

The Inglenook.

Innocent Thieves,

By FRANCES BENT DILLINGHAM,

Good mornin' Mis' Wilkins and Mr. Wilkins. My, ain't you through breakfast yet? I came early because I like to start in sewing on time and I can't give you but half a day, Mis' Wilkins. My motto is, 'Promastication is the thief of time.' Oh, Mr. Wilkins, I've had my breakfast, but if you subsist I suppose I can eat a little bacon and eggs. Speaking of thieves, do you know Mis' Hildreth was telling me that her solid silver vase had been stolen? Since the factories have been enlarged,—begging your pardon, Mr. Wilkin,—such kind of folks have moved in—Why, somebody's in that house across the way. 'Tisn't much of a house. I should think you'd hate to have such a construction to your view. What kind of folks are they?"

Miss Tweedles paused for breath; to eat and talk at the same moment was one of her accomplishments, but at times it had its limitations.

Mrs. Wilkins answered her. "They've just moved in. I haven't noticed them much. A young man and his wife I should say. I suppose he will work in the factory."

"Dear me, I think it's a risk to have such strange people in such close proximity. They may be the very people that stole Mis' Hildreth's vase. Have you missed anything lately?"

Mrs. Wilkins laughed. "Only the usual number of pocket handkerchiefs."

Miss Tweedles nodded over the bacon. "Taken right off the clothesline without doubt. I don't want to respect anybody, but when—You going Mr. Wilkins? I always did say that the owners had to work just as hard as the employers. Thank you, Mis' Wilkins, if you will put my bonnet and dolman away. Yes, the dolman's new. I bought it down to Sears. I paid five dollars for it, marked down from ten; though I never believe a word those clerks tell me they're so likely to repose on you. That ball fringe is good though. Yes, I trimmed my bonnet myself. I think it looks real Parisic. Why, Elizabeth, where did you come from? A little girl like you ought not to be late for breakfast. Little girls should get up early if they want to grow pretty and strong."

Elizabeth lifted thoughtful eyes to Miss Tweedles' face with its criss cross wrinkles, its little bobs of hair above each ear and the small twinkling eyes behind the spectacles.

"Did you always get up early?" she asked.

"Yes, always, what are you looking at me so for?"

Elizabeth had climbed to her chair and was still studying Miss Tweedles with serious eyes.

"I'm 'fraid it would hurt your feelings, Miss Tweedles, I guess I'd better not tell."

"Shan't we go upstairs, Miss Tweedles?" asked Elizabeth's mother in kindly haste, and the two left the room while the young Elizabeth waited for her breakfast.

An hour later, Elizabeth put her head in the sew room door.

"May I go over to see Bessie, mother?"

Her mother looked up from her sewing, a serious function when presided over by Miss Tweedles. "Yes, dear, and be sure to wear something warm, it's cool out to-day."

As Elizabeth came slowly down the stairs, she noticed, over the baluster, Miss Tweedles'

bonnet and dolman on the hall-tree. It suggested to her the often-recurring but ever-delightful play of dressing up and making calls. When seized with this idea, no memory of former admonitions intruded upon Elizabeth to prevent this pleasant belief that the clothes of the world were hers. The dolman possessed one great beauty in fact; it was new.

It did not take Elizabeth long to detach Miss Tweedles' garment from the hook and wrap it about her small person. The ball fringe swept the floor behind, the long pieces in front came down to her toes. She thrust her arms through the two curves at the side and folded her hands in front with a gurgle of pleasure. But some sort of head-gear was needed; Miss Tweedles' bonnet hung within easy reach. Elizabeth perched it on her curls, tied the ribbons energetically under her chin, and did not pause to note the effect of the solferino flowers nodding above her white smooth forehead.

She opened the front door and turned towards Bessie's house; fortunately for the would-be caller, Bessie did not live on the road that passes the sewing-room windows. As Elizabeth minced along, she heard steps behind, and turning, saw a young woman with a baby in her arms. She was a pleasant-faced young woman in a calico dress with a shawl pinned about her shoulders and her bright hair blowing in the wind.

"How do you do," said Elizabeth, nodding the solferino flowers towards her.

The young woman looked as if she might have laughed if something had not laid heavy on her mind. "How do you do," she responded.

"What a pretty baby," said Elizabeth reaching up one hand and touching the tiny pink fingers that projected from the blanket wrapped about the baby. "My children are all dead."

This time the young woman really laughed. "That's too bad," she said.

"Yes and Mis' Tweedles couldn't make me a black dress because she was sewing for Mrs. Andrews, and her husband died, and husbands are worse to die than children. My husband died once."

"Dear me, you've seen considerable trouble for one so young," said the young woman pausing before the small house Miss Tweedles had mentioned that morning.

"Do you live here?" asked Elizabeth as the woman turned in at the gate. "Wouldn't you like to have me come in and call? I was going to see Bessie, but she lives a good way off and I keep stepping on my fringe so it tires me to walk."

The young woman hesitated at the door of house. "Well, come in," she said at last, "but we ain't settled yet."

"Oh, don't mind me," said Elizabeth airily. "I'm used to seeing things look very bad, most as bad as this." She stepped from the little back hall into the small kitchen.

There was a rather rusty stove in the room, a rickety chair and an uncertain looking table. But the cradle in the corner looked inviting, and still more attractive when the young woman laid the baby in it.

"Oh, what a sweet baby it is," cried Elizabeth. "May I kiss it just once?" She stooped over, then drew back. "The flowers on my bonnet went into its eyes. I think I'll take off my bonnet."

Elizabeth played with the crowing baby while the mother tried to light a few sticks of wood in the stove. Presently Elizabeth asked:

"Do you think it would be good for the baby to eat the balls of my fringe?"

The mother flew toward the cradle, coughing from the smoke from the troublesome stove. "Oh, no, no, has she got one in her mouth? She hasn't swallowed one has she?"

"Oh, no," explained Elizabeth in sweet serenity. "She was only trying to, but I didn't believe you'd like to have her. You see the balls jingle lovely and they're nice to play with."

"Perhaps you'd better take off your cape," suggested the young woman, "and I'll hang it up with your bonnet in the back hall."

Many moments passed now, while Elizabeth played happily with the baby, and the mother unpacked a trunk which stood in the room opening off the kitchen. Suddenly the outer door was flung open and there was a step in the hall. The young woman jumped up from her work and ran to the door.

"Oh, Jim," she cried what luck?"

A tall, good-looking young man came into the room. Elizabeth thought he looked either sad or cross. He shook his head at his wife. "No luck," he said. Then he turned toward the cradle. "Hullo, how's the young one?" He caught the baby up in his arms and swung her back and forth.

"Who's this little girl?"

"I don't know her name. What is your name, dear?"

"It's usually Elizabeth Wilkins; but to-day I'm Mrs. Addercomby."

The young man lifted his eyebrows and looked over at his wife.

"Live up there?" he asked, nodding his head toward the window. "Went to see another man to-day. Some old story. I ought to have a recommendation."

"I thought you ought to get one when the Downings shut down; but it seemed as though it would be easy to get another place."

He laughed shortly as he put the baby back in the cradle. "It seems easy enough when you're in one; but it's hard enough when you're out of it, like everything else."

He sat down on the edge of the table and swung one leg gloomily.

"But what did he say?" asked his wife.

"Oh, nothing much. Only he didn't have anything; might have something sometime, couldn't tell. Seemed kind of suspicious. Well, we're here."

"Why, yes, and its good deal better than being there, with everything shut down. You ought to write to the Downings and get a letter from them."

"That's what I mean to do, but it takes time and I don't know what we'll do while we wait."

"We've a roof over our heads."

"But it won't warm and feed us."

"Well, I've got some dinner and—" Then suddenly she became aware of Elizabeth's big serious eyes. She went to the cradle and lifted the baby from it. "You move the cradle into the next room, Jim; and perhaps you will go and play with the baby, Mrs. Addercomby."

Elizabeth went into the next room with the baby, while the man and his wife talked in lowered tones together.

Meantime husband and wife were standing together in the hall of the Wilkins house. Mr. Wilkins was saying to his wife:

"I expect that young fellow that lives down there came into the office to-day, looking for a job."

"Well," said Mrs. Wilkins, as she helped her husband off with his overcoat, "what did