

## THE LITTLE FOLK.

"Tinker."

Now I am going to tell you about my birthday. I had been thinking of it for such a long time, and it seemed as if it would never come. But at last it did come. Meta and Dolly and I all share the same bedroom. Meta and Dolly are older than I am. All the time we are dressing they kept talking secrets; but I didn't mind that day, because I knew they were talking of what they were going to give me. Mother called me into her room before I went downstairs, to wish me "Many happy returns." She took me on her knee by the window, and talked as nobody but Mother can. She looked out of the window across the fields to the hill with the windmill standing up against the sky, and the miller's house close by. It is a white house built of stone.

"That house is built very well because it is on a hill, and it has to stand a great many storms of wind and rain," said Mother, in her dear, sweet voice. She stopped a moment, and I wondered what made her talk about the mill-house. Then she went on; "You are eight years old to-day, little Nell, and I want you to understand that you are building a house every day, only you must be careful to put in good stones." I thought of my box of bricks in the nursery, and wondered more than ever what Mother could mean. But I began to see a little when she said: "If you are kind to others, and unselfish, you will be building with good wearing stones. Think of others before yourself."

What a happy morning it was! They all gave me presents, Meta and Dolly and little Roy; even Sophy in the kitchen made a rag doll for me, which I called Tommy. Mother gave me one of her hens, a black one, with a greenish gloss on her feathers, and just a little scrap of a crest. We called her "Tinker."

We gardened all the morning—all our gardens are in a row. First Frank's (he is away at school, so we take it in turns to keep it tidy for him), then Meta's, then Dolly's; then mine in the corner, with the hawthorn hedge one side, and the maple hedge another. The roots of the hedges want so much space and moisture underground that they don't leave anything else much chance, but still I have a cabbage-rose and a tuft of ribbon grass. We had a very busy time, and I put Tinker in a coop close to my garden, so that I could look at her very often. I ran into the house and got some maize for her, and gave her so much that Dolly said she would die of over-eating. But I wanted to make her fond of me, and I thought that was the best way.

We worked till the dinner-bell rang.

"I must put Tinker back in the henhouse," I said, throwing down my rake in a great hurry.

"Don't stay now; you'll have time afterwards," Meta said.

Meta always gives orders, so I said "Good-bye" to Tinker, and told her not to feel lonely while we were gone in to dinner.

We were going in the afternoon to the farm, to play in the hay. Mrs. Brookes asked us to come early, so that we might have a nice long time before tea.

We did not get home till bedtime, and we were all so tired! Roy was so sleepy that he had to be carried nearly all the way home. We went off to sleep directly we were in bed—at least, I know I did; but I woke up before it was light, because I heard a dreadful screaming. I got very frightened, and listened, lying quite still. The noise came from the garden. Then all at once I thought of poor Tinker, who had been shut up in the coop by my garden since the morning—I hadn't once thought of her.

I called to Meta and Dolly, but they were fast asleep; but at last Meta woke up, after I had tugged a great many times at her counterpane. Our beds were close together, so that I can reach hers without getting out of mine.

"What's the matter, Nell?" she said very sleepily. "Don't you hear that dreadful noise?" I said, half crying.

Meta sat up in bed. Then she got out of bed and went to the window. She peeped out at the side of the blind, but she couldn't see anything. "I'll go and call Father," she said. But when Father came he couldn't see anything either, so he said he would go into the garden and find out what it was.

So he went downstairs and out at the front door, with his walking-stick. I like the garden very much in the daytime, but I could not have gone across the lawn in the dark as Father did—and all the time I felt so hot and ashamed. When Mother came in to tell us not to be frightened I told her how I had forgotten all about Tinker, and left her close to the hedge by my garden. Soon we heard Father's stick beating something. The screaming stopped then. After that Father came back into the house.

It was Tinker, he said, that had been screaming, and he had killed a hedgehog.

When I saw poor Tinker next morning all her little crest was gone, and there was a pink patch on the top of her little black head. In the scullery, floating in a pail of water, was the hedgehog.

I shuddered as I thought of the dreadful death that dear Tinker nearly had, and all through my fault. "Nell," said Mother, "if you had put a good stone into your house yesterday, you would have remembered to put Tinker back in the henhouse."

Tinker has been bald ever since, where the horrid hedgehog tried to eat her. But Mother knows that I am trying to put good stones into my house now.

Sam was very conceited, his mother often said "SAmEWel your opinion of your own merits is four times bigger and your beauty and merits are four times smaller than they ought to be."

Then she would lick his fur all the wrong way, to clean it thoroughly at the roots, she said, but he felt sure it was only done to annoy him. Little Miss Mabel, on the contrary, smoothed him down the right way, and was never tired of telling him how lovely he was, and how beautiful his eyes were, till the poor cat was quite befooled.

One day Mabel's mother said, "We must get rid of Sam, we have too many cats."

"Oh do please keep him," Mabel answered, "I love him."

"But you make the kitten so silly," answered her mother, "always nursing and stroking him. He is useless. I don't believe he would have sense to kill a mouse; you had much better let him be with his mother and learn how to act."

"Oh, I am sure he could kill mice, could you not, darling?" and she hugged him tight, "Do let me keep him."

"Very well," said her mother, "if he proves his cleverness with mice he may stay, if not he must go to the farm."

That evening the housemaid sent to say she had a mouse in the cupboard and Sam could show his valour with it. But, alas! it was a mouse who knew what she was about. She jumped on a box to get a moment's time; then, when the kitten was just going to spring, cried in a voice of rapture, "Oh, welcome death, to be crushed by such lovely teeth!" Sam thought this interesting and paused to listen. The mouse redoubled her efforts. "Let me gaze on your beauty for five minutes before I die. In sight of the glory of your eyes I shall not feel death!" "Most handsome of cats!" went on the mouse, slowly backing towards a hole, "why are you so much more beautiful than your parents or brothers? Your eyes are like stars, and your tail"—by this time she had reached the hole—"like a hideous worm, and you are a conceited vulgar prig." "I see this cat is of no good. He thinks more of himself than his duty," said Mabel's mother. "Take him away to the farm!" "Oh, I love him," cried Mabel. "That can hardly be," answered her mother. "Spoiling and flattering are not signs of love."