

THE LITTLE FOLK.

THE TWINS BIRTHDAY.

BY MURPHY DEANE.

Blanche and Bess woke at the same minute. They almost always did things together, because they were twins. Blanche listened for a minute and heard the rain pattering against the window.

"Oh, dear! it's just going to pour all day, I know it is," and she curled down on her pillow disconsolately.

But Bess climbed out of bed and ran to the window in her little frilled gown.

"Oh, there's lots and lots of blue sky," she cried joyfully. "I believe it is going to clear off, just on purpose for our party."

"But the grass will be all wet," complained Blanche.

"Not if the sun comes out real bright and hot. I'm going to hurry and dress, because there are ever so many things to do." And so, before Blanche had fairly got herself out of the little bed, Bess was all washed and dressed ready to go downstairs.

Sure enough, by the time breakfast was over, all that was left of the shower was a pile of pretty white clouds floating away over the hilltops, and some bright raindrops on the rose bushes, and the air was like a breath out of paradise.

"I want to pick the roses and fill the bowls, and make the bouquets for the plates," said Blanche.

"Somebody must help me with the dishes," said mamma.

But Blanche had run off with the shears and did not hear, so Bess got the dish towels and went into the warm kitchen, that seemed doubly oppressive after a whiff of the sweet summer air.

They were all as busy as bees for the next few hours. The birthday cake turned out beautifully, and the tiny rolls were as flaky and dainty as the heart could wish. The house was all set in order, and the bowl of roses in the bay window was like a picture after Blanche had finished.

Just as they were ready to put on their pretty white gowns the omnibus came lumbering up to the gate, and out stepped Aunt Margaret with her travelling bag. Blanche and Bess looked at their mother in dismay.

Aunt Margaret was their great-aunt, and they stood a little in awe of her, for, perhaps because it had been a long time since she was a little girl herself, she thought children made a great deal of noise and disturbance. What would she think to-day, when there were to be a dozen of them together? But the twins kissed her in a very subdued way, and went up to their room, and were very still while she rested for a few moments in the bedroom downstairs.

Mamma came up to them presently looking sorry.

"Girls, it's too bad to disappoint you, but Aunt Margaret has one of her dreadful sick headaches coming on."

"And we can't have the party!" cried Blanche, and down she flung herself on the bed in a tempest of angry and disappointed tears. The tears came to Bess' eyes, too, but she tried bravely to wink them back.

"Never mind, mamma," she said, and then her voice choked, and she hid her face against mamma's arm, for it was pretty hard to give up one's tenth birthday party.

"There's the beautiful cake," she whispered, "and all the darling little rolls."

"And my beautiful roses," wailed Blanche, muffled in the pillows, "and the girls will be coming."

"But it's hardest for poor Aunt Margaret," Bess said, looking up bravely and winking away the tears.

"I wonder if we couldn't have the party in the orchard, and set the table out there?" said mamma, thoughtfully. "I could put Aunt Margaret in the north chamber, where she wouldn't hear the noise. The shower this morning was such a little one that it is all perfectly dry by this time."

"It won't do nice at all," grumbled Blanche, sitting up among the pillows. "I just know Julia Gilbert will turn up her nose and say she never saw such a party."

But Bess began to dance and clap her hands softly.

"I think it will be perfectly splendid," she said: "a real picnic party!"

So a picnic party it was, and such fun as they had in the shady old orchard. How pretty it all was, with the fluttering of dainty white gowns and bright ribbons, and bobbing of brown heads and golden ones! Gay ripples of laughter rang out, and they played such merry games and frolics that the astonished robins—seen shy little guests—looked on in wonderment.

After a while the sun began to stoop down toward the western hills, as if he wanted to look in at them under the trees, and the long golden beams poured in, and flickered down through the apple leaves, and danced across the bowl of roses and the birthday cake, and all the bright faces and bobbing heads.

Then the robins began their twilight hymn, and there was a glory of sunset colour over the hills. Away in the meadow lands a lark sang, lonely and wild, and then, as the dusk began to creep up the fields, the little guests said good-night and went away down the quiet village streets.

It had been a long, busy, happy day, and when Blanche came and laid her head on mamma's shoulder for a moment, before she gave her good-night kiss, Bess looked up with her round face full of merry mischief, to tell what Julia Gilbert said.

"She said she never, never went to such a perfectly lovely party in all her life!"

A PRINCE OF THE BLOOD.

"I say, Martin, stop that! How's a fellow going to drink with Niagara Falls coming down on him?"

Louis, or "Rufus," as the boys called him, rose up with a face as red as his head.

"All right," said Martin Stone, laughing! "Go ahead and drink: I'll pump easy for you."

Louis bent over again, and put his thirsty lips to the spout. This time his tormenter moved the pump-handle about as fast as the hour-hand of a watch, and about three drops trickled out.

"Pump, will you?" cried Louis.

"Oh, yes! I will," roared the other, and that instant Louis was sputtering in a perfect tush of the bright water, while the group of boys exploded with laughter.

This was too much for Louis, and he sprang at Martin, shaking his wet head like a Newfoundland dog, and grappling him fiercely. But after all it was a friendly tussel. Louis had far too much sense to take the rough joke seriously, and by the time he and Martin had rolled about on the grass awhile, each trying to get the other under, and they had thumped one another a time or two, in boyish fashion, the bell rang, and they all went back into the schoolroom as good friends as ever.

But something had happened in that sham battle, unknown to anybody except Bustle, the pug, and even he did not know much about it. Martin's bag-strap gave way in the scuffle; his books tumbled out on the ground, and a closely written sheet of paper, caught by a breeze in search of a playfellow, began to play hop-scotch over the grass. Bustle gave chase at first, but soon came to the conclusion that the thing had no wings, and went back to bark his interest and applause at the wrestling-match. Away went the paper, across the school's tennis court, through the iron-fence railing out into the road, there to be trampled deep into an early grave by a great drove of cattle passing that way.

Meantime the school routine went on, and presently the teacher said: "Put up your books, boys; I am going to let you decide now who shall get the English prize for the quarter. Martin and Louis, as some of you know, got the same mark on examination, so I gave them each a composition to write last night, and I am going to read them to the English class, without the name, of course, and let the class award the prize."

There was great excitement among the boys; much shuffling of feet; embarrassed coughing; conscious grinning, while Louis got his paper ready and stood waiting to march up to the desk with Martin.

But where was Martin's paper? You and I know that it was being trampled under dusty hoofs: but Martin was perfectly sure that it was in his Algebra. No. Well, then, in his History of the United States; and so he went through every book in his desk, of course without finding it, while Major Price's brow grew darker every minute.

Now, the Major, having received a military education, thought carelessness a much more serious matter than stupidity, and perhaps he was right. At any rate, he was patient with dullness, but carelessness always met with prompt punishment.

"Well, well," he said, shortly, "where are the papers?"

"I have lost mine, sir," said poor Martin, wishing that boys were allowed to cry like girls.

"Then there will be less trouble about awarding the prize," said the angry teacher. "Louis, where is yours?"

There was an instant of silence in the schoolroom; everybody in the class held his breath. Louis turned red and then pale; then, with a quiet air of determination, he tore his paper slowly across the middle, and said in a respectful tone:

"I have none to hand in, sir."

Instantly the class broke into irrepressible applause.

"Silence!" said the Major, and Louis braced himself against the desk behind him. These boys were afraid of the Major, and if he took this as an indication of insubordination, he would be severe. For some reason the teacher did not speak for a minute, and then he said in a tone they had never heard him use before:

"Boys, I would rather see a generous thing like that among you than to have a prince of the blood in my school! That is what I call loving your neighbor as yourself, and you know who gave us that command and set up the great example."

You may be sure that the boys applauded long and loud after that.