with oaths.

"Pretty children!"

"I hain't what they might call a Sunday school man, but that's good enough for me."

"Don't look 's though they's overfed, hey?"

"Or overclothed, for that matter"

He had heard them sing before, but it never sounded quite like this. "Washed and forgiven!" in that sin-defiled place. He raised his head and saw the children turning away from the door with disappointed faces, and Mollie hobbling away last of all.

Some one was asking for a glass now, and remarking: "I reckon their folk's hain't 'eetot'lors."

How he hated himself and this wretched life. He had a dollar in his pocket not yet spent. He got up and strode hastily out and up the street. Soon he found them. A cross-looking man had ordered them away from his saloon, and the children were crying, while Effie tried to hush them. She tried to hush them more and more, when she looked up and saw her father. But he did not scold them. He held out a hand to each, saying: "Come;" and then he stopped at the store and bought some oysters and crackers and oranges, and started for home.

Oh, but wasn't Effie surprised! and as for Bobby and Mollie, they thought oranges were nicer than Sunday school hymns any day.

They all went home and gave mother a surprise—such a big surprise, it almost cured her, and the best part of it all is, it lasts.

The sweet story of old has taken possession of father's heart now, and no more do the little troubadours have to sing for a dinner.

In Connecticut a few years ago lived a lady who had a beautiful flower garden, in which she took great pride. The whole country was proud of it, too, and people drove miles to see it.

She fastened two large baskets on the outside of her fence next the road, and every morning they were filled with cut flowers—the large, showy kinds in one basket, and the delicate, fragile ones in the other. All the school children going by helped themselves and studied the better for it, and business men took a breath of fragrance into their dusty offices that helped the day along. Even the tramps were welcome to all the beauty they could get in their forlorn lives.

"You cut such quantities," some one said to her, "aren't you afraid you will rob yourself?"

"The more I cut the more I have," she answered. "Don't you know that if plants are allowed to go to seed they stop blooming? I love to give pleasure, and it is profit as well, for my liberal cutting is the secret of my beautiful garden. I'm like the man in 'Pilgrim's Progress':

"A man there was (though some did count him mad),  
The more he gave away, the more he had."