

STORIES
POETRY

The Inglenook

SKETCHES
TRAVEL

LITTLE TROT.

By Andre Lichtenberger.

Trot was playing on the beach. Behind mummy's house there is such a pretty little beach, quite a tiny one. Trot is allowed to play there alone—only he must not go too near the sea. Besides, Jane stays in the garden and every now and then takes a peep at him. Trot had his spade with him. He had made an enormous hole and an enormous mountain, almost, but not quite, as high as those big rocks that lie all day as if asleep near the sea.

"Come and have your lunch, Master Trot," and Trot got out of the hole to receive a roll of bread and a piece of chocolate from Jane.

He went back to his mountain. It is not very comfortable to eat standing up. Better change the mountain into an armchair. Trot sat down again, his legs in the hole. He nibbled away at his chocolate with his sharp little teeth. You could make quite pretty designs on it with them. It really was rather amusing.

Who was that? A shadow fell in front of Trot. Trot looked up. It was a little boy! He was very dirty and dreadfully ragged. His face and hands were quite black. There were ugly little red spots under his nose. Trot raised his spade threateningly.

"Go away!"

The little boy rubbed his eyes with his elbow: he went a yard or two away then sat down on the sand opposite Trot and stared at him.

Trot went on munching and stared back. Here was someone Jane could not wash from head to foot every day. What a lucky boy! And yet—after all, Trot was a little gentleman. Of course it is a bother to be washed, but one must be clean. How ugly this little boy was.

"You really are dirty, aren't you?"

The little boy raised his eyes, then dropped them again and began giggling in a silly way without replying. He let the sand slide from one hand to the other. But this did not seem to amuse him much. He never once left off staring at Trot, who was just finished his roll of bread.

Trot looked at him attentively. He noticed that the boy's glance was fixed on the roll.

"Rolls are very good, aren't they?"

said Trot, as he examined the last bit into his mouth.

The boy gave a sad little grunt.

"Have you had your lunch?"

The little boy started at him with amazed eyes. Trot repeated his question:

"Have you had your lunch?"

The little boy shook his head.

"Well, I suppose you will have it soon?"

The little boy looked down. He filled his hand with sand again and went on with his old occupation, once more shaking his head.

"I don't believe you are going to have any lunch."

The little boy did not reply, but Trot knew he had guessed the truth.

"I expect you were bilious yesterday?"

The little boy opened his eyes wide. The word "bilious" did not belong to his world. But he shook his head.

"Did you have a stomach-ache?"

The head-shaking still continued.

"Or perhaps you were naughty?"

Still silence.

"Well, why did you have nothing to eat?"

The little boy scratched his head with one hand and rubbed his nose with the other. He then made a series of quite unintelligible sounds.

"Didn't they give you anything?"

Once more he shook his head.

"Why didn't you ask your mother for something?"

"I did ask her."

"Then why didn't she give you anything?"

"There was nothing in the house."

This information sounded absurd to Trot. What would be the good of larders and pantries? If you opened one in the hall or kitchen you could see any amount of nice things. So that could not be true. The little boy was telling stories. His mother had said there was nothing in order to punish him. Trot said in a very stern voice:

"You must have been naughty. What did you do?"

The little boy simply looked at him with dazed, round eyes. Trot grew impatient.

"Perhaps you were greedy, or rude, or made your governess angry, or did not learn your lessons?"

Nothing but a head-shake.

"Were you disobedient?"

The child's lips trembled.

"I do what I like. No one tells me nothing."

"Whatever did this mean? Trot began to grow angry."

"Well then, why did you get nothing to eat?"

Once more the child replied wearily:

"There was nothing in the house."

So it really was true. Trot was overcome with surprise. Was such a thing possible? Was it true that a mother could really have nothing to give her little son to eat?

"Then you are hungry?"

There was no mistaking the answer in the little boy's eyes.

"If I had known that I would have given you my roll, because I really was not at all hungry. But I have beaten it all, you see."

The little boy nodded his head resignedly; he quite understood.

Trot reflected a moment, then he asked a difficult question:

"Why was there nothing in your mother's pantry?"

"I haven't a pantry."

This was really extraordinary.

"But what about the larder?"

"Father is out of work. Mother is ill in bed with a little brother. So there ain't much to grow fat on."

What a rude way to talk. Trot knew he ought not to listen to badly brought up children. He felt quite sure he ought to go, but curiosity prevailed.

"Why doesn't your father buy you something to eat?"

"He hasn't any money."

Well, here at last was a good reason. And yet Therese often bought things without money; she told them to put them down to mummy's account.

"Tell them to put it down to the account."

The child shook his head. He did not understand. He began playing with the sand again.

Trot felt dazed and almost frightened. There were actually children who were quite good, and yet their mothers had nothing to give them to eat. What could God be thinking of? Was it really possible? Trot began his questions again.

"Does your father ask God each day to give him his daily bread?"

Once more the little boy did not understand. Trot repeated his question.

"I don't think so."

Trot sighed. So here at last was the explanation; and it was really very serious.

"Do you mean to say your father does not say his prayers?"

"I don't think so."

"He never talks to God?"

"I don't think so. At least only when he's angry."

"What a funny time to pray. What does he say then?"

He says 'God Almighty; and he makes a fearful row.'

Trot meditated. That could not be a good prayer. Mother had never taught him one like it. Perhaps it

was only for grown-up people.

"Well, how do you yourself pray?"

The little boy laughed slyly, but did not reply.

"Tell me how you pray."

The little boy went on chuckling.

At last he jerked out:

"It's all lies about God."

Trot was overwhelmed with horror.

All lies about God! The good God to whom his little mother taught him to say his prayers every evening, who took care no harm came to daddy when he was on the sea, who gave Trot his daily bread, and not only bread but cake and chocolate and all sorts of good things besides. Trot went crimson in the face.

"You are very wicked. And God is quite right not to give you anything to eat if that is the way you thank Him."

"What is there to thank Him for?"

asked the little boy.

The question rather puzzled Trot.

The little boy was right—if you are wicked, and very miserable you do not want to pray to God. You feel angry with everybody. Trot had already

raised a step or two away. He thought for a moment, then came back.

"Listen to me. If you do not pray, then of course God cannot hear you. If you ask Him for something to eat, He will give it to you, but you must ask Him."

The little boy looked doubtful. He did not quite believe what Trot had told him. But, after all, it could not matter much asking. You never know what may happen. Only the other day, when he had been begging, someone had given him a penny.

"Where is God?"

It was not easy to answer this question, and Trot's reply was a little confused. God was everywhere, particularly in the churches. You could not see Him, but you had only to ask for something to get it, Trot explained.

"To-night before you go to bed pray God to send you a big roll of bread to-morrow, and you will get it."

"Where shall I find it?"

"Oh, on the table with your cocoa. You won't have any cocoa? Well, then on the mantelpiece."

"Then father would take it. I would rather God put it here in the hole near the cliff. I could come and find it."

Nothing could be easier; it was not the usual thing for God to do, but He would not mind making an exception of the little boy. He must only explain it all to God and tell Him the place—so everything was settled now.

But the little boy still seemed doubtful. What was the matter?

"I don't know how to say it to God. I don't know Him."

Trot sighed patiently. What a stupid little boy he was. Never mind—now he had begun Trot would go through with it. He knelt down.

"Do as I do."

The little boy tried to do the same.

He tumbled on his nose.

Trot grew angry. At least he got him properly into place.

"Fold your hands."

After several unsuccessful attempts, the hands were folded. But how dirty they were! God would certainly not be very pleased with them.

"Say after me: 'Dear God, I am very hungry.' Well, go on."

The little boy made several little grunts; blenning very carefully you could make out "God" and "hungry," and all the time he wiggled like an eel.

"Keep still. I am very hungry. Please put a big roll of bread for me to-morrow morning in the hole by the cliff, where Trot has left his spade. Amen."

Trot got up well content. That was the way to pray. He went off nodding patronizingly to his pupil.

Trot was very thoughtful all the evening. How glad the little boy would be to-morrow. Trot had un-