

## Family Department.

### Little Trouble-the-House.

BY L. T. MEADE.

#### CHAPTER IV.—THE BATTLE THAT IS NEVER DONE.

(Continued.)

They spoke of the future they meant to share together, of the partings that must come, but which they would be brave to endure, because God willed them.

They spoke of the child's school days, and the baskets from home his mother would pack for him; of the rich cakes, and apples, and nuts, and pots of jam those baskets should contain; of how we would share them with the little boys who had no kind mother to give them school prog.

Then of the holidays, when his mother would stand on the steps to greet him, and she would kiss him, and welcome him home.

He hated being kissed by most people; for the last two years he had positively forbidden his nurse's good night salute, and Polly never dreamed of inflicting this torture on him; but but he always hungered for his mother's kisses.

Now it all was over; that long delicious hour before dinner would come back no more. The greatest of earthly partings had come in a moment, and separated this mother and son; he might hunger until he starved for her kisses, he would never receive another.

The child, in the daily agony of this recurring hour, would have sunk in his grief, but for one thing—his promise.

"Be good, Miles—grow up good," sounded every night like his mother's voice in his ears; he was trying to be good with all his small might.

Poor Miss Cecil, the thin, angular, rather sour nursery governess, wondered and puzzled her head over the change in him. She had never understood Miles, she had never had the smallest control over him. At his mother's death she seriously feared she would have to resign her charge; but suddenly Miles was changed; he went through his spelling correctly, he ceased to blot out the sums she set him, he allowed nurse to brush his hair and wash his hands—he was altogether a different boy.

Nurse, too, was spell-bound with wonder and delight, he went to bed so quietly; he no longer splashed the water in his bath, or awoke little Hugh, or tossed the bed-clothes out of his crib. Nurse hoped he was not getting too good, and speculated as to his appetite and the amount of color in his healthy brown cheek.

But Polly looked on and mourned. In being good, in growing up good, Miles had never thought of growing up pleasant. In those days he did not make himself the least agreeable to Polly. In her heart of hearts she much preferred the old happy never-me-care Miles, who was always daring everybody, and getting himself into scrapes twenty times a day, who drew such delightful pictures on his slate when he should have marked his sums, and who played and romped with her.

Now he never played. When his lessons were done he hid himself somewhere, and the days were very flat to Polly. In truth, poor Miles was too unhappy to play—hour by hour his resolution was getting harder to keep, and he dreaded beyond words breaking it.

At the end of a week he determined to speak to Miss Cecil.

"Please," he said, when he had brought this last sum correctly finished for her inspection, "please, I want to ask a favor of you."

Miles was in high repute with Miss Cecil at present, and she now smiled at him, and attempted to take his hand and draw him to sit on her knee, but this he positively objected to, and stood very erect in front of her.

"I want you," said Miles, "to stop ordering me about."

At this unexpected speech the smile faded from Miss Cecil's face, and her spectacled eyes glanced uneasily at Miles.

"You see," continued the boy, shifting himself from one foot to another, "'tis very unfortunate for me, but I've got to obey you. I've got to obey you in every way. If you choose to say to me, 'March up and down the room all day,' why, I've got to do it. You see you have me altogether there."

"I'm glad you perceive it in that light, Miles," answered the governess.

"Yes," replied Miles, "but what I say is that you shouldn't be cowardly about it. You have it all your own way, of course, but you should be generous, same as the kings long ago who won the big victories, were generous with their prisoners—don't you see?"

"No, I'm sure I don't, Miles," replied puzzled Miss Cecil.

"Well, then, 'tis very stupid of you," rudely answered Miles, "and I'll just have to say it out slap bang. You know I never used to obey you, and I don't like it now a bit. I'm doing it for a big reason I've got—But what I want is for you and me make a 'greement, otherwise I may have to break out. I'll obey you all the time I'm at lessons—all the hours from ten till one you have me under your thumb as safe as possible—I'll do my sums with you, and my horrid spelling, and his history, and grammar, but I want you when school hours are over to stop ordering me. I want you to stop saying, 'Don't stand on the hearth-rug, Miles. Miles, hold up your head. Miles, your hair has got to be brushed. Miles, are your feet wet?' I want you to stop all that, and let me come in when I like, and go out when I like, and have a lark with Polly now and then."

Here Polly grinned from ear to ear.

"But, Miles," replied Miss Cecil, "you know it would be very dangerous for you to sit with wet feet, and it is my duty to see that you keep your hair tidy and like a gentleman's, and above all, that you don't get your little sister into trouble."

"Oh dear!" said Miles, "how can I get you to understand me? Can't you ever trust a fellow? Don't you see that what I always did so greatly hate about you was that you would watch and worry a fellow."

"'Tis my duty to watch you," replied Miss Cecil sternly; "little boys like you are not fit to be trusted, and 'tis more than ever my duty, now that your poor mother, who always had some influence over you, has been removed. You have been a good boy, very good since her death and I hope you will continue to be so."

This speech both angered and pained Miles. With a very high color in his face, he spoke again:—

"Then you won't come into our 'greement?"

"It would be impossible for me to do so. I am sorry, but I must say no."

"'Tisn't a bit true of you to say you are sorry, you are not. You are just like the cruel kings who killed the prisoners. Very well! 'tisn't for you I've been good. There! I'm too proud to speak more."

Yes, these were hard times for Miles.

#### CHAPTER V.—HOW JOEY CAME OUT OF HIS HOLE.

Miss Cecil was greatly puzzled after the strange interview Miles had with her. He was rude to her, but she was not all angry with him; it was not her nature to be angry with Miles, whom she loved.

Yes, without in the least understanding him, this stiff, angular, cold looking woman, loved Miles.

Nobody suspected her of this, for nobody suspected her of loving any one.

She was a well meaning woman, but quite incapable of filling the post she had undertaken. Children were incomprehensible to her, for the simple reason that she had never been a child.

Poor Miss Cecil had never been a happy, rosy child, romping in hay fields, and playing in meadows.

She was a city girl, brought up by a stern maiden aunt, a girl with pale cheeks and heavy eyes, eyes that from the first dawning of intelligence in them looked out soberly at life. Her aunt, by the strongest force, the force of example, had taught her to repress emotion; and emotion repressed had grown feeble and almost died within her soul. She always learned her lessons correctly. She played her scales the proper number of times. She hammered out tuneless pieces of music from a tuneless piano, with a due regard to what her master told her about time.

Her aunt had never to blame her for untidy drawers, for holes in her stockings, for dragged skirts, for rough, unbrushed hair.

She grew up pale, grave, severely cold in manner, not commonplace—thank God there are few lives so grave as hers—but uninteresting, for the simple reason that she had no knowledge of real childhood.

And yet she had known a child. Once a bright child life had flashed like sunshine upon her path. A romping, racing, dark-eyed, handsome boy had flung his arms about her neck, had rumbled her smooth hair into confusion, had blotted her neat drawings, had torn her trim dresses, had dragged her down to roll on the floor beside him.

By his worrying, irrepressible spirits, he had driven her into passionate tears; by his sunny, playful, happy mirth, he had surprised her into delighted laughter. Had he lived he might have imparted some of his childhood to her sober nature, and she might have grown up a woman.

But he died, he was drowned when he was eight years old, and with his death hope and brightness faded from her life—her repressed grief made her morbid, she grew up uninteresting.

From her earliest years she had been trained as a governess—the last post she was capable of filling.

And yet she taught correctly, she imparted what were considered nice, and good, and true ideas, she was always proper and quiet, and lady-like.

In the many situations she had held she was much esteemed, the fathers and mothers spoke of her and regarded her as an invaluable person—and the children—well, they never complained of her—they had nothing to complain of, for she never scolded them, she was always just and kind, but they shed no tears at parting with her. However many years they spent together—the children and the governess said good bye without regret. This was easily accounted for—she never loved any child she taught.

Miss Cecil never cared for any child until she met Miles Harleigh—and him she loved.

The reason for this was equally quickly found—he had the gray eyes, the upright figure, the bright expression, the fearless ways of the little brother who had been in his grave for over twenty years.

Miss Cecil loved him at once.

The sensation of loving any one was a new feeling to her, and gave instantly a zest and flavor to her life. More particularly was this love rousing, because it was not in the least returned. No fear of this boy rumpling her neat hair, or causing her cheek to glow with his soft caresses; he shrank from her, he disliked her, he openly defied her. She longed to win his affection, but did not know how; she had no influence, no power over him whatever.