

The Rockwood Review.

BILLY-BOY.

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A Four-year-old does not look back, but for a minute in the new sunshine of the morning it seemed a most wonderful experience. Yesterday the world was a long street of tall houses in the midst of a maze of streets; to-day, after a sweet mossy sleep, it was a sunny road coming from between grassy banks and great trees, and widening out to make room for a dozen gardens and brown-tiled cottages on either side. There were green fields running up and sloping down, as far as one could see. Who would have thought there could be so much grass in all the world? But stranger than the fields were the woods. They grew in a muffling ring all round the sky; they ran up hill and down dale; and where they did not press together in crowds, they loitered about in twos and threes; so that between the woods and the fields it was an enormous green space with a sunny road running through it and playing at hide and seek among the bushy hollows. Over all there was a fresh blue sky with silvery cloud: but though Billy-boy was conscious of this in a dim way, he only discovered it afterwards.

It was in this wonderful new country that he was to be left with the gamekeeper and his wife till he grew brown and plump and strong, and then his mother was to come and take him home. There was a storm of sobs at parting, but before the tears were dry the little man had been bribed into smiles; and then with an invisible hand Nature drew him to her enchanted bosom and found him companionship.

Who can describe the glamour which falls on a child, or explain the play of illusions by which he contrives to make himself happy? Henceforth Billy-boy's life was a long day-dream, in which everything was alive and had stories to tell, and in which there was no

perception of time or of the sequence of events. For instance, what seemed the first of all his impressions must really have been gradually acquired much later. The Sunny Road ran two ways—like most roads, but Billy-boy did not know that. Up-hill it wound away on the ridge of the downs to London Bridge, where, as you know, the children sing and dance in a ring all day long in summer. Down-hill it ambled along through the woods and across the meadows and over the dark pine ridge to the south till it reached the Sea, and you saw the white ships sailing to and fro. Sunny Road southwards was the way of romance and adventure; the carts that came up the slope appeared to have come all the way from the Sea, and the carters must have talked with the sailors in the ships, only Billy-boy did not like to question them. It was enough to watch the carts go by, and dream: it was specially good to see them on a wet day when one could not live out-of-doors.

At the foot of the gamekeeper's garden another road branched off from the Sunny Road, and was bordered by green banks covered with bracken and tufts of heather. If you were not going to the Sea or to London Bridge, you followed this road, for it just went rambling on and on to any place you might want to go to. Billy-boy never found a name for it, but I always think of it as Wishing Gate. There was a strip of woodland along the left-hand side, and the village children took Billy-boy there to play with them beneath the trees. Their favorite spot was underneath an old larch whose boughs swept the ground on three sides and formed a snug house full of green shadow. Here the youngsters made a ground-plan of rooms and passages with pebbles and pieces of stone, and visited each other after they had decked their hats with wild flowers and plumes of bracken. Sometimes, too, they played at school, and sometimes at shop; sometimes they simply nursed their dolls and