



# Bodleian Libraries

UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD

This book is part of the collection held by the Bodleian Libraries and scanned by Google, Inc. for the Google Books Library Project.

For more information see:

<http://www.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/dbooks>



This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 2.0 UK: England & Wales (CC BY-NC-SA 2.0) licence.



2533 e. 1956





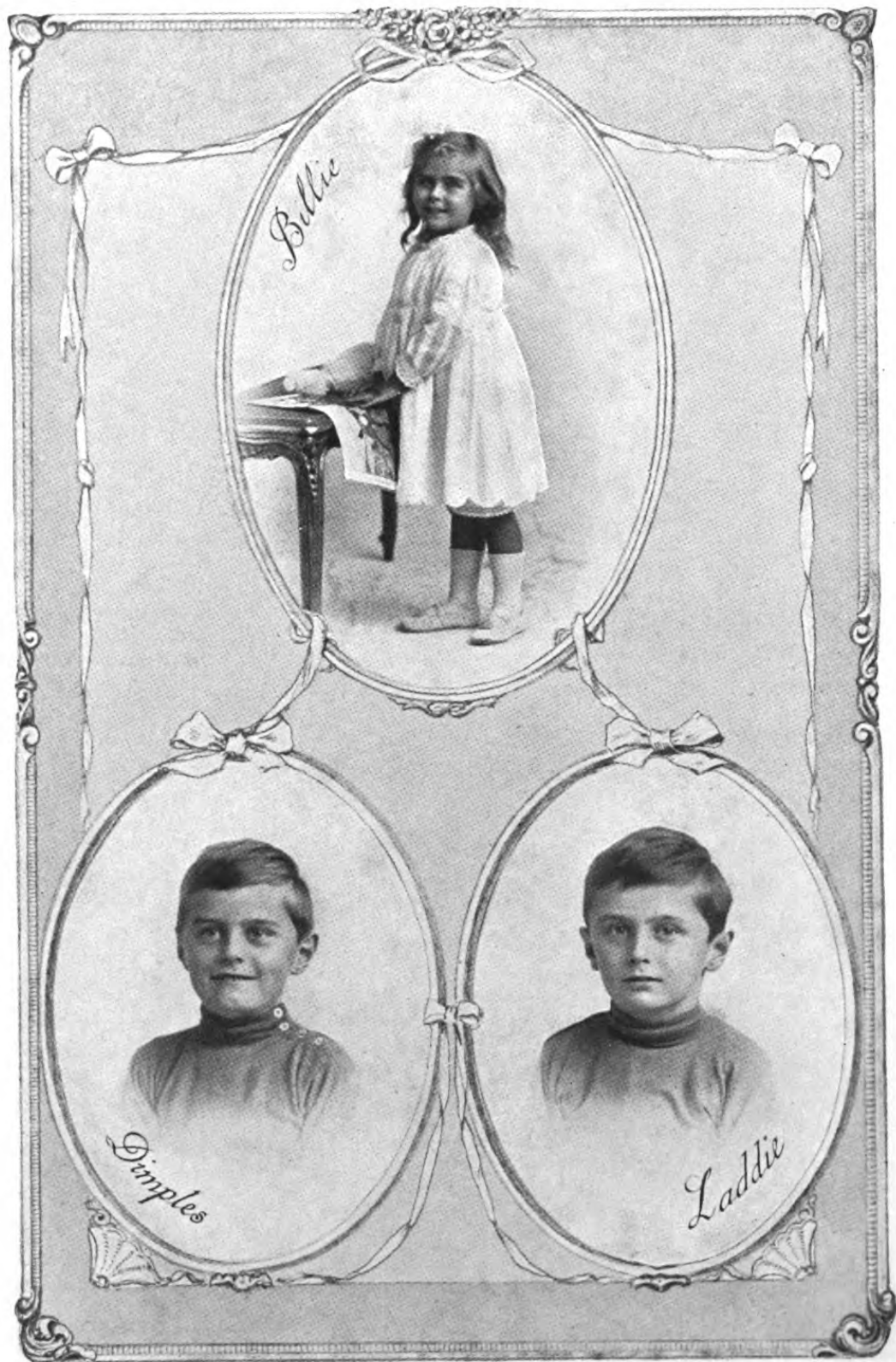


**THREE OF THEM**

**A REMINISCENCE**

**ALL RIGHTS RESERVED**





*Billie*

*Dimples*

*Laddie*



# THREE OF THEM

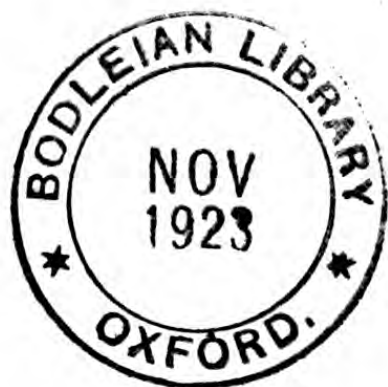
A REMINISCENCE

BY ARTHUR CONAN DOYLE

WITH A FRONTISPIECE

LONDON  
JOHN MURRAY, ALBEMARLE STREET, W.

1923



*Printed in Great Britain by  
Hazell, Watson & Viney Ltd., London and Aylesbury.*



## INTRODUCTION

THIS little book is an attempt to catch some of the fleeting phases of childhood, those phases which are so infinitely subtle and have so rare a charm. No imagination can invent them, and the only task for the chronicler is that of selection. There is hardly a phrase in these dialogues which is not drawn from life. If it be objected that there is nothing remarkable here, and that any three children present the same general characteristics, the writer would not dispute the justice of the criticism, but would rather infer that he had succeeded in his attempt to produce an unexaggerated account of the most beautiful period of human development where thought is frank and fresh. I am prepared to believe that England is full of even such children, and that those who love them may welcome an attempt to picture them as they are.

Several of these sketches appeared some years ago at the conclusion of a volume named

“Danger.” With the addition of the new matter, they now form a homogeneous little record.

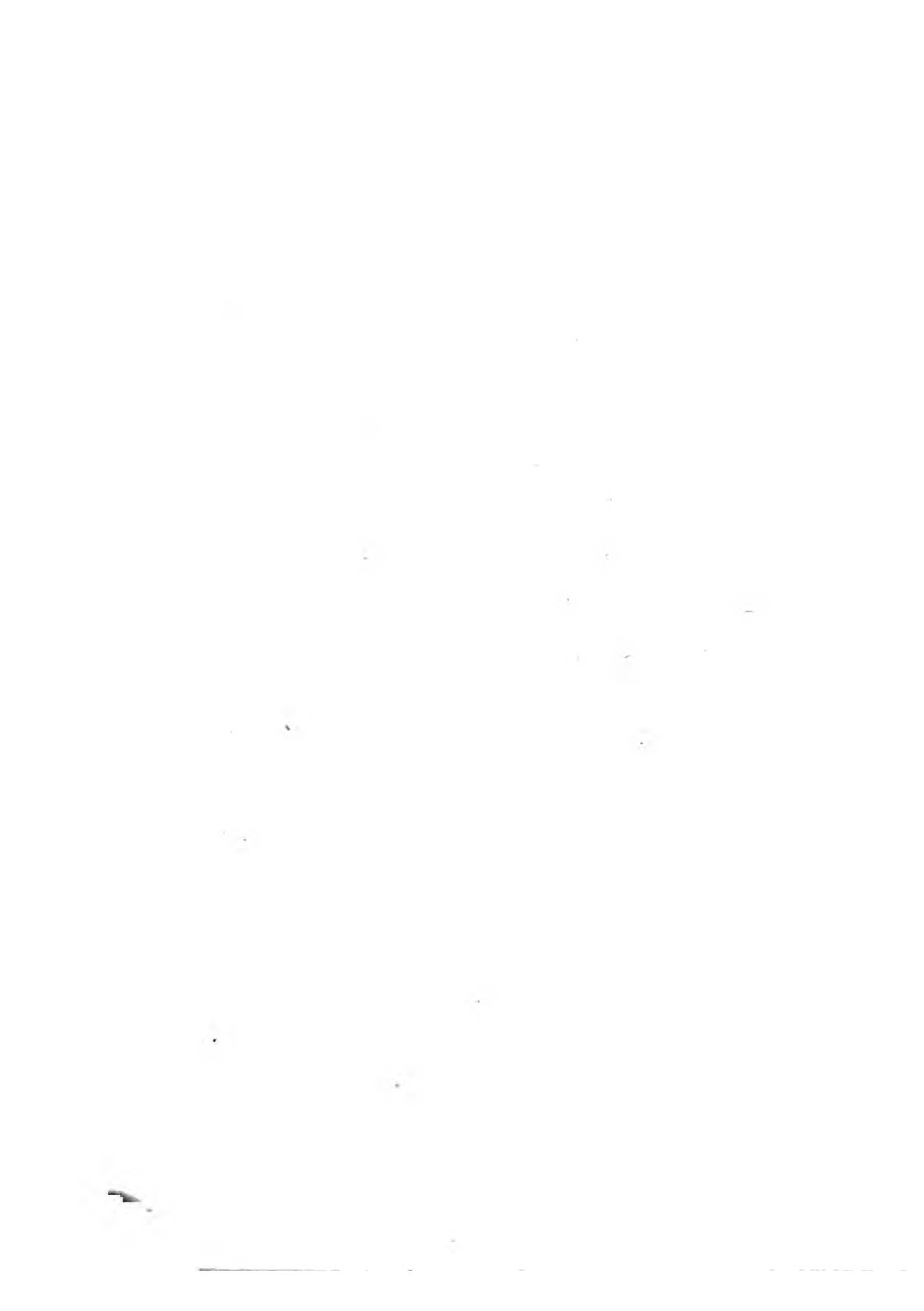
ARTHUR CONAN DOYLE.

CROWBOROUGH,  
*August 22, 1923.*

## CONTENTS

	PAGE
INTRODUCTION . . . .	V
I. A CHAT ABOUT CHILDREN, SNAKES, AND ZEBUS . . . .	I
II. ABOUT CRICKET . . . .	16
III. SPECULATIONS . . . .	29
IV. THE LEATHER-SKIN TRIBE . .	40
V. ABOUT NAUGHTINESS AND FROGS AND HISTORICAL PICTURES . .	53
VI. BILLY BONES . . . .	65
VII. THE FORBIDDEN SUBJECT . .	82





# THREE OF THEM

## I

### A CHAT ABOUT CHILDREN, SNAKES, AND ZEBUS

THESE little sketches are called "Three of Them," but there are really five, on and off the stage. There is Daddy, a lumpish person with some gift for playing Indian games when he is in the mood. He is then known as "The Great Chief of the Leather-skin Tribe." Then there is my Lady Sunshine. These are the grown-ups, and don't really count. There remain the three, who need some differentiating upon paper, though their little spirits are as different in reality as spirits could be—all beautiful and all quite different. The eldest is a boy of eight at the start whom we shall call "Laddie." If ever there was a little cavalier sent down ready-made it is he. His soul is the most gallant, unselfish, innocent thing that ever God sent out to get an extra polish upon

### THREE OF THEM

earth. It dwells in a tall, slight, well-formed body, graceful and agile, with a head and face as clean-cut as if an old Greek cameo had come to life, and a pair of innocent and yet wise grey eyes that read and win the heart. He is shy and does not shine before strangers. I have said that he is unselfish and brave. When there is the usual wrangle about going to bed, up he gets in his sedate way. "I will go first," says he, and off he goes, the eldest, that the others may have the few extra minutes while he is in his bath. As to his courage, he is absolutely lion-hearted where he can help or defend anyone else. On one occasion Daddy lost his temper with Dimples (Boy Number 2), and, not without very good provocation, gave him a tap on the side of the head. Next instant he felt a butt down somewhere in the region of his waist-belt, and there was an angry little red face looking up at him, which turned suddenly to a brown mop of hair as the butt was repeated. No one, not even Daddy, should hit his little brother. Such was Laddie, the gentle and the fearless.

Then there is Dimples. Dimples is nearly seven when he begins, and you never saw a rounder, softer, dimplier face, with two great

## CHILDREN, SNAKES, AND ZEBUS

roguish, mischievous eyes of wood-pigeon grey, which are sparkling with fun for the most part, though they can look sad and solemn enough at times. Dimples has the making of a big man in him. He has depth and reserves in his tiny soul. But on the surface he is a boy of boys, always in innocent mischief. "I will now do mischief," he occasionally announces, and is usually as good as his word. He has a love and understanding of all living creatures, the uglier and more slimy the better, treating them all in a tender, fairylike fashion which seems to come from some inner knowledge. He has been found holding a buttercup under the mouth of a slug "to see if he likes butter." He finds creatures in an astonishing way. Put him in the fairest garden, and presently he will approach you with a newt, a toad, or a huge snail in his custody. Nothing would ever induce him to hurt them, but he gives them what he imagines to be a little treat and then restores them to their homes. He has been known to speak bitterly to the Lady when she has given orders that caterpillars be killed if found upon the cabbages, and even the explanation that the caterpillars were doing the work of

### THREE OF THEM

what he calls "the Jarmans" did not reconcile him to their fate.

He has an advantage over Laddie, in that he suffers from no trace of shyness and is perfectly friendly in an instant with any one of every class of life, plunging straight into conversation with some such remark as "Can your Daddy give a war-whoop?" or "Were you ever chased by a bear?" He is a sunny creature but combative sometimes, when he draws down his brows, sets his eyes, his chubby cheeks flush, and his lips go back from his almond-white teeth. "I am Swankie the Berserker," says he, quoting out of his favourite "Erling the Bold," which Daddy reads aloud at bed-time. When he is in this fighting mood he can even drive back Laddie, chiefly because the elder is far too chivalrous to hurt him. If you want to see what Laddie can really do, put the small gloves on him and let him go for Daddy. Some of those hurricane rallies of his would stop Daddy grinning if they could get home, and he has to fall back off his stool in order to get away from them.

If that latent power of Dimples should ever come out, how will it be manifest? Surely in his imagination. Tell him a story



## CHILDREN, SNAKES, AND ZEBUS

and the boy is lost. He sits with his little round, rosy face immovable and fixed, while his eyes never budge from those of the speaker. He sucks in everything that is weird or adventurous or wild. Laddie is a rather restless soul, eager to be up and doing; but Dimples is absorbed in the present if there be something worth hearing to be heard. In height he is half a head shorter than his brother, but rather more sturdy in build. The power of his voice is one of his noticeable characteristics. If Dimples is coming you know it well in advance. With that physical gift upon the top of his audacity, and his loquacity, he fairly takes command of any place in which he may find himself, while Laddie, his soul too noble for jealousy, becomes one of the laughing and admiring audience.

Then there is Baby, a dainty elfin Dresden-china little creature of five at the outset, as fair as an angel and as deep as a well. The boys are but shallow, sparkling pools compared with this little girl with her self-repression and dainty aloofness. You know the boys, you never feel that you quite know the girl. Something very strong and forceful seems to be at the back of that wee body. Her will is tremendous. Noth-

### THREE OF THEM

ing can break or even bend it. Only kind guidance and friendly reasoning can mould it. The boys are helpless if she has really made up her mind. But this is only when she asserts herself, and those are rare occasions. As a rule she sits quiet, aloof, affable, keenly alive to all that passes and yet taking no part in it save for some subtle smile or glance. And then suddenly the wonderful grey-blue eyes under the long black lashes will gleam like coy diamonds, and such a hearty little chuckle will come from her that everyone else is bound to laugh out of sympathy. She and Dimples are great allies and yet have continual lovers' quarrels. One night she would not even include his name in her prayers. "God bless——" everyone else, but not a word of Dimples. "Come, come, darling!" urged the Lady. "Well, then, God bless horrid Dimples!" said she at last, after she had named the cat, the goat, her dolls, and her Wriggly.

That is a strange trait, the love for the Wriggly. It would repay thought from some scientific brain. It is an old, faded, disused downy from her cot. Yet go where she will, she must take Wriggly with her. All her toys put together would not console

## CHILDREN, SNAKES, AND ZEBUS

her for the absence of Wriggly. If the family go to the seaside, Wriggly must come too. She will not sleep without the absurd bundle in her arms. If she goes to a party she insists upon dragging its disreputable folds along with her, one end always projecting "to give it fresh air." Every phase of childhood represents to the philosopher something in the history of the race. From the new-born baby which can hang easily by one hand from a broomstick with its legs drawn up under it, the whole evolution of mankind is re-enacted. You can trace clearly the cave-dweller, the hunter, the scout. What, then, does Wriggly represent? Fetish worship—nothing else. The savage chooses some most unlikely thing and adores it. This dear little savage adores her Wriggly.

So now we have our three little figures drawn as clearly as a clumsy pen can follow such subtle elusive creatures of mood and fancy. We will suppose now that it is a summer evening, that Daddy is seated smoking in his chair, that the Lady is listening somewhere near, and that the three are in a tumbled heap upon the bear-skin before the empty fireplace trying to puzzle out the little problems of their tiny

## THREE OF THEM

lives. When three children play with a new thought it is like three kittens with a ball, one giving it a pat and another a pat, as they chase it from point to point. Daddy would interfere as little as possible, save when he was called upon to explain or to deny. It was usually wiser for him to pretend to be doing something else. Then their talk was the more natural. On this occasion, however, he was directly appealed to.

"Daddy!" asked Dimples.

"Yes, boy."

"Do you fink that the roses know us?"

Dimples, in spite of his impish naughtiness, had a way of looking such a perfectly innocent and delightfully kissable little person that one felt he really might be a good deal nearer to the sweet secrets of Nature than his elders. However, Daddy was in a material mood.

"No, boy; how could the roses know us?"

"The big yellow rose at the corner of the gate knows *me*."

"How do you know that?"

"'Cause it nodded to me yesterday."

Laddie roared with laughter.

"That was just the wind, Dimples."

## CHILDREN, SNAKES, AND ZEBUS

“ No, it was not,” said Dimples, with conviction. “ There was none wind. Baby was there. Weren’t you, Baby ? ”

“ The wose knew us,” said Baby, gravely.

“ Beasts know us,” said Laddie. “ But then beasts run round and make noises. Roses don’t make noises.”

“ Yes, they do. They rustle.”

“ Woses wustle,” said Baby.

“ That’s not a living noise. That’s an all-the-same noise. Different to Roy, who barks and makes different noises all the time. Fancy the roses all barkin’ at you. Daddy, will you tell us about animals ? ”

That is one of the child stages which take us back to the old tribe life—their inexhaustible interest in animals, some distant echo of those long nights when wild men sat round the fires and peered out into the darkness, and whispered about all the strange and deadly creatures who fought with them for the lordship of the earth. Children love caves, and they love fires and meals out of doors, and they love animal talk—all relics of the far distant past.

“ What is the biggest animal in South America, Daddy ? ”

Daddy, wearily : “ Oh, I don’t know.”



### THREE OF THEM

" I s'pose an elephant would be the biggest ? "

" No, boy ; there are none in South America. "

" Well, then, a rhinoceros ? "

" No, there are none. "

" Well, what is there, Daddy ? "

" Well, dear, there are jaguars. I suppose a jaguar is the biggest. "

" Then it must be thirty-six feet long. "

" Oh, no, boy ; about eight or nine feet with his tail. "

" But there are boa-constrictors in South America thirty-six feet long. "

" That's different. "

" Do you fink, " asked Dimples, with his big, solemn, grey eyes wide open, " there was ever a boa-'stricator forty-five feet long ? "

" No, dear ; I never heard of one. "

" Perhaps there was one, but you never heard of it. Do you fink you would have heard of a boa-'stricator forty-five feet long if there was one in South America ? "

" Well, there may have been one. "

" Daddy, " said Laddie, carrying on the cross-examination with the intense earnestness of a child, " could a boa-constrictor swallow any small animal ? "

## CHILDREN, SNAKES, AND ZEBUS

" Yes, of course he could."

" Could he swallow a jaguar ? "

" Well, I don't know about that. A jaguar is a very large animal."

" Well, then," asked Dimples, " could a jaguar swallow a boa-'strictor ? "

" Silly ass," said Laddie. " If a jaguar was only nine feet long and the boa-constrictor was thirty-five feet long, then there would be a lot sticking out of the jaguar's mouth. How could he swallow that ? "

" He'd bite it off," said Dimples. " And then another slice for supper and another for breakfast—but, I say, Daddy, a 'strictor couldn't swallow a porkpine, could he ? He would have a sore throat all the way down."

Shrieks of laughter and a welcome rest for Daddy, who turned to his paper.

" Daddy ! "

He put down his paper with an air of conscious virtue and lit his pipe.

" Well, dear ? "

" What's the biggest snake you ever saw ? "

" Oh, bother the snakes ! I am tired of them."

But the children were never tired of

### THREE OF THEM

them. Heredity again, for the snake was the worst enemy of arboreal man.

“Daddy made soup out of a snake,” said Laddie. “Tell us about that snake, Daddy.”

Children like a story best the fourth or fifth time, so it is never any use to tell them that they know all about it. The story which they can check and correct is their favourite.

“Well, dear, we got a viper and we killed it. Then we wanted the skeleton to keep and we didn’t know how to get it. At first we thought we would bury it, but that seemed too slow. Then I had the idea to boil all the viper’s flesh off its bones, and I got an old meat-tin and we put the viper and some water into it and put it above the fire.”

“You hung it on a hook, Daddy?”

“Yes, we hung it on the hook that they put the porridge pot on in Scotland. Then just as it was turning brown in came the farmer’s wife, and ran up to see what we were cooking. When she saw the viper she thought we were going to eat it. ‘Oh, you dirty divils!’ she cried, and caught up the tin in her apron and threw it out of the window.”

Fresh shrieks of laughter from the chil-

## CHILDREN, SNAKES, AND ZEBUS

dren, and Dimples repeated " You dirty divil ! " until Daddy had to clump him playfully on the head.

" Tell us some more about snakes," cried Laddie. " Did you ever see a really dreadful snake ? "

" One that would turn you black and dead you in five minutes ? " said Dimples. It was always the most awful thing that appealed to Dimples.

" Yes, I have seen some beastly creatures. Once in the Sudan I was dozing on the sand when I opened my eyes and there was a horrid creature like a big slug with horns, short and thick, about a foot long, moving away in front of me."

" What was it, Daddy ? " Six eager eyes were turned up to him.

" It was a death-adder. I expect that would dead you in five minutes, Dimples, if it got a bite at you."

" Did you kill it ? "

" No ; it was gone before I could get to it."

" Which is the horriest, Daddy—a snake or a shark ? "

" I'm not very fond of either ! "

" Did you ever see a man eaten by sharks ? "

### THREE OF THEM

"No, dear, but I was not so far off being eaten myself."

"Oo!" from all three of them.

"I did a silly thing, for I swam round the ship in water where there are many sharks. As I was drying myself on the deck I saw the high fin of a shark above the water a little way off. It had heard the splashing and come up to look for me."

"Weren't you frightened, Daddy?"

"Yes. It made me feel rather cold." There was silence while Daddy saw once more the golden sand of the African beach and the snow-white roaring surf, with the long, smooth swell of the bar.

Children don't like silences.

"Daddy," said Laddie. "Do zebus bite?"

"Zebus! Why, they are cows. No, of course not."

"But a zebu could butt with its horns."

"Oh, yes, it could butt."

"Do you think a zebu could fight a crocodile?"

"Well, I should back the crocodile."

"Why?"

"Well, dear, the crocodile has great teeth and would eat the zebu."

"But suppose the zebu came up when



## CHILDREN, SNAKES, AND ZEBUS

the crocodile was not looking and butted it."

" Well, that would be one up for the zebu. But one butt wouldn't hurt a crocodile."

" No, one wouldn't, would it? But the zebu would keep on. Crocodiles live on sand-banks, don't they? Well, then, the zebu would come and live near the sand-bank too—just so far as the crocodile would never see him. Then every time the crocodile wasn't looking the zebu would butt him. Don't you think he would beat the crocodile? "

" Well, perhaps he would."

" How long do you think it would take the zebu to beat the crocodile? "

" Well, it would depend upon how often he got in his butt."

" Well, suppose he butted him once every three hours, don't you think——? "

" Oh, bother the zebu! "

" That's what the crocodile would say," cried Laddie, clapping his hands.

" Well, I agree with the crocodile," said Daddy.

" And it's time all good children were in bed," said the Lady as the glimmer of the nurse's apron was seen in the gloom.

## II

### ABOUT CRICKET

SUPPER was going on down below and all good children should have been long ago in the land of dreams. Yet a curious noise came from above.

“What on earth——?” asked Daddy.

“Laddie practising cricket,” said the Lady, with the curious clairvoyance of motherhood. “He gets out of bed to bowl. I do wish you would go up and speak seriously to him about it, for it takes quite an hour off his rest.”

Daddy departed upon his mission intending to be gruff, and my word, he can be quite gruff when he likes! When he reached the top of the stairs, however, and heard the noise still continue, he walked softly down the landing and peeped in through the half-opened door.

The room was dark save for a night-light. In the dim glimmer he saw a little white-clad figure, slight and supple, taking short

## ABOUT CRICKET

steps and swinging its arm in the middle of the room.

“Halloa !” said Daddy.

The white-clad figure turned and ran forward to him.

“Oh, Daddy, how jolly of you to come up !”

Daddy felt that gruffness was not quite so easy as it had seemed.

“Look here ! You get into bed !” he said, with the best imitation he could manage.

“Yes, Daddy. But before I go, how is this ?” He sprang forward and the arm swung round again in a swift and graceful gesture.

Daddy was a moth-eaten cricketer of sorts, and he took it in with a critical eye.

“Good, Laddie. I like a high action. That’s the real Spofforth swing.”

“Oh, Daddy, come and talk about cricket !” He was pulled on to the side of the bed, and the white figure dived between the sheets,

“Yes ; tell us about cwicket !” came a cooing voice from the corner. Dimples was sitting up in his cot.

“You naughty boy ! I thought one of



## THREE OF THEM

you was asleep, anyhow. I mustn't stay. I keep you awake."

"Who was Popoff?" cried Laddie, clutching at his father's sleeve. "Was he a very good bowler?"

"Spofforth was the best bowler that ever walked on to a cricket-field. He was the great Australian Bowler and he taught us a great deal."

"Did he ever kill a dog?" from Dimples.

"No, boy. Why?"

"Because Laddie said there was a bowler so fast that his ball went frue a coat and killed a dog."

"Oh, that's an old yarn. I heard that when I was a little boy about some bowler whose name, I think, was Jackson."

"Was it a big dog?"

"No, no, son; it wasn't a dog at all."

"It was a cat," said Dimples.

"No; I tell you it never happened."

"But tell us about Spofforth," cried Laddie. Dimples, with his imaginative mind, usually wandered, while the elder came eagerly back to the point. "Was he very fast?"

"He could be very fast. I have heard cricketers who had played against him say that his yorker—that is a ball which is

## ABOUT CRICKET

just short of a full pitch—was the fastest ball in England. I have myself seen his long arm swing round and the wicket go down before ever the batsman had time to ground his bat.”

“ Oo ! ” from both beds.

“ He was a tall, thin man, and they called him the Fiend. That means the Devil, you know.”

“ And *was* he the Devil ? ”

“ No, Dimples, no. They called him that because he did such wonderful things with the ball.”

“ Can the Devil do wonderful things with a ball ? ”

Daddy felt that he was propagating devil-worship and hastened to get to safer ground.

“ Spofforth taught us how to bowl and Blackham taught us how to keep wicket. When I was young we always had another fielder, called the long-stop, who stood behind the wicket-keeper. I used to be a thick, solid boy, so they put me as long-stop, and the balls used to bounce off me, I remember, as if I had been a mattress.”

Delighted laughter.

“ But after Blackham came wicket-keepers had to learn that they were there to stop the ball. Even in good second-class

## THREE OF THEM

cricket there were no more long-stops. We soon found plenty of good wicket-keepers—like Alfred Lyttelton and MacGregor—but it was Blackham who showed us how. To see Spofforth, all india-rubber and ginger, at one end bowling, and Blackham, with his black beard over the bails waiting for the ball at the other end, was worth living for, I can tell you."

Silence while the boys pondered over this. But Laddie feared Daddy would go, so he quickly got in a question. If Daddy's memory could only be kept going there was no saying how long they might keep him.

"Was there no good bowler until Spofforth came?"

"Oh, plenty, my boy. But he brought something new with him. Especially change of pace—you could never tell by his action up to the last moment whether you were going to get a ball like a flash of lightning, or one that came slow but full of devil and spin. But for mere command of the pitch of a ball I should think Alfred Shaw, of Nottingham, was the greatest bowler I can remember. It was said that he could pitch a ball twice in three times upon a half-crown!"

"Oo!" And then from Dimples:

## ABOUT CRICKET

“ Whose half-crown ? ”

“ Well, anybody’s half-crown.”

“ Did he get the half-crown ? ”

“ No, no ; why should he ? ”

“ Because he put the ball on it.”

“ The half-crown was kept there always for people to aim at,” explained Laddie.

“ No, no, there never was a half-crown.”

Murmurs of remonstrance from both boys.

“ I only meant that he could pitch the ball on anything—a half-crown or anything else.”

“ Daddy,” with the energy of one who has a happy idea, “ could he have pitched it on the batsman’s toe ? ”

“ Yes, boy, I think so.”

“ Well, then, suppose he *always* pitched it on the batsman’s toe ! ”

Daddy laughed.

“ Perhaps that is why dear old W. G. always stood with his left toe cocked up in the air.”

“ On one leg ? ”

“ No, no, Dimples. With his heel down and his toe up.”

“ Did you know W. G., Daddy ? ”

“ Oh, yes, I knew him quite well.”

“ Was he nice ? ”

“ Yes, he was splendid. He was always

## THREE OF THEM

like a great jolly schoolboy who was hiding behind a huge black beard."

"Whose beard?"

"I meant that he had a great bushy beard. He looked like the pirate chief in your picture-books, but he had as kind a heart as a child. I have been told that it was the terrible things in this war that really killed him. Grand old W. G.!"

"Was he the best bat in the world, Daddy?"

"Of course he was," said Daddy, beginning to enthuse to the delight of the clever little plotter in the bed. "There never was such a bat—never in the world—and I don't believe there ever could be again. He didn't play on smooth wickets, as they do now. He played where the wickets were all patchy, and you had to watch the ball right on to the bat. You couldn't look at it before it hit the ground and think, 'That's all right. I know where that one will be!' My word, that was cricket. What you got you earned."

"Did you ever see W. G. make a hundred, Daddy?"

"See him! I've fielded out for him and melted on a hot August day while he made a hundred and fifty. There's a pound or



## ABOUT CRICKET

two of your Daddy somewhere on that field yet. But I loved to see it, and I was always sorry when he got out for nothing, even if I were playing against him."

" Did he ever get out for nothing ? "

" Yes, dear ; the first time I ever played in his company he was given out leg-before-wicket before he made a run. And all the way to the pavilion—that's where people go when they are out—he was walking forward, but his big black beard was backward over his shoulder as he told the umpire what he thought."

" And what *did* he think ? "

" More than I can tell you, Dimples. But I dare say he was right to be annoyed, for it was a left-handed bowler, bowling round the wicket, and it is very hard to get leg-before to that. However, that's all Greek to you."

" What's Gweek ? "

" Well, I mean you can't understand that. Now I am going."

" No, no, Daddy ; wait a moment ! Tell us about Bonner and the big catch."

" Oh, you know about that ! "

Two little coaxing voices came out of the darkness.

" Oh, please ! Please ! "

### THREE OF THEM

“ I don't know what your mother will say ! What was it you asked ? ”

“ Bonner ! ”

“ Ah, Bonner ! ” Daddy looked out in the gloom and saw green fields and golden sunlight, and great sportsmen long gone to their rest. “ Bonner was a wonderful man. He was a giant in size.”

“ As big as you, Daddy ? ”

Daddy seized his elder boy and shook him playfully. “ I heard what you said to Miss Cregan the other day. When she asked you what an acre was you said ‘ About the size of Daddy. ’ ”

Both boys gurgled.

“ But Bonner was five inches taller than I. He was a giant, I tell you.”

“ Did nobody kill him ? ”

“ No, no, Dimples. Not a story-book giant. But a great, strong man. He had a splendid figure and blue eyes and a golden beard, and altogether he was the finest man I have ever seen—except perhaps one.”

“ Who was the one, Daddy ? ”

“ Well, it was the Emperor Frederick of Germany.”

“ A Jarman ! ” cried Dimples, in horror.

“ Yes, a German. Mind you, boys, a

## ABOUT CRICKET

man may be a very noble man and be a German—though what has become of the noble ones these last three years is more than I can guess. But Frederick was noble and good, as you could see on his face. How he ever came to be the father of such a blasphemous braggart"—Daddy sank into reverie.

"Bonner, Daddy!" said Laddie, and Daddy came back from politics with a start.

"Oh, yes, Bonner. Bonner in white flannels on the green sward with an English June sun upon him. That was a picture of a man! But you asked me about the catch. It was in a test match at the Oval—England against Australia. Bonner said before he went in that he would hit Alfred Shaw into the next county, and he set out to do it. Shaw, as I have told you, could keep a very good length, so for some time Bonner could not get the ball he wanted, but at last he saw his chance, and he jumped out and hit that ball the most awful ker-wallop that ever was seen in a cricket-field."

"Oo!" from both boys; and then, "Did it go into the next county, Daddy?" from Dimples.

"Well, I'm telling you!" said Daddy,



### THREE OF THEM

who was always testy when one of his stories was interrupted. "Bonner thought he had made the ball a half-volley—that is the best ball to hit—but Shaw had deceived him and the ball was really on the short side. So when Bonner hit it, up and up it went, until it looked as if it were going out of sight into the sky."

"Oo!"

"At first everybody thought it was going far outside the ground. But soon they saw that all the giant's strength had been wasted in hitting the ball so high, and that there was a chance that it would fall within the ropes. The batsmen had run three runs and it was still in the air. Then it was seen that an English fielder was standing on the very edge of the field with his back on the ropes, a white figure against the black line of the people. He stood watching the mighty curve of the ball, and twice he raised his hands together above his head as he did so. Then a third time he raised his hands above his head, and the ball was in them and Bonner was out."

"Why did he raise his hands twice?"

"I don't know. He did so."

"And who was the fielder, Daddy?"

"The fielder was G. F. Grace, the younger

## ABOUT CRICKET

brother of W. G. Only a few months afterwards he was a dead man. But he had one grand moment in his life, with twenty thousand people all just mad with excitement. Poor G. F. ! He died too soon."

" Did you ever catch a catch like that, Daddy ? "

" No, boy. I was never a particularly good fielder."

" Did you never catch a good catch ? "

" Well, I won't say that. You see, the best catches are very often flukes, and I remember one awful fluke of that sort."

" Do tell us, Daddy ? "

" Well, dear, I was fielding at slip. That is very near the wicket, you know. Woodcock was bowling, and he had the name of being the fastest bowler of England at that time. It was just the beginning of the match and the ball was quite red. Suddenly I saw something like a red flash and there was the ball stuck in my left hand. I had not time to move it. It simply came and stuck."

" Oo ! "

" I saw another catch like that. It was done by Ulyett, a fine Yorkshire player—such a big, upstanding fellow. He was bowling, and the batsman—it was an

### THREE OF THEM

Australian in a test match—hit as hard as ever he could. Ulyett could not have seen it, but he just stuck out his hand and there was the ball."

"Suppose it had hit his body?"

"Well, it would have hurt him."

"Would he have cried?" from Dimples.

"No, boy. That is what games are for, to teach you to take a knock and never show it. Supposing that——"

A step was heard coming along the passage.

"Good gracious, boys, here's Mumty. Shut your eyes this moment. It's all right, dear. I spoke to them very severely and I think they are nearly asleep."

"What have you been talking about?" asked the Lady.

"Cwicket!" cried Dimples.

"It's natural enough," said Daddy; "of course when two boys——"

"Three," said the Lady, as she tucked up the little beds.

### III

#### SPECULATIONS

THE three children were sitting together in a bunch upon the rug in the gloaming. Baby was talking, so Daddy behind his newspaper pricked up his ears, for the young lady was silent as a rule, and every glimpse of her little mind was of interest. She was nursing the disreputable little downy quilt which she called Wriggly and much preferred to any of her dolls.

"I wonder if they will let Wriggly into heaven," she said.

The boys laughed. They generally laughed at what Baby said.

"If they won't I won't go in, either," she added.

"Nor me, neither, if they don't let in my Teddy-bear," said Dimples.

"I'll tell them it is a nice, clean, blue Wriggly," said Baby. "I love my Wriggly." She cooed over it and hugged it.

"What about that, Daddy?" asked

### THREE OF THEM

Laddie, in his earnest fashion. "Are there toys in heaven, do you think?"

"Of course there are. Everything that can make children happy."

"As many toys as in Hamley's shop?" asked Dimples.

"More," said Daddy, stoutly.

"Oo!" from all three.

"Daddy, dear," said Laddie. "I've been wondering about the deluge."

"Yes, dear. What was it?"

"Well, the story about the Ark. All those animals were in the Ark, just two of each, for forty days. Wasn't that so?"

"That is the story."

"Well, then, what did the carnivorous animals eat?"

One should be honest with children and not put them off with ridiculous explanations. Their questions about such matters are generally much more sensible than their parents' replies.

"Well, dear," said Daddy, weighing his words, "these stories are very, very old. The Jews put them in the Bible, but they got them from the people in Babylon, and the people in Babylon probably got them from someone else away back in the beginning of things. If a story gets passed down



## SPECULATIONS

like that, one person adds a little and another adds a little, and so you never get things quite as they happened. The Jews put it in the Bible exactly as they heard it, but it had been going about for thousands of years before then."

"So it was not true?"

"Yes, I think it was true. I think there was a great flood, and I think that some people did escape, and that they saved their beasts, just as we should try to save Nigger and the Monkstown cocks and hens if we were flooded out. Then they were able to start again when the waters went down, and they were naturally very grateful to God for their escape."

"What did the people who didn't escape think about it?"

"Well, we can't tell that."

"They wouldn't be very grateful, would they?"

"Their time was come," said Daddy, who was a bit of a Fatalist. "I expect it was the best thing."

"It was jolly hard luck on Noah being swallowed by a fish after all his trouble," said Dimples.

"Silly ass! It was Jonah that was swallowed. Was it a whale, Daddy?"

### THREE OF THEM

“ A whale ! Why, a whale couldn't swallow a herring ! ”

“ A shark, then ? ”

“ Well, there again you have an old story which has got twisted and turned a good deal. No doubt he was a holy man who had some great escape at sea, and then the sailors and others who admired him invented this wonder.”

“ Daddy,” said Dimples, suddenly, “ should we do just the same as Jesus did ? ”

“ Yes, dear ; He was the noblest Person that ever lived.”

“ Well, did Jesus lie down every day from twelve to one ? ”

“ I don't know that He did.”

“ Well, then, I won't lie down from twelve to one.”

“ If Jesus had been a growing boy and had been ordered to lie down by His Mumty and the doctor, I am sure He would have done so.”

“ Did He take malt extract ? ”

“ He did what He was told, my son—I am sure of that. He was a good man, so He must have been a good boy—perfect in all He did.”

“ Baby saw God yesterday,” remarked Laddie, casually.



## SPECULATIONS

Daddy dropped his paper.

" Yes, we made up our minds we would all lie on our backs and stare at the sky until we saw God. So we put the big rug on the lawn and then we all lay down side by side, and stared and stared. I saw nothing, and Dimples saw nothing, but Baby says she saw God."

Baby nodded in her wise way.

" I saw Him," she said.

" What was He like, then ? "

" Oh, just God."

She would say no more, but hugged her Wiggly.

The Lady had entered and listened with some trepidation to the frank audacity of the children's views. Yet the very essence of faith was in that audacity. It was all so unquestionably real.

" Which is strongest, Daddy, God or the Devil ? " It was Laddie who was speculating now.

" Why, God rules everything, of course."

" Then why doesn't He kill the Devil ? "

" And scalp him ? " added Dimples.

" That would stop all trouble, wouldn't it, Daddy ? "

Poor Daddy was rather floored. The Lady came to his help.

### THREE OF THEM

“ If everything was good and easy in this world, then there would be nothing to fight against, and so, Laddie, our characters would never improve.”

“ It would be like a football match with all the players on one side,” said Daddy.

“ If there was nothing bad, my darling, then nothing would be good, for you would have nothing to compare by,” added the Lady.

“ Well, then,” said Laddie, with the remorseless logic of childhood, “ if that is so, then the Devil is very useful ; so he can't be so very bad, after all.”

“ Well, I don't see that,” Daddy answered. “ Our Army can only show how brave it is by fighting the German Emperor, but that does not prove that the German Emperor is a very nice person, does it now ?

“ Besides,” Daddy continued, improving the occasion, “ you must not think of the Devil as a person. You must think of all the mean things one could do, and all the dirty things, and all the cruel things, and that is really the Devil you are fighting against. You couldn't call them useful, could you ? ”

The children thought over this for a little.

## SPECULATIONS

“Daddy,” said Laddie, “have *you* ever seen God?”

“No, my boy. But I see His works. I expect that is as near as we can get in this world. Look at all the stars at night, and think of the Power that made them and keeps each in its proper place.”

“He couldn’t keep the shooting stars in their proper place,” said Dimples.

“I expect He meant them to shoot,” said Laddie.

“Suppose they all shot, what jolly nights we should have!” cried Dimples.

“Yes,” said Laddie; “but after one night they would all have gone, and a nice thing then!”

“Well, there’s always the moon,” remarked Dimples. “But, Daddy, is it true that God listens to all we say?”

“I don’t know about that,” Daddy answered, cautiously. You never know into what trap those quick little wits may lead you. The Lady was more rash, or more orthodox.

“Yes, dear, He does hear all you say.”

“Is He listenin’ now?”

“Yes, dear.”

“Well, I call it vewy rude of Him!”

Daddy smiled, and the Lady gasped.

### THREE OF THEM

"It isn't rude," said Laddie. "It is His duty, and He *has* to notice what you are doing and saying. Daddy, did you ever see a fairy?"

"No, boy."

"I saw one once."

Laddie is the very soul of truth, quite painfully truthful in details, so that his quiet remark caused attention.

"Tell us about it, dear."

He described it with as little emotion as if it were a Persian cat. Perhaps his perfect faith had indeed opened something to his vision.

"It was in the day nursery. There was a stool by the window. The fairy jumped on the stool and then down, and went across the room."

"What was it dressed like?"

"All in grey, with a long cloak. It was about as big as Baby's doll. I could not see its arms, for they were under the cloak."

"Did he look at you?"

"No, he was sideways, and I never really saw his face. He had a little cap. That's the only fairy I ever saw. Of course, there was Father Christmas, if you call him a fairy."

## SPECULATIONS

"Daddy, was Father Christmas killed in the war?"

"No, boy."

"Because he has never come since the war began. I expect he is fightin' the Jarmans." It was Dimples who was talking.

"Last time he came," said Laddie, "Daddy said one of his reindeers had hurt its leg in the ruts of the Monks-town Lane. Perhaps that's why he never comes."

"He'll come all right after the war," said Daddy, "and he'll be redder and whiter and jollier than ever." Then Daddy clouded suddenly, for he thought of all those who would be missing when Father Christmas came again. Ten loved ones were dead from that one household. The Lady put out her hand, for she always knew what Daddy was thinking.

"They will be there in spirit, dear."

"Yes, and the jolliest of the lot," said Daddy, stoutly. "We'll have our Father Christmas back and all will be well in England."

"But what do they do in India?" asked Laddie.

"Why, what's wrong with them?"



## THREE OF THEM

“ How do the sledge and the reindeer get across the sea ? All the parcels must get wet.”

“ Yes, dear, there *have* been several complaints,” said Daddy, gravely. “ Halloa, here’s nurse ! Time’s up ! Off to bed ! ”

They got up resignedly, for they were really very good children. “ Say your prayers here before you go,” said the Lady. The three little figures all knelt on the rug, Baby still cuddling her Wriggly.

“ You pray, Laddie, and the rest can join in.”

“ God bless everyone I love,” said the high, clear child-voice. “ And make me a good boy, and thank You so much for all the blessings of to-day. And please take care of Alleyne, who is fighting the Germans, and Uncle Cosmo, who is fighting the Germans, and Uncle Woodie, who is fighting the Germans, and all the others who are fighting the Germans, and the men on the ships on the sea, and Grandma and Grandpa, and Uncle Pat, and don’t ever let Daddy and Mumty die. That’s all.”

“ And please send plenty sugar for the poor people,” said Baby, in her unexpected way.

## SPECULATIONS

“ And a little petrol for Daddy,” said Dimples.

“ Amen ! ” said Daddy. And the little figures rose for the good-night kiss.



## IV

### THE LEATHERSKIN TRIBE

"DADDY!" said the elder boy. "Have you seen wild Indians?"

"Yes, boy."

"Have you ever scalped one?"

"Good gracious, no."

"Has one ever scalped you?" asked Dimples.

"Silly!" said Laddie. "If Daddy had been scalped he wouldn't have all that hair on his head—unless perhaps it grew again!"

"He has none hair on the very top," said Dimples, hovering over the low chair in which Daddy was sitting.

"They didn't scalp you, did they, Daddy?" asked Laddie, with some anxiety.

"I expect Nature will scalp me some of these days."

Both boys were keenly interested. Nature presented itself as some rival chief.

"When?" asked Dimples, eagerly, with the evident intention of being present.

## THE LEATHERSKIN TRIBE

Daddy passed his fingers ruefully through his thinning locks. "Pretty soon, I expect," said he.

"Oo!" said the three children. Laddie was resentful and defiant, but the two younger ones were obviously delighted.

"But I say, Daddy, you said we should have an Indian game after tea. You said it when you wanted us to be so quiet after breakfast. You promised, you know."

It doesn't do to break a promise to children. Daddy rose somewhat wearily from his comfortable chair and put his pipe on the mantelpiece. First he held a conference in secret with Uncle Pat, the most ingenious of playmates. Then he returned to the children. "Collect the tribe," said he. "There is a Council in a quarter of an hour in the big room. Put on your Indian dresses and arm yourselves. The great Chief will be there!"

Sure enough when he entered the big room a quarter of an hour later the tribe of the Leatherskins had assembled. There were four of them, for little rosy Cousin John from next door always came in for an Indian game. They had all Indian dresses with high feathers and wooden clubs or

### THREE OF THEM

tomahawks. Daddy was in his usual untidy tweeds, but carried a rifle. He was very serious when he entered the room, for one should be very serious in a real good Indian game. Then he raised his rifle slowly over his head in greeting and the four childish voices rang out in the war-cry. It was a prolonged wolfish howl which Dimples had been known to offer to teach elderly ladies in hotel corridors. "You can't be in our tribe without it, you know. There is none body about. Now just try once if you can do it." At this moment there are half-a-dozen elderly people wandering about England who have been made children once more by Laddie and Dimples.

"Hail to the tribe!" cried Daddy.

"Hail, Chief!" answered the voices.

"Red Buffalo!"

"Here!" cried Laddie.

"Black Bear!"

"Here!" cried Dimples.

"White Butterfly!"

"Go on, you silly squaw!" growled Dimples.

"Here," said Baby.

"Prairie Wolf!"

"Here," said little four-year-old John.

"The muster is complete. Make a circle

## THE LEATHERSKIN TRIBE

round the camp-fire and we shall drink the fire-water of the Palefaces and smoke the pipe of peace."

That was a fearsome joy. The fire-water was ginger-ale drunk out of the bottle, which was gravely passed from hand to hand. At no other time had they ever drunk like that, and it made an occasion of it which was increased by the owlsh gravity of Daddy. Then he lit his pipe and it was passed also from one tiny hand to another, Laddie taking a hearty suck at it, which set him coughing, while Baby only touched the end of the amber with her little pink lips. There was dead silence until it had gone round and returned to its owner.

"Warriors of the Leatherskins, why have we come here?" asked Daddy, fingering his rifle.

"Humpty Dumpty," said little John, and the children all began to laugh, but the portentous gravity of Daddy brought them back to the warrior mood.

"The Prairie Wolf has spoken truly," said Daddy. "A wicked Paleface called Humpty Dumpty has taken the prairies which once belonged to the Leatherskins and is now camped upon them and hunting

### THREE OF THEM

our buffaloes. What shall be his fate? Let each warrior speak in turn."

"Tell him he has jolly well got to clear out," said Laddie.

"That's not Indian talk," cried Dimples, with all his soul in the game. "Kill him, great Chief—him and his squaw, too." The two younger warriors merely laughed and little John repeated "Humpty Dumpty!"

"Quite right! Remember the villain's name!" said Daddy. "Now, then, the whole tribe follows me on the war-trail and we shall teach this Paleface to shoot our buffaloes."

"Look here, we don't want squaws," cried Dimples, as Baby toddled at the rear of the procession. "You stay in the wigwam and cook."

A piteous cry greeted the suggestion.

"The White Butterfly will come with us and bind up the wounds," said Daddy.

"The squaws are jolly good as torturers," remarked Laddie.

"Really, Daddy, this strikes me as a most immoral game," said the Lady, who had been a sympathetic spectator from a corner, doubtful of the ginger-ale, horrified at the pipe, and delighted at the complete absorption of the children.



## THE LEATHERSKIN TRIBE

“ Rather ! ” said the great Chief, with a sad relapse into the normal. “ I suppose that is why they love it so. Now, then, warriors, we go forth on the war-trail. One whoop all together before we start. Capital ! Follow me, now, one behind the other. Not a sound ! If one gets separated from the others let him give the cry of a night owl and the others will answer with the squeak of the prairie lizard.”

“ What sort of a squeak, please ? ”

“ Oh, any old squeak will do. You don't walk. Indians trot on the war-path. If you see any man hiding in a bush kill him at once, but don't stop to scalp him——”

“ Really, dear ! ” from the corner.

“ The great Queen would rather that you scalp him. Now, then ! All ready ! Start ! ”

Away went the line of figures, Daddy stooping with his rifle at the trail, Laddie and Dimples armed with axes and toy pistols, as tense and serious as any Redskins could be. The other two rather more irresponsible but very much absorbed all the same. The little line of absurd figures wound in and out of the furniture, and out on to the lawn, and round the laurel bushes, and into the yard, and back to the clump



## THREE OF THEM

of trees. There Daddy stopped and held up his hand with a face that froze the children.

“ Are all here ? ” he asked.

“ Yes, yes.”

“ Hush, warriors ! No sound. There is an enemy scout in the bushes ahead. Stay with me, you two. You, Red Buffalo, and you, Black Bear, crawl forward and settle him. See that he makes no sound. What you do must be quick and sudden. When all is clear give the cry of the wood-pigeon— and we will join you.”

The two warriors crawled off in most desperate earnest. Daddy leaned on his gun and winked at the Lady, who still hovered fearfully in the background like a dear hen whose chickens were doing wonderful and unaccountable things. The two younger Indians slapped each other and giggled. Presently there came the “ coo ” of a wood-pigeon from in front. Daddy and the tribe moved forward to where the advance guard were waiting in the bushes.

“ Great Chief, we could find no scout,” said Laddie.

“ There was none person to kill,” added Dimples.

The Chief was not surprised, since the

## THE LEATHERSKIN TRIBE

scout had been entirely of his own invention. It would not do to admit it, however.

“ Have you found his trail ? ” he asked.

“ No, Chief.”

“ Let me look.” Daddy hunted about with a look of preternatural sagacity about him. “ Before the snows fell a man passed here with a red head, grey clothes, and a squint in his left eye. His trail shows that his brother has a grocer’s shop and his wife smokes cigarettes on the sly.”

“ Oh, Daddy, how could you read all that ? ”

“ It’s easy enough, my son, when you get the knack of it. But look here, we are Indians on the war-trail, and don’t you forget it if you value your scalp ! Aha, here is Humpty Dumpty’s trail ! ”

Uncle Pat had laid down a paper trail from this point, as Daddy well knew ; so now the children were off like a little pack of eager harriers, following in and out among the bushes. Presently they had a rest.

“ Great Chief, why does a wicked Pale-face leave paper wherever he goes ? ”

Daddy made a great effort.

“ He tears up the wicked letters he has

### THREE OF THEM

written. Then he writes others even wickeder and tears them up in turn. You can see for yourself that he leaves them wherever he goes. Now, warriors, come along ! ”

Uncle Pat had dodged all over the limited garden, and the tribe followed his trail. Finally they stopped at a gap in the hedge which leads into the field. There was a little wooden hut in the field, where Daddy used to go and put up a printed cardboard : “ WORKING.” He found it a very good dodge when he wanted a quiet smoke and a nap. Usually there was nothing else in the field, but this time the Chief pushed the whole tribe hurriedly behind the hedge, and whispered to them to look carefully out between the branches.

In the middle of the field a tripod of sticks supported a kettle. At each side of it was a hunched-up figure in a coloured blanket. Uncle Pat had done his work skilfully and well.

“ You must get them before they can reach their rifles,” said the Chief. “ What about their horses ? Black Bear, move down the hedge and bring back word about their horses. If you see none give three whistles.”

## THE LEATHERSKIN TRIBE

The whistles were soon heard, and the warrior returned.

"If the horses had been there, what would you have done?"

"Scalped them!" said Dimples.

"Silly ass!" said Laddie. "Who ever heard of a horse's scalp? You would stampede them."

"Of course," said the Chief. "If ever you see a horse grazing, you crawl up to it, spring on its back and then gallop away with your head looking under its neck and only your foot to be seen. Don't you forget it. But we must scupper these rascals on our hunting-grounds."

"Shall we crawl up to them?"

"Yes, crawl up. Then when I give a whoop rush them. Take them alive. I wish to have a word with them first. Carry them into the hut. Go!"

Away went the eager little figures, the chubby babes and the two lithe, active boys. Daddy stood behind the bush watching them. They kept a line and tip-toed along to the camp of the strangers. Then on the Chief's signal they burst into a cry and rushed wildly with waving weapons into the camp of the Palefaces. A moment later the two pillow-made trappers were

### THREE OF THEM

being dragged off into the hut by the whooping warriors. They were up-ended in one corner when the Chief entered, and the victorious Indians were dancing about in front of them.

“ Anybody wounded ? ” asked the Chief.

“ No, no.”

“ Have you tied their hands ? ”

With perfect gravity Red Buffalo made movements behind each of the pillows.

“ They are tied, great Chief.”

“ What shall we do with them ? ”

“ Cut off their heads ! ” shrieked Dimples, who was always the most bloodthirsty of the tribe, though in private life he had been known to weep bitterly over a squashed caterpillar.

“ The proper thing is to tie them to a stake,” said Laddie.

“ What do you mean by killing our buffaloes ? ” asked Daddy, severely.

The prisoners preserved a sulky silence.

“ Shall I shoot the green one ? ” asked Dimples, presenting his wooden pistol.

“ Wait a bit ! ” said the Chief. “ We had best keep one as a hostage and send the other back to say that unless the Chief of the Palefaces pays a ransom within three days——”



## THE LEATHERSKIN TRIBE

But at that moment, as a great romancer used to say, a strange thing happened. There was the sound of a turning key and the whole tribe of the Leatherskins was locked into the hut. A moment later a dreadful face appeared at the window, a face daubed with mud and overhung with grass, which drooped down from under a soft cap. The weird creature danced in triumph, and then stooped to set a light to some paper and shavings near the window.

“Heavens!” cried the Chief. “It is Yellow Snake, the ferocious Chief of the Bottlenoses!”

Flame and smoke were rising outside. It was excellently done and perfectly safe, but too much for the younger warriors. The key turned, the door opened, and two tearful babes were in the arms of the kneeling Lady. Red Buffalo and Black Bear were of sterner stuff.

“I’m not frightened, Daddy,” said Laddie, though he looked a little pale.

“Nor me,” cried Dimples, hurrying to get out of the hut.

“We’ll lock the prisoners up with no food and have a council of war upon them in the morning,” said the Chief. “Perhaps we’ve done enough to-day.”



### THREE OF THEM

" I rather think you have," said the Lady, as she soothed the poor little sobbing figures.

" That's the worst of having kids to play," said Dimples. " Fancy having a squaw in a war-party ! "

" Never mind, we've had a jolly good Indian game," said Laddie, as the sound of a distant bell called them all to the nursery tea.

## V

### ABOUT NAUGHTINESS AND FROGS AND HISTORICAL PICTURES

THERE are all sorts of types and moods of childish naughtiness, as every harassed parent knows. With these three particular little people the difference was quite marked. Laddie was rarely naughty, but if he was it was in a despairing can't-help-it, very sorry-but - you-will-have-to-put - up - with-it way which it was difficult to deal with. Dimples, on the contrary, was cold-blooded and deliberate with a determined " I will-now-do-some-mischuff " air, which invited spanking. Baby was seldom obstreperous, but it took her, when it did come, in a " I-don't-care-a-blow-for - anybody-and-I'm going-to-kick-my-slipper-up-to-the-ceiling " delirium of wickedness which it was impossible to control, so that a distressed lady and a secretly chuckling Daddy could only wait till the weather cleared.

This is preliminary to the fact that

### THREE OF THEM

Dimples had been exceedingly naughty in his own characteristic fashion upon the day under discussion. The truth was that he had been disappointed, and when that happened he usually ended by taking it out of someone. The disappointment was that in a too expansive moment Daddy had given him to understand that some day the tribe would gather in the dead of the night and would burn down the chauffeur's cottage with a rain of arrows directed all the while upon the windows and doors. Dimples had prepared the bundles of straw, and now it had to be explained to him that Daddy had got a little beyond what was practical, and that the law had a fussy and unreasonable objection to games of that kind.

Then there was something else which had shaken his nerves up on the day before. It was a tragedy in three scenes. The first scene was that Dimples discovered a wasps' nest and stirred it up. The next was a wasps' nest discovered Dimples and stirred *him* up. The third--well, the result of it was heard all over a quiet country parish, for Dimples has the largest howl to the square inch that has ever been heard. So perhaps after such an experience there was

## ABOUT NAUGHTINESS AND FROGS

some little excuse for his being contrary after all.

But it took the queerest shape—like many of his vagaries, for his ways were original. It began by sticking remarks of his own into his prayers which were by no means of a humble or prayerful character. Thus he said, addressing his Maker, "Please make me a good boy—which I am!" At the dictation of his mother he said, "Please teach me self-control to others," and added, "Please also teach others self-control to me." Finally he showed how much he needed this self-control by completely losing his temper, and charging in tears and fury with clenched teeth and raging fists at Laddie, who looked with gentle contempt at the furious figure, and remarked icily: "*Do* blow your nose!" which brought the charge to an ignominious halt. That was a touch of Laddie's knightly spirit, as cool, proud, and reserved before menace as he was soft and yielding to love.

So the rascal was punished and dismissed to the garden, where he was to remain until he felt chastened. Presently, however, his parents relented in the weak way they had, and strolled out into the garden, to see the flowers, or the weather, or how the potatoes

## THREE OF THEM

were coming on, or any excuse upon earth which would hide from each other their true purpose, which was to see how the exile was enduring his sufferings—each, of course, being perfectly aware all the time of the other's duplicity. There was no sign of the sinner, but presently as they approached the little bush-girt pond they heard a high, tremulous, childish voice. These were the words they heard :

“ Once on a Cannibal Island dwelt  
A-dark-eyed-maid——”

Daddy signalled caution, and the two grown-ups, as if they were playing Indian games themselves, crept up to the bushes and looked over. It was a scene which each will remember. The child stood facing the pond swinging his hand and nodding his head as he shouted :

“ She turned very red and she snorted and said  
' I wouldn't leave my little hut for you-oo-oo !  
I've got one lover and I don't want two-oo-oo ! ' ”

His eyes as he sang this weird ballad, which he had learned from his nurse, were so fixed and set that it was easy to discover his audience. Six large frogs were sitting head-on with their goggle eyes turned



## ABOUT NAUGHTINESS AND FROGS

upwards on the grass margin of the pond. They looked absurdly like six rather over-fed critics in the front row of the stalls.

"Hullo!" said Daddy, coming round the corner, and there were six flops in the water. The critics were gone.

"Hullo!" said Dimples cheerily. He never bore a grudge even when he had to be whipped.

"Singing to the frogs?"

"And two water beetles," said Dimples, who had a curious control over animals. "There was a newt, but he wouldn't stay."

"Do you think they liked it, darling?" asked the Lady, putting her arms round her prodigal.

"Oh, yes, I *know* they liked it. They gruff their throats in and out when they like things. I sang it right through twice."

Baby and Laddie had appeared upon the scene. Baby was swollen with pride because she had been taken the day before to London to see what she called "an Octopus" about her eyes. All day she sat about in corners with a piece of glass pretending to be "an octopus," and acting, as the true artist does, not to impress others, but for her own amusement in the demure self-contained way which is characteristic.



### THREE OF THEM

"Wriggly," her ancient eider-down quilt fetish, was her absurd patient, and now, up-ended in all sorts of grotesque angles, it was having its eyes examined. She had insisted upon taking it with her to London, but as it was a most disreputable rag she had to compromise that it go in a cardboard box. "Yes, dear, *I* enjoyed the journey, but Wriggly was *so* stuffy in the box." With the extraordinary imagination of young childhood she has rigged up quite a family tree of relations for this tattered quilt, mere names most of them, but very vivid all the same. Some days before the Lady had been somewhat taken aback to learn that Baby had been married the day before. "Yes, dear, I have married Wriggly's brother," she explained, and went about for some days with an air of great importance in honour of her invisible bridegroom.

Allusion has been made in previous papers to the traces of racial stages which can be observed in the development of normal children, the animal stage, the savage stage, the hunter, the scout, even the fetish worshipper. But there is one well-marked stage which may still puzzle the student, and that is the make-pretence stage. It is

## HISTORICAL PICTURES

well marked, comes suddenly, goes suddenly, and is very strong while it lasts. During this time the child continually pretends to be this or that, taking the pretence very seriously, carrying out the part very thoroughly, and showing wonderful ingenuity not only in its own playing of the rôle but in the way in which at a moment's notice it will play up to the rôle of a companion, and find the right word. "I am the dog Crusoe," says Dimples. "Down! puppy, down!" says Laddie. In a moment each catches the spirit of the other. And their answers to objections come quick and sharp. "I am a thirty-foot rock snake," Laddie announced one day, and gravely acted the part till evening. "How in the world will you get into your bed?" asked Daddy. "Oh, coil up, coil up!" said he. Now and then the absurdity of it overcomes them, and you hear the pleasantest of sounds, the sincere laughter of a child. But as a rule they are as grave as judges, if one can still use such a simile.

On one occasion early in the war, Laddie, who was then a very small boy, was seen standing about with a gloomy and malevolent air of majesty. "Who are you to-day, dear?" asked the mother. "I am the

### THREE OF THEM

German Emperor." "Oh, dear," said the Lady, "I don't think Daddy will like that at all." "Daddy! A mere common Englishman!" said the Emperor. That was one of Laddie's naughty days, and he was getting level in this fashion. With their nimble little wits they often, consciously or not, score off their elders. "What are you going to be when you grow up?" a sympathetic visitor asked Dimples. "Oh, I'll just do nothing, the same as Daddy," was the answer.

If you want to study the strange quick workings of the child mind get a book with interesting pictures which excite the imagination, and then ask the young students what they are. Daddy has an ancient illustrated history of the world which is a perpetual joy both to master and to pupils. It begins with Babylonian affairs, and then Assyrian, Egyptian, Grecian, and so on in the order of the great Empires. The Three will sit in an absorbed circle upon the hearth-rug looking at the wall-carvings of their ancestors and speculating as to their meaning, while Daddy, overlooking them from his own chair, pretends to know a good deal more than he does.

"What's this?" he asks. The "this"

## HISTORICAL PICTURES

happens to be a section of a neolithic grave, with skeleton and funeral pots in a circle all around it.

The children gaze at it earnestly.

"It's the inside of a Jumbo with a man he has eaten," says Dimples with decision.

"Jumbos don't eat men," says Laddie.

"Jumbos eat buns."

"Pots," says baby. She speaks seldom, but always with decision, and is usually right.

"Yes, dear. Pots. The man is dead and buried, and these are for his use in the next world. That was their idea in those days. Now, then, what is this?"

"Uncle Remus sucking a wolf."

"Romulus and Remus. They were the two children who grew up and built Rome. They were nursed by a wolf."

"I wonder if they knew Mowgli," said Laddie. "He had a wolf for a mummy, too."

"I'm jolly glad we've got a proper mummy," said Dimples. "Fancy saying your prayers at night to a wolf! Wouldn't it be beastly?"

"But they grew up very strong," said Daddy, "and they made such a wonderful

### THREE OF THEM

city that in time it conquered the whole world."

"But no England," said Laddie stoutly.

"Yes, England, too."

"Oo!" cried the children.

"But not *fairly*," said Laddie.

"Well, it was a good thing for England," said Daddy. "We were just painted savages and they taught us some sense. Now, boys, what is this?"

It is surprising what a lot of information the eager little brains can pick up, if you make the thing a game instead of a task. They had seen some of these pictures before and now they were off full cry, each capping the other.

"That's where the Greeks play games."

"Chariots run round that place."

"That's a temple where God lived."

"That's Babylon, and they had big stone shelves and gardens on them, and the houses were made of mud, and they are just heaps of dirt now with dogs running about."

"That's the King's palace. That's him killing lions on the wall."

"Now," said Daddy. "What's that?"

It was certainly a puzzle—an Egyptian overseer in a wall painting was standing



## HISTORICAL PICTURES

with his tablets telling off the work for a line of negro slaves. The arms were all held at strange angles.

"It's one man boxing against six," said Laddie.

"It's a woman with six men that want to marry her," was Dimples' decision.

Baby could only shake her little curly head.

"Soldiers," said she.

So they guessed and prattled as they turned over those fascinating leaves, now arguing about the cave painting of a pre-historic savage, now the picture writing of an Indian, now some strange dado taken from a Yucatan Temple buried in primeval forest. Daddy leaned back and smoked and watched and listened in the gathering gloom of evening while the firelight came and went on the eager features of the children. They were the very last buds at the end of the newest branches of the great tree of life. And here in this book they were gazing at the work of those old, old flowers upon those branches which had withered so long ago. They too would work and they would pass, and there would come yet others, as far from us as we from Babylon, who would stare and guess and laugh when



## THREE OF THEM

they saw the pictures of our little ships and aeroplanes and rude appliances for outwitting nature. It was all working and working—and to what end? The life urge was terrific and relentless, and it pushed them always on, monkey men crouching in a cave at one end—pure spirit perhaps at the other. There was more in Daddy's mind than he could tell the children as he looked at the three heads clustered over the old book before the fire.

## VI

### BILLY BONES

DADDY was a heavy sort of person as a rule, with his mind wandering away upon things that don't matter, and writing them down upon bits of paper. But when he was in the mood he could make up some very decent games, and perhaps some other Daddies would like to know about them, even if the poor munties have to do a bit of cleaning up afterwards. Let us see how a game was worked. Cunning Daddy had prepared it all—you must take a little trouble if you want a thing to be worth doing—but he had said nothing to anyone about it.

It was Christmas Day and a clear crisp afternoon. "I am so glad Christ has a fine day for his birthday," said Baby, whom we shall have to call Billie, for she would answer to no other name.

"Yes," said Dimples, "I hope He will have many happy returns."

## THREE OF THEM

“ How proud God must be of Him ! ”  
remarked Laddie.

Daddy has allowed them all to find their own relations with the Creator, and their loving little brains have conceived some very human and happy ones. Perhaps they would have been even more unusual if the Lady had not wisely intervened. But as it is there is something wonderful in their trust. “ God, Darling ! ” is the beginning of their prayers. Christ they look upon as a glorious elder brother who can do anything, and do it better than anyone else. The remorseless logic of their clean-cut minds produced dreadful dilemmas for Mumty, for she is less agile in hopping out of corners than Daddy, who is capable of cutting an argument short with a sofa cushion.

“ Mumty, dear, do you think there is cricket in the children’s heaven ? ”

“ I am sure, dear, that there is everything which would make little boys and girls happy.”

Three serious child faces grow grave over this answer and all that it involved.

“ Very well, then,” said Laddie at last.  
“ In that case of course there is cricket.”

Mumty did not dispute it, so the case

## BILLY BONES

went by default. But the consequences must follow.

“ Well, then, when they have cricket would Christ play ? ”

Mumty wriggled violently, but thought that she saw a way to safety.

“ Well, my darling, if it would make the children happier Christ would do anything.”

“ That means He would play if He was wanted,” said Laddie.

“ He would play if they were one short,” said Dimples.

“ I think, my dears, you had better go out and play on the lawn,” said the harassed lady.

“ I expect He would be jolly useful,” said Laddie with intense earnestness.

“ Perhaps He can bowl googlies,” said Dimples.

Daddy, who had been grinning at the Lady round the corner of his paper, thought it time to intervene.

“ Well, dear, it’s better than fear, is it not ? ” said he, and then, “ I say, what about a game of Billy Bones ? ”

There was a rapturous acquiescence and a general clapping of hands. In a few minutes the neighbours’ boys had assembled,

## THREE OF THEM

little cousin John, who is the same age as Billie, and Frank, his younger brother. John is engaged to Billie, and warned Frank that he must give up kissing her. "Yes, I will kiss her," said little Frank. "Then I hope you'll get a cold and then you won't be allowed," said John. John and Billie had been out all morning looking for a house. But their romance is another story, so we will get back to the point that they and a dozen others had assembled.

Daddy sat on the edge of the table and looked down at the earnest little faces. One wants to be earnest also if one is to play a good boys' game. It was a very serious council.

"Look here," said Daddy, wagging his pipe in an impressive manner. "No one must come into this who does not know what he is doing. You all understand, I hope, that it is a pretty dangerous business."

The elder ones looked elated and the younger awe-struck.

"There is still time," said Daddy, looking more and more portentous, "to get out of it. We may scrape through, but we take a risk."

They were all ready, though one little

## BILLY BONES

fellow seemed inclined to whimper, and was called a funk by his brother.

"Well, then," said Daddy, "you know, of course, what the business is. It's that horrible fellow the one-legged pirate, Billy Bones." Shade of Stevenson, forgive the two-legged pirate who writes this.

"Whatever has he done?" asked Cousin John.

"Ah, what hasn't he done? The less said about it the better."

"Was it very awful?" asked Dimples.

"No, no, dear," said Mumty.

All the faces fell.

"So awful Mumty tries to hide it. Now the point is that the fellow has been seen round here, and can easily be traced by the mark of his wooden leg. We'll either get him or he'll get us. If we can't find him we'll find his treasure anyhow. Are you ready?"

A general buzz.

"Have you all sticks or weapons?"

Yes, they all had sticks. Daddy produced a small revolver from his side pocket which gave an austere dignity to the whole proceedings.

"If we start we must see it through," said Daddy. "There is still time for anyone to back out."



## THREE OF THEM

"Is it a job for girls?" asked Dimples, with his eyes on Billie, and then gave a loud howl as his sister's stick came across his shins.

"No ragging. This is serious. Just one thing before we start. If, as we go, you come suddenly on a tall dark man with a squint and a long cloak get on to him at once. Don't wait for him to draw. That's Jack Gilmore." Here Daddy disgraced himself by bursting into laughter, a really inexcusable thing in a pirate hunt. It had suddenly occurred to him how funny it would be if they really did happen to meet some inoffensive gentleman who answered to the description, and if the whole swarm settled upon him. "It's all right, my lads," said Daddy. "I am only laughing to think of Billy's face when he comes back for his treasure and finds that it is gone. Now, then, all line up on the doormat of the garden door. Are you all there? Well, then, here is the first clue."

He drew a slip of paper from his pocket with an impressive skull and crossbones upon it. Beneath was written :

"Ten to East and ten to West  
Find the murdered pedlar's vest."

## BILLY BONES

"That's west," said Daddy, pointing straight out from the open door.

The gang drew together and consulted while Daddy lit his pipe and awaited developments.

"Ten what?" asked one.

"Well, it's always yards in the books," said Laddie.

"Paces," said Dimples.

"Well, then, ten paces to west, and then ten to east."

"That brings us back here."

"It must surely be a mistake."

"Perhaps it *is* here," said a small quiet boy named Brodie.

They all looked suspiciously at the mat. Yes, there was a bulging there against the wall. In an instant they had it up, and there was the vest with a carving knife right through the middle of it and half a bottle of red ink over the lining. The lady was shocked by realistic details, but Daddy, of coarser fibre, was quite uncompromising in getting his atmosphere. They all stood hushed and awed in the presence of this gruesome relic.

"Perhaps there's a clue in it."

"Yes, yes, here it is."

A bit of paper projected from the pocket.

## THREE OF THEM

It was torn out and eagerly opened. On it was the pirate symbol and the words :

" Hurry ! Hurry ! Do not tarry !  
Find the Flagon in the Quarry ! "

The paper had not fluttered to the earth before the whole pack was off on a hot scent. Daddy and two or three volunteer whippers-in came lumbering behind. There was only the one quarry, so the hounds streamed in and out of the furze bushes, shot across the common, and poured down into the hollow, where the high carved wall of Ashdown sandstone faced them, with alternate lines of stone and of rubble which seemed to show the rhythmic movement of the ages. There was a corner there with a huge prehistoric footmark stamped deep within it, three-toed and enormous. That is a long way from Billy Bones, but it was strange to Daddy, as he leaned upon his stick, to watch these little human bubbles, blown yesterday and bursting to-morrow, with the old, old stage as their background and the very footprint of a veteran in the piece still stamped upon it.

They nosed about, and whimpered and grouped and broke, like a dozen young puppies. Then there was a cry, and Laddie's

## BILLY BONES

slim active figure was seen tearing up a slope and balancing on a ledge. There, forty feet above the ground, was Daddy's copper shaving jug, gleaming coldly in the thin winter sunshine. Very absurd it looked stuck in a corner of the rock. It meant a climb and a long reach, but Laddie has no fear of heights, and a minute later the pot was on the ground with a ring of eager faces around it. The paper within it was plucked out and eagerly examined.

“ Fourth green—eastern edge,  
A bird is sitting in the hedge,  
Search forward—search back  
There is wicked Billy's track.”

The pack was in full cry once more, down the steep spoil-bank on the far side of the quarry, in and out of the gorse clumps, and parallel to the golf course, until they came to the fourth green, where they ran up and down the adjacent hedge. There was an absurd looking bird, which usually mounted guard over an ash tray in the study, sticking its red beak out of a thorn bush. No inscription was needed this time and the pack simply scattered and hunted for tracks. One little boy came to Daddy with a teaser.

“ Please, sir, when Billy Bones runs

### THREE OF THEM

away and hides a treasure, why does he leave clues behind him to show where he has gone ? ”

Daddy made a fine effort.

“ I don't tell everyone, ” said he, “ but between you and me Billy's negro wife has quarrelled with her husband and hates him. She leaves the traces behind in order to spite him. ”

More awkward questions might have come, but a clear call of triumph showed that Billie and John, who as an affianced pair ran in couples, had struck the trail. From now onwards the wicked negress had left little balls of paper to mark her husband's flight. Nose down and tail up the pack were on his heels—down a long slope, over a gate, along the edge of a field, and then——!

It was a truly fearsome place, and would have baulked a good many grown-ups. There was a deeply worn tangled valley upon the right with a stream at the bottom. A narrow gorge ran down to it, and it was this which cut across the path of the children. They halted at the edge and peered down into the depths, a good twenty-five-foot drop, with a wall of slippery clay, not very far from the perpendicular.



## BILLY BONES

Could it really be the trail? Yes, there was a ball of paper caught among the bramble bushes down at the bottom. One by one, seated on the ground, they slithered down into the depths. John came last with the crook of his stick in the belt which circled Billy's little waist. Then someone slipped, and in a moment what had been a perpendicular line of children had changed to a tumbled heap of humanity at the bottom of the descent. But they were up in a moment and flowed down among the thorn bushes and over the boulders till they had followed the side gorge down to the stream and were racing down the bush-grown valley. Cowardly Daddy had slipped round an easier way, for he is not built to be shot down small precipices—and besides, he had laid the trail in the morning.

Billy Bones had run down the bed of the stream among all sorts of interlacing branches and thickets of undergrowth. There, like the villain he was, he had gone right up the steep clay bank again, seventy feet high by now, but with a better slope and occasional tufts of grass. It was a hard clamber and there was many a slip and many a rescue, but stained with mire and breathing hard the whole pack reached



### THREE OF THEM

the top, and strained in the leash while Daddy shouted to them from below to hold hard until every straggler had come in. Then off again along the edge of fields with the steep valley always on the right. A grim place that valley, with the name "Slaughter Glen" and a legend of foul work done among crouching fugitives in the wars of the Danes. That little stream had run blood once, and Red Bridge spanned it lower down, so full of meaning are the old Shire names.

But the little rosy-faced boys and girls of good King George's reign knew and cared little for the dark old shadows down yonder in the valley. For half a mile they raced in and out among the hazels which border the slope. Then suddenly the track dipped down, and it was slip and slide and squatter and scramble until they were down once more in the bed of the stream which runs brown and rich with the Sussex iron. Now the directions were up stream, and all the Mumtles would have thrown up their hands could they have seen them stumbling over greasy boulders, and plodding ankle-deep through pools as they traced Billy to his lair. There were perilous passages and moments of dread when they

## BILLY BONES

came to deep places and had to make their way round one by one, their toes in crevices of the rocks and their hands clinging to drooping branches while Daddy shepherded them with a strong stick and a watchful eye. Graceful silver birches and tall shiny beech stems rose from the very lips of the stream, and their bare interlacing branches formed a continuous tunnel overhead. Keen young eyes darted in every direction for the treasure which at any moment might lie before them. Once a bottle was found in the stream.

“ It’s him ! ” cried Daddy. “ It’s his rum bottle ! We’re near him now. On, boys, on ! ”

But now they came on a curve of the valley and there before them was a perfect waterfall. The ledge of rock, green and slithery, reared itself up for ten or twelve feet, and the water covered it save for a streak on one side where a treacherous foothold could be found. This was the climax of the hunt. At the top was Billy Bones’ lair. “ Silence here, or the fellow may deal with us one by one ! ” With a fearful joy the children felt that all domestic laws had gone to the winds as the cold stream flowed down their sleeves and over

## THREE OF THEM

their grasping hands. It was hard work, but there was not one who failed to reach the summit. There they had been ordered to halt until Daddy joined them. No one must speak above a whisper. "It's just round the corner!" said Daddy, drawing his revolver. "Now, boys!" with a shout. "All together and down with the villain for ever."

A few knew that it was a game. A few were in doubt. Quite half had taken every step of the way with all seriousness, thanks to the careful detail. It was in a real Victoria Cross spirit that they charged forward with a cheer and threw themselves into the rascal's den. It was a quiet rock-girt pool with a small cavern at the side. No sign of Billy, but a cry of delight went up all the same, for there was the treasure all right. A brass-bound box lay among the rocks with an inscription in paper upon the lid, and a huge wax seal.

### BILLY BONES HIS TREASURE

FROM THE COCOS ISLANDS

	Value
X Billy his mark.	240,000 gold dollars.

## BILLY BONES

"Billy Bones has gone," cried several treble voices, while the uplifted clubs were lowered.

"The better for him!" said Daddy grimly, as he pocketed his revolver. "No, we won't open the treasure here. The diamonds might get loose. Wait till we are safe at home and then we'll see what we have got."

Keeping in a solid clump so as to form a treasure guard, the hunters made for home. There was still the atmosphere of danger. It is part of the game to work all chance events into it, so that when the three shots of some pheasant shooters rang out as they cleared the valley, Daddy yelled out that it was the pirate's alarm, and that they were pursued. Many a backward glance was cast as they hurried over the moor.

It was an eager group which leaned over the box as Daddy cut the strings with a knife. "Of course the pirates always put horrible things over their treasure. Don't be alarmed, but be ready for anything! Sometimes it was a bit of the slave who dug the hole; sometimes a poisoned dagger, sometimes merely a viper!" With an eldritch screech he threw open the lid and there was a considerable widening of the

### THREE OF THEM

circle. But they closed in again when nothing happened and listened with shining eyes to Daddy's brazen account of the contents.

"These are only diamonds," said Daddy, shaking a small bag of pebbles. "I don't suppose you would get ten thousand pounds for the lot. But this is good"—it was an ugly lump of malachite from his geological case. "This is probably the greatest uncut emerald in the world."

"Oo!" said the children, gazing with round eyes.

"Yes, they bid up to a hundred thousand in Paris, but it was withdrawn. That's the Corona Corona emerald. Here are the two famous beryls from the Sultan of Travancore's turban. They are linked together with gold for fear they should get separated." It was a very common sleeve link, but it passed all right. "All these things that look like copper medals are double doubloons artfully disguised. Here is a glass necklace of great value torn from some poor lady's throat. Here is a war medal, which no doubt could tell a terrible secret. Here is silver and opals and rubies and small stuff of all sorts."

"And what will you do with it now?"



## BILLY BONES

“ We shall get four policemen to take it to London and land it in the safe depository. So now, boys, I must go and do some work ! ”

“ My word ! So must all of us ! ” said the smiling lady, as she surveyed the flushed, mud-stained, squelch-booted group in front of her.

So there you are, Daddies all—I make you a present of the Billy Bones game. It has its advantages. It can occupy anything from ten to one hundred of the most rowdy youngsters you can get together. It can be played within a hundred-yard garden or on a five-mile moor. It gives unlimited scope for ingenuity. It need not be a treasure alone. Billy Bones was a many-sided rascal. It may be a stolen will, or the blue eye of the Yellow God, or the gold cup that Raffles stole, or the head of the Shawnee maiden. But like everything else that is worth doing at all it needs concentration and doing well. Then you will find yourself a real Daddy and the true comrade of your kiddies.



## VII

### THE FORBIDDEN SUBJECT

BOTH the boys were becoming very fair boxers and full of the spirit of the game. Even little Billie, now a nine-year-old girl, was touched with it. She could swing a fine loose left, and her right jab to the tummy has been favourably commented upon in influential quarters. But after all, it is not of much practical use to her sex. It was different with the boys.

A famous amateur champion had given them two pairs of small gloves, and never was a gift better bestowed. They took to the game like ducklings to the water, and a hen foster-mother was never more proud and fearful and surprised, all in one compound emotion, than was the lady when she found her two male children welting each other in furious combat, and yet grinning in the utmost good-nature over the contest.

They have different styles, and Daddy, watching with critical but approving eyes,

## THE FORBIDDEN SUBJECT

is not too quick to alter and make conventional that which has been taught by nature. Laddie is of the old British tradition, straight-standing, firm-footed, with a quick, straight left and a covering guard. Dimples is half American and half unalloyed nature. He sinks his chin on his chest, his left vibrates in front of him like a curious antenna which either guards or strikes, while his right is his real offensive weapon, round-handed, with a touch of upper-cut, and a fine natural swing. He is the more aggressive and dangerous, but on points the left prop must win. But the charge of the younger might shake his opponent and rattle him, and after that anything would be possible.

"They really shape very well," said Daddy, in private consultation with the lady.

She had shown her usual sense in the matter. "Of course, dear, boys ought to be able to defend themselves, and be manly and brave. But don't you think that book of old fights with the pictures . . . ?"

"Yes, I do. I've locked it up in my room."

"And the stories of those old days. They *were* rather brutal, were they not, when they fought for money and without

### THREE OF THEM

gloves? Yet Laddie is for ever drawing you on to tell about them. Do you think it wise?"

"They were grand old fellows, dear. They kept up all our ideals of courage and fair play. If it had not been for the blackguards. . . ."

"I know, dear. But still your descriptions are occasionally a little too graphic. And they love it so. They simply sit with their eyes glued upon you, lost to the world, while you talk of it. And Laddie is getting to know such a surprising amount about it. Dimples, too, tells me the most awful stories, which I trace to you."

"Well, dear, when they are so interested and inquisitive, it is not in human nature. . . ."

"But they are interested in moths and caterpillars."

"Right oh! Prize-ring is off! Moths and caterpillars are on."

So it was arranged, and Daddy had the best of resolutions, but he was overlooking the main point of all, that he was himself interested and knowledgeable when it came to old fights, and therefore could be interesting to others, while what he knew about caterpillars would not overcrowd a pill-box.

## THE FORBIDDEN SUBJECT

The mind will work on the line of least resistance.

A couple of days later, when the lady's wise words had lost their full force, Daddy sat in his arm-chair with his pipe, and he manfully chatted about caterpillars, rather handicapped by the fact that Dimples was an expert upon the subject, and had forgotten rather more than his Daddy ever knew. Then the clever little brains began to work, and this was how they did it.

"It's the oak-egger, not the privet hawk, that you mean, Daddy," said Dimples, "but I expect your memory has so much in it you have no room for the moths."

"Daddy has a fine memory."

"Used to have," said Daddy apologetically.

"Could you say all the kings of England?"

"Well, most people can do that."

"I'll tell you what Daddy can do," said Laddie. "He can give the names of all the heavy-weight champions of England from the beginning, with their dates and who beat them, and how they were beaten. Couldn't you, Daddy?"

"Well, perhaps I could. Now about this blessed moth. . . ."

## THREE OF THEM

“ But you couldn't really, Daddy,” interrupted Dimples.

“ He could, I've tried him. Ask him one yourself.”

“ Who was the first champion, Daddy ? ”

“ Well, I suppose you would call Fig the first champion,” said Daddy, with his foot deep in the trap. “ Yes, you can't go further back than Fig.”

“ Oh, do tell us about Fig.” Three pairs of elbows were on three pairs of knees, and three absorbed listeners were ready for the forbidden subject.

“ Fig was what you might call an all-round fighter. I expect Master Fig would soon be warned off if he put in an appearance at the National Sporting Club. It was 'all in' in those days. He had a place up in the Tottenham Court Road, if I remember right, and he would take anyone on at anything. If you wanted a good hiding with an ashen single-stick, or your head opened with a broadsword, or your nose flattened with a blow, Fig was the man to do it.”

“ But he wouldn't hurt his own pupils, would he ? ”

“ Oh, wouldn't he just ! Captain Godfrey said he was a man of a rugged temper,



## THE FORBIDDEN SUBJECT

and would spare no man, high or low, who took up a stick against him. That meant a good deal in those rough old days. Godfrey ought to know, for he was one of his pupils."

"Did he get hurt by Fig?"

"Rather. But he stuck it out as a gentleman should, and took all Fig could give him and came back for more, until Fig found two could play at that game, and wasn't so fond of knocking him about."

"Who was Godfrey?"

"He was a great fellow, a fine sportsman, and a grand writer. We can't judge his fighting now, but we can judge his prose, and he had Sam Johnson and all the rest of them beaten to pieces. So far as I know, he only wrote the one little book, but it has the best English of his time. I used to be able to quote some of it, but I don't remember as clearly as I used to. There was his description of how Broughton used to guard and counter. I can remember that. He says, 'He bids a welcome to the coming blow. Then with a general summons of his swelling muscles, and his firm body seconding his arm and supplying it with all its weight, he pours his pile-driving force upon his man.'"

"Fine!" cried Dimples. "Fine!" His



### THREE OF THEM

grey eyes were shining, and his cheeks flushed, for he had the soul of an artist, and every true note in music, colour, or phrase, found its answer in him.

"Who came next, Daddy?" he asked.

"But this was a little too obvious, and Daddy began to be conscious of a conspiracy.

"I'm not going through the list. Don't you think it! Let's get back to that oak-egger."

"No, but really there was just one thing I wanted to ask!" cried Laddie, with a great appearance of large-eyed sincerity.

"Who was it who beat Slack?"

"Why, surely it was Stephens the Nailor, a man of no great consequence, but then Slack was of no great consequence either, and yet the Nailor has survived in common speech, for often when folk are describing some tip-top man they say he's a nailor."

"But, Daddy," said the boy, cleverly argumentative, to keep the ball rolling.

"You said that Slack was of no consequence. How can you say that, when he beat the wonderful old champion, whose name I forget, but you said he held the belt for twenty years?"

"Broughton. Jack Broughton. Well, it's true Slack beat him, but it was one of

## THE FORBIDDEN SUBJECT

those battles which are decided by a single chance hit, and the worst man wins. Broughton got a single crack between the eyes, probably from over-confidence, and as he was not in good training, both his eyes puffed, and he went blind. Poor old chap, he went feeling his way round the ring, and crying, ' I'm not beat, your Royal Highness, but I can't see my man.' Unfortunately, his man could see him, so that was the end of the great Jack Broughton, who wanted to fight the whole regiment of Prussian Guards, one down another come on."

" But what had he to do with the Prussian Guards ? "

" Well, the Duke of Cumberland used to take Jack about with him, and he went to Germany, among other places, when the old King of Prussia, the father of Frederick the Great, had a regiment of giants who excited Jack's ambition."

" But, Daddy"—if you only keep on arguing, you can always hope to keep the game alive—" how can you prove that Slack was not really the better man, since he won ? "

" You can prove it on public form. Broughton beat men who had beaten Slack.

### THREE OF THEM

Of course, if Broughton were younger, he would have fought again, and soon turned the tables. But coming at such a time, when he was well on in middle age, it settled him. Now, about that old caterpillar we were discussing. . . .”

“Just one other thing, Daddy. You were saying that several men had lost battles just by single chance blows: who did you mean?”

“Oh, there are plenty of examples, both in old times and more recently. For example, Mace was winning his fight against Tom King with the greatest ease, when his foot slipped, and at that instant he received a terrible blow from which he never had time to recover. Then there was Tom Spring. His record would, so far as I can remember, have been one long series of victories, but for his bad luck once with Ned Painter of Norwich, whom he beat once before comfortably enough. Painter was said to have some physical peculiarity in his right shoulder which gave great force to his blow, and as he chanced to get it home in the first round, down went Master Spring for the first and last time. But Painter was an awkward chap for anyone. He was beaten by Shaw, the giant Life-

## THE FORBIDDEN SUBJECT

guardsman, who laid out so many French Cuirassiers at Waterloo. But it took him all his time. Then, of course, there was the downfall of Hickman, the terrible gasman, who invented the whisker blow, which is the father of our knockout blow to the jaw. The Bristol butcher, Neate, was really not of the same class, for Hickman was a wonder, yet that one blow did it. No doubt Hickman would have had his revenge, if it were not for his dreadful death."

"Why was his death dreadful?"

"Well, dear boy, he died drunk, and I cannot conceive anything more dreadful than that."

"What killed him then?"

"He was coming back drunk from a fight—I think it was the Hudson-Shelton battle, and he was upset from his gig, and a waggon wheel went right over his head. He had killed a dog with a poker at the last inn he had stopped at."

"Then it served him jolly well right," cried Dimples, who is a great champion of animals.

"Same here," chirped Billie.

"Oh, do go on, Daddy!" cried the elder boy. "We do love it so. Tell us anything about the ring."

## THREE OF THEM

Daddy was conscious now of how deeply he was bogged, but it was no use stopping when the mischief was done. "Well, my dears, it's against orders, and it's the last time. What more do you want to know?"

"Who do you think was the finest fighter of them all?"

"That's a matter of opinion. I don't remember any good man in the old days—nor in modern times, either—who got through without at least one defeat. Jem Belcher was beaten three times, and yet I think he was the greatest natural fighter that ever jumped into a ring. On the whole, I should vote for him."

"But, why, if he was beaten three times?"

"Because he was only beaten after his eye had been cut out."

"Oo! Who cut it out?" asked Dimples, who is always on the lookout for horrors.

"It was a racquet ball that cut it out, and put that splendid machine out of gear. And yet his proud, brave nature would not give in, and rose in fury against the thought that any should be champion but he. Have you seen his picture?"

"No."

"Well, it's in that book. . . . Oh, Lord,



## THE FORBIDDEN SUBJECT

no, it's nowhere at all, but you can take it from me that he was a grand falcon of a man to look at. He was slight, and just under six foot, with no showy muscle, but he could throw a cricket ball over a hundred yards with each hand, and that will give you an idea of his hitting power."

"Who were the men who beat him?"

"Hen Pearce, the Game Chicken, beat him. It was a sad business, for they were bosom friends, but Jem's ardent spirit would brook no rival. 'I fear to hurt your other eye, Jem,' cried the gallant Chicken from time to time in the fight. The other two fights were with Cribb. Cribb was slow and stolid, and he knew well that he had no chance with the speed and fire of Belcher, but he reckoned on two things, the single eye, which interfered with judgment of distance, and the thickness of his own skull. 'He will break his hands to pieces on my head,' said he before the fight. So it happened, and Cribb won, though not till Belcher was senseless, for that was the way of those bulldogs. And it's worth while to remember it, boys!" cried Daddy, warming suddenly to a favourite hobby. "If ever you have to fight a long fight, either with your mind or your body, and

### THREE OF THEM

if you sicken and weary, as all of us do in our weaker moments, say to yourselves, ' Well, if those poor ignorant chaps would fight to the last gasp for next to nothing, is it not for me, a gentleman, to fight till I am senseless too, or dead, if you like, before I give in over what I know to be right ? ' I don't mind telling you, my dears, that there have been times when it was not the words of good and pious men, but it was the memory and example of those old rascals, that helped me over a rough patch of the road."

Daddy paused to let the sentiment sink in, but general reflections don't interest children, though they may come back to them later.

" What did Jem Belcher do then ? "

" He died of a broken heart, as many of these old heroes did when they were really up against it. Exactly the same thing happened to George Taylor, who came after Fig. His eye was knocked out, he lost his battle with Faulkner, the cricketer, and he broke his heart, dying within a couple of months."

" Was Faulkner a very good cricketer ? " asked Laddie, whose heart is all with the national game.

## THE FORBIDDEN SUBJECT

“ I don't know about that. I suppose he must have been pretty good, for he is always so described. Anyhow, he was a most desperate fighter. He was one of the famous three from Birmingham.”

“ Who were the three from Birmingham ? ”

“ Oh, come, I am sure I've told you that story. Birmingham was only a small place then—the ‘ hardware village,’ they called it—but it was already a great sporting centre. What do you think this little place did one day ? They challenged London.”

“ Hurrah ! ” cried the children.

“ The Birmingham Three were Perrins, the giant, who weighed seventeen stone in hard training ; Jacombs, of whom I know nothing ; and Faulkner, the cricketer. They were matched against Tom Johnson, Champion of England, Big Ben Brain, and Ingleston, the Brewer. The Londoners won all three battles, but the interest centred on the giant and the champion. It was a very stern and worthy contest, and though Johnson won, it is said that he never recovered from the ponderous blows he received. Anyhow, he died not very long afterwards.”

“ I wish little Birmingham had won,”

### THREE OF THEM

said Laddie. "But that other Londoner, Big Ben Brain, wasn't he champion afterwards?"

"Yes, he had the better of Tom Johnson. We get a glimpse of Big Ben in the writings of Borrow, a splendid man whose books you will read some day. Borrow's father was a grenadier in the army, and a bit of a scrapper himself. One day he seems to have met Ben Brain in Hyde Park, and they paired off for a fight, quite in a cheerful and sociable way. The grenadier held his own, and became quite a friend of Brain's. Borrow describes how, when his father was dying, his memory went back to this old battle, and he described it and his terrible opponent, with the little descriptive touch that as Brain pulled his shirt over his head before the conflict, he showed that his body was 'swarthy and mottled like a toad.'"

"Why was it mottled?"

"I expect," said Dimples, "it was all the beatings he had had."

"Maybe he was cold," suggested Daddy. "Anyhow, it brings him clearly back to us after all the years—a dusky, sullen, inexorable sort of man. He died three years after he won the Championship from Johnson. They didn't live long in those rough

## THE FORBIDDEN SUBJECT

old days, for even the educated classes drank far more than was good for them, so you can imagine how it was with these poor fellows, who were taken about and made much of by the rich, so long as they were successful, and then deserted the moment some better man came along. But I owe Ben Brain thanks for one thing. He gave that beast, Hooper, the tinman, the thrashing he deserved."

"Why was he a beast?"

"Well, he was what they used to call a hired bully. He would let himself out to some dissipated young scoundrel. Then this fellow would insult decent people in public places, and if you remonstrated, you were likely to get your face knocked in by this bully, who would be in attendance. Bully Hooper used to walk behind a certain noble lord at Vauxhall Gardens, and fight his quarrels, in which he was always in the wrong. On one occasion he even went the length of dressing the bully up as a clergyman, but I think that ended by trying the patience of the public too far, and both he and his patron were driven out of the Gardens."

"What became of him?"

"The end of even the good fighting men



### THREE OF THEM

was not generally very happy, and most of them died young, so you can think that the black sheep were not more fortunate. Hooper died in the workhouse, diseased and wretched."

"Well, he deserved it," said Laddie, "but I don't like to think that all these other brave men had such sad ends."

"There is a good deal to be said on the other side. I don't bear in mind the fate of many of them, but speaking from memory, I could give quite a list of those who did pretty well in life, and invested their winnings in a wise way. Broughton used to buy and sell curios and furniture, and lived to be over eighty. Humphries became a successful coal merchant. Cribb and Spring were both successful publicans, and lived to be about sixty. Perrins, the giant, became a very old man. Ward, the black diamond, lived to be eighty, and used to exhibit at the Royal Academy. He was a good painter. Of course, in these days, many of the best boxers are men of some culture, and all of them are, or should be, fairly rich men. But the best of them all was Gully, who said that he had three ambitions—to be Champion of England, to win the Derby, and to be a Member of

## THE FORBIDDEN SUBJECT

Parliament. I think he won all three, certainly the first and the last. He became M.P. for Pontefract, which really means—what, Laddie ? ”

“ Broken bridge.”

“ Good boy ! One place up ! Rather a good name for a prize-fighter to represent, for their noses are generally a bit off the plumb. And now. . . .”

“ Daddy, do tell us about Molyneux.”

“ Look here, we have really talked too much. I was a fool to let you start me. And I hear Mumty’s step in the passage. Not a word more about fights. Yes, my dears, caterpillars do lay eggs. Also they turn into cocoons, or cocoons turn into caterpillars, I am not sure which. We have had a most edifying talk, dear, but it’s a glorious day, and I think we should all be better out on the links.”



By **ARTHUR CONAN DOYLE**

---

*Volumes in Murray's 2s. net Novels Series*

**THE CONAN DOYLE STORIES**  
**TALES OF THE RING AND CAMP**  
**TALES OF PIRATES AND BLUE WATER**  
**TALES OF TERROR AND MYSTERY**  
**TALES OF TWILIGHT AND THE**  
**UNSEEN**  
**TALES OF ADVENTURE AND MEDICAL**  
**LIFE**  
**TALES OF LONG AGO**

This series of volumes contains a re-issue of the short stories — apart from those relating the adventures of Sherlock Holmes — written by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle and selected by him from the various books in which they originally appeared. The stories are grouped generally according to subject, and have been taken from 'The Green Flag,' 'Round the Fire Stories,' 'Round the Red Lamp,' 'The Last Galley,' 'The Captain of the Polestar,' and 'Danger,' and some hitherto unpublished stories have been added.

They are vivid, dramatic tales that will reveal Conan Doyle in a new light to those who know him mainly as the author of 'Sherlock Holmes.'

# By ARTHUR CONAN DOYLE

---

## *Volumes in Murray's 2s. net Novels Series*

**HIS LAST BOW.** SOME REMINISCENCES OF SHERLOCK HOLMES. 'They are of the first vintage, sparkling, rich and very palatable.'—*Daily Graphic*.

**THE ADVENTURES OF SHERLOCK HOLMES.** Keenest thrills and mysteries *de luxe* which stir the blood and make the heart beat faster.

**THE MEMOIRS OF SHERLOCK HOLMES.** Thousands of his admirers will revel in these memoirs of the famous sleuth.

**THE HOUND OF THE BASKERVILLES.** A Curse, then a Mystery; at last the solution by that master, Sherlock Holmes.

**THE SIGN OF FOUR.** Who murdered Sholto? The last and highest court of appeal in detection, Sherlock Holmes, was roused to solve that problem—and solved it.

**MICAH CLARKE.** A moving romance of the Monmouth Rising—of stirring gallantry and of proved appeal.

**THE STARK MUNRO LETTERS.** Characteristically Conan Doyle. Exciting, mysterious and strongly dramatic.

**THE FIRM OF GIRDLESTONE.** A romance which abounds in lively incidents.'

**ROUND THE RED LAMP.** One of the most popular books of this famous author.

**RODNEY STONE.** A gallant, stirring story of sport and sportsmen in olden times.

**THE WHITE COMPANY.** What of the men? The men were bred in England: The bowmen—the yeomen—the lads of dale and fell.

**SIR NIGEL.** A prelude to 'The White Company,' wherein the gallant Sir Nigel wins his spurs and his lady.

**ADVENTURES OF GERARD.** With sword, imagination and wit, he served Romance—and the reader—well.

**THE EXPLOITS OF BRIGADIER GERARD.** Intrepid, witty and always gay is this amazing hero.



# By ARTHUR CONAN DOYLE

---

*Uniform Edition in 25 Volumes. 6s. net each*

MICAH CLARKE.  
THE CAPTAIN OF THE POLE STAR.  
THE SIGN OF FOUR.  
THE WHITE COMPANY.  
ADVENTURES OF SHERLOCK HOLMES.  
THE MEMOIRS OF SHERLOCK HOLMES.  
THE RETURN OF SHERLOCK HOLMES.  
THE REFUGEES.  
THE STARK MUNRO LETTERS.  
THE EXPLOITS OF BRIGADIER GERARD.  
RODNEY STONE.  
UNCLE BERNAC: A Memory of the Empire.  
THE TRAGEDY OF THE "KOROSKO."  
A DUET, with an occasional Chorus.  
THE GREEN FLAG.  
THE HOUND OF THE BASKERVILLES.  
THE ADVENTURES OF GERARD.  
SIR NIGEL.  
THROUGH THE MAGIC DOOR.  
ROUND THE FIRE STORIES.  
THE LAST GALLEY.  
THE LOST WORLD.  
ROUND THE RED LAMP.  
HIS LAST BOW: Some Reminiscences of Sherlock Holmes.  
THE VALLEY OF FEAR.

---

DANGER! AND OTHER STORIES. 6s. net.

By **ARTHUR CONAN DOYLE**

---

**POEMS : COLLECTED EDITION. 7s. 6d. net.**

'A verse-book full of keen zest in action, of humour and high spirits.'—*Morning Post*.

'Such ringing rhymes and inspiring sentiments deserve to be popular wherever the national character is valued at its true worth.'—*The Daily Telegraph*.

'His songs have a ring and a lilt of their own. Whether he be telling of the true nature of Corporal Dick's promotion, or describing the race for the Farnshire Cup, there is a vigour about his work which warms the blood!'—*Sunday Times*.

'He sings of noble deeds by land and sea, light lilting verses of hunting and racing, and inspiring lines to urge us on to fresh endeavour.' *Daily Express*.

'Many of Sir Arthur's pieces will live as long as the love for poetry itself. . . . The collection is one which should be found upon the bookshelves of all lovers of poetry.'—*Field*.

'A handsome volume that rounds off the uniform edition of his works.'—*Poetry Review*.

'A strong human note prevades them all. They are marked by those "sabre cuts of Saxon speech" that appeal so much more to the average man than the subtle weavings of poetic fancy and the "faint pulsings" of the mystical wind.'—*Light*.

THREE OTHER VOLUMES OF VERSE

SONGS OF ACTION.	6s. net.
SONGS OF THE ROAD.	6s. net.
THE GUARDS CAME THROUGH.	2s. 6d. net.











