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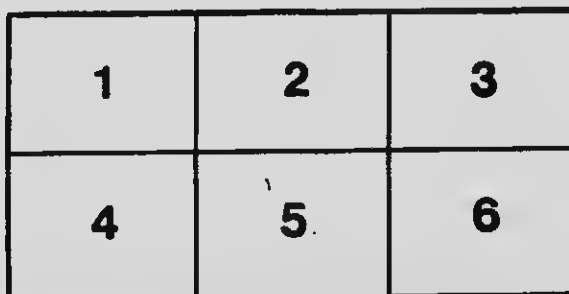
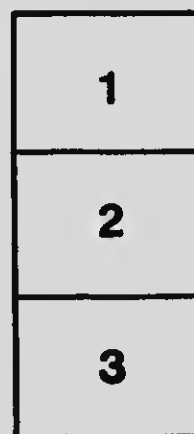
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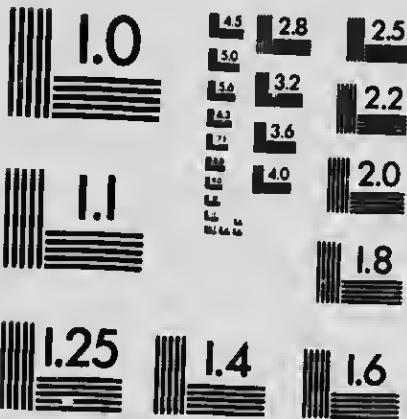
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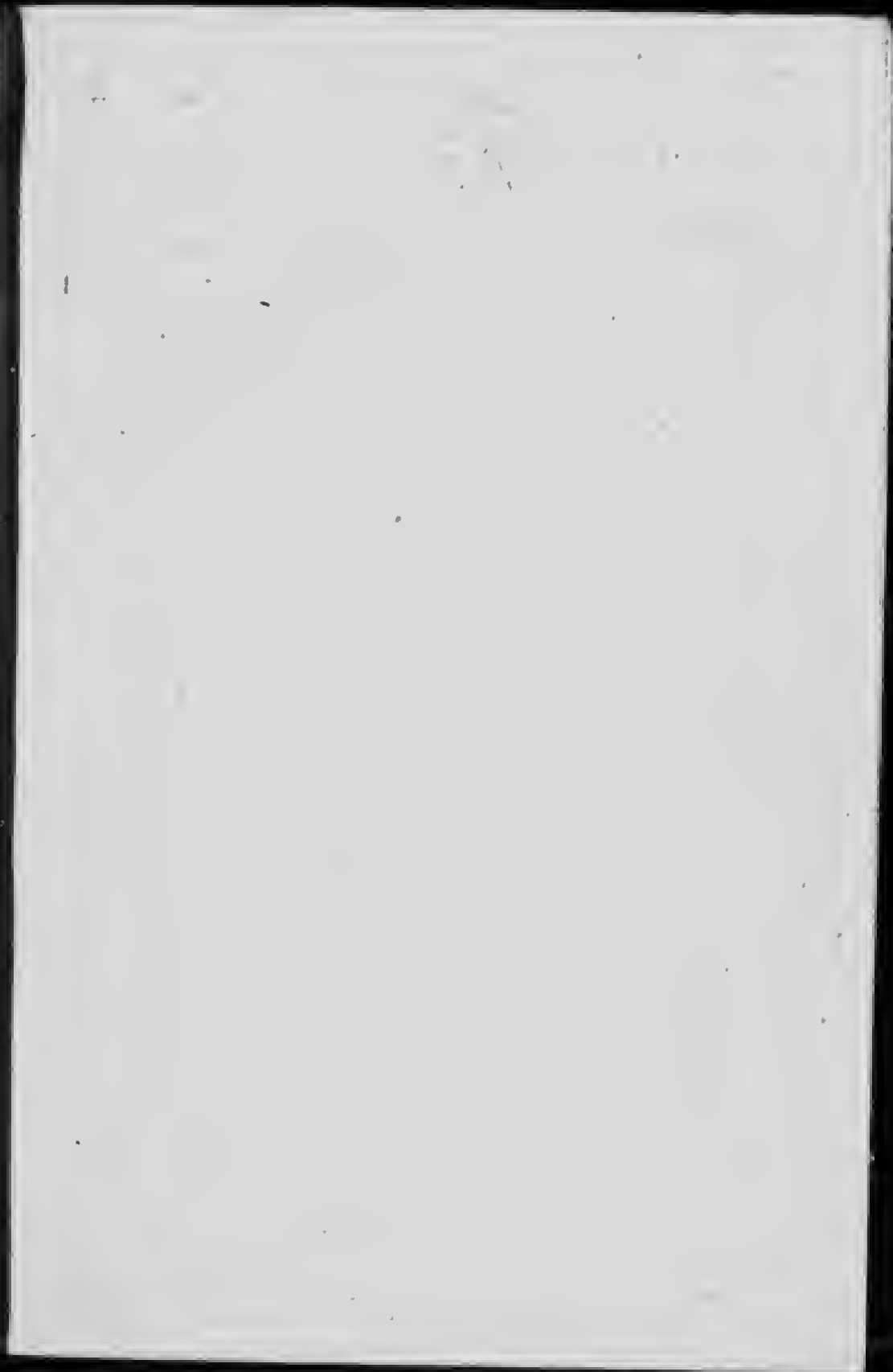
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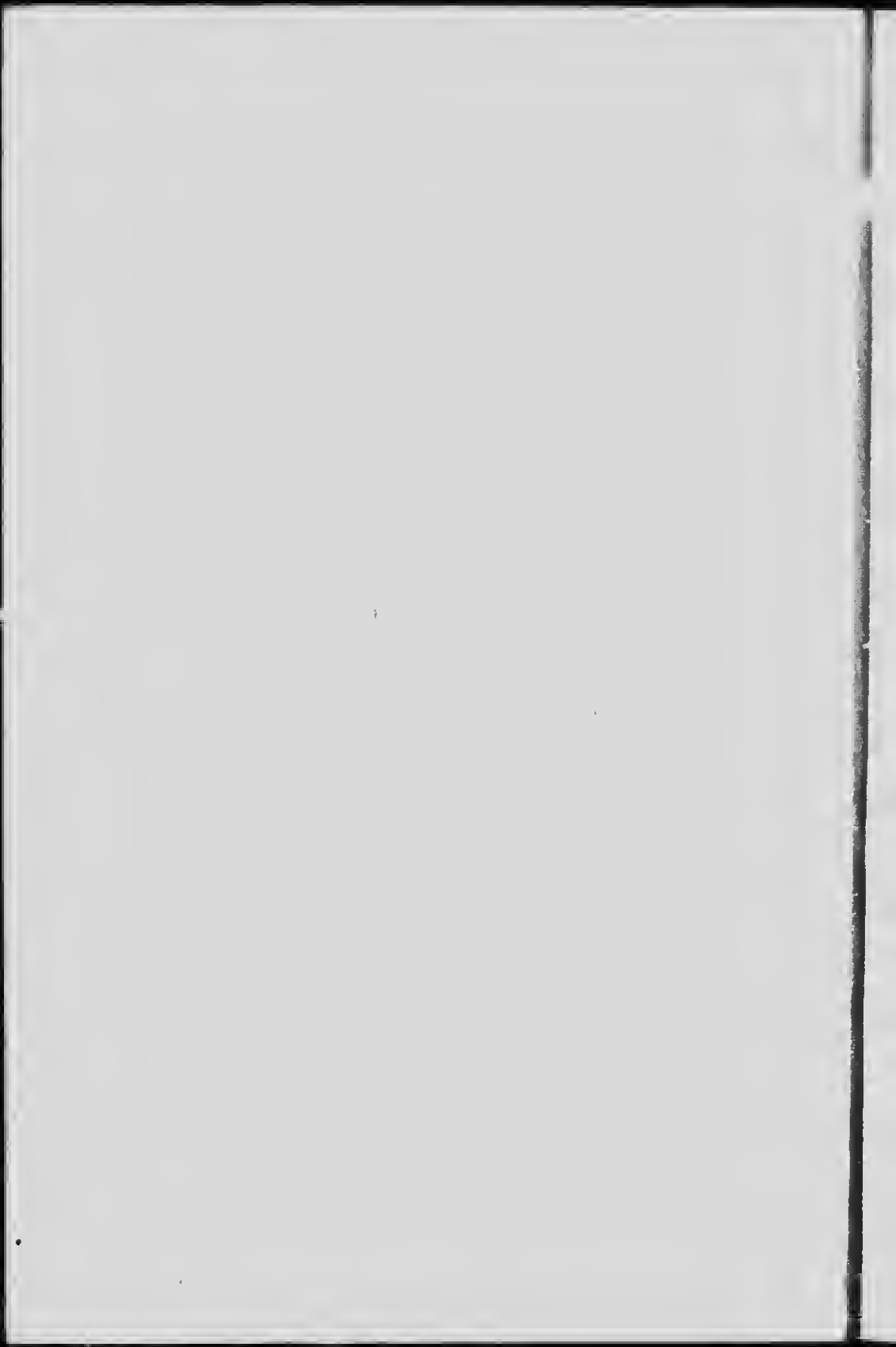
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A LITTLE CHILD
SHALL LEAD THEM

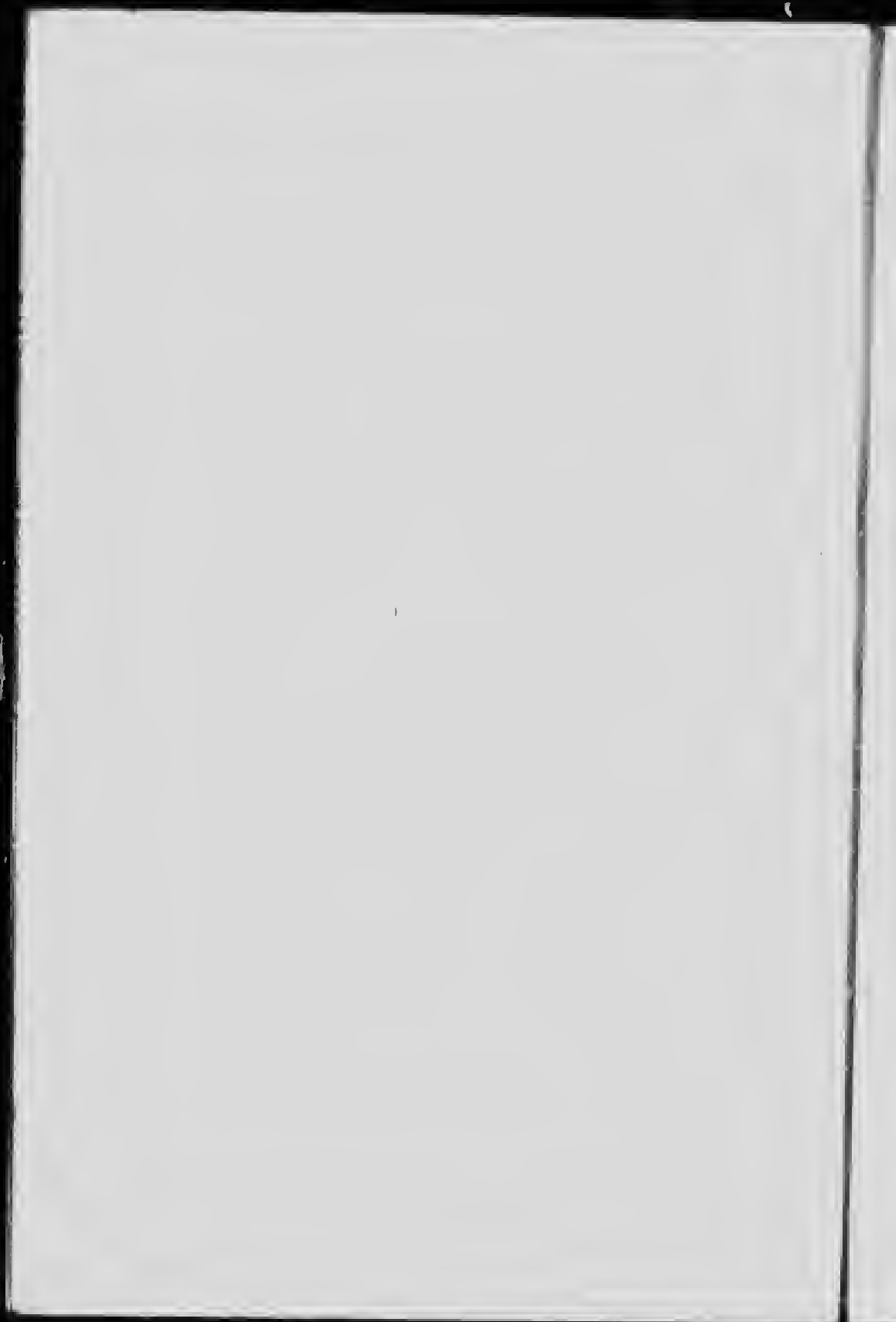


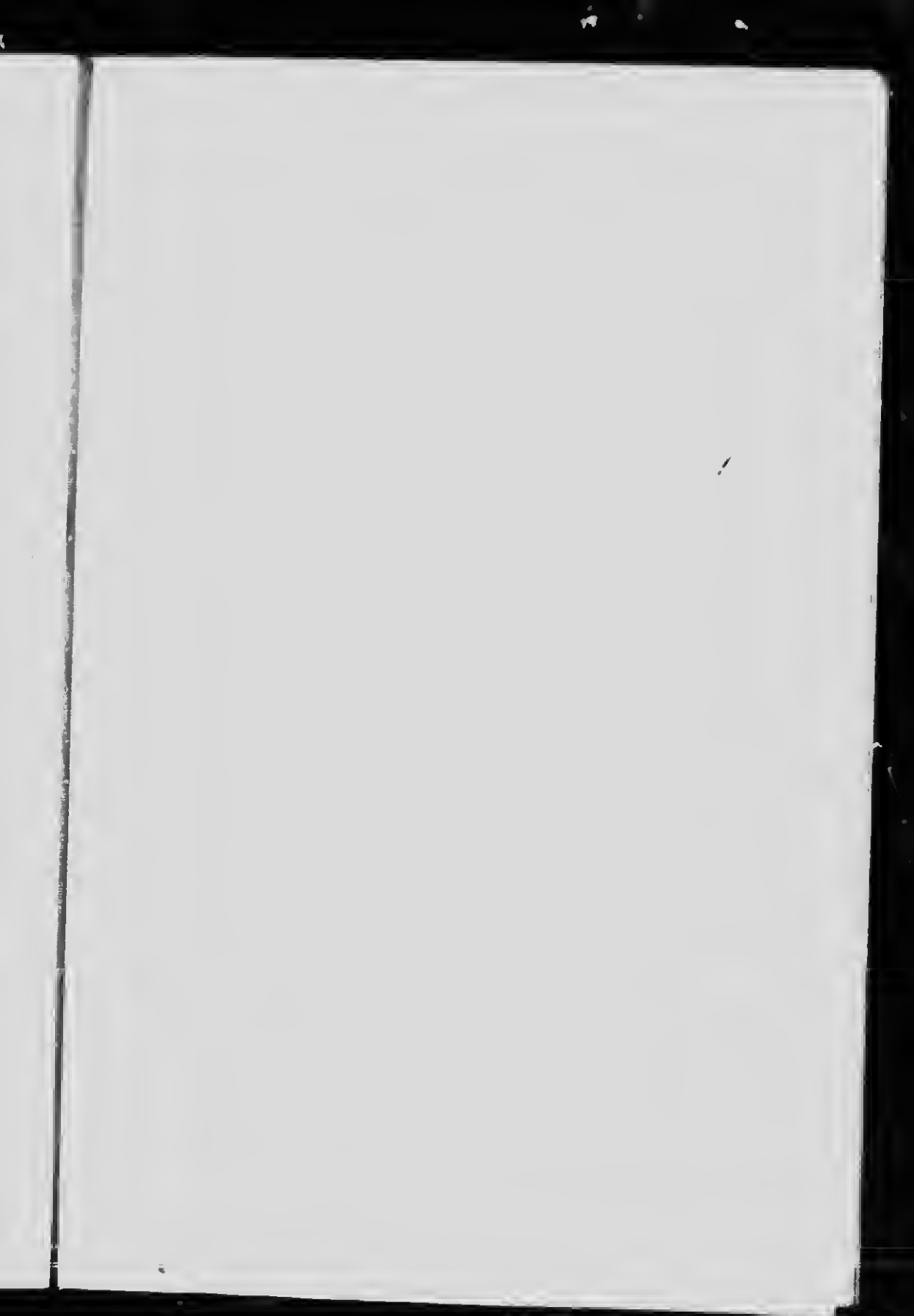
ADELINE · M · TESKEY





**A Little Child shall
lead Them**

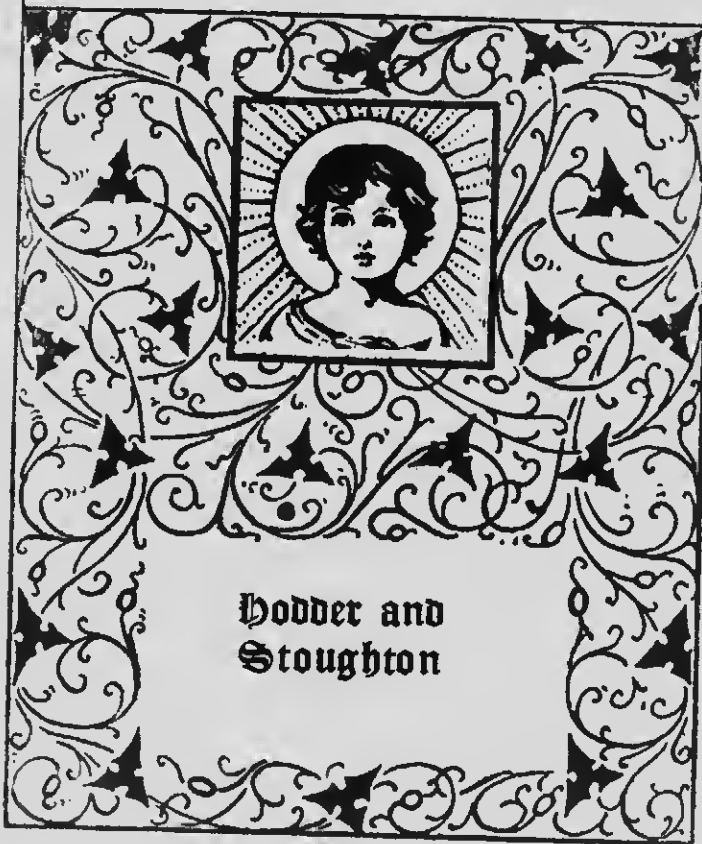






He knew, and Jane knew that he was celebrating
his first Christmas Day.

A Little Child
shall lead them
Adeline M Teskey



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JANE BENDER was a meek little woman who had very few of what are generally considered advantages in life. She learned to read and write at the country school, and very soon after leaving school she married Jake Bender, and settled down to the life of a farmer's wife.

The husband was a rough fellow, utterly devoid of any polish, and a superficial observer could not but wonder what there was about Jake to commend him to any woman, not to mention the meek, pretty little woman who had become his wife.

Jane had but one avenue out into the great world beyond her own neighbourhood. In her early school days she had a seat-mate and chum, Lavinia Millar; while



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yet in childhood her life and that of Lavinia drifted apart, the latter attended a higher-grade school, and eventually went as a missionary to India.

Owing to the fact that this friend of her childhood was there, Jane's heart had thrown out many a strong tendril toward that strange benighted land, and the very first money she could call her own, money she had earned by taking first prize at a provincial fair for a lamb that she had raised, she sent to Lavinia to be expended in any way, toward the betterment of her own sex, which the latter thought best.

Lavinia Millar decided to spend the money thus sent to her toward the education of a little native child who was brought to the mission about the same time that Jane's money arrived. She wrote back to this effect, telling her old schoolmate that she had christened the dear little girl on whom the money was to be expended "Jane Bender."

It made a great stir among the neighbours



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on the surrounding farms and in the village where she carried some of her farm products, when it became known that Jane Bender, as some of them said, had "adopted a little gal in Injy," and conjectures deep and wide were indulged in as to her reasons for doing so. In this case, as in all other cases, the impression depended upon the character of the person impressed.

"Pleny o' heathen at home," said Peter McKim, who was very chary about spending his money; "why must Jake Bender's wife be sendin' her money off after a young 'un in furrin parts?"

"Jane Bender is a-thinkin' she'll have some one to fall back on in her old age, her own children bein' dead," said Peter's wife in a knowing whisper. "Like enough, she'll bring the little Injy girl out here when the child's large 'nough to travel alone."

"Tut!" said the worldly-wise Peter, "'t would cost more to pay her passage than to hire a girl here."



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"But a hired girl ain't like one o' your own, even if it's ou'y a adopted one," returned the unconvinced wife.

"Jane's crazy!" exclaimed Mrs. Perkins, who lived on the farm adjoining the Bender's, "spendin' her hard-earned money on a strange child; like enough she'll turn out bad when she is reared, an' bring Jane's gray hair in sorrow to the grave!"

"'Make to yourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness; that, when you fail, they may receive you into everlasting habitations,'" said the Village Saint, bending his near-sighted eyes closer to the shoe on which he was stitching; "Mrs. Bender is following her Lord's injunction."

Among all the cloud of witnesses that compassed Jane about, none were more profoundly impressed at the way she chose to spend her prize money than her big, burly husband, Jake. She had not asked his advice about it, and he did not know whether he should approve or not when the manner of its disposal came to his know-



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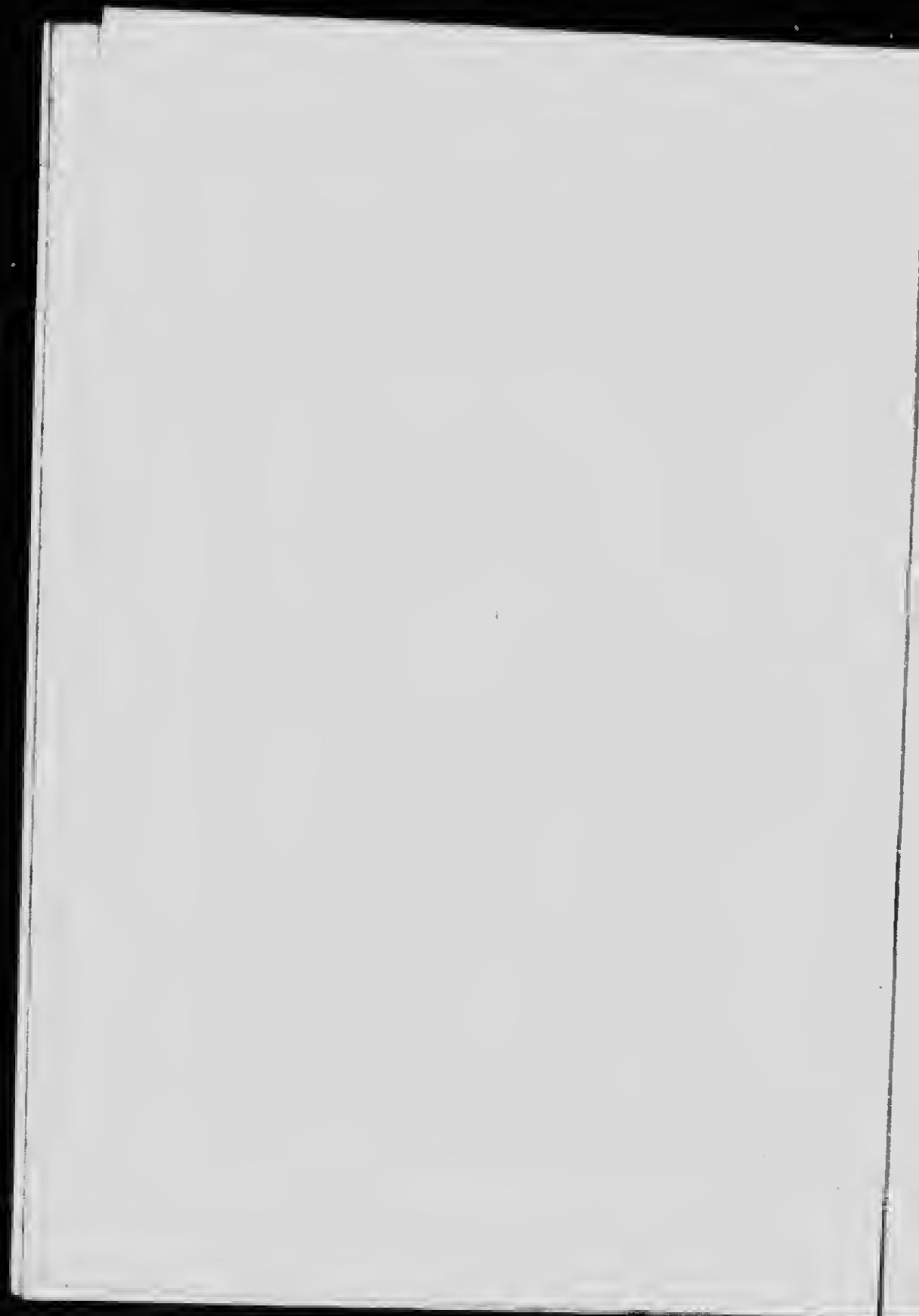
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He sat down by a lighted candle and began to read aloud the news to her.

23
6



A Little Child shall lead Them

ledge. So he remained silent (except for the conversations he held with his own inner self) and mystified. But when the letter came stating that the little girl had been given the name Bender, he completely surrendered. Although he would not have owned it for worlds, he was greatly uplifted at the thought of having a little girl in far-off India, that land of elephants and big diamonds, called by the name Bender—Jane Bender, a union of his own name with that of his wife and his own little girl, whose grave had been green a number of years. Without saying anything about it to Jane, he decided that, as the name Bender belonged to him by birthright, he, as well as Jane, had a share in the little girl in India.

It was evening when the Benders received the letter containing the marvellous intelligence of their Indian possession, and Jake and Jane retired, but not to sleep. That little girl in India—or her ghost—wandered over their house all night. She stood by



A Little Child shall lead Them

their bedside, rocked the small chair in their room, stepped airily up and down stairs, brushed their faces with her soft hair, clasped her chubby arms around their necks, and in fact allowed them only spasmodic naps until dawn came peeping in the window and sent her away.

By this time the birds out-doors were giving each other their morning salute, and Jake rose to feed his horses preparatory to doing his fall ploughing; Jane rose to get breakfast.

The eastern heavens were a pale yellow, and an exquisitely soft purple mist was obscuring the horizon line when Jake hitched his horses, Sorrel and Snow—they were named for their color—to the plough, and began his long tramp.

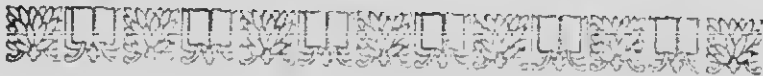
There was nothing to suggest the æsthetic about Jake as he strode his ten-acre field; his tall, heavy form leaned over the plough, one suspender across his shoulder and the other encircling his waist. The sleeves of his blue gingham shirt were rolled up to



A Little Child shall lead Them

his elbows, revealing a pair of sinewy, sun-burnt arms, while his brawny, work-hardened hands guided the plough. The exterior was unmistakably common, not to say ugly, but there was something very rare and beautiful at that moment stirring in Jake's inner consciousness. If you were near enough to him you would have heard him say softly to himself more than once, "Janey, Janey Bender, 'way off there in Injy."

Somehow there seemed to have come suddenly to Jake a strange spiritual awakening; he looked with a sort of mysterious awe at the pale, yellow sky and the purple mist hanging beneath it. The sky tint was casting a soft golden glow over the field and the gray stump fence which outlined one side of it, and even over the horses and plough; and there was something about the whole scene which made Jake think of a hymn his mother used to sing when he was a little fellow: "Jerusalem, the golden, with milk and honey blest."



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Out from the purple mist there issued the liquid trill of a bird, and Jake looked wistfully toward the spot from whence it proceeded, as if he would not have felt surprised had he seen an angelic presence—his mother's presence.

He was ploughing in a crop of clover for the purpose of fertilizing the field, and as his eye swept over the still untouched ground he was charmed for the first time in his life by the pink and white flowers which carpeted his field. He paused, and allowed his team to stop, while he brushed back his hand over his eyes, as if to be sure his vision was not deceiving him.

"Where did them flowers keep themselves all the rest o' the time?" he said aloud. "I never saw clover-tops es big an' all-fired bright es these here ones. I wisht Janey wus on'y here now to see 'em. Wonder hev they any such red-an'-white clover out there in Injy! 'Tain't likely; they grow palm trees an' sech. Man! wouldn't she



A Little Child shall lead Them

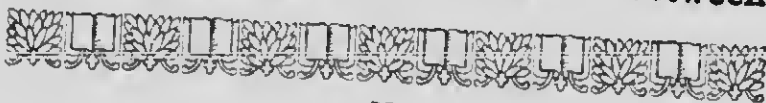
like to trot round an' pick them clover blooms, laugh, an' hold up her posy fer me to look at."

He lifted his hat, and drew the part of arm covered by a shirt-sleeve over his forehead to wipe off the drops of perspiration which stood there in big beads. Jake was literally earning his bread by the sweat of his brow, but looking on the fair picture of his own conception had put a smile into his small, light blue eyes, and parted something almost like a flush on his tawny, lantern-jawed cheeks.

He drew a long, trembling breath, shook the reins which were around his body, and, with a loud "G'lang, Sorrell! g'lang, Snow!" he started his horses again.

Up and down the long furrows trod Jake all that forenoon, but keeping step with him, controlling his thoughts, smoothing his temper, and softening his speech was "the little girl from Injy."

By and by there came reverberating across the acres which intervened between



A Little Child shall lead Them

Jake and his home, the long, slow blast of a tin horn.

"Dinner!" he ejaculated, glancing up at the sun. "Shortest forenoon I ever put in!"

Jake unhitched the team and started for home. The horses, as they walked before their master on the road to the stable, passed through various swarms of winged insects, impatiently shaking their heads and switching their tails; a bird —

"Shifting his light of song
From post to post along the
cheerless fence,"

snatched agilely at one of the insects that came in dangerous proximity to his sharp bill; a small garter snake glided from under Jake's feet off into the longer grass, and a field-mouse ran athwart the path, but he heeded none of them. While he was walking from the field to the stable he saw little Janey grow from childhood to womanhood, have as great an education as Lavinia Millar — and he could imagine nothing greater —



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come out to this country to make him and Jane a visit. He was just planning their return visit to India when the stable was reached. He gave each of the horses a measure of oats, and went into the house.

He washed his hands in the tin basin at the kitchen sink, drew his fingers through the locks of hair immediately surmounting his brow, and sat down in silence to his dinner. Jane, too, was silent and preoccupied; she also had spent the forenoon with the little Janey. A pair of small pattering feet had run about after her as she swept and dusted, strained and skimmed the milk, washed dishes, cooked, and took the thousand and one steps that fall to the lot of women in her class, and love had done for labour what it has been doing since the beginning of time.

As Jake was helping himself to a third piece of apple pie, as a finish to his noon repast, he said suddenly:

“I wonder what they ’ll give her to eat?”

Jane seemed to know intuitively the line



A Little Child shall lead Them

in which Jake's mind was running, for she replied promptly, while a glow of ardour surged into her face:

"Lavin' 'll be good to her."

"I hear tell they feed on rice mostly out there," added Jake, "an' that's thin livin' to my way o' thinkin'. Better write to Lavin' an' tell her to give the little gal 'nough to eat, even ef we hev to pay more fur her keeps."

"Lavin' 'll be good to her," repeated Jane; "she was always generous when we traded apples at school."

Early that afternoon Jake stopped his ploughing to go into the village. He decided to walk as the horses were tired. He had only gone a quarter of a mile when he met a neighbour.

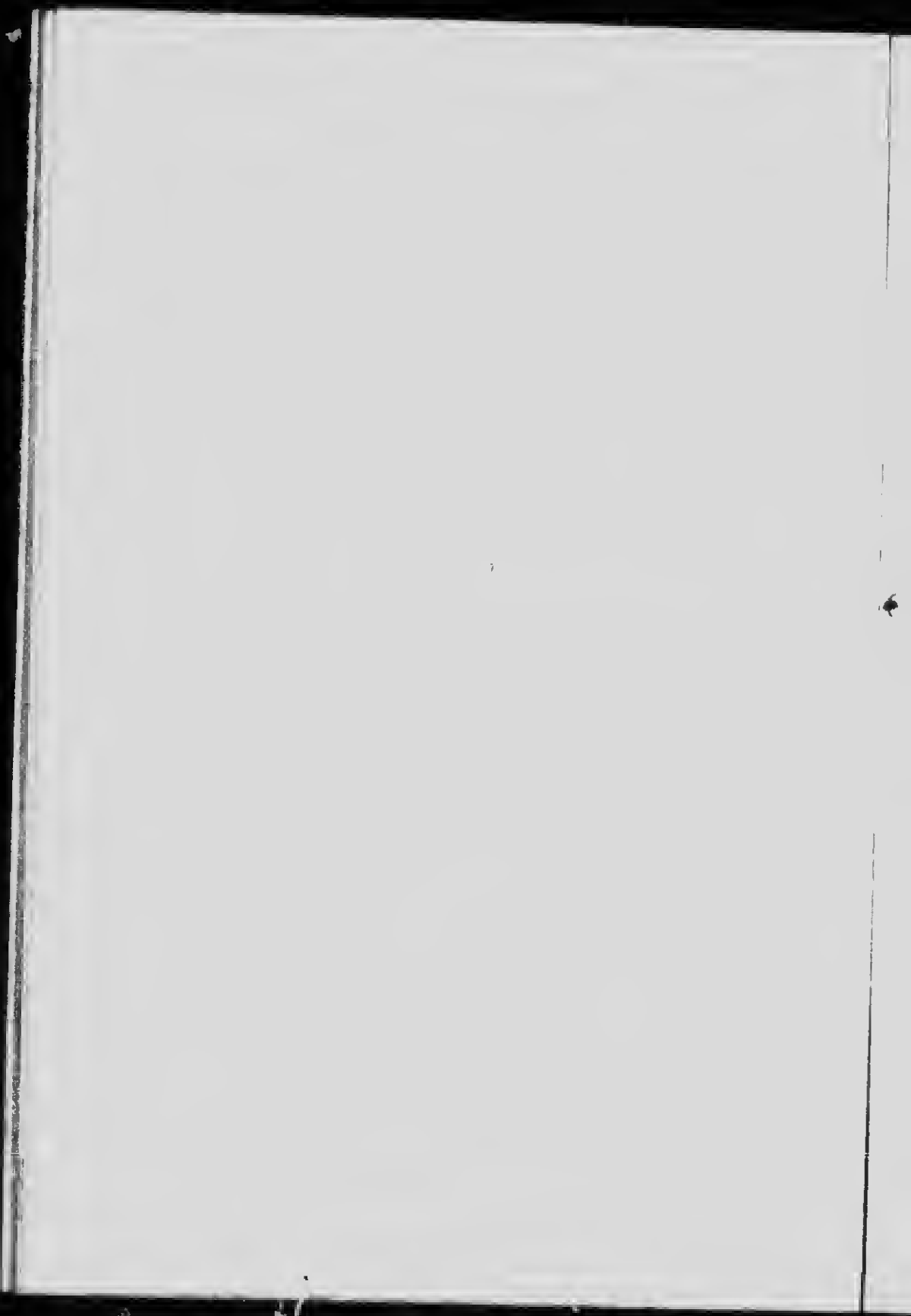
"Hello!" said the neighbour, coming to a standstill in front of Jake, "I hear tell you an' the missis — or is it on'y the missis? — hev adopted a little girl in furrin parts."

Jake was conscious of a feeling somewhat like jealousy that the little girl should be





He went off into some hidden corner and prayed.



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thought of as belonging only to his wife, and he decided then and there to share at least half with Jane all the money sent in future for her support.

Before he reached the village two more neighbours had asked him about the little girl in India.

"By gum!" said Jake, after the last questioner had left him, "it's mighty nice to own a little gal in Injy. Neighbours seem to think so, too!" He straightened his shoulders, stepped faster, and felt for the moment as if he owned the wealth of the Indies. "S'pose ef she wus 'round here now she 'd be a-calling me Pa, same 's our own Janey used to do afore she died."

Some tight feeling in his throat made Jake run his fingers around the neckband of his shirt. With this act a new thought was suggested, and gave Jake a voice:

"I'll be slivered if I don't think a man who owns a little gal out there in Injy oughtn't to wear a collar! Perhaps Janey'd want her pa to wear a collar. I'll buy,



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a paper one when I get to the village store, which will hold out till I git home. Jane hes three or four all ironed up an' put 'way in a drawer to hev ready 'gainst funerals. She wouldn't mind ef I put one o' them on every time I come to town."

When Jake reached the village more people asked about the little girl in India—the interest in her seemed to be general, and he felt so uplifted that he forgot what he came to the village for.

He turned a corner suddenly, and met the minister—Jane's minister, as he always mentally characterized him—for Jake himself did not belong to any church, or even attend one.

"Jacob," said the minister, cordially extending his hand, "I have heard all about your wife's interest in a little girl in India—"

"An' my interest," jealously stammered Jake, looking shamefaced.

"Of course, of course," returned the minister, feeling at the same time no small amount of surprise. "It is a wonderful priv-



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ilege, my friend," he continued, "the child no doubt, if she lives, shall grow up to be a great blessing to her own race. Eternity alone shall be able to reveal the great work you may be doing."

Jake stepped uneasily from one foot to the other, and wished he had on his collar before he met the minister.

Immediately they parted, Jake hurried to the village general shop. Entering almost timidly, he surveyed the stock arranged on the row of shelves to the right and left of him. He saw fish-hooks and corn-plasters, he saw shirts and ready-made "pants," calico by the dozen yards, and cod-fish, but he could see no paper collars.

After awhile the assistant, who had been in the back of the shop running treacle into a quart measure, noticed Jake's anxious scrutiny, and having filled his measure, he came forward and said grandly—he was imagining himself at that moment in a large city warehouse—"What's your order, Mr. Bender?"



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"You don't keep no such thing es a paper collar round these here diggin's?" said Jake, with an embarrassed air, casting his eyes to the top shelf.

"Yes," said the clerk; "what size do you wear?"

"Oh, any size 't all," said Jake, in some relief that the clerk had not expressed surprise at him for asking after such a thing. "Better put this round your neck, and find its size," said the clerk, handing him a tape-line.

When the collar had been selected, and, with the help of the clerk, put on, Jake walked out of the store holding his head very high, and feeling his neck very stiff.

"Ef I could meet the minister now," he soliloquised, "I'd be a credit to my country, an'— an' to — Janey."

He went round to the post-office for his weekly *Tribune*, then, to save his life, he could not think what had brought him to the village, and he started for home.

As he walked along the quiet country



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road his thoughts were busy, as thoughts always are, and this was about the line in which they ran:

"The neighbours are settin' great store by ownin' a little girl in Injy, an' it is somethin' out o' the common. No one else in these here parts, not even th^e parson, owns a girl out there; I'll be slivered ef I ain't got reason to be proud." He slapped his thigh, and made a mighty kick at a tall thistle which stood near his path.

A thunderstorm had been threatening all the afternoon, and before Jake reached home it came upon him. The lightning was very sharp and the rain poured. Jake sought shelter in a small belt of woods, drew a large bandanna handkerchief out of his pocket, and carefully tied it over his paper collar. While he was waiting there the lightning struck a tall pine tree not many yards from where he was standing. He looked on the death-smitten tree, and instantly he remembered reading that terrible storms prevailed in India. A great fear suddenly



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possessed him that little Janey might possibly be caught in one of those storms.

He remembered the minister had said "if she lives"; he did not like the sound of the words then, and they struck a chill to his heart now. Jake had not prayed for a long time. "What's the use?" he had argued with himself, "ef things is a-goin' to happen, they 'll happen anyhow," so he had given over praying. But now before he knew what he was doing he had whispered, "O God, take keer o' the little Janey out in Injy, an' don't let anythin' happen to hurt her!" When he thought about it he was rather surprised at himself, but now that he had once said it, he repeated several times as he tramped home in the mud, "O God, take keer o' the little Janey out in Injy!" It somehow gave him a grain of comfort, when he could not have a hand himself in shielding her from danger, to appeal to One whom he was taught in his childhood had a hand in managing the whole universe.



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When he reached home he felt reluctant to take off the paper collar, while at the same time he felt half ashamed to leave it on before Jane. Although it was very stiff, and chafed his neck sorely as he stooped and reached while feeding the stock and doing odd jobs about his barn and stable, somehow it made him think himself of more importance to have it on.

When he had done his work, and had come in from the barn, he found that Jane, in clearing up the house, had somehow mislaid his *Tribune*, which he had just brought home from the post-office—at least when he could not find it he blamed her for mislaying it. He was beginning to show much impatience and to talk very crossly, when suddenly it occurred to him, “Janey’d hate to hear me speak so to her ma.” The thought suddenly calmed him, and a few seconds later he found the newspaper behind the large eight-day clock where he had shoved it himself when he came home from the village.



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Jake was very pleased with himself then that he had not continued to find fault with Jane, and he sat down by a lighted tallow candle, and began to read aloud the news to her, while she sewed buttons on his waistcoat. He read on and on, skipping some of the words and mispronouncing others, until among the local items he stumbled on the following:

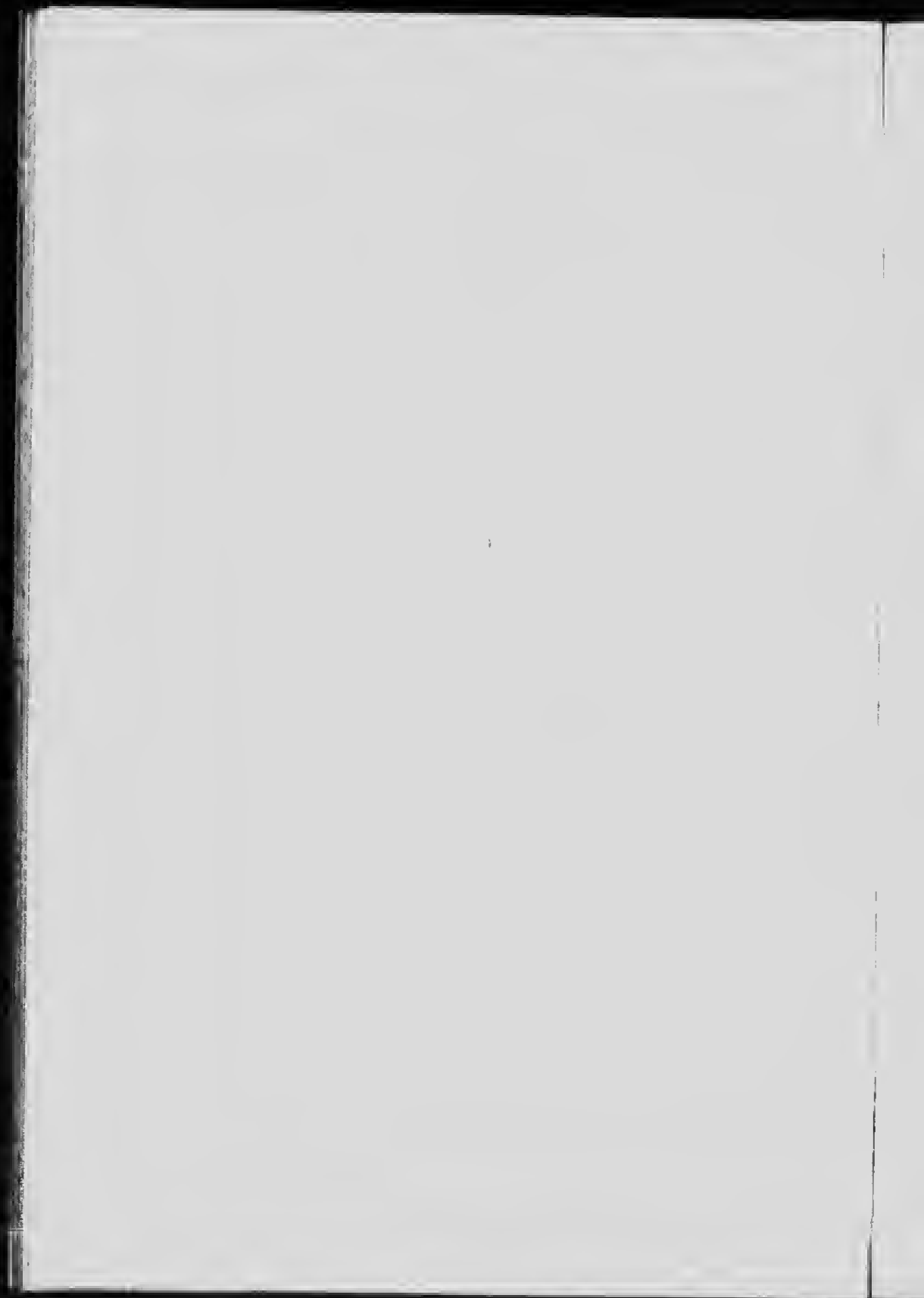
"Mr. and Mrs. Jacob Bender, of the Ninth Concession, have undertaken the support of a child, said to be a very handsome and promising little girl, in a mission school in India. It is a novel and praiseworthy undertaking, and the *Tribune* wishes them every success."

Jake was beside himself with delight; it was the first time he had seen his own name in the newspaper since he had read the notice of his marriage, which notice Jane had clipped out of the newspaper fifteen years before, and pasted on a fly-sheet of the family Bible. He read the article three or four times, looking more pleased each time.





Take hitched his horses to the plough,
and began his long tramp.



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"Did you ever see the like o' that? How did they ever hear about it? Ef that don't beat cucumbers?" he said to Jane, waiting for no replies.

"Did you notice they said 'handsome' an' 'promisin'?" That's right! Of course she's handsome an' promisin' or we wouldn't hev anythin' to do with her! Cut out this little piece, Jane, an' paste it in beside our weddin' notice."

There was a short silence, and then Jake said hesitatingly, eyeing a hole in the stove-pipe which ran along the ceiling of the room, "Would you mind, Jane, ef I wore one o' them b'iled collars every time I went to the village?"

"No," said Jane, arranging a brown horn button on her needle, feeling conscious that she would be proud of having her husband wear a collar.

That night, when Jake and Jane were retiring, Jane kneeled sedately by their bedside, and prayed long and earnestly. Jake glanced at her kneeling form, and knew,



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without being told, that she was praying for the little girl in India. For one moment he felt like kneeling down beside her, then, instead, he began pulling at his heavy sodden boots. "There are moments when, whatever be the attitude of the body, the soul is on its knees," and Jake, as he threw the boots one after the other into a corner, was again whispering, "O God, take keer o' the little Janey out in Injy."

The next morning Jake saw Jane carrying some heavy pails, and in a sort of shame-faced way he went up and took them out of her hands and carried them himself. Jane, with woman's intuitive power, said, in her secret heart, "It's the little gal in Injy is makin' him do this."

Jake Bender was not profane in the accepted sense of the word; in his early life his mother had so impressed on him the awful sin of taking God's name in vain that when he grew to manhood he somehow, with all his forgetting of many good things, could not forget that. He had some



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strong expletives, however, which he used where other men used oaths. When he was in the stable, re-harnessing his horses for the second day's ploughing, one of them crushed against him. Jake was quick-tempered, and his first impulse, which he obeyed, was to hurl a lot of expletives at the offending horse, and start to pound him over the head with his fists. Suddenly something seemed to arrest him.

"Janey'd hate to hear them — big words," he said to himself. Then he mildly asked his poor, bewildered horse to stand over, a request with which the horse immediately complied.

"I'll be slivered," said Jake, "ef I won't quit them words, they ain't fit fur the father of a handsome, promisin' girl. I'll be slive —. I s'pose that's one o' them," he gasped, and he never finished the sentence.

Some weeks after this Jane received another letter, in which it was stated that the little girl in India had scarlet fever. The writer had no idea how seriously her words



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would be taken when she said: "The attack threatens to be very severe." Jake and Jane were filled with the gravest forebodings, and slept and ate very little for days. It had become quite noticeable that Jake was wearing a collar when he went away from home, was dropping his rough exclamations—he had caught himself up on "I'll be sliv—" at least a dozen times—and altogether presenting a smoother exterior to Jane and the outside world. But this piece of sad news made his large weather-beaten face wear a truly pitiful expression. If Janey should die he felt that he could scarcely stand it. Jane's faith kept her from sinking into the depths of despair which threatened to swamp her husband. He simply could not endure it alone; sometimes he would talk out his fears to Jane, but more often he went off into some hidden corner and prayed over and over again, "O God, take keer o' the little Janey in Injy!"

Prayer was fast becoming a habit with Jake, but still he was restless, not having



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any assurance that Janey would get better. Without saying anything about it to Jane, he visited all the neighbours to inquire what they thought about little Janey's chances of recovery; but, alas! he found this a vain source from which to seek comfort. To be sure, one woman who felt sorry for him said, "Children often get over scarlet fever," but others shook their heads. Mrs. Perkins said if children did not die, they generally were left blind or deaf.

Winter had come, and Jake, having no longer much to do out of doors, spent most of his time longing for a letter from India. One day he and Jane felt almost certain that the time to expect one had come. He went to the post-office, but there was no letter. He was sure now that Janey had died, or was dying, and that was the reason Lavinia Millar did not write. He was almost overpowered; as soon as he reached home he went away into the hay-loft; he would have preferred going into the woods, but at that time the ground was covered by



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a foot of snow. Falling on his knees — it was years since Jake had assumed such an attitude—on the soft hay up near the rafters, he lifted his hands to heaven, and prayed as he had never prayed before. As he prayed a strange peace crept slowly over his stormy heart, indeed, the great wave of peace seemed to fill the cobweb-draped hay-loft, and Jake, remembering that the next day was Christmas Day, whispered in awed, breathless tones:

“It’s the little baby Christ coming to tell me Janey’ll get better.”

He rose from his knees and went into the house, wearing an expression of countenance such as Jane had never before seen him wear.

That evening a neighbour who had been into the post-office called and brought them the expected letter from India. The letter was written in Lavinia Millar’s clear, beautiful hand, and contained the joyful intelligence that Janey had fully recovered.



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"I knowed it afore the letter came!" said Jake joyfully.

Jane looked at him and said nothing.

The twenty-fifth of December had always been in Jake's mind simply a day of feasting and merry-making, roast turkey and plum-pudding had loomed prominently in the foreground of his conception of that day; he had heard of the birth of Christ as of something dim and mystic, and quite beyond his comprehension. But this Christmas Day he was up early brushing the horses and polishing the harness. When he came into breakfast he said earnestly, "Hurry up, Jane, an' wash your dishes; we must go into church to-day." Jane was not surprised; she had been reading Jake's heart better than he knew.

As Jake stood in the quiet village church, the soft winter light falling through the blue glass on the hymn-book, and joined the congregation in singing one of the old Christmas hymns, he knew, and Jane knew, that he was celebrating his first Christmas Day.

