

How a Holiday Ended

(Cassell's Little Folks.)

The summer sun shone brightly down on the glaring dusty streets and the miles of roofs of the Great City. Its cheerful rays peeped in at the ground-glass windows of a hospital and lit up the bare whitewashed walls of the wards and the still whiter faces of the sufferers.

'Here's summer come at last,' said one of the nurses as she moved about the boys' ward. 'What a lovely day it must be in the country!'

'What's the country?' asked little Jack of Bill, who, his back less painful, was sitting up in a chair.

'Oh, all green-like and no one about—no bobbies—and lots of flowers, as don't belong to nobody,' replied Bill.

'I would like to see it,' sighed little Jack, who thought an afternoon in the Victoria park a great treat. 'Tell me some more on't, Bill.'

But just at that moment the doctors came their rounds and silence reigned in the ward. They pronounced Bill's back better and Jack's cough to be nearly gone, and then they went out in the passage and had a long, mysterious conversation with the ward-nurse.

'I wonder what's up?' asked one little patient.

'I 'specs they're a-goin' to turn me out,' remarked Bill, dolefully. 'I just 'ate to go 'ome. Father do wallop me so when he's tipsy, and carryin' them 'eavy loads 'll make my back bad again.'

'An' I ain't got no home to go to—not since granny died,' whimpered little Jack.

And Amelia Ann, in the girls' ward, at the other end of the passage, said much the same.

'I know my knee's nearly well, but I do wish I could stop here. It's just lovely, and nurse that kind! To go back and lug that heavy baby about for missis and scrub on them damp floors—oh, dear; oh, dear!'

And everyone's spirits sank. The hospital, ill though they were, was to many of these poor children the happiest place they had ever known.

But they need not have been so frightened. The house-surgeon and the nurses returned with good news, such news as they had never dreamed of.

A kind lady, living down in a beautiful country-house near the seashore, had most generously offered to take three children who were getting better for a fortnight's sea air and change. The question with the doctors was, whom to send. Nearly all the children would have been better for the trip.

Eventually the choice fell on little Jack, Bill and Amelia Ann. They could hardly believe their ears. It seemed too good to be true.

Little Jack, too, could hardly believe his eyes, when, the following day, he found himself in the train, speeding through a 'country' more lovely in its early summer dress than any words of Bill's could have described.

It was growing dusk when they reached their destination and the carrier's cart deposited them at the lodge of Melcombe hall, where the coachman's wife was prepared to receive them.

'Bless your little 'earts!' ejaculated good Mrs. Brown. 'If you be the kind of children they grows in Lunnon town, I, for one, don't hold with the place. Come you here,

now, and make short work of these here bowls of bread-and-milk, and then to bed with you and rest. We must get some roses on your cheeks and some flesh on your bones to do us credit!'

Little Jack was very weary and very sleepy, yet ere he lay down in the loft over the stable, where beds had been got ready for Bill and himself, he could not help listening to a mysterious sound.

'Whatever's that, Bill? Someone a-

paddled, they bathed; they collected shells, seaweed, crabs, and jelly-fish; they built castles, they climbed the rocks and the cliffs, and got so sunburnt that no one would have known them again. It was a delightful time.

'The country's just splendid!' exclaimed Bill. 'But the sea beats everythink!'

They were lying on the warm sands, under the shade of old Jones's boat, idly watching the waves curl at their feet.



A SAIL! A SAIL!

sighin' like, and breathin' hard, as if he's asleep.'

Bill opened the window and listened.

'It ain't a person, Jack,' he cried. 'I know what it is. It be the sea!'

Next morning when Amelia Ann awoke, the air seemed full of an uncommon fragrance.

'It ain't flowers,' she said to herself, sniffing, 'though them roses round the window are lovely! And it ain't something nice a-cookin'. I wonder what it is?'

She opened the casement to smell the flowers, and was struck dumb with surprise. There, before her, shimmering like silver in the bright morning sun, lay the sea!

Now, would you like to know what these three did during their visit to Melcombe Cove? Well, very much the same as other children do at the seaside, only I do not think any three children ever enjoyed themselves so much before. They dug, they

'So it do,' replied Amelia Ann. 'The only pity is it can't last forever. When we came I marked thirteen holes on the chalk cliff for the thirteen days we've got to stop here, and every day I've marked one off. There's only one left!'

'The day after to-morrow we go back!' ejaculated Jack, mournfully. 'Goes back to them pavements as 'urts yer feet, and to sleepin' on doorstep!'

'And carryin' heavy children!'

'And gettin' walloped!'

'It'll be all the wusser arter this!' sighed Jack.

'I won't stand it!' cried Bill. 'I won't go back! I'll just run away!'

'You'd be catched!'

'Not I! Who can catch ye on the sea?'

'On the sea, Bill? You'd go on the sea!'

'Sail right over to France. There, where the tides come from! We'd be free then!'