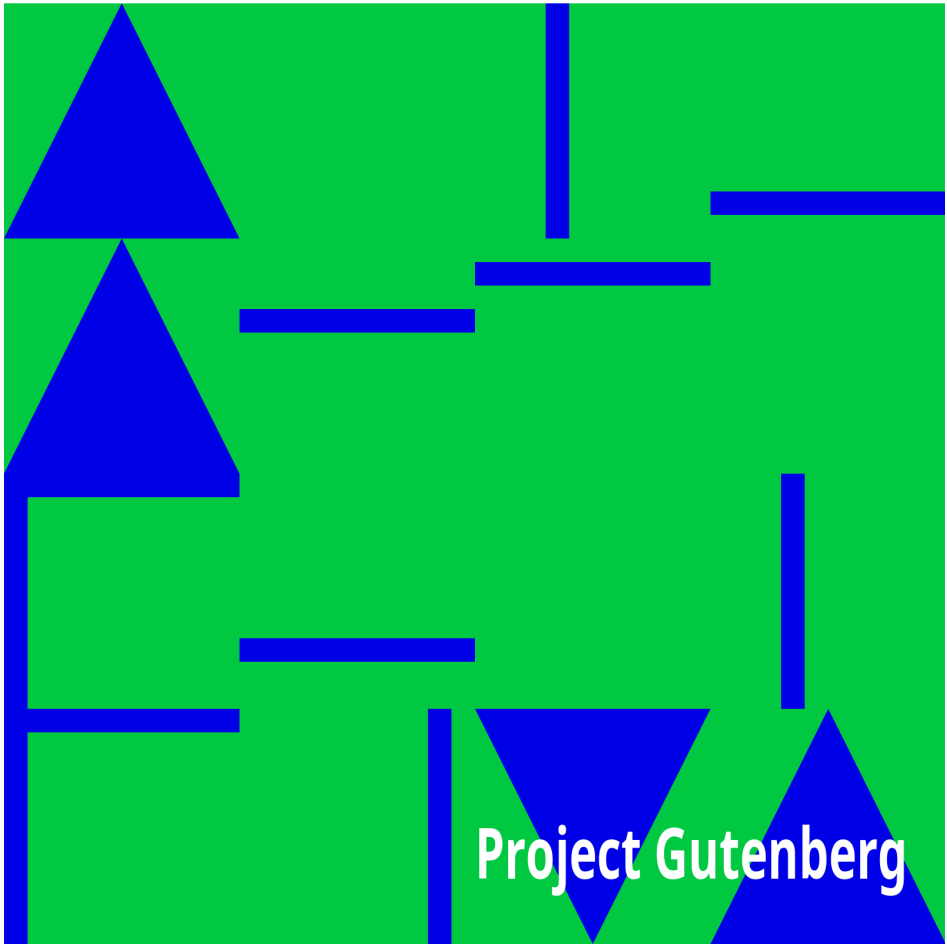
A Brace Of Boys

Fitz Hugh Ludlow



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*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK A BRACE OF BOYS ***

A BRACE OF BOYS

By Fitz Hugh Ludlow

From “Little Brother,”

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I am a bachelor uncle. That, as a mere fact, might happen to anybody; but I am a bachelor uncle by internal fitness. I am one essentially, just as I am an individual of the Caucasian division of the human race; and if, through untoward circumstances—which Heaven forbid—I should lose my present position, I shouldn't be surprised if you saw me out in the “Herald” under “Situations Wanted—Males.” Thanks to a marrying tendency in the rest of my family, I have now little need to advertise, all the business being thrown into my way which a single member of my profession can attend to. I suppose you won't agree with me; but, do you know, sometimes I think it's better than having children of one's own? People tell me that I'd feel very differently if I did have any. Perhaps so, but then, too, I might be unwise with them; I might bother them into mischief by trying to keep them out. I might be avaricious of them—might be tempted to lock them up in my own stingy old nursery-chest instead of paying them out to meet the bills of humanity and keep the Lord's business moving. I might forget, when I had spent my life in fining their gold and polishing their graven-work, that they were still vessels for the Master's use—I only the Butler—the sweetness and the spirit with which they brimmed all belonging to His lips who tasted bitterness for me. Then, if seeking to drain another's wine, I raised the chalice to my lips and found it gall, or felt it steal into my old veins to poison the heart and paralyze the hand which had kept it from the Master, what further good would there be for me in the world? Who doesn't know, in some friend's house, a closet containing that worst of

skeletons—the skeleton which, in becoming naked, grim and ghastly, tears its way through our own flesh and blood? To be an uncle is a different kind of thing. There you have nothing of the excitement of responsibility to shake your judgment That's what makes us bachelor uncles so much better judges of what's good for children and their fathers and mothers. We know that nobody will blame us if our nephews unjoint their knuckles or cut their fingers off; so we give them five-bladed knives and boxing gloves. This involves getting thanked at the time, which is pleasant; and if no catastrophe occurs, when they have grown stout and ingenious, with what calm satisfaction we hear people say, “See what a pretty windmill the child's whittled out with Uncle Ned's birthday present!” or, “That boy's grown an inch round the chest since you set him sparring!” Uncles never get stale. They don't come every day like parents and plain pudding; they're a sort of holiday relative with a plummy, Christmas flavor about them. Everybody hasn't got them; they are not so rare as the meteoric showers, but as occasional as a particularly fine day, and whenever they come to a house they're in the nature of a pleasant surprise.

I meander, like a desultory, placid river of an old bachelor as I am, through the flowery mead of several nurseries. I am detained by all the little roots that run down into me to drink happiness, but I linger longest among the children of my sister Lu.

Lu married Mr. Lovegrove. He is a merchant, retired, with a fortune amassed by the old-fashioned slow process of trade, and regards the mercantile life of the present day only as so much greed and gambling Christianly baptized. For the ten years elapsing since he sold out of Lovegrove, Cashdown & Co., he has devoted himself to his family and a revival of letters, taking up again the Latin and Greek which he had not looked at since his college days, until he dismissed teas and silks to adorn a suburban villa with a spectacle of a prime Christian parent and Pagan scholar. Lu is my favorite sister; Lovegrove an unusually good article of brother-in-law; and I can not say that any of my nieces and nephews interest me more than their two children, Daniel and Billy, who

are more unlike than words can paint them. They are far apart in point of years; Daniel is twenty-two, Billy eleven. I was reminded of this fact the other day by Billy, as he stood between my legs, scowling at his book of sums.

"'A boy has 85 turnips and gives his sister 80'—pretty present for a girl, isn't it?" said Billy with an air of supreme contempt. "Could *you* stand such stuff—say?"

I put on my instructive face and answered: "Well, my dear Billy, you know that arithmetic is necessary to you if you mean to be an industrious man and succeed in business. Suppose your parents were to lose all their property, what would become of them without a little son who could make money and keep accounts?"

"Oh!" said Billy with surprise. "Hasn't father got enough stamps to see him through?"

"He has now, I hope; but people don't always keep them. Suppose they should go by some accident when your father was too old to make any more stamps for himself?"

"You haven't thought of brother Daniel—"

True; for nobody ever had, in connection with the active employments of life.

"No, Billy," I replied; "I forgot him; but then, you know, Daniel is more of a student than a business man, and—"

"Oh, Uncle Teddy! you don't think I meant he'd support them? I meant I'd have to take care of father and mother and of all when they'd all got to be old people together. Just think! I'm eleven and he's twenty-two; so he is just twice as old as I am. How old are you?"

"Forty, Billy, last August."

"Well, you aren't so awful old, and when I get to be as old as you Daniel will be eighty. Seth Kendall's grandfather isn't more than that, and he has to be fed with a spoon, and a nurse puts him to bed and wheels him around in a chair like a baby. That takes the stamps, *I* bet! Well, I'll tell you how I'll keep my accounts; I'll have a stick like

Robinson Crusoe, and every time I make a toadskin I'll gouge a piece out of one side of the stick, and every time I spend one I'll gouge a piece out of the other."

"Spend a what!" said the gentle and astonished voice of my sister Lu, who, unperceived, had slipped into the room.

"A toadskin, ma," replied Billy, shutting up Colburn with a farewell glance of contempt.

"Dear! dear! where does the boy learn such horrid words?"

"Why, ma! don't you know what a toadskin is? Here's one," said Billy, drawing a dingy five-cent stamp from his pocket. "And don't I wish I had lots of 'em!"

"Oh!" sighed his mother, "to think I should have a child so addicted to slang! How I wish he were like Daniel!"

"Well, mother," replied Billy, "if you wanted two boys just alike you'd oughter had twins. There ain't any use of my trying to be like Daniel now when he's got eleven years the start. Whoop! There's a dog-fight! Hear 'em! It's Joe Casey's dog—I know his bark!"

With these words my nephew snatched his Glengarry bonnet from the table and bolted downstairs to see the fun.

"What will become of him?" said Lu hopelessly; "he has no taste for anything but rough play; and then such language as he uses! Why *isn't* he like Daniel?"

"I suppose because his Maker never repeats himself. Even twins often possess strongly marked individualities. Don't you think it would be a good plan to learn Billy better before you try to teach him? If you do you'll make something as good of him as Daniel; though it will be rather different from that model."

"Remember, Ned, that you never did like Daniel as well as you do Billy. But we all know the proverb about old maids' daughters and old bachelors' sons. I wish you had Billy for a month—then you'd see."

“I'm not sure that I'd do any better than you. I might err as much in other directions. But I'd try to start right by acknowledging that he was a new problem, not to be worked without finding the value of 'x' in his particular instance. The formula which solves one boy will no more solve the next one than the rule of three will solve a question in calculus—or, to rise into your sphere, than the receipt for one-two-three-four cake conduct you to a successful issue through plum pudding—”

I excel in metaphysical discussions, and was about giving further elaboration of my favorite idea when the door burst open. Master Billy came tumbling in with a torn jacket, a bloody nose, the trace of a few tears in his eyes, and the mangiest of cur dogs in his hands.

“Oh my! my!! my!!!” exclaimed his mother.

“Don't you get scared, ma!” cried Billy, smiling a stern smile of triumph; “I smashed the nose off him! He won't sass me again for nothing *this* while! Uncle Teddy, d'ye know it wasn't a dogfight after all? There was that nasty good-for-nothing Joe Casey 'n' Patsy Grogan and a lot of bad boys from Mackerelville; and they'd caught this poor little ki-oodle and tied a tin pot to his tail and were trying to set Joe's dog on him, though he's ten times littler—”

“You naughty, naughty boy! How did you suppose your mother'd feel to see you playing with those ragamuffins?”

“Yes, I *played* 'em! I polished 'em—that's the play I did! Says I, 'Put down that poor little pup! Ain't you ashamed of yourself, Patsy Grogan?' 'I guess you don't know who I am,' says he. That's the way they always say, Uncle Teddy, to make a fellow think they're some awful great fighters. So says I again, 'Well, you put down that dog or I'll show you who *I* am'; and when he held on, I let him have it. Then he dropped the pup, and as I stooped to pick it up he gave me one on the bugle.”

“*Bugle!* Oh! oh! oh!”

“The rest pitched in to help him; but I grabbed the pup, and while I was trying to give as good as I got—only a fellow can't do it well with only one hand, Uncle Teddy—up came a policeman and the whole crowd ran away. So I got the dog safe, and here he is!”

With that Billy set down his “ki-oodle,” bade farewell to every fear, and wiped his bleeding nose. The unhappy beast slunk back between the legs of his preserver and followed him out of the room, as Lu, with an expression of maternal despair, bore him away for the correction of his dilapidated raiment and depraved associations. I felt such sincere pride in this young Mazzini of the dog-nation that I was vexed at Lu for bestowing on him reproof instead of congratulation; but she was not the only conservative who fails to see a good cause and a heroic heart under a bloody nose and torn jacket. I resolved that if Billy was punished, he should have his recompense before long in an extra holiday at Barnum's or the Hippotheatron.

You already have some idea of my other nephew if you have noticed that none of us, not even that habitual disrespecter of dignities, Billy, ever called him Dan. It would have seemed as incongruous as to call Billy William.

He was one of those youths who never give their parents a moment's uneasiness; who never have to have their wills broken, and never forget to put on their rubbers or take an umbrella. In boyhood he was intended for a missionary. Had it been possible for him to go to Greenland's icy mountains without catching cold, or to India's coral strand without getting bilious, his parents would have carried out their pleasing dream of contributing him to the world's evangelization. Lu and Mr. Lovegrove had no doubt that he would have been greatly blessed if he could have stood it. They brought him up in the most careful manner, and I can not recollect the time when he was not president, secretary, or something in some society of small yet good children. He was not only an exemplar to whom all Lu's friends pointed their own nursery as the little boy who could say most hymns and sit stillest in church, but he was a reproof even unto his elders. One Sunday afternoon, in the Connecticut village where my brother-in-law used to spend his summers, when half of the congregation was slumbering under the combined effect of the heat, a lunch of cheese and apples, and the sermon, my nephew, then aged five, sat bolt upright in the pew, winkless as a demon hearing a new candidate

suspected of shakiness on a “a card'nal p'int,” and mortified almost to death poor old Mrs. Pringle, who, compassionating his years, had handed him a sprig of her “meetin'-seed” over the back of the seat, by saying, in a loud and stern voice: “I don't eat things in church.”

I should have spanked the boy when I got home, but Lu, with tears in her eyes, quoted something about the mouths of babes and sucklings.

Both she and his father always encouraged old manners in him. I think they took such pride in raising a peculiarly pale boy as a gardener does in getting a nice blanch on his celery, and, so long as he was not absolutely sick, the graver he was, the better. He was a sensitive plant, a violet by a mossy stone, and all that sort of thing. But when in his tenth year he had the measles, and was narrowly carried through, Lu got a scare about him. During his convalescence, reading aloud a life of Henry Martyn to amuse him, she found in it a picture of that young apostle preaching to a crowd of Hindus without any boots on. An American mother's association of such behavior with croup and ipecac was too strong to be counteracted by known climatic facts; and from that hour, as she never had before, Lu realized that being a missionary might involve going to carry the gospel to the heathen in your stocking-feet.

When they had decided that such a life would not do for him, his training had almost entirely unfitted him for any other active calling. The strict propriety with which he had been brought up had resulted in weak lungs, poor digestion, sluggish circulation, and torpid liver. Moreover, he was troubled with the painfulest bashfulness which ever made a mother think her child too ethereal, or a dispassionate outsider regard him as too flimsy, for this world. These were weights enough to carry, even if he had not labored under that heaviest of all, a well-stored mind.

No misnomer that last to any one who has ever frequented the Atlantic Docks, or seen storage in any large port of entry. How does a storehouse look? It's a vast, dark, cold chamber-dust an inch deep on the floor, cobwebs festooning the girders—and piled from floor to ceiling on the principle of getting the largest bulk into the least room, with barrels,

boxes, bales, baskets, chests, crates, and carboys—merchandise of all description, from the rough, raw material to the most exquisite *choses de luxe*. The inmost layers are inextricable without pulling down the outer ones. If you want a particular case of broadcloth you must clear yourself an alleyway through a hundred tierces of hams, and last week's entry of clayed sugars is inaccessible without tumbling on your head a mountain of Yankee notions.

In my nephew's unfortunate youth such storage as this had minds. As long as the crown of his brain's arch was not crushed in by some intellectual Furman Street diaster, those stevedores of learning, the schoolmasters, kept on unloading the Rome and Athens lighters into a boy's crowded skull, and breaking out of the hold of that colossal old junk, The Pure Mathematics, all the formulas which could be crowded into the interstices between his Latin and Greek. At the time I introduce Billy, both Lu and her husband were much changed. They had gained a great deal in width of view and liberality of judgment. They read Dickens and Thackeray with avidity; went now and then to the opera; proposed to let Billy take a quarter at Dod-worth's; had statues in their parlor without any thought of shame at their lack of petticoats, and did multitudes of things which, in their early married life, they would have considered shocking. Part of this change was due to the great increase of travel, the wonderful progress in art and refinement which has enlarged this generation's thought and corrected its ignorant opinions; infusing cosmopolitanism into our manners by a revolution so gradual that its subjects were a new people before their combativeness became alarmed, yet so rapid that a man of thirty can scarcely believe his birthday, and questions whether he has not added his life up wrong by a century or so when he compares his own boy-Hood with that of the present day. But a good deal of the transformation resulted from the means of gratifying elegant tastes, the comfort, luxury, and culture which came with Lovegrove's retirement on a fortune. They had mellowed on the sunny shelves of prosperity, like every good thing which has an astringent skin when it is green. They would greatly have liked to see Daniel shine in society. Of his erudition they were proud, even to worship. The young

man never had any business, and his father never seemed to think of giving him any; knowing, as Billy would say, that he had stamps enough to "see him through." If Daniel liked, his father would have endowed a professorship in some college and have given him the chair; but that would have taken him away from his own room and the family physician.

Daniel knew how much his parents wished him to make a figure in the world, and only blamed himself for his failure, magnanimously forgetting that they had crushed out the faculties which enable a man to mint the small change of everyday society in the exclusive cultivation of such as fit him for smelting its ponderous ingots. With that merciful blindness which alone prevents all our lives from becoming a horror of nerveless reproach, his parents were equally unaware of their share in the harm done him, when they ascribed to his delicate organization the fact that, at an age when love runs riot in all healthy blood, he could not see a balmoral without his cheeks rivaling the most vivid stripe in it. They flattered themselves that he would outgrow his bashfulness, but Daniel had no such hope, and frequently confided in me that he thought he should never marry at all.

About two hours after Billy's disappearance under his mother's convoy, the defender of the oppressed returned to my room bearing the dog under his arm. His cheeks shone with washing like a pair of waxy Spitzenbergs, and other indignities had been offered him to the extent of the brush and comb. He also had a whole jacket on.

"Well, Billy," said I, "what are you going to do with your dog?"

"I don't know what I'm going to do. I've a great mind to be a bad, disobedient boy with him, and *not* have my days long in the land which the Lord my God giveth me."

"O Billy!"

"I can't help it. They won't be long if I don't mind ma, she says; and she wants me to be mean, and put Crab out in the street to have Patsy catch him and tie coffee-pots to his tail. I—I—I—"

Here my small nephew dug his fist into his eye and looked down.

I told Billy to stop where he was, and went to intercede with Lu. She was persuaded to entertain the angels of magnanimity and heroism in the disguise of a young fighting character, and to accept my surety for the behavior of his dog. Billy and I also obtained permission to go out together and be gone the entire afternoon.

We put Crab on a comfortable bed of rags in an old shoe box, and then strolled, hand-in-hand, across that most delightful of New York breathing-places, Stuyvesant Square.

“Uncle Teddy!” exclaimed Billy with ardor; “I wish I could do something to show you how much I think of you for being so good to me. I don't know how. Would it make you happy if I was to learn a hymn for you—a smashing big hymn—six verses, long metre, and no grumbling?”

“No, Billy; you make me happy enough just by being a good boy.”

“Oh, Uncle Teddy!” replied Billy decidedly, “I'm afraid I can't do it. I've tried so often and I always make such an awful mess of it.”

“Perhaps you get discouraged too easily—”

“Well, if a savings-bank won't do it, there ain't any chance for a boy. I got father to get me a savings-bank once and began being good just as hard as ever I could for three cents a day. Every night I got 'em, I put 'em in reg'lar, and sometimes I'd keep being good three whole days running. That made a sight of money, I tell you. Then I'd do something, ma said, to kick my pail of milk over, and those nights I didn't get anything. I used to put in most of my marble and candy money, too.”

“What were you going to do with it?”

“It was for an Objeck, Uncle Teddy. That's a kind of Indian, you know, that eats people and wants the gospel. That's what pa says, anyway; I didn't ever see one.”

“Well, didn't that make you happy—to help the poor little heathen children?”

“Oh, does it, Uncle Teddy? They never got a cent of it. One time I was good so long I got scared. I was afraid I'd never want to fly my kite on a roof again or go anywhere where I oughtn't, or have any fun. I couldn't

see any use of going and saving my money to send out to the Objecks if it was going to make good boys of 'em. It was awful hard for me to have to be a good boy, and it must be worse for them 'cause they ain't used to it. So when there wasn't anybody upstairs I went and shook a lot of pennies out of my chimney and bought ever so much taffy and marbles and popcorn. Was that awful mean, Uncle Teddy?"

The question involved such complications that I hesitated. Before I could decide what to answer Billy continued:

"Ma said it was robbing the heathen, and didn't I get it? I thought if it was robbing I'd have a cop after me."

"What's a 'cop'?"

"That's what the boys call a policeman, Uncle Teddy; and then I should be taken away and put in an awful black place underground, like Johnny Wilson when he broke Mrs. Perkins's window. I was scared, I tell you. But I didn't get anything worse than a whipping, and having my savings bank taken away from me with all that was left in it, I haven't tried to be good since, much."

We now got into a Broadway stage going down, and being unable, on account of the noise, to converse further upon those spiritual conflicts of Billy's which so much interested me, we amused ourselves with looking out until just as we reached the Astor House, when he asked me where we were going.

"Where do you guess?" said I.

He cast a glance through the front window and his face became irradiated. Oh, there's nothing like the simple, cheap luxury of pleasing a child, to create sunshine enough for the chasing away of the bluest adult devils!

"We're going to Barnum's," said Billy, involuntarily clapping his hands.

So we were; and, much as stuck-up people pretend to look down at the place, I frequently am. Not only so, but I always see that class largely represented there when I do go. To be sure, they always make believe

that they only come to amuse the children, or because their country cousins visit them; and never fail to refer to the vulgar set one finds there, and the fact of the animals smelling like anything but Jockey Club; yet I notice that after they've been in the hall three minutes they're as much interested as any of the people they come to poh-poh, and only put on the high-bred air when they fancy some of their own class are looking at them. I boldly acknowledge that I go because I like it. I am especially happy, to be sure, if I have a child along to go into ecstasies and give me a chance, by asking questions, for the exhibition of that fund of information which is said to be one of my chief charms in the social circle, and on several occasions has led that portion of the public immediately about the Happy Family into the erroneous impression that I was Mr. Barnum explaining his five hundred thousand curiosities. On the present occasion we found several visitors of the better class in the room devoted to the Aquarium. Among these was a young lady, apparently about nineteen, in a tight-fitting basque of black velvet, which showed her elegant figure to fine advantage, a skirt of garnet silk, looped up over a pretty Balmoral, and the daintiest imaginable pair of kid walking-boots. Her height was a trifle over the medium, her eyes, a soft expressive brown, shaded by masses of hair which exactly matched their color, and, at that rat-and-miceless day, fell in such graceful abandon as to show at once that nature was the only maid who crimped their waves into them. Her complexion was rosy with health and sympathetic enjoyment; her mouth was faultless, her nose sensitive, her manners full of refinement, and her voice musical as a wood-robin's, when she spoke to the little boy of six at her side, to whom she was revealing the palace of the great show-king. Billy and I were flattening our noses against the abode of the balloon-fish and determining whether he looked most like a horse-chestnut burr or a ripe cucumber, when his eyes and my own simultaneously fell on the child and lady. In a moment, to Billy the balloon-fish was as though he had not been.

“That's a pretty little boy!” said I. And then I asked Billy one of those senseless routine questions which must make children look at us, regarding the scope of our intellects very much as we look at Bushmen.

“How would you like to play with him?”

“Him!” replied Billy scornfully, “that's his first pair of boots; see him pull up his little breeches to show the red tops to them! But, crackey! isn't *she* a smasher!”

After that we visited the wax figures and the sleepy snakes, the learned seal, and the glass-blowers. Whenever we passed from one room into another, Billy could be caught looking anxiously to see if the pretty girl and child were coming, too.

Time fails me to describe how Billy was lost in the astonishment at the Lightning Calculator—wanted me to beg the secret of that prodigy for him to do his sums by—finally thought he had discovered it, and resolved to keep his arm whirling all the time he studied his arithmetic lesson the next morning. Equally inadequate is it to relate in full how he became so confused among the waxworks that he pinched the solemnest showman's legs to see if he was real, and perplexed the beautiful Circassian to the verge of idiocy by telling her he had read all about the way they sold girls like her in his geography.

We had reached the stairs to that subterranean chamber in which the Behemoth of Holy Writ was wallowing about without a thought of the dignity which one expects from a canonical character. Billy had always languished upon his memories of this diverting beast, and I stood ready to see him plunge headlong the moment that he read the signboard at the head of the stairs. When he paused and hesitated there, not seeming at all anxious to go down till he saw the pretty girl and the child following after—a sudden intuition flashed across me. Could it be possible that Billy was caught in that vortex which whirled me down at ten years—a little boy's first love?

We were lingering about the elliptical basin, and catching occasional glimpses between bubbles of a vivified hair trunk of monstrous compass, whose knobby lid opened at one end and showed a red morocco lining, when the pretty girl, in leaning over to point out the rising monster, dropped into the water one of her little gloves, and the swash made by the hippopotamus drifted it close under Billy's hand. Either in play, or as

a mere coincidence, the animal followed it. The other children about the tank screamed and started back as he bumped his nose against the side; but Billy manfully bent down and grabbed the glove, not an inch from one of his big tusks, then marched around the tank and presented it to the lady with a chivalry of manner in one of his years quite surprising.

“That's a real nice boy—you said so, didn't you, Lottie? And I wish he'd come and play with me,” said the little fellow by the young lady's side, as Billy turned away, gracefully thanked, to come back to me with his cheeks roseate with blushes.

As he heard this, Billy sidled along the edge of the tank for a moment, then faced about and said:

“P'rhaps I will some day—where do you live?”

“I live on East Seventeenth Street with papa—and Lottie stays there too now—she's my cousin: where d'you live?”

“Oh, I live close by—right on that big green square where I guess the nurse takes you once in a while,” said Billy patronizingly. Then, looking up pluckily at the young lady, he added, “I never saw you out there.”

“No, Jimmy's papa has only been in his new house a little while, and I've just come to visit him.”

“Say, will you come and play with me some time?” chimed in the inextinguishable Jimmy. “I've got a cooking stove—for real fire—and blocks and a ball with a string.”

Billy, who belonged to a club for the practice of the great American game, and was what A. Ward would call the most superior battest among the I. G. B. B. C, or “Infant Giants,” smiled from that altitude upon Jimmy, but promised to go and play with him the next Saturday afternoon.

Late that evening, after we had got home and dined, as I sat in my room over Pickwick, with a sedative cigar, a gentle knock at the door told of Daniel. I called “Come in!” and, entering with a slow dejected air, he sat down by my fire. For ten minutes he remained silent, though

occasionally looking up as if about to speak, then dropping his head again to ponder on the coals. Finally I laid down Dickens, and spoke myself.

“You don't seem well to-night, Daniel?”

“I don't feel very well, uncle.”

“What's the matter, my boy?”

“Oh—ah—I don't know. That is, I wish I knew how to tell you.”

I studied him for a few moments with kindly curiosity, then answered: “Perhaps I can save you the trouble by cross-examining it out of you. Let's try the method of elimination. I know that you are not harassed by any economical considerations, for you've all the money you want; and I know that ambition doesn't trouble you, for your tastes are scholarly. This narrows down the investigation of your symptoms—listlessness, general dejection, and all—to three causes: Dyspepsia, religious conflicts, love. Now is your digestion awry?”

“No, sir, good as usual. I'm not melancholy on religion and—”

“You don't tell me you're in love?”

“Well—yes—I suppose that's about it, Uncle Teddy.”

I took a long breath to recover from my astonishment at this unimaginable revelation, then said:

“Is your feeling returned?”

“I really don't know, uncle. I don't believe it is. I don't see how it can be. I never did anything to make her love me. What is there in me to love! I've borne enough for her—that is, nothing that could do her any good—though I've endured on her account, I may say, anguish. So, look at it any way you please, I neither am, do, nor suffer anything that can get a woman's love.”

“Oh, you man of learning! Even in love you tote your grammar along with you, and arrange a divine passion under the active, passive, and neuter!”

Daniel smiled faintly.

“You've no idea, Uncle Teddy, that you are twitting on facts; but you hit the truth there; indeed you do. If she were a Greek or Latin woman I could talk Anacreon or Horace to her. If women only understood the philosophy of the flowers as well as they do the poetry—”

“Thank God they don't, Daniel!” sighed out I devoutly.

“Never mind—in that case I could entrance her for hours, talking about the grounds of difference between Linnaeus and Jussieu. Women like the star business, they say—and I could tell her where all the constellations are; but sure as I tried to get off any sentiment about them, I'd break down and make myself ridiculous. But what earthly chance would the greatest philosopher that ever lived have with the woman he loved, if he depended for her favor on his ability to analyze her bouquet or tell her when she might look out for the next occultation of Orion? I can't talk bread and butter. I can't do anything that makes a man even tolerable to a woman!”

“I hope you don't mean that nothing but bread and butter talk is tolerable to a woman!”

“No; but it's necessary to some extent—at any rate the ability is—in order to succeed in society; and it is in society men first meet and strike women. And Uncle Teddy! I'm such a fish out of water in society!—such a dreadful floundering fish! When I see her dancing gracefully as a swan swims, and feel that fellows, like little Jack Mankyn, 'who don't know twelve times,' can dance to her perfect admiration; when I see that she likes ease of manners—and all sorts of men without an idea in their heads have that—while I turn all colors when I speak to her, and am clumsy; and abrupt, and abstracted, and bad at repartee—Uncle Teddy! sometimes (though it seems so ungrateful to father and mother, who have spent such pains for me)—sometimes, do you know, it seems to me as if I'd exchange all I've ever learned for the power to make a good appearance before her!”

“Daniel, my boy, it's too much a matter of reflection with you! A woman is not to be taken by laying plans. If you love the lady (whose name I don't ask you because I know you'll tell me as soon as you think

best), you must seek her companionship until you're well enough acquainted with her to have her regard you as something different from the men whom she meets merely in society, and judge your qualities by another standard than that she applies to them. If she's a sensible girl (and God forbid you should marry her otherwise!) she knows that people can't always be dancing, or holding fans, or running after orange ice. If she's a girl capable of appreciating your best points (and woe to you if you marry a girl who can't!), she'll find them out upon closer intimacy, and once found they'll a hundred times outweigh all brilliant advantages kept in the showcase of fellows who have nothing on the shelves. When this comes about, you will pop the question unconsciously, and, to adopt Milton, she will drop into your lap, 'gathered—not harshly plucked.'"

"I know that's sensible, Uncle Teddy, and I'll try. Let me tell you the sacredest of secrets—regularly every day of my life I send her a little poem fastened round the prettiest bouquet I can get at Hanfts."

"Does she know who sends them?"

"She can't have any idea. The German boy that takes them knows not a word of English except her name and address. You'll forgive me, Uncle, for not mentioning her name yet? You see she may despise or hate me some day when she knows who it is that has paid her these attentions; and then I'd like to be able to feel that at least I've never hurt her by any absurd connection with myself."

"Forgive you? Nonsense! The feeling does your heart infinite credit, though a little counsel with your head would show you that your only absurdity is self-depreciation."

Daniel bade me good-night. As I put out my cigar and went to bed, my mind reverted to the dauntless little Hotspur who had spent the afternoon with me, and reversed his mother's wish, thinking: "Oh, if Daniel were more like Billy!"

It was always Billy's habit to come and sit with me while I smoked my after-breakfast cigar, but the next morning did not see him enter my room till St. George's hands pointed to a quarter of nine.

“Well, Billy Boy Blue, come blow your horn; what haystack have you been under till this time of day? We shan't have a minute to look over our spelling together, and I know a boy is going in for promotion next week. Have you had your breakfast and taken care of Crab?”

“Yes, sir, but I didn't feel like getting up this morning.”

“Are you sick?”

“No-o-o—it isn't that; but you'll laugh at me if I tell you.”

“Indeed, I won't, Billy!”

“Well”—his voice dropped to a whisper and he stole close to my side —“I had such a nice dream about *her* just the last thing before the bell rang; and when I woke up I felt so queer—so kinder good and kinder bad —and I wanted to see her so much, that if I hadn't been a big boy, I believe I should have blubbered. I tried ever so much to go to sleep and see her again; but the more I tried the more I couldn't. After all, I had to get up without it, though I didn't want any breakfast, and only ate two buckwheat cakes, when I always eat six, you know, Uncle Teddy. Can you keep a secret?”

“Yes, dear, so you couldn't get it out of me if you were to shake me upside down like a savings-bank.”

“Oh, ain't you mean! That was when I was small I did that. I'll tell you the secret, though—that girl and I are going to get married. I mean to ask her the first chance I get. Oh, isn't she a smasher!”

“My dear Billy, shan't you wait a little while to see if you always like her as well as you do now? Then, too, you'll be older.”

“I'm old enough, Uncle Teddy, and I love her dearly. I am as old as the Kings of France used to be when they got married—I read it in Abbott's history. But there's the clock striking nine! I must run or I shall get a tardy mark and perhaps she'll want to see my certificate some time.”

So saying, he kissed me on the cheek and set off for school as fast as his legs could carry him. Oh, Love, omnivorous Love, that sparest neither the dotard leaning on his staff nor the boy with pantaloons

buttoning on his jacket—omnipotent Love, that, after parents and teachers have failed, in one instant can make Billy try to become a good boy!

With both of my nephews hopelessly enamored and myself the confidant of both, I had my hands full. Daniel was generally dejected and distrustful; Billy buoyant and jolly. Daniel found it impossible to overcome his bashfulness, was spontaneous only in sonnets, brilliant only in bouquets. Billy was always coming to me with pleasant news, told in his slangy New York boy vernacular. One day he would exclaim: “Oh, I'm getting on prime! I got such a smile off her this morning as I went by the window!” Another day he wanted counsel how to get a valentine to her—because it was too big to shove in a lamppost and she might catch him if he left it on the steps, rang the bell, and ran away. Daniel wrote his own valentine, but, despite its originality, that document gave him no such comfort as Billy got from twenty-five cents' worth of embossed paper, pink cupids, and doggerel.

Finally Billy announced to me that he had been to play with Jimmy and got introduced to his girl.

Shortly after this Lu gave what they call “a little company”—not a party, but a reunion of forty or fifty people with whom the family were well acquainted, several of them living in our immediate neighborhood. There was a goodly proportion of young fold and there was to be dancing; but the music was limited to a single piano played by the German exile usual on such occasions, and the refreshments did not rise to the splendor of a costly supper. This kind of compromise with fashionable gayety was wisely deemed by Lu the best method of introducing Daniel to the *beau monde*—a push given the timid eaglet by the maternal bird, with a soft tree-top between him and the vast expanse of society. How simple was the entertainment may be inferred from the fact that Lu felt somewhat discomposed when she got a note from one of her guests asking leave to bring along her niece who was making her a few weeks' visit. As a matter of course, however, she returned answer to bring the young lady and welcome.

Daniel's dressing-room having been given up to the gentlemen, I invited him to make his toilet in mine, and indeed, wanting him to create a favorable impression, became his valet *pro tem.*, tying his cravat and teasing the divinity-student look out of his side hair. My little dandy Billy came in for another share of attention, and when I managed to button his jacket for him so that it showed his shirt studs “like a man's,” Count d'Orsay could not have felt a greater sense of his sufficiency for all the demands of the gay world.

When we reached the parlor we found Pa and Ma Lovegrove already receiving. About a score of guests had arrived. Most of them were old married couples which, after paying their devoirs, fell in two like unriveted scissors, the gentlemen finding a new pivot in pa and the ladies in ma, where they mildly opened and shut upon such questions as severally concerned them, such as “The way gold closed” and “How the children were.”

Besides the old married people there were several old young men, of distinctly hopeless and unmarried aspect, who, having nothing in common with the other class, nor sufficient energy of character to band themselves for mutual protection, hovered dejectedly about the arch pillars or appeared to be considering whether on the whole it would not be feasible and best to sit down on the centre-table. These subsisted upon such crumbs of comfort as Lu could get an occasional chance to throw them by rapid sorties of conversation—became galvanically active the moment they were punched up and fell flat the moment the punching was remitted. I did all I could for them, but, having Daniel in tow, dared not sail too near the edge of the Doldrums, lest he should drop into sympathetic stagnation and be taken preternaturally bashful with his sails all aback, just as I wanted to carry him gallantly into action with some clipper-built cruiser of a nice young lady. Finally, Lu bethought herself of that last plank of drowning conversationalists, the photograph album. All the dejected young men made for it at once, some reaching it just as they were about to sink for the last time, but all getting a grip on it somehow and staying there, in company with other people's

babies whom they didn't know, and celebrities whom they knew to death, until, one by one, they either stranded upon a motherly dowager by the Fire-Place Shoals, or were rescued from the Sofa Reef by some gallant wrecker of a strong-minded young lady, with a view of taking salvage out of them in the German.

Besides these, were already arrived a dozen nice little boys and girls who had been invited to make it pleasant for Billy. I had to remind him of the fact that they were his guests, for, in comparison with the queen of his affections, they were in danger of being despised by him as small fry.

The younger ladies and gentlemen—those who had fascinations to disport or were in the habit of disporting what they considered such—were probably still at home consulting the looking-glass until that oracle should announce the auspicious moment for their setting forth.

Daniel was in conversation with a perfect godsend of a girl who understood Latin and had taken up Greek.

Billy was taking a moment's vacation from his boys and girls, busy with “Old Maid” in the extension room, and whispering, with his hand in mine, “Oh, don't I wish *she* were here!” when a fresh invoice of ladies, just unpacked from the dressing-room, in all the airy elegance of evening costume, floated through the door. I heard Lu say:

“Ah, Mrs. Rumbullion! happy to see your niece, too. How do you do, Miss Pilgrim?”

At this last word Billy jumped as if he had been shot, and the bevy of ladies opening about Sister Lu disclosed the charming face and figure of the pretty girl we had met at Barnum's.

Billy's countenance rapidly changed from astonishment to joy.

“Isn't that splendid, Uncle Teddy? Just as I was wishing it! It's just like the fairy books!” and, rushing up to the party of new-comers, “My dear Lottie!” cried he, “if I had only known you were coming I'd have come after you!”

As he caught her by the hand, I was pleased to see her soft eyes brighten with gratification at his enthusiasm, but my sister Lu looked on, naturally with astonishment in every feature.

“Why Billy!” said she, “you ought not to call a strange young lady '*Lottie?* Miss Pilgrim, you must excuse my wild boy—”

“And you must excuse my mother, Lottie,” said Billy, affectionately patting Miss Pilgrim's rose kid, “for calling you a strange young lady. You are not strange at all—you're just as nice a girl as there is.”

“There are no excuses necessary,” said Miss Pilgrim, with a bewitching little laugh. “Billy and I know each other intimately well, Mrs. Lovegrove, and I confess that when I heard the lady Aunt had been invited to visit was his mother, I felt all the more willing to infringe on etiquette this evening, by coming where I had no previous introduction.”

“Don't you care!” said Billy encouragingly, “I'll introduce you to every one of our family; I know 'em if you don't.”

At this moment I came up as Billy's reinforcement, and, fearing lest, in his enthusiasm, he might forget the canon of society which introduced a gentleman to a lady, not a lady to him, I ventured to suggest it delicately by saying, “Billy, will you grant me the favor of a presentation to Miss Pilgrim?”

“In a minute, Uncle Teddy,” answered Billy, considerably lowering his voice. “The older people first;” and after this reproof I was left to wait in the cold until he had gone through the ceremony of introducing to the young lady his father and his mother.

Billy, who had now assumed entire guardianship of Miss Pilgrim, with an air of great dignity intrusted her to my care, and left us promenading while he went in search of Daniel. I, myself, looked in vain for that youth, whom I had not seen since the entrance of the last comers. Miss Pilgrim and I found a congenial common ground in Billy, whom she spoke of as one of the most delightfully original boys she had ever met; in fact, altogether the most fascinating young gentleman she had seen in New York society. You may be sure it wasn't Billy's left ear which burned when I made my responses.

In five minutes he reappeared to announce, in a tone of disappointment, that he could find Daniel nowhere. He could see a light through his keyhole, but the door was locked and he could get no admittance. Just then Lu came up to present a certain—no, an uncertain—young man of the fleet stranded on parlor furniture earlier in the evening. To Lu's great astonishment, Miss Pilgrim asked Billy's permission to leave him. It was granted with all the courtesy of a *preux chevalier*, on the condition, readily assented to, that she should dance one Lancers with him during the evening.

“Dear me!” exclaimed Lu, after Billy had gone back like a superior being, to assist at the childish amusement of his contemporaries, “would anybody ever suppose that was our Billy?”

“I should, my dear sister,” said I, with proud satisfaction; “but you remember I always was just to Billy.”

Left free, I went myself to hunt up Daniel. I found his door locked and a light showing through the keyhole, as Billy had said. I made no attempt to enter by knocking; but, going to my room and opening the window next his, I leaned out as far as I could, shoved up his sash with my cane and pushed aside his curtain. Such an unusual method of communication could not fail to bring him to the window with a rush. When he saw me, he trembled like a guilty thing, his countenance fell, and, no longer able to feign absence, he unlocked his door and let me enter by the normal mode.

“Why, Daniel Lovegrove, my nephew, what does this mean; are you sick?”

“Uncle Edward, I am not sick, and this means that I am a fool. Even a little boy like Billy puts me to shame. I feel humbled to the very dust. I wish I'd been a missionary and got massacred by savages. Oh, that I'd been permitted to wear damp stockings in childhood, or that my mother hadn't carried me through the measles! If it weren't wrong to take my life into my own hands, I'd open that window and—and—sit in a draught this very evening! Oh, yes! I'm just that bitter! Oh! Oh! Oh!”

And Daniel paced the floor with strides of frenzy.

“Well, my dear fellow, let's look at the matter calmly for a minute. What brought on this sudden attack? You seemed doing well enough the first ten minutes after we came down. I was only out of your sight long enough to speak to the Rumbullion party who had just come in, and when I turned you were gone. Now you are in this fearful condition. What is there in the Rumbullions to start you off on such a bender of bash-fulness as this which I here behold?”

“Rumbullions indeed!” said Daniel. “A hundred Rumbillions could not make me feel as I do; but *she* can shake me into a whirlwind with her little finger, and *she* came with the Rumbullions!”

“What! D'you—Miss Pilgrim?”

“Miss Pilgrim!”

I labored with Daniel for ten minutes, using every encouragement and argument I could think of, and finally threatened him that I would bring up the whole Rumbullion party, Miss Pilgrim included, telling them that he invited them to look at his conchological cabinet, unless he instantly shook the ice out of his manner and accompanied me downstairs. This dreadful menace had the desired effect. He knew that I would not scruple to fulfil it; and at the same time that it made him surrender it also provoked him with me to a degree which gave his eyes and cheeks as fine a glow as I could have wished for the purpose of a favorable impression. The stimulus of wrath was good for him, and there was little tremor in his knees when he descended the stairs. Well-a-day—so Daniel and Billy were rivals!

The latter gentleman met us at the foot of the staircase.

“Oh, there you are, Daniel!” said he, cheerily. “I was just going to look for you and Uncle Teddy. We wanted you for the dances. We have had the Lancers twice and three round dances; and I danced the second Lancers with Lottie. Now we're going to play some games to amuse the children, you know,” he added loftily with the adult gesture of pointing his thumb over his shoulder at the extension room. “Lottie's going to

play, too, so will you and Daniel, won't you, uncle? Oh, here comes Lottie now! This is my brother, Miss Pilgrim; let me introduce him to you. I'm sure you'll like him. There's nothing he don't know."

Miss Pilgrim had just come to the newel post of the staircase, and when she looked into Daniel's face blushed like the red, red rose, losing her self-possession perceptibly more than Daniel.

The courage of weak warriors and timid gallants mounts as the opposite party's falls, and Daniel made out to say, in a firm tone, that it was long since he had enjoyed the pleasure of meeting Miss Pilgrim.

"Not since Mrs. Cramcroud's last sociable, I think," replied Miss Pilgrim, her cheeks and eyes still playing the telltale.

"Oho! so you don't want any introduction," exclaimed Master Billy. I didn't know you knew each other, Lottie."

"I have met Mr. Lovegrove in society. Shall we go and join in the plays?"

"To be sure we shall!" cried Billy. "You needn't mind; all the grown people are going to."

On entering the parlor we found it as he had said. The guests being almost all well acquainted with each other, at the solicitation of jolly little Mrs. Bloomingal, Sister Lu had consented to make a pleasant Christmas kind of time of it, in which everybody was permitted to be young again and romp with the rompiest. We played Blindman's-buff till we tired of that—Daniel, to Lu's great delight, coming out splendidly as Blindman, and evincing such "cheek" in the style he hunted down and caught the ladies, as satisfied me that nothing but his sight stood in the way of his making an audacious figure in the world. Then a pretty little girl, Tilly Turtelle, who seemed quite a premature flirt, proposed "Doorkeeper"—a suggestion accepted with great *éclat* by all the children, several grown people assenting.

To Billy—quite as much on account of his shining prominence in the executive faculties of his character, as host—was committed the duty of counting out the first person to be sent into the hall. There were so many

of us that “Aina-maina-mona-mike” would not go quite around; but with that promptness of expedient which belongs to genius, Billy instantly added on “Intery-mintery-cutery-corn,” and the last word of the cabalistic formula fell upon me, Edward Balbus. I disappeared into the entry amid peals of happy laughter from both old and young, calling, when the door opened again to ask me who I wanted, for the pretty, lisping flirt who had proposed the game. After giving me a coquettish little chirrup of a kiss and telling me my beard scratched, she bade me, on my return, send out to her “Mither Billy Lovegrove.” I obeyed her; my youngest nephew retired and, after a couple of seconds, during which Tilly undoubtedly got what she proposed the game for, Billy being a great favorite with the little girls, she came back pouting and blushing, to announce that he wanted Miss Pilgrim. The young lady showed no mock modesty, but arose at once and laughingly went out to her youthful admirer, who, as I afterward learned, embraced her ardently and told her he loved her better than any girl in the world. As he turned to go back she told him that he might send to her one of her juvenile cousins, Reginald Rumbullion. Now, whether because on this youthful Rumbullion's account Billy had suffered the pangs of that most terrible passion, jealousy, or from his natural enjoyment of playing practical jokes destructive of all dignity in his elders, Billy marched into the room, and, having shut the door behind him, paralyzed the crowded parlor by an announcement that Mr. Daniel Lovegrove was wanted.

I was standing at his side and could feel him' tremble—see him turn pale.

“Dear me!” he whispered, in a choking voice; “can she mean me?”

“Of course she does,” said I. “Who else? Do you hesitate? Surely you can't refuse such an invitation from a lady.”

“No; I suppose not,” said he, mechanically. And, amid much laughter from the disinterested, while the faces of Mrs. Rumbullion and his mother were spectacles of crimson astonishment, he made his exit from the room. Never in my life did I so much long for that instrument,

described by Mr. Samuel Weller—a pair of patent, double-million magnifying microscopes of hex-tery power, to see through a deal door. Instead of this I had to learn what happened only by report.

Lottie Pilgrim was standing under the hall burners with her elbow on the newel-post, more vividly charming than he had ever seen her before, at Mrs. Crajncroud's sociable or elsewhere. When startled by the apparition of Mr. Daniel Lovegrove instead of little Rumbullion whom she was expecting—she had no time to exclaim or hide her mounting color, none at all to explain to her own mind the mistake that had occurred, before his arm was clasped around her waist and his lips so closely pressed to hers that, through her soft, thick hair she could feel the throbbing of his temples. As for Daniel, he seemed in a walking dream, from which he waked to see Miss Pilgrim looking into his eyes with utter, though not incensed stupefaction,—to stammer, “Forgive me! do forgive me! I thought you were in, earnest.”

“So I was,” she said tremulously, as soon as she could catch her voice, “in sending for my cousin Reginald.”

“Oh dear, what shall I do! Believe me, I was told you wanted me. Let me go and explain it to mother. She will tell the rest—I couldn't do it—I'd die of mortification. Oh, that wretched boy Billy!”

On the principle already mentioned, his agitation reassured her.

“Don't try to explain it now—it may get Billy a scolding. Are there any but intimate family friends here this evening?”

“No—I believe—no—I'm sure,” replied Daniel, collecting his faculties.

“Then I don't mind what they think. Perhaps they'll suppose we've known each other long; but we'll arrange it by and by. They'll think the more of it the longer we stay out here—hear them laugh! I must run back now. I'll send you somebody.”

A round of juvenile applause greeted her as she hurried into the parlor, and a number of grown people smiled quite musically. Her quick woman's wit told her how to retaliate and divide the embarrassment of the occasion. As she passed me she said in an undertone:

“Answer quick! Who is that fat lady on the sofa who laughed so loud?”

“Mrs. Cromwell Craggs,” said I, quietly.

Miss Pilgrim made a satirically low courtesy and spoke in a modest but distinct voice:

“I really must be excused for asking. I'm a stranger, you know; but is there such a lady here as Mrs. Craggs—Mrs. *Cromwell* Craggs? For, if so, the present doorkeeper would like to see Mrs. Cromwell Craggs.”

Then came the turn of the fat lady to be laughed at; but out she had to go and get kissed like the rest of us. Before the close of the evening Billy was made as jealous as his parents and I were surprised to see Daniel in close conversation with Miss Pilgrim among the geraniums and fuchsias of the conservatory.

“A regular flirtation,” said Billy, somewhat indignantly. The conclusion which they arrived at was that after all no great harm had been done, and that the dear little fellow ought not to be peached on for his fun. If I had known at the time how easily they forgave him, I should have suspected that the offence Billy had led Daniel into committing was not unlikely to be repeated on the offender's own account; but so much as I could see showed me that the ice was broken.

Billy's jealousy did not outlast the party. He became more and more interested in “his girl,” and often went in the afternoon, after getting out of school, ostensibly to play with Jimmy. Daniel's calls, according to adult etiquette, made in the evening, did not interfere with my younger nephew's, and as neither knew that the other, after his fashion, was his most uncompromising rival, my position, as the confidant of both, was one of extreme delicacy. But the matter was more speedily settled than I expected.

Billy came to me one day and told me that he intended to get married immediately; that he was going to speak to his Lottie that very afternoon. He was prepared to meet every objection. He had asked his father if he might, and his father said yes, if he had money enough to support a wife—and Billy thought he had. He'd saved up all the money his Uncle Jim and Aunt Jane had sent him for Christmas; and besides, if

he were once married, his father wouldn't see him want for stamps, he knew. Then, too, he was going to leave school and be a merchant next year—and I'd help him now and then, if he got hard up, wouldn't I? If he were driven to it, he could be a good boy again, and save up the money to buy Lottie presents with, instead of giving it to nasty old “Objecks.” He was so much older than when he had the savings-bank that he ought to have at least ten cents a day now for being good; didn't I think that was fair? As to his age, if Lottie loved him, he didn't care—anyway he would be lots bigger than she was before long—and he'd often heard his ma say she approved of early marriages; hers and pa's was one. So he ran off up Livingston Place, the most undaunted lover that ever put an extra shine on his proposal boots, or spent half an hour on the bow of his popping necktie.

Shortly after, Daniel went into the street. Not meaning to call upon his *inamorata*, but drawn by the irresistible fascination of passing her house, he strolled in the direction that Billy had gone. As he came to the Rumbullions', something suddenly bade him enter—a whim he called it, but not his own—one of the whims of destiny which are always gratified.

“Yes, sir,” said the servant, “Miss Pilgrim is in, I will call her.”

His step was always light. He passed noiselessly into the front parlor and sat down among the heavy brocatelle curtains which shadowed the recess of one of the windows. He supposed Miss Pilgrim to be upstairs, and while his heart fluttered, expecting her footfall at the particular door, he heard an earnest boyish voice in the inside room. Looking from his concealment he beheld Miss Pilgrim on a sofa in the pier and sitting by her side, with her hand clasped in his, his brother Billy. Before he could avoid it, he became aware that Billy was unconsciously but eagerly forestalling him.

“Now, Lottie, my dear Lottie! I wish you would! I'll do everything I can to make you happy. If you'll only marry me, I'll be good all the time! Come now! Say yes! Father's got a really nice place over the stable—they only use it for a tool room now; we could clear it out and have it scrubbed and go to housekeeping right away. Ma'd let us have all her old

set of chinai I've got a silver mug Uncle Teddy gave me and a napkin ring and four spoons. As soon as I make my money I'll buy a nice carriage and horses, any color you want 'em. Oh, my darling, darling Lottie, I do love you so much and we could have such a splendid time! Do say yes, Lottie—please, *do* please!"

Miss Pilgrim looked at the earnest little suitor with a face in which tender interest and compassion quite overrode any sense of the whimsicality of the situation which might lurk there. Daniel's astonishment at the sight was so great that he realized the entire state of the case before he could recover himself sufficiently to rise and go into the back room.

Billy jumped up and looked defiantly at the intruder. Miss Pilgrim blushed violently, but turned away her head to avoid the exhibition of a still more convulsing emotion than embarrassment.

"I must beg your pardon, Miss Pilgrim—and yours, too, Billy," began Daniel in a hesitating way, hardly knowing how to treat the posture in which he found things, "but—you see—the fact is the servant said she'd go to announce me—and really when I came in, I hadn't any idea you were here, or Billy either."

"Then," said Billy, moderating the defiant attitude, "you actually weren't dodging around and trying to find out what Lottie and I were about on the sly? Well, I'll believe you. I'm sure you couldn't be as mean as that, when I'm the only brother you have got, that always brings you oranges when you're sick, and never plays ball on the stairs when you've got a headache. Now, then, I'll trust you, I've been asking Lottie to marry me, and I want you to help me. Ask her if she won't, Daniel—see if she won't do it for you!"

Miss Pilgrim had been trying to find words, but her face was too much for her and she was obliged to seek retirement in her handkerchief. As she drew it from her pocket, a well-worn piece of paper followed it and fell upon the floor. Billy picked it up before she noticed it, and was about to hand it to her, when his jealous eye fell upon a withered rosebud sewed to its margin. As he looked at it, with his little brows knit into a

precocious sternness, he recognized his brother's handwriting immediately beneath the flower. It was one of the daily anonymous sonnets, of which Daniel had told me, and the bud a relic of the bouquet accompanying it. Still Daniel was silent. What else could he be?

“Very well, very well, Master Daniel!” exclaimed Billy, in a voice trembling with grief and indignation, “there's good enough reason why you won't speak a word for me. You want her yourself—here it is in your own writing. No wonder you won't tell Lottie to be my wife, when you're trying to take her away from me. Oh, Lottie, dear Lottie! I love you just as much as he does, though I don't know everything and can't write you poetry like it was out of the Fifth Reader! Daniel, how could you go and write to my Lottie this way: 'My churner'—no, it isn't churner, it's charmer,—'let me call thee mine'?”

Forgetting the sacredness of private MS. in that of private grief, he would have gone on, with a pause here and there for certainty of spelling, to the conclusion of the poem, had not Lottie sprung up, with her imploring face suffused by her discovery, for the first time, of the identity of her secret lover and the escape of his sonnet from her pocket. It was too late! There he stood before her unmistakably proved, and herself unmistakably proving in what estimation she held his verses and bouquets.

“Oh Billy, dear Billy! If you do love me, don't do so!” So exclaiming, she held out her hand, and Billy put the MS. into it with all the dignity of a wounded spirit.

“Mr. Lovegrove,” said Miss Pilgrim, “I don't know what to say.”

“I feel very much that way myself,” said Daniel.

“*I* don't,” said Billy, now in command of his voice. “I'll tell you what it is: perhaps Daniel didn't know how much I wanted you, Lottie—and perhaps he wants you 'most as bad as I do. But whatever way it is, I want you to choose between us, fair and square, and no dodging. Come now! You can take just whichever one of us you please, and the other won't lay up any grudge, though I know if that's me, or like me, he'll feel awful.

You can have till to-morrow morning to make up your mind between me and Daniel, and if he won't say anything about it to pa and ma till then, I won't. Good-by, *dear* Lottie!"

He drew her face down to his, kissed her almost affectionately and then marched out of the door, feeling, as he afterward told me, as if he had blackened his boots all for nothing. Ah me! my dear Billy, how many times we do that in this world! Of what followed when Daniel and Miss Pilgrim were left alone, I have never had full details.

But I do know that the young lady obeyed Billy and made her choice. Six months after that both my nephews stood up in Mrs. Rumbullion's parlor to take their several shares in a ceremony in which Miss Pilgrim was the central figure when it began, and Mrs. Daniel Lovegrove when it concluded. Time and elasticity of boyhood had so closed the sharp but evanescent wound in Billy's heart that he could stand the trial of being groomsman where he had wanted to be groom—more especially since he was supported through the emergency by a little sister of Lottie's who promised to be wondrously like her by the time Billy could stand up in the more enviable capacity. Neither Daniel nor Lottie would listen to any objection to such a groomsman on the score of his extreme youth, for, as they said, Billy had been quite as instrumental in bringing them together as any agent, save the Divinity shaping the ends and tying all the knots in which there are heartstrings concerned, as well as white ribbon.

Since then Lu has stopped wishing that Billy were like Daniel, for she says that if he had been, there would never have been any Mrs. Daniel Lovegrove in the world.

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK A BRACE OF BOYS ***

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