

PEOPLE WE MEET

It was merely a happening that we met, in the cold grayness of a March afternoon, and in the gloam of the Grand Opera auditorium.

The big public, that knows our theaters only in the brilliancy of electric lights, warmth and glow and evening-dress audience, would hardly recognize the great places in their morning or undress appearance—so bare and chill, so full of gloom, and vague, dim stretches of space; with the crimson and gilt concealed under dusky linen, and the pretty drop-curtain hidden behind a stretch of dull green.

Time and place mean much, even in the nature world; but in the world of art they are everything.

I had asked a question. "Here is Mr. Palmer Cox himself. He will be able to tell you," answered the manager; and, turning, with a few introductory words, he brought me face to face with the celebrated brownie man.

It hardly seems the correct thing that the father of these wonderful little fellows should be a six-footer; yet I had to look up and up to the height of six feet two, in order to study the kind, quiet face of Palmer Cox, and that was a surprise, to begin with.

My question required a little searching, and while we waited the reply we stood chatting together in the rear of the big auditorium, whose gloom was relieved by the row of quivering foot-lights, while the orchestra rehearsed the brownie music for the evening performance. Mr. Cox measures the full stature of a man in more than physical proportions. He is slenderly muscular, with blue eyes set under heavy brows, high cheek bones; a face rugged in its lining; a manner straightforward, free from affectations; a speech philosophic and sensible; a most approachable man, —and really fond of his brownies, who are the only children he has. For Mr. Cox is a bachelor,

who, when he is not travelling, lives all day in his Broadway studio, in the center of busy New York, where he works among his brownies, drawing and writing the adventures of the funny little fellows; while they surround him in all shapes and forms, climbing his curtains, dangling above him from strings, peering out from picture and desk corners—hundreds of them.

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"I wish you would tell me how your odd little fellows were first conceived, Mr. Cox," I said. "What was the very first idea—the germ of them?"

"I hardly think there was any first idea," he answered. "The first brownie was created like Adam—whole, as far as the drawing is concerned. I advanced them in knowledge by degrees. The brownies are thirteen years old now; they had their birthday in February, and, of course, it is quite time they had outgrown their baby mischief, and knew something," he added, laughing.

"Tell me about the birth of the first brownie," I persisted.

Mr. Cox sat down in one of the vacant chairs, and listened to a few bars of the orchestral music, before replying.

"I was searching for suitable fancies to

up over the little human face, and last the broad smile that tells of a frank understanding and a sympathy established between the two—child and brownie. It is very pretty to see."

"In my brownie books, I have advanced them by degrees from babyhood pranks to graver work. I have put them to school, colleges, clubs, and brought them into the older world,—but always the principle maintains with my brownies—that good must be done for good's sake; whether people deserve it or not.

"I have written one hundred and fifty brownie stories, which are published in five separate volumes. My brownies are thirteen years old, yet I believe they are loved to-day as much as at their birth."

"That is because the children and the child heart is always with our weary old world—to save it," I said.

"Yes," answered the big brownie father, "but the grown-ups like them well also, possibly because of the suggestion of humor which is the foundation of all elfish lore. None of us get fun enough in our lives—good wholesome fun. Sometimes I think there should be a school for the deliberate cultivation of lawful humor in our midst. Honestly now," he turned to me suddenly, "do you think there is laughter enough in our lives?"

"No," I answered slowly "not nearly."

"Well," he said, smiling. "My brownies make a very good primary school for fun, if it were only followed up."

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It is nice to be able to claim Mr. Cox as a Canadian. He was born at Granby, a village near Montreal,—somewhere back in the fifties possibly. Afterward, he tells me, he came west, and lived for a time in a little village, Lucknow, I think, by name. Finally he went to San Francisco, "to seek his fortune," as the nursery rhyme says; but the fortune came when, back again in New York, he sought and summoned the bonnie Scotch brownies to cross the waters and play their pranks for the children of the New World.

FAITH FENTON.



PALMER COX.

use in illustrating children's books. I didn't like the idea of the German gnomes and elves; since their deeds are always more or less vicious. The conventional fairies were hardly mirthful enough, not sufficiently novel, and a trifle too effeminate,—if you will pardon me," he added in funny parenthesis.

"Suddenly I thought of the brownies—Scotch fairies, all of the male sex; who are accredited with doing only kindly things. You know of them?"

I didn't know, save through Mr. Cox's merry portraiture. But I strongly suspect the brownie man has Scotch blood in his veins—which makes a difference.

I nodded in affirmative and he went on.

"I wanted to give the idea of innocent, yet kindly sprites; full of baby pranks, yet always doing good deeds—not vicious ones. And that is the idea I have tried to keep prominent in all my brownie sketches.

"It was to secure baby effects that I took the little, round, bare heads sitting down in necks—or the absence of necks—the wide open eyes, and round bodies. Have you ever watched a child studying a brownie sketch for the first time?"

"Yes," I answered. "And it is well worth while to note first the intent, puzzled look, then the amusement that creeps slowly

