

DEASANT HOURS

A PAPER FOR OUR YOUNG FOLK

TORONTO, AUGUST 5, 1893.

[No 31.]

Vol. XIII.]

Babyhood.

BY JAMES WHITCOMB RILEY.

Heigh-ho! Babyhood! Tell me where you linger,
Let's toddle home again, for we have gone astray;
Take this eager hand of mine, and lead me by the finger
Back to the lotus lands of the far-away.

Turn back the leaves of life; don't read the glory—
Let's find the pictures, and fancy all the rest;
We can fill the written pages with a brighter story
Than Old Time, the story-teller, can do at his best!

Turn to the brook, where the honey-suckle tipping
O'er its vase of perfume, spills it on the breeze,
And the bee and humming bird in ecstasy are sipping
From the fairy flagons of the blooming locust trees.

Turn to the lane where we used to "teeter-totter,"
Printing little foot-palms in the mellow mould;
Laughing at the lazy cattle wading the water
Where the ripples dimple round the butter-cups of gold;

Where the dusky turtle lies basking on the gravel
Of the sunny sandbar in the middle-tide,
And the ghostly dragon-fly pauses in his travel
To rest like a blossom where the water-lily died.

Heigh-ho! Babyhood! Tell me where you linger,
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Take this eager hand of mine, and lead me by the finger
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GIANT CACTUS.

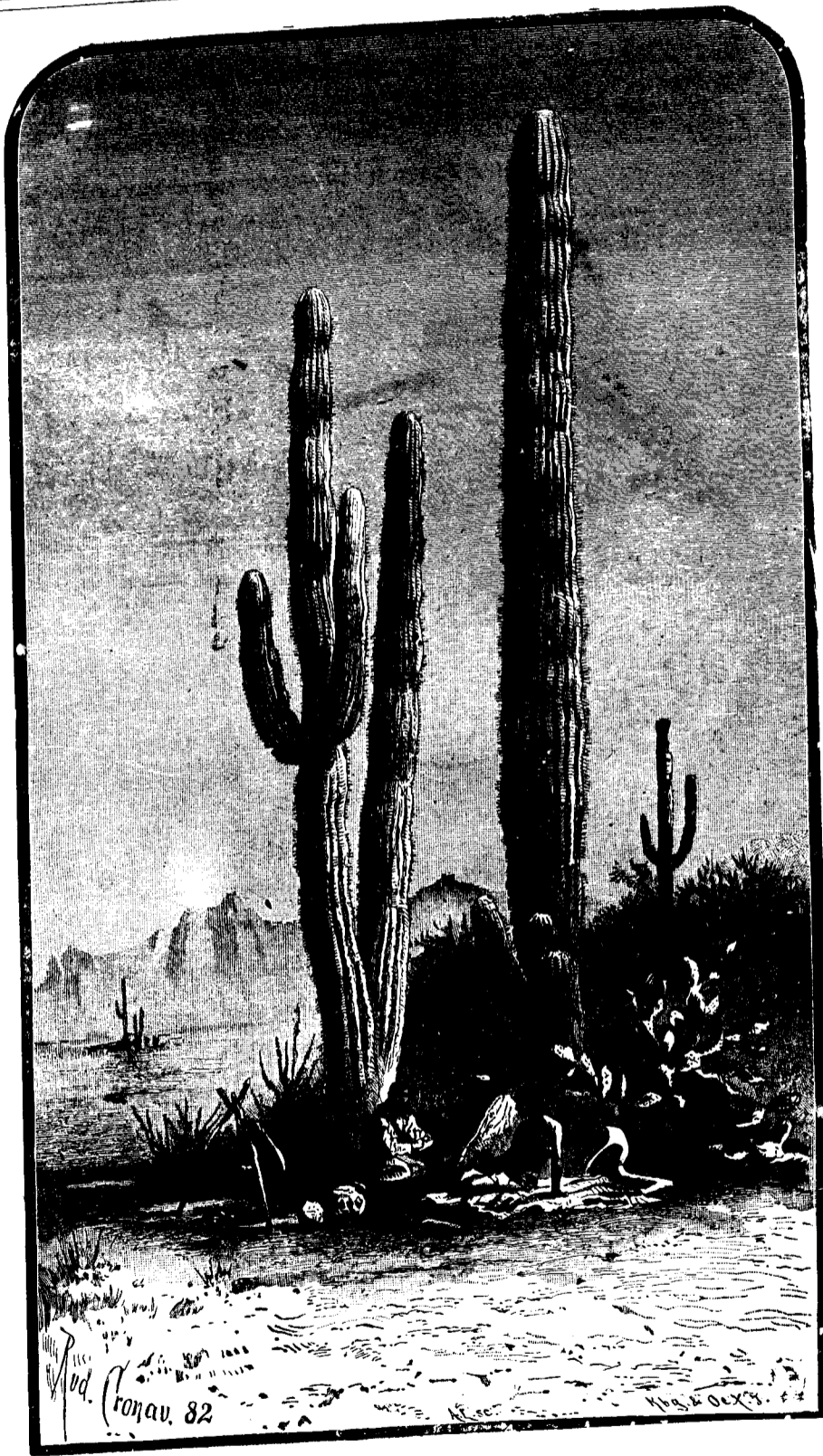
You have all seen a cactus, but how many of you have ever seen a Giant cactus like those shown in the picture?

It grows in the hot dry desert of New Mexico and is commonly called there, the Torch Thistle. It is from fifty to sixty feet high, and has a diameter from one to two feet. Sometimes it has branches and sometimes not. The branches grow out at right angles from the main stem and then curve upwards and continue their growth parallel to it, making it look very much like our telegraph poles.

The fruit of this cactus, which are green oval buds, from two to three inches long, contain a crimson pulp, from which certain tribes of Indians make an excellent preserve. The ripe fruit is also gathered by means of a forked stick and used for food.

Do you notice the Indians in the picture sitting on the ground by the cactuses and the preserves cooking in the kettle over the fire? How small they look as they sit at the foot of this immense plant!

All kinds of cactuses are covered with sharp spikes or bristles and seldom have any leaves. In Florida these plants are as common as our Canadian thistle and it is even more uncomfortable to fall against a cactus plant than to come in contact with a thistle, for the spines pierce right into the flesh and leave it bleeding and sore.



GIANT CACTUS.

A MOTHER AND HER BOY.

THE mother and boy were waiting for the train in the Albany station, when the dullness was broken by a funny figure of an old woman, in rusty gown, a catskin muff and tippet, and a black bonnet made of as many odds and ends as a magpie's nest, and her false front askew. She kept chewing on nothing, working her umbrella, and opening and shutting the other hand in its black glove in the aimless way of old people.

The high-school girls began to titter and to make jokes to each other, watching the old lady far too openly for good manners at all. The young lady in the smart tailor suit who gives readings at the Sunday-school concerts smiled back at them, and studied the old creature with a satiric eye. The boy began to laugh quietly with the rest. "Do look, mother. Isn't she funny? Did you ever see such a sight?"

The mother glanced delicately, and turned her eyes. "Poor lady," she said.

He was silent, considering. "If I hadn't you," she went on, "and had lost all my money and my friends, till my mind was touched, and I lived alone among queer people, I might look just like that woman. She must have been very good-looking when she was young."

The boy's mouth twitched as he turned his gaze from the "poverty piece," as some of the girls called her, to his pleasant mother; and as the old lady went prowling about looking for something, a light step was at her side, a cap was raised, and a kindly, boyish voice asked, "Can I do anything for you, madam?"

"I was looking for some place to buy some checkermints," said the old soul nodding carelessly and blinking with weak eyes. "I like checkermints if they're Boston bought; but I don't seem to see any. There used to be a boy with a basket come round in the Fitchburg depot, and I thought maybe I could find him here."

"Shall I get you some at the fruit stall?" said the boy, politely to her, but with a flashing glance at the giggling girls, which somehow did not make them feel proud of themselves.

Then the mother watched her boy lead the old woman to the candy stall and stand by her courteously, pointing out this and suggesting the other, till she made her fumbling purchases, and escort her across the herringy passage to her seat in the train, out of his own compassionate young heart.

"My dear boy!" was all she said as he came back to her; but it was breathed in a voice of music, and she looked most happy.

The boy stood close to his mother, thoughtfully, one hand just striving to caress her. Their train called, he picked up her parcels and marched protectingly by her.

"You have a boy, mother, who will take care of you," he said lifting his eyes to her at the gate.

WHAT IS IT GOOD FOR?

DEAR me? how thirsty my plants are! They drink up the water as if they hadn't had any for a week, but 'twas only yesterday I gave them a good drink. But then, plants are like folks, after all; they keep wanting. I had my breakfast yesterday, but I wanted some this morning just as bad. I dare say if I lived out in the sun like the flowers do, I'd be thirsty all the time. Miss Slocum said we must think of all the things water is good for. It is good for plants, for trees, for people, for cattle; it is good to make ice in the winter. That gives us fun, then, and gives us cool drinks in summer. Water is good for fishes to live in. I love to see them swim and dart about. Then I like to bathe in it; I like to sail on it too. I like to drink it. Oh, it's good for ever so many things; but Miss Slocum says it is so free to all, and there is so much of it, and we aren't thankful as we ought to be. Perhaps that's why she told us to think about it. I'll go in now and write out on a paper all I've thought, and ask my brother John to think up some more for me.

It would be a fine thing if men knew on some lines as much as horses. No horse will drink whiskey and make a fool of himself.