

# PLEASANT HOURS

A PAPER FOR OUR YOUNG FOLK

ENLARGED SERIES.—VOL. VII.]

TORONTO, DECEMBER 24, 1887.

[No. 26.]

## LILL'S TRAVELS IN SANTA CLAUS LAND.

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EFFIE had been playing with her dolls one cold December morning, and Lill had been reading, until both were tired. But it stormed too hard to go out, and, as Mrs. Pereline had said they need not do anything for two hours, their little jaws might

have been dislocated by yawning before they would as much as pick up a pin. Presently Lill said, "Effie, shall I tell you a story?"

"O yes, do!" said Effie, and she climbed up by Lill in the large rocking chair in front of the grate. She kept very still, for she knew Lill's stories were not to be interrupted by a sound, or even a motion. The first thing Lill did was to fix her eyes on the fire, and rock backward and forward quite hard for a little while, and then she said, "Now I am going to tell you about my thought travels, and they are apt to be a little queerer, but oh, ever so much nicer than the other kind!"

As Lill's stories usually had a formal introduction, she began: "Once upon a time, when I was taking a walk through the great field beyond the orchard, I went 'way on, 'round where the path turns behind the hill. And after I had walked a little way, I came to a high wall—built right up into the sky. At first I thought I had discovered

the 'ends of the earth,' or perhaps I had somehow come to the great wall of China. But after walking a long way I came to a large gate, and over it was painted in beautiful gold letters, 'SANTA CLAUS LAND,' and the letters were large enough for a baby to read!"

How large that might be Lill did not stop to explain.



"But the gate was shut tight," she continued, "and though I knocked and knocked, as hard as I could, nobody came to open it. I was dreadfully disappointed, because I felt as if Santa Claus must live here all of the year except when he went out to pay Christmas visits, and it would be so lovely to see him in his own home, you know. But what was I to do? The gate was entirely too high to climb over, and there wasn't even a crack to peek through."

Here Lill paused, and Effie drew a long breath,

and looked greatly disappointed. Then Lill went on:

"But you see, as I was poking about, I pressed a bell spring, and in a moment—jingle, jingle, jingle, the bells went ringing far and near, with such a merry sound as was never heard before. While they were still ringing the gate slowly opened, and I walked in. I didn't even stop to enquire if Santa Claus was at home, for I forgot all about myself and my manners, it was so lovely. First there was a small paved square like a court; it was surrounded by rows and rows of dark green trees, with several avenues opening between them.

"In the centre of the court was a beautiful marble fountain, with sugar plums and bon-bons tumbling out of it. Funny-looking little men were filling cornucopias at the fountain, and pretty little barefoot children, with chubby hands and dimpled shoulders, took them as soon as they were filled, and ran off with them. They were all too much occupied to speak to me, but as I came up to the fountain one of the funny little fellows gave me a cornucopia, and I marched on with the babies. (See illustration on fourth page.)

"We went down one of the avenues, which would have been very dark only it was splendidly lighted up with Christmas candles. I saw the babies were slyly eating a candy or two, so I tasted mine, and they were delicious—the real Christmas kind. After we had gone a little way, the trees were smaller and not so close together, and here there were other funny little fellows who were climbing up on ladders and tying toys and bon-bons to the trees. The children stopped and delivered their packages, but I walked on, for there was something in the distance that I was curious to see. I could see that it was a large garden, that looked as if it might be well cared for, and had many things growing in it. But even in the distance it didn't look natural, and when I reached it I found it was a very uncommon kind of a garden indeed. I could scarcely believe my eyes, but there were dolls and donkeys and drays and cars and croquet coming up in long, straight rows, and ever so many other things beside. In one place the wooden balls had only just started; their funny little heads were just above ground, and I thought they looked very much surprised at their surroundings. Farther on were china dolls, that looked quite grown up, and I suppose were ready to pull; and a gardener was hoeing a row of soldiers that didn't look in a very healthy condition, or as if they had done very well.

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