

"but I haven't got a hat," he suddenly remembered.

"What, came without your hat?" said Mrs. Birch in surprise.

"Well, you see, I hadn't even a little time to think, and I knew if I didn't run, run, run, and be ever so quick, I shouldn't catch old—I mean Mr. Birch. Besides, there's Maria, you know," nodding his little head.

"And who's Maria?" inquired Mr. Birch.

"Oh! Maria's rather a——. I do believe I was nearly saying a naughty word," said Boy, pulling himself up; "You can't guess what it was can you?" bursting with merriment; "And I can't tell you. But I will tell you so much. It begins with a P and it ends with a G, and this between," pointing to his eye.

"But you'll never, never guess, and perhaps you'd better not, for Doddles says I must never, never call her a p——! there! I was very near doing it again, wasn't I? But I didn't quite, so I specs Doddles will be glad."

"Who's Doddles?" asked Mr. Birch.

"Oh! don't you know?" said Boy, sweetly. "Our curate, of course!" he explained.

The squire looked at his watch and jumped up in a hurry, for he heard the dog-cart coming round to the door.

"What shall I do for a hat?" asked Boy.

"I think I can find a cap that will do, darling," said Mrs. Birch; "but won't your mother be dreadfully anxious?"

"I shouldn't think so," answered the child; "I s'pose you know I am 'only Boy?'"

"Only?" she answered, in a wondering tone.

"Yes, 'only,'" retorted Boy, "but it's fortunate sometimes," he added.

"But, surely, they will miss you?" persisted Mrs. Birch.

"Oh! dear, yes, they will," went on Boy; "but they'll only look at each other and nod and say, 'they daresay I'm up to no good.'"

While he waited for the squire, kind Mrs. Birch made him drink some tea and eat a biscuit, for she thought the child looked so fragile, and she dreaded all this excitement for him. She could hardly tell why, but she sighed as she saw the dog-cart drive off, and waved her hand in answer to the little voice calling "Good-by, kind Mrs. Birch, good-by!"

To be Continued.

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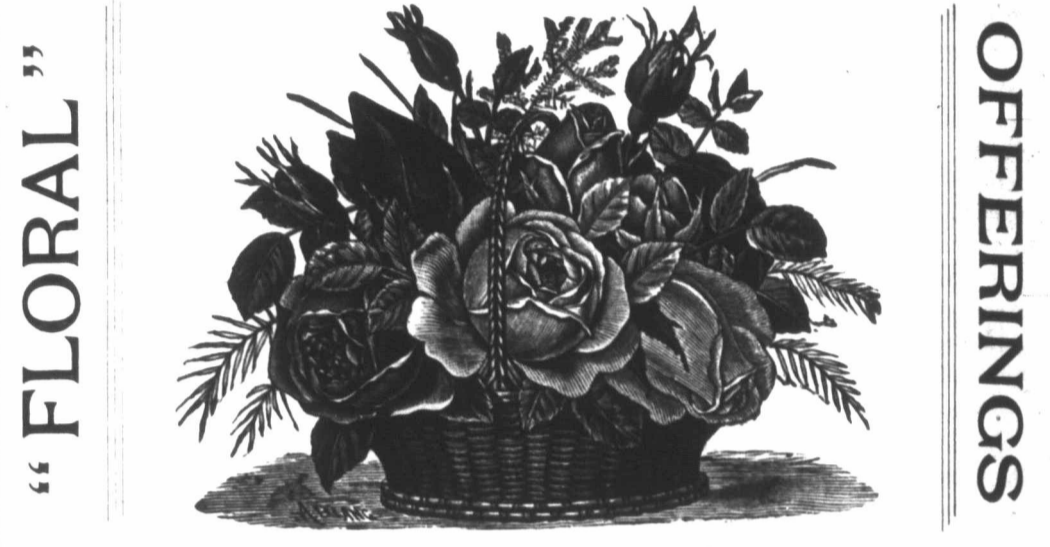
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