

OUR YOUNG FOLKS.

"A BIG SURPRISE."—A STORY OF SEVEN DIALS.

BY L. T. MEADE, AUTHOR OF "A PRISON INTO PARADISE."

CHAPTER I.—Continued.

First of all she unfolded her card, and after making him gaze at the lily and admire it as much as it was in boy's nature to do, he had to read the words, "Consider the lilies of the field." He had to read these words very slowly two or three times, while Maggie followed him, pointing to each letter with her tiny white finger. This over, she ended up with her invariable remark, "Oh! I does want to see a real, live posie."

"Posies's well enough," said Joe in a would-be indifferent tone, for he did not wish to arouse Maggie's envy, "but bless yer, Mag, they disappoints, same as h'every think h'else, and yer 'ave the pictur, a fust-rate pictur too!"

"But don't the real, live posies smell?" asked Maggie.

Here Joe was thrown off his guard, as Maggie meant he should be.

"Smell!" he exclaimed, "I should rayther think they did smell. My heart alive! Mag, some o' them smell jist h'ever so."

"Sweet?" questioned Maggie.

"My stars! the flowers in some o' the shop winders are fit to knock yer down. Yer'd smell 'em a mile orf. Sweet! I should think they was sweet."

"Tell us 'bout the colours," asked Maggie, her eyes beginning to gleam.

"'Nough to blind yer! Green and yaller, and purple, and maginter, and horange, and wiolet, and—and slate colour, and hall o' them mashed h'up together, like the rainbow."

"And the stars," said Maggie, who had seen stars from her attic.

"Brighter," said Joe, "a deal more blindin'—but there, Mag," suddenly recollecting himself, "where's the use o' talking o' them, wen yer can't 'ave 'em. I'll bring yer a pictur o' a coloured posie some day—there!"

"But I want a live one," said Maggie, "a live one as'll smell. I never, never seed a live flower."

"Poor little kid! Some day wen I 'ave a 'ap'ny I'll buy yer a flower; but now, Mag, you listen, for I've got a bumper of a story to tell yer."

"H'all right," said Maggie, but she said "all right," indifferently, and though Joe began a most thrilling adventure in which he was himself personally interested, he soon saw that Maggie's thoughts were far away. When he stopped speaking, she laid her hand on his arm, and asked entreatingly, "Does yer think as God H'almighty 'll ever let me see a flower?"

"'Course, Maggie, 'caps and 'caps o' 'em."

"But not till I gets to 'eaven," said Maggie.

She closed her eyes, and one or two tears trickled slowly down her cheeks. As Joe looked at her, an idea, a new and brilliant idea, came into his head. He clapped his hand to his mouth, and his breath came and went quickly, with the magnitude of this sudden thought.

"Mag," he said at last, "I 'ave it. Yer shall see posies—'caps o' 'em, Maggie—to-morrer, Maggie." These words, brought out slowly and impressively, caused Maggie's face

to grow white, even to her lips. "Yes, Maggie," continued Joe, delighted with the effect already produced; "to-morrer yer 'll see 'caps and 'caps o' flowers."

"Tell us," said Maggie, breathlessly.

"No, that I won't—I'll tell yer nothink; o'ny to-morrer, wen St. Martin's clock's gone two, 'll be the most 'mazin' day o' yer life, Mag. I'll come h'in at two, Mag—and then——"

"But yer at school at two."

"Never mind, leave it to me."

Here Joe rubbed his red hair into a mop, rolled his eyes about in a manner meant to be frightfully knowing, and being very much delighted with himself, he further stuck his tongue into the side of his mouth, and finally took two or three somersaults on the floor.

"Leave it to me," he said, winking violently at Maggie.

CHAPTER II.

That night Maggie was sleepless. This was not a very rare occurrence with her. The pain in her leg, or the dull aching of her poor little head, often kept her awake, but on the present occasion her sleeplessness was caused by neither of these things.

No, to-night, happi'ness kept her awake; her heart beat, her head was full of fancies—fancies all the brighter because hitherto her life had been so ugly.

At break of day Joe got up, but before he left the room he darted to Maggie's side, and whispered in an energetic manner in her ear, "You leave it to me, Mag; I'm not a forgettin'. Wen the clock strikes two, Mag."

After this Maggie ventured to ask her mother, even though it was Monday, for a clean pinafore, and attired in it she had sat patient, hopeful, happy, all the morning.

Who can wonder at little Maggie being cross now? who can wonder at her tears falling? for the clock in St. Martin's Church has struck two—it has even chimed forth the first quarter, and no Joe has appeared. Poor Maggie; she is putting by sadly the first great hope of her little life. Joe has found it impossible to keep his promise, and she can see no flowers that day. Suddenly, however, in the midst of her saddest meditation, and her most despairing thoughts, a hasty, noisy step was heard on the stairs, and Joe, his face very red, and his hair very like a mop, dashed into the room.

"Now then, Mag; no, I wasn't a forgettin', but the master, 'ee were that sharp, I 'adn't a chance of runnin' away. So at last—fur I didn't want yer to be a frettin', Mag—I put a bold face on it, and axed 'im wot I wanted—and Lor bless yer, 'ee just larfed h'out and said, 'Orf wid yer, and God bless yer, old chap.' So here I l.e, Mag, and I'm glad as I didn't run away from school."

While Joe was speaking Maggie was drying her eyes, and now she was smiling radiantly; the baby, too, perceiving that the clouds had all cleared from the moral atmosphere, began to crow with considerable spirit.

"Mrs. Jones 'll take care of 'im," said Joe, unfastening the string which secured the little fellow to Maggie's chair, and running downstairs with him.

"Joe, I'm too happy," said Maggie when he returned.

"Does yer mind a-goin' blindfold?" said

Joe, regarding her solemnly. "I'd like it to come on yer wid a start like, and yer can see the shop winders a-comin' back."

"Oh! Joe," bringing out the words with a gush, "are we a-goin' h'out?"

"'Course—yer didn't s'pose as I could bring the posies in yere. You just let me put this 'andkercher round yer h'eyes, Mag, and wen I h'open it again yer'll see the flowers."

Maggie was now quite past all speech, and when Joe had fastened a dirty red cotton handkerchief tightly over her little face he lifted her into his strong arms, and they set off.

(To be continued.)

FLINT ONCE WAS SPONGE.

YOU never would think it?—but I'm told that flint really is nothing more nor less than sponge turned to stone. Once the sponge grew at the bottom of the sea, as other sponges grow now; but that was ages and ages ago, and since then the sponge, turned to flint, has lain covered by rocks and earth of many kinds piled thick above it. Seen with a microscope, flint shows the make of sponge in its fibres; and sometimes you can see, bedded in it, the shells of the tiny creatures on which the sponge had fed. Now and then, inside a flint, will be found bits of the sponge not yet changed.

That last proof settles it; but I must say it's hard to believe;—hard as the flint, almost.—"Jack-in-the-Pulpit," *St. Nicholas for February.*

HOW TO BE BEAUTIFUL.

"HOW can I be beautiful?" Every boy and girl, man and woman, wants to know that. Here is Mr. Emerson's beauty recipe: "There is no beautifier of complexion, or form, or behavior, like the wish to scatter joy and not pain around us." Do you suppose that recipe will work? Think of the most beautiful people you know. Ah, I knew some one would say "mother." Do you not think these people are those who try very hard to make others happy? I know very many beautiful people who would have remained very plain had they sought only to please themselves.

We want to try Emerson's rule for becoming beautiful, so it will not do to forget that "There is no beautifier of complexion, or form, or behavior, like the wish to scatter joy and not pain around us."

But we would like to have him tell us what things last longest.

He is all ready to tell whoever wants to know. "Beauty is the quality which makes to endure. In a house that I know, I have noticed a block of spermaceti lying about closets and mantel-pieces for twenty years together, simply because the tallow-man gave it the form of a rabbit; and I suppose it may continue to be lugged about unchanged for a century. Let an artist draw a few lines or figures on the back of a letter, and that scrap of paper is rescued from danger, is put in a portfolio, or framed and glazed, and, in proportion to the beauty of the lines drawn, will be kept for centuries." And there are beauties of heart, mind and character, that do not meet the eye, but are none the less powerful in "making to endure."—*Julia E. Sargent, St. Nicholas for February.*