

OUR YOUNG FOLKS.

MAGIC CURTAINS.

I know of some curtains, all lined with pink silk,
And bordered with fringes of gold,
That, fashioned of satin, the hue of rich milk,
Are made to fold and unfold.

When darkness comes on, and the world sinks to sleep,
These beautiful curtains slip down;
And, all through the night-hours, caressingly sweep
The cheeks of all sleepers in town.

And when the day dawns, and the people wake up—
These curtains, they fold up so tight—
Then creamy-white fulness so closely take up,
That only the fringe is in sight!

Do you know what these wonderful curtains are yet?
Oh, will you be filled with surprise,
When I tell you that two are most cunningly set
Right over your wondering eyes?

—*Wide Awake.*

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

BY E. T. HEAD, AUTHOR OF "A PEEP INTO PARADISE"

CHAPTER I.

HOW cross little Maggie felt! how cross she looked! Her thin, colourless lips were drawn down at the corners; her dark eyes had that dim, wistful look which shows that tears are very near the surface; her voice, when she spoke, was set in a fretful, quavering key.

So decidedly uncome-at-able was Maggie, that the baby, seated on the floor opposite, instead of stretching out his arms to approach her, sucked his thumb, while he gazed at her discontented face in gloomy silence. There was no one else to watch Maggie, but to judge from the baby's expression, which betokened a kind of stolid surprise and discomfort, it was evident that this state of affairs was unusual, and that generally the little girl kept a firm control over her temper.

There is a part of London very little known to respectable people, only seen by such people when they pass through it in cabs and omnibuses. No person at all comfortable or well to do would think of residing in this part of London, or indeed remaining there an instant longer than was absolutely necessary.

The place in question is called Seven Dials, and it is quite one of the lowest parts of the great city. From Seven Dials itself, branch off seven miserable, low streets, each of which again communicates with wretched alleys and courts. Not bright places these for a home! for not one of the attributes of a home—cleanliness, peace, order—do they possess. Crumbling and foul are the walls of these houses, dark and broken the staircases, sadly dilapidated and bare of furniture the rooms and cellars, but alas! human beings swarm here, and in such a place little Maggie lived.

It was a burning July day, and the atmosphere in Maggie's home was certainly neither wholesome nor pleasant. The tiny window in the roof only admitted air through one of its broken panes, and very hot was the little air that came through this opening.

Neither was the furniture conducive to cheerful thoughts. It consisted of a three-legged stool, a dirty mattress, a saucepan and pot, and a little hard wooden chair, originally meant for a baby, with a round rung in front. In this chair, placed under the window, so as to derive what benefit she could from the fresher outside air, sat Maggie. In this chair she had at almost from her birth. She was eight years old now, but, except for the won-

derfully intelligent expression of her face, she did not look more than four. Little Maggie had never been outside this room, and had never walked in her life. No wonder she looked unhappy, ill, weak, lame; she had never been outside Tiger Alley for eight long years! Who could imagine a more wretched fate? But Maggie was not usually unhappy; except when suffering pain, she was generally patient, and even cheerful, and her mother often declared she was worth two of the great hulking strong ones, to give you back a pleasant word.

Yes, desolate as Maggie looked, she filled her own little niche in the world; she fulfilled her own duties, and she had her own happiness. She had a very loving heart—a heart too big, and warm, and sensitive for that poor little frame; and her heart was not empty—it had its treasures.

Three very great treasures had Maggie, and one lesser one. First came the baby, who was left in her care day after day while mother went out charing. Every morning Mrs. Thomas took a long string and, tying one end round Maggie's chair, she fastened the other to the baby's waist. As far as his tether permitted might the baby go, but no farther, and to take care of him was Maggie's duty and pleasure.

Then came mother—poor, tired, and overworked mother, who was always so patient and good to her little lame child, who, however cross and put out she might be with the strong and healthy children, was always gentle and loving to this weak and ailing one.

Yes, her mother and the baby were great treasures of Maggie's, but I think, well as she loved them, she loved some one else better. I think in her heart of hearts some one else reigned as king. This third and greatest of all Maggie's treasures was her brother Joe. Joe was eleven years old, tall, stout, healthy, rough, with a loud voice, a rattling, noisy step, a ringing whistle, a gay laugh.

Joe was the sort of boy who everywhere, no matter what his surroundings, carries all before him. He was not a very good boy; by no means; but he was so healthy, so joyous, so never-me-care, so entirely regardless of danger, that he was a favourite with his street companions, he was a favourite at school, he was a favourite at home: but no one cared for him as Maggie did, and perhaps he cared for no one like Maggie. He returned her love in kind, if not in intensity. He returned it, too, in self-sacrifice, for when Maggie's head ached, or when Maggie suffered more pain than usual, he could soften his rough voice, he could subdue his noisy tones. At such times he was so nice that Maggie thought the pain almost worth bearing for the sake of his tender looks, and even mother never carried her half as comfortably as Joe.

Yes, certainly, of all Maggie's treasures, Joe was her greatest, dearest, best. When she thought of him she never envied the children who ran about and played, who could peep into the park and see the trees, the green grass and the flowers; happy and healthy as these children were, they none of them possessed her brother, and to give up Joe she would not have changed with any of them.

I have mentioned Maggie's great treasures, but I must not forget her little one—a treasure quite apart and distinct from the others, not

for an instant to be placed in the same category, but still holding a decided place of its own in her heart; at the present moment, never noticing the baby's discontented face, she is drawing it out of a tin box by her side, has tenderly removed from it a piece of soiled tissue paper, and now two or three heavy tears drop from her eyes, and one of them blots this lesser treasure. What is it? A dirty card which has once been trodden under some one's foot. On the card is painted, in faded colors, a large white lily; round the lily the words are printed, "Consider the lilies of the field."

Maggie does not know how to read, but she can repeat every one of these words. She can point with her finger to where "consider" stands, to where "field" stands, to where "lilies" stands. She knows nothing about them, except that lily means a flower, and this faded thing on the card is a picture of a flower.

As her eyes drop on the card, the exasperated baby, tired out of sucking his thumb, makes a dart at it, and in trying to rescue it from his vicious little grasp, the card gets torn. Poor Maggie! this is the crowning drop in her cup of sorrows; she sobs bitterly and passionately, and though the baby, quite penitent now, clambers to her knee, puts his arms about her neck, and pulls all her dark hair about her face, he cannot, successful as these endearments usually are, stay her tears.

The fact is, the card has reminded her too bitterly of her disappointment, and the cause of all her sorrow and bad temper this afternoon. Here is the story—

Yesterday being Sunday, Mrs. Thomas went to spend the evening with some friends taking the baby with her, and Joe, as a wonderful act of condescension, agreed to stay for a few hours alone with Maggie. This was no small act of self-denial, for the boys in the court below were having a splendid game at marbles, and he had such beauties in his pocket. However, the little pale dark-eyed sister won the day, and he determined to give her some of the benefit of his society.

Maggie had too few pleasures not to enjoy them systematically, and she was quite determined to get as much out of Joe during the precious hours he would remain with her as possible.

(To be continued.)

IT is a fine thing in friendship to know when to be silent.—*George MacDonald.*

GOD binds not up thy wounds, unless thou lay them open by confession, and bewail them. He covers not, unless thou first uncover. He pardons not, unless thou first acknowledge. He justifies not, unless thou first condemn thyself. He comforts not unless thou despair in thyself.—*Gerard.*

IT is a striking truth that he who would benefit his fellow man must walk by faith, sowing his seed in the morning, and in the evening withholding not his hand—knowing that in God's good time the harvest shall spring up and ripen; if not for himself yet for others, who as they bind the full sheaves and gather in the heavy clusters, may, perchance, remember him with gratitude and set up stones of memorial on the fields of his toil and sacrifice.—*Whittier.*