

happy over his discovery of the real thief. Grandma was quite nice to Billy ever after he tried to hide her stick, and told the story often. "It was such a clever thing for a bird to do!" she would say.

#### Telling Mother.

There was a shout of delight in the nursery, and three children rushed to open the door as they heard their mother's step on the stairs.

It was nearly bedtime, and they knew that she had come for her usual chat before saying good-night. In another minute Mrs. Burton was sitting in an arm-chair hearing all that her little people had been doing in the afternoon.

She noticed that the elder girl, Mary, was rather quieter than usual; but she thought she was, perhaps, a little tired, and took no further notice.

Presently Alice put her arms round her neck and said, "Shall I tell you a secret, mother?"

Mary started up and looked round eagerly; but as her mother's head was bent, she did not see what her elder girl was doing.

"Yes, darling, if it is one that you may tell. I do not care for you to hide anything from me, you know. What is it you have to tell me?—something nice, I hope."

"But Alice ought not to tell," said Mary, suddenly. "It is nothing much."

The child's face grew red as she spoke, and Mrs. Burton felt sure that her little daughter had been doing something wrong.

"Do not tell me then, Alice, dear," she said. "If it is anything I ought to know, I hope Mary will tell me, as she is the eldest."

The children were rather quiet that evening, and when Mary's voice trembled as she asked God to forgive anything naughty that she had done during the day, her mother felt more than ever sure that there was something wrong.

She left the nursery, meaning to go round to the little beds after the children were in them, when she was told the doctor wanted to see her. Instead of politely shaking hands, as usual, and asking how she was, he came to meet her with an anxious face.

"Do you know where your children were this afternoon, Mrs. Burton?" he asked.

"In the garden, I expect. Nurse had a holiday, and I sent them there to play. They were alone rather longer than usual, because a friend called to see me, Janet fetched them in to tea at five."

"Well, at four they were riding in the donkey-cart with Farmer White's eldest lad, and all the other children are down with scarlet fever."

Yes, that was the secret which Alice had to tell—the ride in the donkey-cart. She knew nothing about the fever, nor did Mary; but Mary had been trusted by her mother to take care of her little brother and sister, and she ought not to have let them go out of the garden.

A sad, sad time followed. All three children had the fever soon after Jem White had it.

They got well at last, but each of them had learned a sharp lesson, and Mary felt that she, most of all, was to blame. She made up her mind after that to obey in little things, for she had found that dark troubles may have very small beginnings.

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## BITTERS

### King Alfred and the Orphan.

King Alfred was sitting one day in his palace, dispensing justice, and surrounded by his barons, or thanes—as the nobles of the country were called in those days. As his eye glanced over the assembled group, he observed that the place of one faithful servant was vacant, and, in answer to his enquiries as to the cause of the absence of the Earl of Holderness, he was informed that the noble thane and his lady had both died some short time previous. Before the monarch could express his grief, his informant, the warrior Wulph, proceeded to ask Alfred to confer on him the estates of Holderness (that part of Yorkshire lying between the mouth of the Humber and the German Ocean), as a reward for his prowess in war. Instantly another noble, the wise Thurstan, spoke:—"Nay, king, it would be more just to bestow them on me, for dost thou not remember how, when at thy command I crossed the sea, my wisdom was of more avail at the Danish court than all the warlike skill and bravery of Wulph?"

At that moment a door at the far end of the room opened, and a pale, toil-worn woman entered, leading by the hand a lovely boy, whose flaxen hair, blue eyes, and fair complexion, plainly showed his Saxon origin. With difficulty she pressed through the throng of anxious and excited nobles, until she stood before the monarch himself; then, bending low, she said—

"Oh, gracious king, I ask that justice may be done to this boy, the only child of the late Earl of Holderness and the Lady Alice. He has no father now to defend him, no mother to care for him, but orphaned and utterly friendless he looks to thee for protection; his is the orphan's claim—oh, king, regard it!"

Here she was interrupted by one of the thanes, who angrily exclaimed, "His claim, forsooth! What! dost thou think, then, that our king needs the services of babes, such as that? No; in these troubled times, when our Danish foes are threatening us on all sides, we want men with active bodies, stout arms, and brave hearts. If the lands of Holderness were given to that child, even though he were the lawful heir, say, what could he do to guard his country?"

The little fellow lifted his bright blue eye to the stern speaker, and replied, "I would pray to God in heaven."

The good King Alfred—than whom a nobler or better never sat on England's throne—looked earnestly first at the upturned face of the boy, then upon his thanes, who were anxiously awaiting the royal decision, and rising, said slowly and solemnly—"The king will gladly give all praise and due reward to the faithful thanes who have served him so well in times of need, but the estates of Holderness must be restored to this child, for they are his by birthright and his claim; the orphan's claim is before all other—his Father is God who reigns in heaven."

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