

THE LAME MOUSE.

IN TWO PARTS.

PART I.

IT was an old house, very quaint and very pretty in its foliated framework of grand old trees. Beech Hall, the farmer called it from the fine old tree which grew before the door, and shook its blood-red leaves, like a princess's tresses, in the wind. Around the diamond windows the ivy grew, and white and red roses nodded against the glass when the wind breathed softly, and threw kisses to the children, night and morning, when they knelt to pray.

The farmer's barn was farther on, amid the trees. It had been full of golden grain, but was empty now, for summer had come, and it was cleared for the coming harvest. The floor was clean and polished. Above, in the roof, the beams were dark and dusty, and it was only when the sun shone in that one could see that they were hung with curtains of silk and gold. The farmer said, "Hem, what a lot of cobwebs;" but the little mice, who sometimes saw them in the sunlight, were not convinced for all the farmer said.

Some of those little mice made the barn their banqueting-hall and council-chamber, and many a merry night did they pass there. They loved it, and their love made them think it fit for a king. 'Tis true, they had never seen a king: he might have been as big and as fine as Master Tom, the farmer's cat, for what they knew; but then, mice have their thoughts, their laughter, and their tears, and Master Tom, who slept upon the big red rug before the kitchen fire, was something to wonder at and to fear.

One night, when the farmer and his big sons were gone to bed, and all was calm and still, four of those little mice came from their holes to hold high carnival within the barn. The moon was high in the heaven without, and the stars were gazing down with a tremor of delight upon the sleeping flowers. The pale light

crept in through the openings in the shutters, and made lines of silver light upon the floor.

"A merry night to us all," said the first which came. He was a very handsome mouse, very dark, with long silken whiskers, and a noble tail. "A merry night to us all," he repeated, and sat him down with the grace and dignity which became his rank and beauty. It needed only a glance to tell that he was President of the Council, and a mouse of some repute.

Master Mottle and Master Grey, two dapper mice, smiled, bowed their heads, and sat down too. The fourth was Master Brown, a delicate and refined mouse, and one which, though young, had seen something of the world. He lay on his breast in the moonlight, and from the heaving of his little bosom seemed in pain.

"I am glad to meet you all again," said the President, "and trust you are all well. But why so sad, Master Brown? Body or mind, aye? Not wise, my young friend, not wise to lie there in the moonlight, and to turn your face from your friends. Remember Master Tom. Don't seek danger, though meet it bravely when it comes. You must be equal to your gifts and reputation. What say you, my friends?"

"Yes," said the other two.

"Reputation! I've lost mine," said Master Brown, with a sigh.

"Lost it? It cannot be," said the President.

"No," answered the other two.

"'Tis too true," and he lifted his head and turned his face towards them with a cry of pain.

They started to their feet, thinking that Master Tom had come. But no, Master Tom was far away and fast asleep on the big red rug, and they sat down again.

"I am wounded," he continued, "and am so ill. I thought to come to-night with a noble tale of daring and success, but I am here to tell of pain and disgrace. Early to-night I crept to the larder over the way