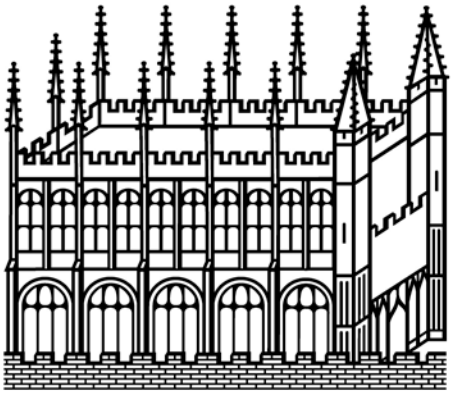
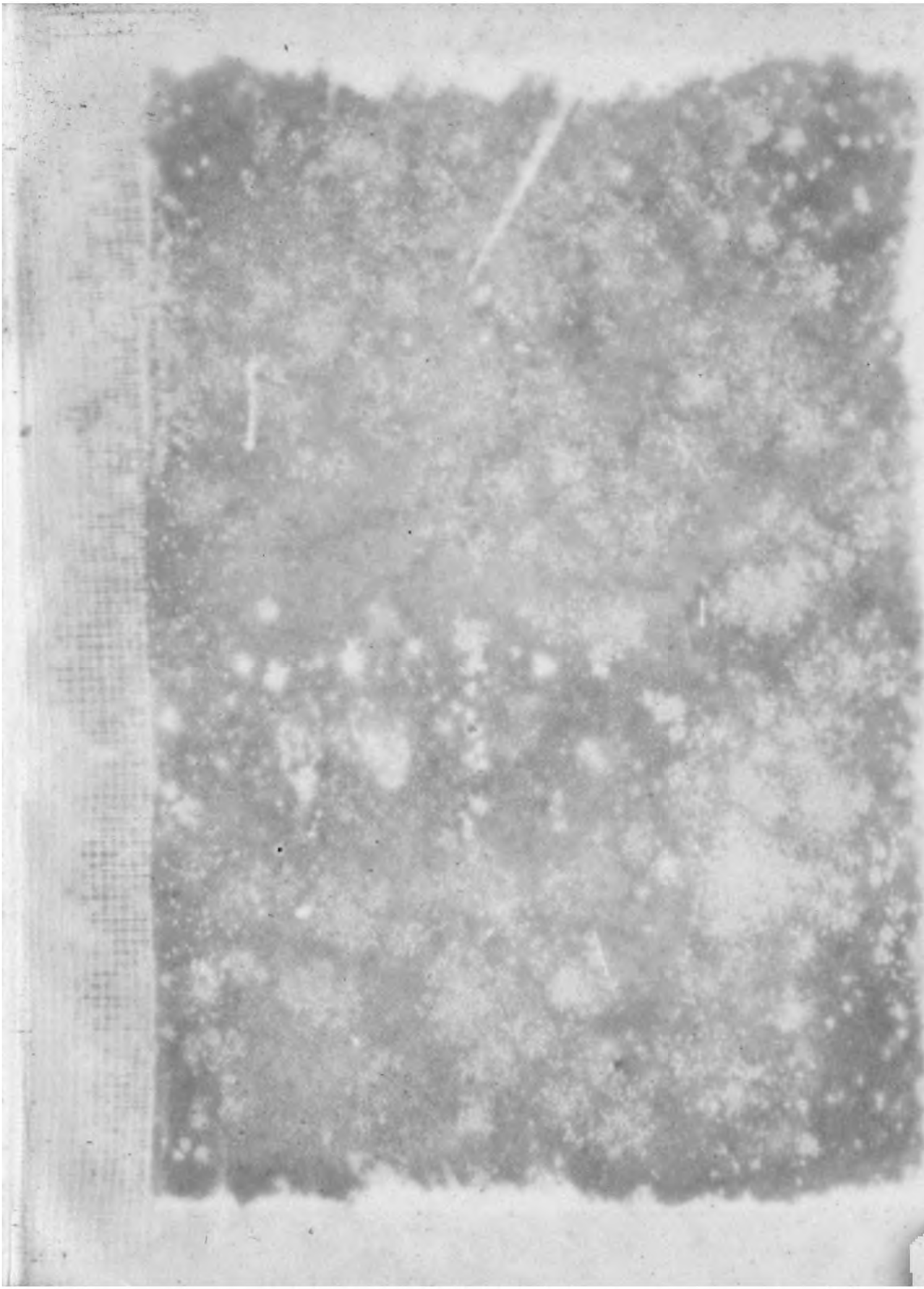


TOPO

By G. E. Brunefille.

Illustrated by Kate Greenaway.



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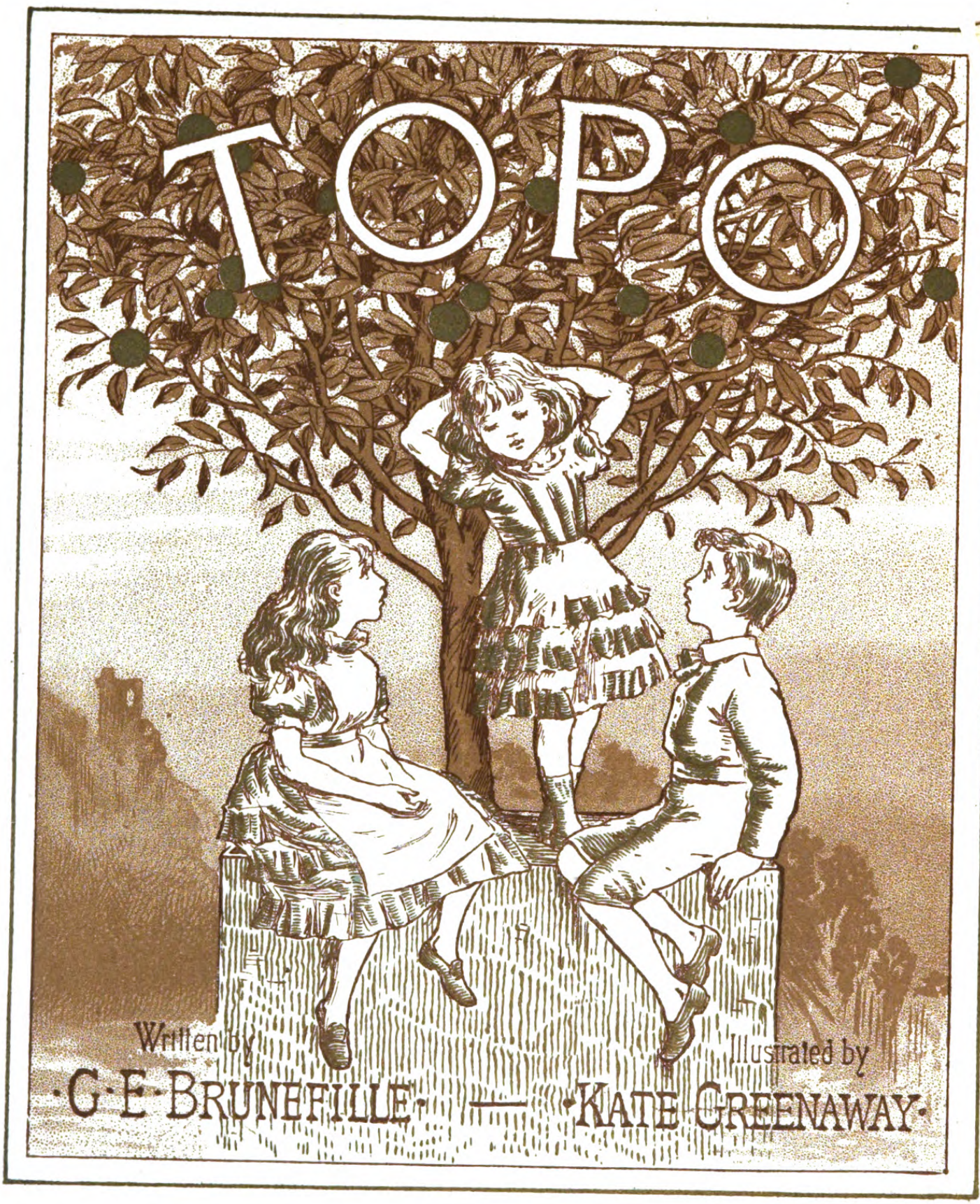
TOPO
Written by
G·E·BRUNEFILLE·
—
Illustrated by
·KATE GREENAWAY·

TOPO

A Tale about English Children in Italy

BY

G. E. BRUNEFILLE

WITH 44 PEN-AND-INK ILLUSTRATIONS

BY KATE GREENAWAY

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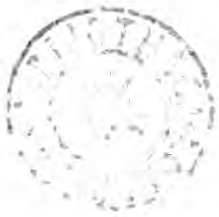

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TOPO.

CHAPTER I.

"CASA WEBB."

ONCE upon a time, and not so very long ago, there were three little children in a great big room in a large stone house, built by an Englishman named Webb, some years ago, among the mountains of North Italy, not very far from the sea and not very far from the Alps.

Now these three little children were English, and

how did they come to be up among the Italian mountains?

They were the children of Mr. and Mrs. Lynne, and it was because of the delicate state of their mother's health that they could not remain in England. The doctors all said that Mrs. Lynne would die if she stayed there, and that she must go to Italy.

Both Mr. and Mrs. Lynne were very sorry to leave their nice comfortable home in England, but after some time spent in wandering every summer, at last they settled down in this great old palace of a house, perched upon the side of a mountain, surrounded with forests of chestnut-trees and vineyards; for the mountain side sloped to the south, and was not barren and rocky like the mountains you see in pictures, but very fertile, and as it was sheltered from the cold north and east winds it was warm in winter and yet not too hot in the summer months, for it lay high above the scorching plains among cool breezes.

The house was called "Casa Webb," which means "Webb house," and was very beautifully situated. There was a fine prospect from the front lawn right

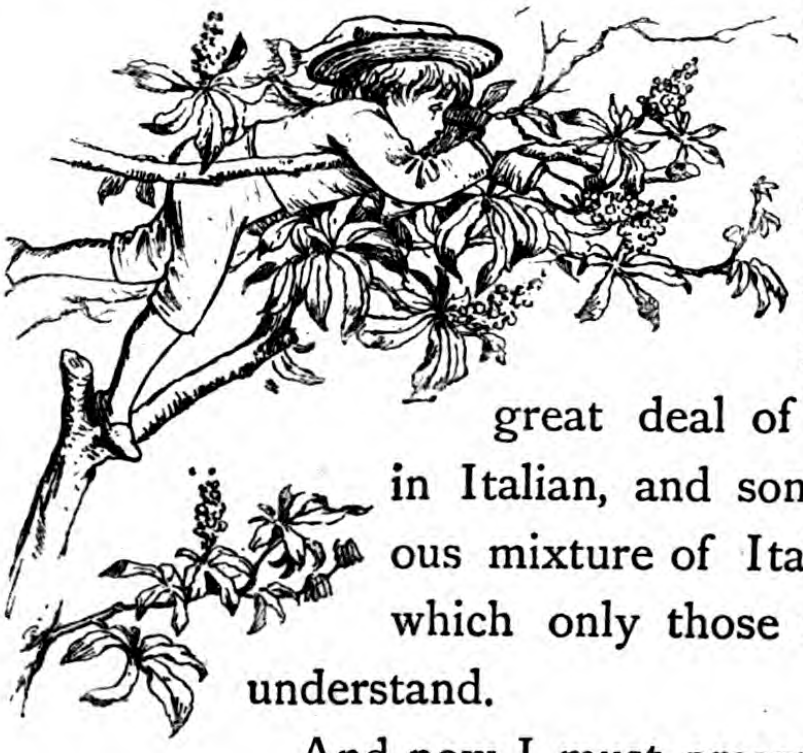
across plains and corn-fields, and olive and mulberry plantations, and pleasant white-washed villages with their square church towers, and there was a view of the Mediterranean Sea away in the far distance.

In the rear of the house was a magnificent garden, with vines, and pomegranates, and orange and lemon trees, and gorgeous flowers, and fountains, and statues, and pea cocks strutting about. There were also shady bowers and summer houses, not of trellis work, but built of solid stone, which were cool on the hottest day.

When the family first came to reside in Italy they brought with them their English servants, who, however, soon became home-sick, and could never get accustomed to the queer outlandish ways, and after a while they went back. Then Mr. and Mrs. Lynne had to engage Italian servants, like other English families who resided in the neighbourhood. Many other English people, some for the sake of their health,

and some because they liked the nice warm climate, had settled among these mountains and in the sheltered valleys, and hired or built themselves houses as best pleased them.

Mr. and Mrs. Lynne had resided abroad, and spoke French and Italian fluently; and the children learnt to speak the language of the country, as young children always do, in a marvellously short time; so that, although this story is written in English, a great deal of the talking was in Italian, and sometimes in a curious mixture of Italian and English, which only those used to it could understand.



And now I must present the three children to you. First came Principe, a handsome blue-eyed little scamp, a perfect terror to his nurse, whom he was always frightening out of her wits by climbing trees,

leaping from heights, and swinging on gates in his rashness.

Next came Ria, a pretty flaxen-haired, fair-skinned little girl, with light-blue eyes, and rather a timid look about her. She was very delicate, poor little thing; and Lucia their nurse was in constant hot-water if she let her go out in the garden with her brother and sister, as they nearly always led her into scrapes of one kind or another, which had no hurtful effect upon them, but which poor Ria was generally laid up by for several days.

Last of all came the "pickle" of the family, called "Topo" (the mouse), and sometimes "Topo Rotondo" (the dormouse), from her being so round and fat and brown. Her hair was fair, and her eyes nearly

black, and she was very pretty; but as to mischief! Nurse, when she got on that subject, could only raise her hands and shake her head, for words failed her to convey any idea of what Topo could do in that way. "Master Principe," she would say, was bad enough by himself; but when Miss Topo joined him—and then would come the lift of the hands, the shrug of the shoulders, and the shake of the head.

It was Topo who cut the doll's corns, or the threads that made the bends at the knees and elbows, so that all the bran ran through, and dolly's figure lost all its shape, while her legs and feet became bulgy. In fact there seemed to be no end to Topo's thoughtless misdeeds. When she was scolded for them, she was really so sorry when she understood what she had done that Nurse found it very hard to punish her.

One day Principe came to his sisters and said, "Papa and mamma have gone out; come into the drawing-room and let's make a train."

"No," said Ria, "we ought not. Mamma does not like our making trains. She says it makes the room in a dreadful mess. Besides, she said we might break

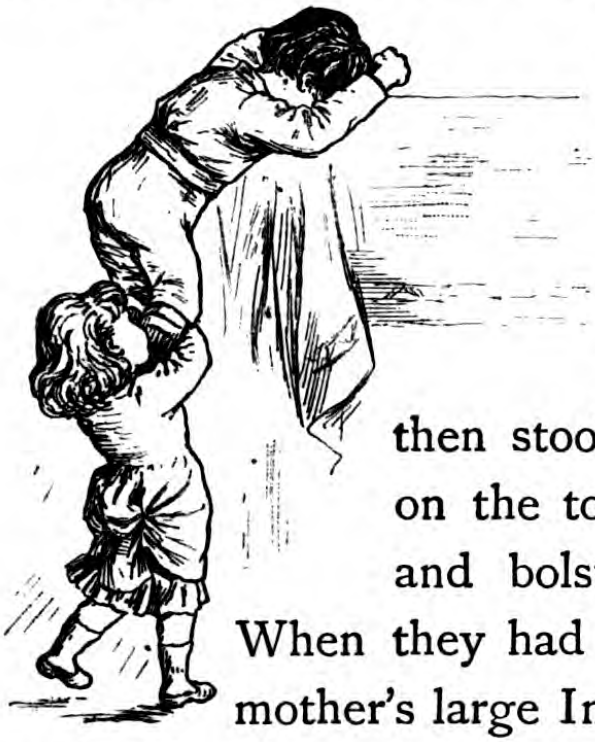
our necks if we fell from the top." But Ria's remonstrances were unheeded, as, in fact, they always were.

"I'll come, Principe," said Topo in delight at the idea, jumping down from the table where she had been sitting dangling her short, fat legs. "I'll sit on the top, with a crown on, and be Queen Elizabeth; and you'll stand at the bottom and be my footman."

"No, I won't," said Principe stoutly. "I won't be anybody's footman. There never were any queens by themselves worth anything. But I'll tell you what I'll be, I'll be King Solomon, and you two will be the two mothers with the dead baby, and I'll judge between you."

Topo did not like this, and felt rather inclined to cry at not being Queen Elizabeth; but Ria found in their Bible story-book the picture of the judgment of Solomon, and the sight of it comforted Topo for the loss of her crown. Between them Principe and Topo quite overruled Ria's feeble remonstrances against their making the train; and they all went off to the drawing-room in great excitement at the thought of the different parts they were to take.

The drawing-room in Casa Webb was an immense room opening on to the garden, and there were a great number of tables and chairs in it; the children therefore had plenty of material for their train, and they set to work with great vigour.



They dragged and pushed the largest table against the wall near the garden steps, on it they put a number of small chairs, then stools on top of the chairs, and on the top of all as many cushions and bolsters as they could collect. When they had finished they spread their mother's large India shawl over it all, which made it look very gorgeous and quite Oriental. Principe was in the very act of ascending the "train" in order to sit on the top as Solomon upon the judgment-seat, and Topo was helping him up from behind, when they heard a burst of laughter behind them. Topo let her brother go, and turned round suddenly; and poor Principe feeling his support desert him made a grab at

the shawl, and came to the ground with a run, buried beneath a mass of cushions and bolsters which the weight of the shawl had dragged down. Fortunately the stools and chairs did not follow their example.

The laughter which had been the cause of it all came from the children's parents, who had just come in with some friends. Running forward and picking Principe up, in fear lest he should have hurt himself in his fall, his mamma told him and his sisters that they were very naughty in being so disobedient, and that they were never to do it again.

"You may consider yourself lucky in getting off so easily, Principe," she said, "for you might have had a very bad fall. Promise me not to do so again."

"Promise," they all said very humbly.

Nurse Lucia appeared just then in a fright, for she had missed them from the nursery, and was afraid there was some mischief brewing. So she carried them off, with orders from their mamma to put them to bed an hour earlier as punishment for their disobedience.

CHAPTER II.

THE SCORPION.

ONE hot day Topo was lying on the dining-room table catching flies. This was how she caught them. If she saw a fly some distance off, she would drag herself along the table till she was within reach of him, then she opened her little fat hand and brought it slowly down over him. Sometimes she caught him, but generally the fly opened his little gauzy wings as she opened her brown paw, and as it came down he flew away.

This made Topo think deeply, so she lay on the table, with her little fat arms crossed before her, and her hands tucked under her chin. She looked out of the open door, over the garden and down the valley, her thoughts wandering far away.

Everything was quite silent outside, except the hum of the bees as they flew about the garden from one flower to the other, and the distant rush of the river far down in the valley below the chestnut woods and vineyards.

Now and then, in the deep silence, Topo would hear a slight rustle through the bushes in the garden, which she knew meant that the snakes were going out to pay visits.

In hot countries it is unsafe for men, women, or children to go out of doors much in the middle of the day, so the snakes avail themselves of the opportunity.

Topo had been desired not to go into the garden on that side of the house; and she would have done it

most likely, for she was often very naughty and disobedient, if it had not been for the snakes that she knew were there. Topo had a horror of snakes; merely the sight of one made her shiver and shake as if she had been already bitten by them. So she lay on her side, and thought, and slept a little and dreamt, and then woke up and wished she had a little pair of gauzy wings like her friends the dragon-flies, that she might fly away, away down the valley, and over the chestnut and olive woods, over to those distant, far-away mountains that looked such a lovely pale-blue, where she was sure the Fairies must live; for that fairies did exist she was quite sure, as every really wise person is. Presently she thought the table was getting very hard, and the flies were all out of her reach, and so she rolled herself over the edge of the table, as it was the easiest way of getting off, and came down in a soft lump on the floor without hurting herself a bit.

It was very hot, and Topo thought it would be much cooler to patter over the marble floor without

shoes and stockings; so staying in just the same position as when she rolled off the table above her, she pulled off her shoes and stockings, and presently, with the little, fat round feet quite bare, Topo got up, walked over to the garden door, and sat down on the top step putting her feet down on the next.

Almost immediately she gave a loud scream, and her mamma, just then coming in to see what she was doing, found her rolling on the floor holding one of her little feet in both hands.

"What's the matter, my darling?" said her mamma, taking her up off the floor; "what have you been doing? Show me your foot."

"Oh! it burns, it burns, mother," said poor little Topo, sobbing.

Her mother examined the foot to see, and found the traces of a scorpion sting on the sole.

"My poor darling!" said she, quite frightened, for those scorpions' stings are often dangerous in the hot weather, and she was still more frightened when, feeling Topo's head sink on her shoulder, she looked at the child, and found the poor little thing had fainted.

But now the nurse, who had heard Topo's screams of pain, came in, and Topo was carried off to bed; wet tobacco and bandages were put to her foot, and after being kept in bed for two days she was all right, but she never went on to the garden steps with bare feet again.

CHAPTER III.

A DUTCH CONCERT.

"WHAT shall we do to-day?" said Principe one very wet day that they could not go out.

They had flattened their three noses against the window-panes very often in hopes of finding that the rain had stopped; but it was of no use.

The rain came drip, drip, drip, from the broad eaves of the house; the garden looked like a pond; and, in fact, there would be no going out that day.

They amused themselves for some time with breathing on the panes, and then drawing pictures with their fingers on them; but after a time the glass got wet, and would not take the breath any longer, and looking at each other, they found that they all had smutty noses from repeatedly rubbing them on the

dusty panes. So that game came to an end, and "what shall we do?" they all asked.

"Shall we tie some grasshoppers by the leg and make them draw carts?" said Principe.

"No, we can't," said Topo, "grasshoppers live in the grass, and we can't go out and get them to-day, it rains so. I'm sure the grasshoppers, though, would like it. To be taken away from the nasty damp grass and rain! Poor things!"

"They mightn't like being tied by the leg, and have to pull a cart, Topo," said their nurse from the other end of the room. "Do you think they would, though you did bring them in from the rain?"

Topo looked thoughtful. "No; I don't think they can *like* it, or else they wouldn't sometimes jump away from the leg that's tied, you know, would they?"

"No; I don't think they would," said the nurse, smiling.

"Ria, what have you there?" said Principe to his sister, who was bending over a book at the table.

Topo and he both ran over to look. "It's only the pictures in the book of songs we got some time ago,"

said Ria; "but look here, I have an idea we will sing, as we have nothing else to do on this nasty day."

"But Nurse can't bear our singing," said Topo in doubt; "she says we make such an '*awful din*,' that it makes her head ache. Ugh! I don't think she knows what is pretty."

"I don't think she does," said Principe, "but she will be going to her dinner in a minute, and then — There! she's gone," he exclaimed, as the door closed on Nurse; "now we can sing as much as we like; I shall sing 'Killiecrankie.'"

"You can't sing it, unless we all sing it together," said Ria, "and I am going to sing, 'Alonzo the Brave and the Fair Imogen.' I like the picture. Look at Imogen and Alonzo at dinner, and the worms crawling about his forehead and eyes; I wonder how she could eat her dinner with those worms crawling about so near her."

"Ria! how nasty you are!" said Topo, shuddering; "I think that picture is the nastiest in the book; I'm going to sing, 'The Burial of Sir John Moore.'"

"I won't," "I won't, either," said both the others; so

to prove they were right, they all began singing, each one his own song, at the top of their voices! Presently Principe stopped, and, looking at his two sisters, burst out laughing, and the other two, seeing how stupid and naughty they all were, burst out laughing too.

"Well," said Ria, laughing, "I think Nurse would be

right now. But then she 'doesn't know what's pretty,' does she, Topo?"

"Well, you needn't laugh at me," said Topo stoutly, "you have been making as much noise as either of us; hasn't she, Principe?"

"There, don't fight, you two girls," said Principe, "and

I'll tell you how we'll manage. We'll sing the three songs, but not together, one after the other."

"Yes, we can do that," said Ria, "but we must begin with mine. It's much the prettiest. Besides, I am older than Topo, and Papa says gentlemen always give way to ladies, so you ought to give way to me."

"No," said Topo, not liking to be put below Ria in this grand way, "we won't sing yours first, we'll sing Principe's."

"That's it," said Principe, "we'll do it by age. Mine first, then yours, Ria, and then Topo's."

"Very well," said Ria, seeing she could not get her way, and so they began and sang, "The Battle of Killiecrankie" through, and then Ria's "Alonzo the Brave and the Fair Imogen," and then came Topo's "Burial of Sir John Moore."

Just as they had done, their nurse came up from her dinner. "Why, what have you been doing with yourselves?" she said. "You look all hot and red. Get up, Miss Ria, and you, Miss Topo, sitting on the ground there, with your hands clasping your knees like little frogs!"

"Do frogs clasp their knees with their hands, Nurse?" said Topo; "how funny they must look!"

"You are always asking questions," said Nurse. "Little girls oughtn't to ask questions; it's not pretty. And you, Master Principe, sitting on the table! I'm ashamed of you. Come and help me to lay the cloth for your dinner; and if you are good I'll take you out this afternoon for a little walk;" and so they did help her, and had their dinners, and then, the rain being over, they went out for a nice walk.

CHAPTER IV.

THE SNORING OWLS.

WHEN first our three little friends arrived at Casa Webb they were dreadfully afraid of going to bed at night. As soon as the candles were put out, and everything was quite silent, the children would hear a loud snoring as if a man was fast asleep in their room. Presently the snoring would stop, and then would begin a frightful hissing and fighting, and then the snoring would begin again.

The three children stayed awake some time listening in terror to these dreadful noises, and then fell asleep from fatigue, for they had only just arrived from a journey. But their nurse, when she came to bed and heard it also, was just as frightened as they,

till she called one of the servants of the place, who told her that it was the noise the owls made.

Next night and every night they heard the snoring of these great, big owls; quantities of them had made their nests under the broad eaves of the house. They were never seen by day, but as soon as it became dark the children used to watch them flying to and fro, so softly and silently that even when they passed quite close to them they did not hear a sound from their wings. If a cat passed close to an owl anywhere the owl would commence hissing and spitting at the cat till he frightened her away.

The chickens used to roost on the branches of a tree that grew in the fowl-yard, and as the owls were very fond of young chicken for their supper this was how they used to get the poor little things. The owl could not catch the chicken unless it was below him, so to manage this he would sit beside the chicken between it and the tree, and begin to talk to it. The chicken, very much frightened, would still try to be polite to such a dangerous neighbour. The owl would sit up quite close to the chicken, and edge it little by

little on to the end of the branch, till at last the chicken would be pushed off the end of its perch, and down would pounce the owl, and gobble poor little chick up in no time. The children thought it very wicked of the owls when their papa told them this story.

One hot night, when the moon was shining brightly outside, Principe was lying awake in his little crib. The moonlight came in at the open window, and outside Principe saw the stars looking in at him, and winking at him slyly. He thought it very rude of the stars to do so; so he winked both eyes very slowly once or twice (he could not wink one eye at a time, so he winked both), and then looked at them to see what they would do. The stars seemed to him to be in fits of laughter at him, and they winked so fast that he could only make out where they were by their light.

Principe got angry, and saying to himself, "Wink away, you rude things. I'll go and tell Mrs. Moon. Wait till she catches you winking like that;" he slowly got out of his crib, so as not to make any noise to awake his nurse.

There was hardly a sound to be heard; now and then

would come to Principe's ears the mournful cry of the "chiù," a tiny little owl, who repeats his own name over and over again; or perhaps the bushes would rustle, which told of the snakes.

Principe was just standing like a little white statue in the flood of moon-light, and was making his way across the marble floor to the window, when suddenly one of his enemies, the snoring owls, perched on the window-sill and looked at him with his great, round, solemn eyes. Principe stood still and looked at the owl in return.

Suddenly he thought how grand it would be if he could catch him! "I must manage to catch him somehow or other, dead or alive; I wonder how I could do it!" he said to himself; "salt on his tail? That *might*

do, but then I have no salt; and besides," he went on doubtfully, "I don't think salt *would* do for so big a bird. It's only little ones you can catch with it."

Looking about for something that would do, he saw the heavy wooden shoes that the nurse used in muddy weather. Those would do, he thought; so he took one up gently so as not to frighten the owl, who sat and looked at him all the time, and threw it with all his force at the bird.

Principe could throw very well, his papa had taught him to do so; and he had aimed so well this time, that the wooden shoe caught the owl full on the side of the head and knocked him back into the garden. There he lay quite motionless and still. Surely he would never snore again.

Principe was so delighted that he gave a faint "Huzza; and Nurse, waking in a fright at the noise, was still more frightened when she saw a little white figure capering about in the moonlight like an elf; for she did not at first

recognize Principe. When she did she jumped out of bed and ran at him, with the intention of boxing his ears; but he dragged her to the window, saying in high glee: "I've killed him, Nurse! I've killed him!"

"Killed what, child?" said the nurse crossly.

"The owl that snores!" said Principe; "the owl that eats up the chickens and frightens the poor pussy!"

"But where is he then?" said Nurse, not quite believing him.

"There, there. Don't you see him, beside the rose-tree? And there he was sure enough lying on the ground dead; and a little farther off, Nurse perceived one of her own wooden shoes. She could not imagine how her shoe got into such a strange place.

"What's my shoe doing there?" said she in surprise.

"I killed him with it," said Principe, "hit him on the head, and knocked him over; oh! I am so glad."

"Hush! child, and come to bed, it is much better for you to go to sleep than to sit up looking for owls."

"I wasn't looking for them, nurse. They looked for me, and I killed him! Hooray!" and Principe danced along beside his nurse; when suddenly remembering what had first brought him out of his crib, he broke away from her, and running back to the window, looked up at the moon: "If you please, Mrs. Moon, your stars are very rude. They winked at me dreadfully; but I don't mind now, as they have seen me kill Mr. Owl!"

"*Will* you never come back to bed?" said his nurse, catching him again. So to bed he went.

CHAPTER V.

THE CHERRIES.

One day Ria was wandering through the vineyard above the house. She walked on and on, eating some of the unripe grapes now and then, with a delicious feeling of being very naughty in doing so, for both her mamma and her nurse had desired her not to eat unripe fruit.

It was still early in the day, and the sun was not very hot as it shone down on Ria through the vine leaves. The mulberry-trees on which the vines hung were all in bright young leaves, and the fruit was already turning colour on them.

The grasshoppers and crickets sang in the soft grass, and a little farther on a hedge of roses in bloom made the air sweet with their perfume.

Ria walked on through it all, stopping now and then to pick a yellow or red tulip, or some scarlet and purple

anemones, and then some of the sweet roses, and perhaps some violets.

Presently she had so many flowers that her little hands could no longer hold them all, so she sat down

under a tree to settle them. She put the tulips in the centre, and then round them she put a circle of roses and violets, and outside them she put the scarlet and purple anemones; and through all, here and there, she put little tufts of grass and corn to stick up. Her nosegay was lovely, for Ria had great taste in settling flowers.

In tying her flowers with a piece of long grass she cut her fingers with it; so when she had done with her flowers she lay back against the tree and sucked her finger. She lay so quiet that after some time the grasshoppers began to hop about her on her dress, and she watched them, and saw how beautiful their grey wings, with bright crimson linings, were; and also others that were dressed entirely in grass-green silk coats and satin trousers. All their clothes seemed to fit them so well. She wondered how she would look if she had long elbows that went up high over her back, and seemed to cross there. Presently a Lady Bird came and walked up her hand, and looked at each of her fingers; and Ria was delighted when she found it would walk up stairs as she called, presenting one

finger after another to it. However, Lady Bird got tired of walking up stairs; perhaps she thought the weather was too hot for such hard work, but she opened her wings and flew away. So then, Ria sang

"Lady Bird, Lady Bird, fly away home,
Your house is on fire,
Your children are gone."

And Lady Bird, believing her, flew away as hard as she could, alarmed for the safety of her home and family.

It was a cherry-tree Ria was lying under, and she began to think it would be very nice to have some cherries, as she was very thirsty from being out in the sun so long. So she looked about, but all the cherries were out of her reach, shining and glistening a delicate red through the bright green leaves. What was she to do? The tree was not an easy one to climb; besides, Ria could not climb at all well, Topo and Principe were the ones to run up trees;

and then the weather was too hot for the attempt. After great looking about she at last saw one which she could reach with her lips if she stood on tip-toe; so she got under it, and opening her mouth bit the cherry in half.

What could be the matter with the child? She had no sooner bitten the cherry in half than she uttered a shriek, and tore away down the vineyard over the corn, rushing through the vines.

The truth of the matter was that tree-bugs were as fond of cherries as Ria herself, and one of them was quietly having his dessert when Ria came and bit him and the cherry in half.

Now when tree-bugs are killed they give out by no means an agreeable odour, or, as Ria found, taste either; so the poor little thing ran away home till she fairly nestled in her papa's arms.

"Why! Ria! my love, what is the matter?" said her father.

"Oh, Papa, Papa, I've eaten a beast!" was all Ria could gasp out for some time till she recovered her breath a little; and when she at last told her papa what

was the matter he burst out laughing. Ria looked rather hurt, so her papa stopped laughing and said: "Well, Ria, I am very sorry for your having eaten the beast, as you call him; but you should have remembered the proverb and not 'made two bites of a cherry.'"

Ria did not eat cherries again for a long time.

CHAPTER VI.

TOPO AT CHURCH.

ONE day, it was Sunday, Topo asked her mamma to let her go to church with her, when she was going in the afternoon, instead of going with Principe and Ria and the nurse in the morning. Her mamma said "Yes;" and so when the time came Topo was dressed in her pretty pink and white muslin frock; her fluffy fair hair was smoothed and tied with a pink ribbon, and she was declared ready by her nurse. Topo always objected to putting on gloves; in fact it was very seldom that she could be induced to let them be put on; but to-day, what is that Nurse is bringing out for her? Why, a most beautiful little pair of black silk mittens, only covering her hand up to her fingers, and leaving them free to wriggle about as much as they pleased.

Topo was delighted, and as her mamma was not ready, ran about the house showing them to everybody in great glee.

When her mamma came out she found her jumping up and down the steps. "Mamma, dear, do look, I can jump down three steps at a time. Isn't it grand. Here goes." And down she went, after having stood for some time at the top swinging her arms backwards and forwards to get a spring out of her little fat self.

"Very grand," said her mamma, smiling; "but don't you think, Topo, that it is time to leave off jumping, and thinking of jumping, and go to church, and think of church."

Topo stopped at once, for she was quite sure her mamma was right; and besides, at the last jump she had gone down on the tail of her frock, and she was afraid of Nurse looking out of the window and seeing it, and scolding her afterwards; so she wanted to get out of sight of the house.

The children always admired their pretty mamma very much; she was so pretty, and had such a soft velvet skin to kiss; Topo always said she was even

softer and nicer to kiss than Mina, the Persian cat; for when you kissed Mina you probably got a mouthful of soft fur, which was not pleasant. And how pretty her mamma looked to-day in her brown silk dress, and lace shawl, and little brown bonnet. To Topo's great delight she found that her mamma's mittens were exactly like hers, which made her more proud of them than ever; for it was Topo's great ambition to be in everything as like her mamma as possible.

Presently they got to the church, and went in through the porch. Topo had not been often to church before, for she was very little, and the service was too long for her patience in sitting quiet. It was only on promises of good behaviour that her mamma consented to take her with her to-day.

Mamma walked up the aisle, and Topo followed close after, for she was afraid to lose herself amongst all the big people round them. Her mamma put Topo up on the seat beside her, and then knelt down to say her prayers. Topo looked round the church and examined everything, and so shall you with her if you like.

The church was a small one, and inside it was all made of beautiful brown wood, painted here and there with bright colours, which looked very well. It was divided into three parts by pillars, a low part at each side, and a high part in the middle, and all the roofs went sloping up to the top. Between every pillar was an arch, and opposite the arches were little round windows, made of such little bits of glass put together that you could not see out; "and what's the use of windows," said Topo to herself in disgust, "if you cannot see out of them?"

Just opposite them at the end of the church were two long windows, in each of which there was a big figure. One of them was dressed in a bright blue cloak, which seemed to be in his way a good deal, as he was holding it up under his arm as well as he could, and with both

hands he held two white pieces of stone with numbers on them. Topo knew that this was Moses; but the funniest part of Moses was, that he had two horns growing out of his white hair.

"Why has Moses got horns, I wonder?" thought Topo; "it's only the Devil who has horns, I thought;

and why have both he and Saint Peter at the other side such very big lumps on their toes? It's not pretty.

Saint Peter stood at the other side in a crimson cloak, as great a bother to him as Moses' was, and holding two great keys.

Topo understood what the keys were; she had heard her nurse say one day that they were the keys of heaven. But now her mamma had got up from her knees, and in came by two and two at the top of the church a number of little boys in white shirts, and big men also in white shirts following them. They sat down at the top.

"Mamma," whispered Topo, "what are they for, and *why* do they wear their night-gowns in the day-time?"

"Hush, Topo," said her mamma; "those people are to lead the singing."

"May I ting too, Mamma?" said Topo.

"Yes, dear, when the organ plays, you may."

Topo was delighted, for, as we have seen, she and the other children were all very fond of singing.

Now, by and by the organ began playing very softly, while the clergyman walked up the steps of the reading-desk and knelt down there.

But what is this shrill sound in the church?

"'Ittle Bo-Peep has 'ost her s'eep,
And canno' tell where to find dem;
'Et dem alone and dey'll come home,
And bring dere tails behind dem."

Why, I declare it is Topo who is singing at the top of her voice by herself. "Sit down, Topo. What are you doing?" said her mamma, horrified, pulling her down, for she had got up to sing.

"Mayn't I sing, Mamma? You said I might, you know."

"How could you be so silly, Topo! I meant when everyone sang. Sit quiet now, and be good, or else I must take you home immediately."

Poor little Topo was thoroughly subdued; and still more so when, looking round a little, she found everyone

laughing at her. Even the clergyman was smiling; she saw him do so, though he was trying to hide it. Topo remained perfectly quiet for the rest of the service; looked at her toes stretched out in front of her, for they were too short to reach the edge of the seat, and never once looked round or moved in any way.

When they came out her mamma told her that she must never do such a thing again; little girls must be seen and not heard in most places, and especially in church. Topo declared she was very sorry at having been so "irreverent," as her mamma called it; but she could not help thinking that if she was not to sing her mamma ought not to have told her she might. She knew she had done wrong, as her mamma said so; but she could not quite see how.

CHAPTER VII.

A BIRD-CATCHING EXPEDITION.

PRINCIPE had a great friend, an Italian boy called Camillo, whom he was often playing with. One evening Camillo came to him and asked him to go out bird-catching next morning. Principe was only too glad, and when he said he would go if his papa allowed him, Camillo told him to bring Topo; for Camillo was very fond of Topo, and they used to have great games together. Principe said he was sure she would come, and ran home in great delight to ask leave for them both. Ria was such a delicate child that there was no question of her going, as both getting up so early and the fatigue of the walk would be too much for her.

Principe and Topo both got leave to go, and went to bed, after making their nurse promise to have them

called at half-past three, making plans of what they would do with all the birds they intended catching.

"I'll give you all the little ones, Topo," said Principe generously, "but the big ones I shall keep for myself."

Topo did not mind this arrangement in the least, knowing perfectly well that whatever bird she wanted Camillo would give her.

At half-past three they were wakened by their nurse's mother, a countrywoman of the place, who lived in the house, but went out to work every morning, as all the other peasants did, at four o'clock.

Neither of the children understood very well at first why they were called so early, and Principe was rather cross, as he always was when first waked; but as soon as they remembered the reason of it all, they jumped out of their cribs, and it was a race who should be dressed the first.

They were soon ready, and would hardly wait to take their bread and milk before rushing out of the house down to where they were to meet Camillo.

It was still some time before sunrise, and the air was quite sharp and cold, which made the warm handker-

chiefs that had been tied round their throats very comfortable. The birds were all twittering and singing in the bushes, and down towards the east a faint pinkish-yellow was creeping up over the sky.

They found Camillo waiting for them a little impatiently, though he had only just arrived, and they set off immediately. Camillo carried a bundle of long green sticks under one arm and under the other hugged a cage

in which was a small grey owl, of the kind known in Italy as "civetta." Principe was given a glue-pot filled with a green, shiny-looking mixture, the bird-lime, to carry, and Topo, wishing to make herself useful also, got hold of a bundle of string. Camillo, who had often been out

bird-catching before, and said he knew all about it, told his companions that they were going some distance off to a little copse, principally of low brushwood, where he was sure they would find plenty of "game." As they went along they met parties of peasant girls on their way to work in the fields. The men dressed in the loose "pegtop" trousers of some very bright coloured cloth, which the Italian countrymen dearly love, and their coat slung over one shoulder, for they hardly ever put their arms into the sleeves.

The women wore short petticoats of red or blue, or some bright colour, white chemises with long, full white sleeves under their bodices, and some bright handkerchief over their head, and tied under the chin. They all smiled and nodded to the three children as they passed, and asked them where they were going so early. "Bird-catching," was the reply from Camillo; at which the peasants generally smiled still more, as if rather amused at these three little things trying to catch birds not *very* much smaller than themselves.

So on they went, climbing the steep road that began to look whiter as the day drew on. At last they reached

the place Camillo had fixed upon. It was a small wood on the hill side, with only a few really big trees in it, the rest being middle sized or small, and between them grew low bushes.

Camillo had chosen well; it looked just the place for

small birds. Topo was all excitement. Visions of catching an eagle perhaps floated before her eyes. She did not quite understand how it was all to be managed, but

she was sure Camillo and Principe did, and she had entire faith in them. They made their way through the bushes with as little noise as possible, and got to a little space amongst them, which was to be the scene of action.

"Now, Topo," said Camillo, "if you want to be of any use at all, or in fact if we are to catch anything, or have any luck at all to-day, you must be as quiet as a mouse. You may kneel down behind this bush and look through this little hole. Principe and I will do the rest."

Topo would have liked to help, but she submitted and took her place behind the bush as she was told. Camillo now took the owl out of the cage. The poor little owl had been blinking his eyes and looking very uncomfortable all the way along. He found it very hard to sit on his perch sometimes; for when the children took to running,

as they did most part of the way, he was jerked up and down and from side to side, without any regard for his feelings. Principe took a stick from one of the surrounding bushes, as Camillo told him, and stuck it firmly in the ground, and then stamped upon the earth all about and around it, so that it should not easily come

out. Camillo then took Mr. Owl, and tying a string round his leg, tied the other end of it to the stick in the ground. Now Topo's ball of string came in very usefully; for, after smearing Camillo's bundle of long green branches all over with the bird-lime Principe carried, the branches had to be tied up through the bushes surrounding the space of grass where Mr. Owl was tied by the leg.

And now, while Camillo, Principe, and Topo are lying behind their bush waiting for the birds to come and be caught, I will try and tell you all about this way of catching birds.

This little owl, the "civetta" (I don't know the English name for it), is the greatest enemy of the little birds in the woods in Italy. He eats every one he can. But

the little birds are so stupid, that whenever they hear his petulant little cry they immediately gather all around. Is it not silly of them? Now when the "civetta" is tied to a stake in the way I have told you of, and begins to cry out, the little birds from all parts come flocking to the place, and finding their enemy tied by the leg sit down on the bushes all round to scold and look at him. Of course, as the branches covered with bird-lime are stuck all through the bushes, it is most likely the birds will sit on them and be stuck, and so not be able to fly away. Then when as many are caught as the hunters want, they are taken off the sticky branches and put into the big cage always brought out for that purpose. I forgot to say that Principe had carried this cage all the way, on condition that Camillo should carry it back, "when it will be full of birds, you know."

Now all the time that I have been telling you this the three children have been lying quite still behind their bush, through which they could see on to the grass plot where Mr. Owl was. Mr. Owl did his duty beautifully. He hopped round and round his stake, his

big round eyes glaring solemnly in every direction and giving out his shrill cry from time to time.

The sky was now getting redder and redder, and presently the children saw great streaks of rose-colour shoot up from behind the hill that hid the sunrise from them. One of the streaks seemed to touch and go through a little white cloud that, till the streak touched it, seemed to be still asleep floating about in the sky. But as soon as it got this scolding from the sun for its laziness it seemed to blush all over, as if in shame of having been found out. Presently the streaks of rose-colour that had so frightened the cloud melted away and covered the whole sky with pink, and as the children lay there and watched all this wonderful fairy-like changing from pale-sea-green to yellow, from yellow to orange, from orange to bright red, and from the red to the pale blue of the morning sky, they saw the cause of it all come slowly up over the little hill in front of them, and suddenly they felt themselves bathed in the warm flood of light, the morning greeting from that king of happiness the sun.

"Good gracious! it must be nearly half-past five!"

said Camillo suddenly; "why, we have been all but asleep, watching the sunrise. But how lovely it is, isn't it?"

"Oh! it's beautiful!" said Topo breathlessly; for she had seen sunrises very seldom in her small life. "Does it really do all that *every* morning?"

"I believe so, little woman," said Camillo, yawning. "But are those wretched birds *never* coming, I wonder; I haven't seen one yet."

"Don't you think it's rather cold?" asked Principe, shivering. He had rebelled against a warmer coat when dressing that morning, and was now paying the penalty of his wilfulness. "Cold! no! what can be making you cold?" said Topo in surprise, for she was warmly made up, and besides, was so fat she hardly ever felt cold.

"I don't believe in those birds," said Camillo, "we've been here nearly an hour and a half lying quite still, and no bird has yet come."

"What's the matter with the owl?" said Topo, who had been watching Mr. Owl through the bush. Mr. Owl was, and had been for ever so long, standing per-

fectly still, and, as Topo thought, watching her with one eye as steadily as she was watching him with both. He never winked his open eye, but kept it as wide awake as his other was fast asleep. To tell the truth, the bird was as tired of the whole business as they were, and was all but fast asleep when Topo called attention to him.

"I say, Principe, I vote we leave this and go home again. It's stupid work when those birds won't come. And I'm *awfully* hungry," said Camillo.

"Oh! so am I," and "I am too," said the others in chorus, for the keen morning air had made them as hungry as wolves. So the move was made, and waking up Mr. Owl for his journey home, which he seemed greatly to dislike, and tried to bite at the children when they came to untie his leg, put him into his cage, and then turned to collect the rest of their things.

What was Topo's delight when, after untying a good many of the bird-limed branches, they came to one where they found a little bird caught, and almost dead from fright and struggling. It was a very young bird, that evidently knew nothing of the world as yet. It was covered with dark brown feathers, its breast being a

little lighter-coloured. Topo freed its legs from the bird-lime and took it between her hands to warm it, for it was dreadfully cold. Neither she nor Principe knew what kind of bird it was; but Camillo, who was rather vexed at having caught nothing else, scornfully said that it was a sparrow. Topo was very indignant at such a name being given to her bird, which she was sure must be of some very rare kind. After they had gone round all the bushes and found nothing else they gathered their things together and set out homewards, rather out of temper at having to come back with only one tiny bird in the big cage they had taken out with the intention of bringing home full of eagles, or some such big game.

Topo had one consolation, however. Her little brown "sparrow," as Camillo called it, was pronounced by the gardener to be, what do you think? A young nightingale! Topo was enchanted, and took her bird in and gave it to her mamma, for she had heard her say very often how much she wished for one.

And so ended her and Principe's first attempt at bird-catching.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE TOY-MOUSE.

One rainy day the children did not know what to do. After trying to play in the nursery they found that the dolls were stupid, and so were all their other toys. The dolls lay stiffly on their backs, and stared hard at the ceiling, except one of them, who shut her eyes whenever she was laid flat.

The bricks would not stand up in the right positions; besides, the three children all wanted to build with them at the same time, and all but came to a quarrel, so Nurse had to interfere and shut the bricks up in the closet.

That closet was the children's horror. Very often,

if they were naughty, the favourite toys were locked up there, and Ria and Topo had often cried their eyes out at the thought of their poor dollies being shut up there in the dark. Once Topo had bravely asked her nurse to shut her up in the closet instead of Carmelita her doll; but she found it so nasty and dark when she was there, that she always let Carmelita be shut up after that, and never interfered to save her again.

Then they had tried their Chinese puzzles, but the pieces would not fit in, for they had lost one or two, which spoiled the others.

Finally Principe took his white mouse that ran about the room if you wound it up. It was a very pretty little mouse covered all over with white shiny fur; it had a pretty pointed little nose, with a black tip, and a little bit of red cloth hanging out just under it, which was its tongue. On the top of its head it had a pair of little pointed ears, and a little below them two beautiful red eyes; and also it had a long white tail behind. When you wanted to wind it up you had to turn it over and put the key in just between its paws, where there was a little hole. It

would run about very fast at first, and then get slower and slower, until whirr-r-r-r—it would stop suddenly and look as if it quite knew what it was doing. It was a dear little mouse, and almost as good as a live one. The children were very fond of it, and had only had it a short time, so were not tired of it yet. To-day they had made it run about many times, until Principe thought that if he wound it faster it would perhaps run about longer. So he set to work, winding it as fast as he could, when suddenly the rolling sound of the winding stopped and there was a sharp click! Principe put the mouse down to run about, but the mouse stood perfectly still, and would not run a bit.

"Oh! Principe, you have broken it!" said Ria in dismay.

"Broken it? Not I!" said Principe slowly, for he did not know what the mouse could mean by not running about. "Perhaps it is not wound up enough, and so saying he took up the mouse and found a little bit of wire sticking out of the winding-up hole.

"I'm afraid I have broken it! What shall I do? Mamma will be so angry; she told us to take great care

of it. Ugh! you nasty thing! why did you break like that? and Principe gave poor Mousie a kick with his foot." Topo flew to the rescue of her name-sake.

"Principe, how can you!" she said, sobbing, for she was crying at the loss of her favourite toy. "I'll take it to Mamma and see if she can mend it."

"I think Topo's right," said Ria, "I think we had better go and tell her."

"Well, perhaps so," said Principe reluctantly. "Cheer up, Topo, don't cry. Perhaps Mamma will be able to mend poor Mousie." Topo put Mousie into her pina-

fore, dried her eyes, and followed by Principe and Ria made her way to her mamma's door. "Come in," they heard, after they had knocked; so in they went.

"My dear children, what is the matter?" said their mamma, startled at the sight of the three pitiful faces.

Topo, her cheeks still stained from her tears, held up with both her little hands the corners of her pinafore in which lay poor Mousie.

"Mousie won't run any more, Mamma."

"Oh, is that all?" said their mother, relieved, for she had thought something serious had happened.

"Show me Mousie—you have her, Topo; give her to me." Mousie was accordingly delivered over; but after examining her a good deal she was declared to be past recovery.

"I'll ask Papa if he can do anything to it," said their mamma, seeing Topo's face grow longer when she heard that Mousie's racing powers were over.

"Do you really think he will be able to mend Mousie?" said Topo; "I heard him say when he brought her to us, that we must take care of it, as it would be easily broken."

"Well, well, if it is broken it can't be helped," said Principe impatiently; "after all, what is the use of making a fuss about the stupid thing."

"Never mind, Topo," said their mamma, "and we'll see what can be done when father comes in. In the meantime, would you all like me to tell you a story about a real mouse."

"Oh, *please* do, dear mother," they all exclaimed, for it was one of their greatest treats to get their mamma to tell them a story, as she only did so now and then.

"Now you must all be good children, and listen; but if you find it too long and stupid to listen to, say so, and I will stop."

The children laughed at the idea of their mamma's stories being either too long or too stupid to listen to.

Principe got hold of a big arm-chair, his papa's chair, and curling himself up at the back of it invited Topo to come and share it with him, which she did gladly.

Ria curled herself up in a ball on the bed, and to all appearance went fast to sleep, though she listened carefully all the time.

And while their mamma is putting away her work

before beginning her story I will tell you what kind of room she had. It was not too big a room, nor too small a one, but just the nice comfortable size. The walls were all papered with a lovely rose-coloured paper, with little gold lines on it. Pretty pictures were hung on the walls, and the curtains to the three windows were all white muslin, tied up with pink ribbons. There were curtains too over the looking-glasses, all lined and frilled with pink. The children used to think it the prettiest room in the world. It was always so deliciously cool, for the sun never came on that side of the house, and the green shutters were nearly closed all the day long. It would be no wonder if Ria did go to sleep altogether, curled up on a soft bed in this cool, shady room, with the gentle noise of falling water from the fountain in the garden, the hum of the bees flying from one flower to the other, and the "ru-coo, ru-coo" of the doves in their cage in one corner of the room. She does not go to sleep though; but lies there lazily watching her mother moving about putting her work in order, and thinking was there ever such a dear, sweet, pretty mamma as hers.

"Now, kittens, are you all settled and ready to listen?" said Mamma when she had put her things away, and sat down with her colour box in front of her, for she was going to paint a bunch of flowers while she talked to them.

"Oh, quite, quite ready!" was the answer.

So she began:—But I think I must put it off to the next chapter, and give such a story a whole one to itself.

CHAPTER IX.

THE TRUE HISTORY OF MR. AND MRS. MOUSE.

ONCE upon a time there lived a Mr. and Mrs. Mouse. They were sometimes almost tempted to be sorry that they did live, for they were often very short of anything to eat, and it had happened once or twice that they were very nearly eaten up by cats, or hunted by dogs, all of which made them very unhappy. They had changed their house over and over again, till they were quite sick of such a wandering life. At last Mr. Mouse said to his wife one day: "My dear, I have made up my mind not to settle down anywhere till I have thoroughly examined the place to see if it will suit, for I am tired of having to change every week like this."

"Very well, dear," said his wife, "I quite agree with

you. I am as tired of this moving as you can be. Do you know, I am getting quite thin from all this worry of dogs and cats. I feel quite loose in my coat, and I feel so dreadfully nervous of traps every time I venture out at night into the kitchen."

"Poor little thing," said Mr. Mouse; "but I think I know of a place that may suit us. The old lady that lives up stairs in her bed-room is a kind old woman, I have heard cook say; don't you think we might look behind the wainscot of her room, and see if it would suit?"

So they agreed to go up stairs that very night and pay a visit to the old lady's room. The old lady was a great invalid, and hardly ever left her room. Mr. and Mrs. Mouse inspected the whole room carefully, she looking after their lodgings, and he seeing what chances there were of food, and what kinds of it, for Mr. Mouse was rather dainty in his eating, if he were not hard up for food, as they had been a good deal lately. They found everything perfection. As to the lodgings, Mrs. Mouse found a hole which delighted her extremely. It was obscurely hid

in the wainscot under the wardrobe, where nobody could possibly see them going in and out, just to her liking. With a little nibbling of the wood here and there inside the hole she thought it would make the most delightful house anybody ever had. There were no nasty draughts to give her cold, and if they wanted a little amusement during the day there was the whole length of the wardrobe to race along under; for, to tell the truth, Mr. and Mrs. Mouse were both quite young yet, and enjoyed a good scamper immensely. She also found that there had been no other mice for a very long time, if there ever had been. She was very glad of this, as she by no means approved of a lot of other mice being there to interfere with her and her husband. Mr. Mouse was equally pleased with what he found.

The old lady who lived in the room was constantly having all kinds of invalid messes, arrow-root, gruel, &c. There would have been quite enough to eat from what she left alone; but besides all her eatables there was a large cage full of birds, who spattered their seed about in all directions, and Mr. and Mrs. Mouse were very fond of bird-seed. Then there were always bread-

crumbs about, and lumps of sugar; in fact both Mr. and Mrs. Mouse agreed in thinking that there had never been a place so thoroughly fitted for them in every way. So after examining the room into every corner, and being quite satisfied, they both scampered off down stairs again, and, avoiding the cat, got safely home.

Next day they set about moving, or rather next night, for they did nothing all day but pack up their trunks and rest themselves before the night came on. They worked very hard, and were all but settled in their new home when the morning came.

Then Mrs. Mouse turned her husband out while she arranged the inside of her house. She took great pains about their bed-room, which she filled up with some rose-leaves from a "pot-pourri" vase on the landing outside, which made a deliciously soft bed to lie upon. At each corner, to make the pillars of the bed, she stuck a clove or bit of cinnamon, and to make the curtains over the top and at the sides she robbed a spider's web, which looked lovely. When she had finished all her arrangements she called Mr. Mouse in,

and when she heard his little squeaks and screams of delight she was fully satisfied. In the meantime he had brushed the floor just outside with his tail till it was quite clean, and on it he had spread their first meal in their new house. And what a good breakfast it was! Bird-seed of several kinds, bread-crumbs, a little bit of arrow-root, some lumps of sugar, and as dessert he had with great courage stolen a little piece of chocolate from the old lady's bedside. They were very jolly in their new house; they had never felt so secure anywhere before, and hoped they might now live in peace.

After living there some time they found out that the old lady was very fond of all kinds of animals, and the idea of anything being killed was dreadfully painful to her. She was not aware that a cat was kept below stairs, or she would not have allowed it, for she was very fond of mice. Mr. and Mrs. Mouse knew they were perfectly safe with her, but they were not at all as sure of her maid, who looked very cross and grumpy.

So things went on for some time very happily, and Mrs. Mouse began to look about for a good place to put her babies in, for she had fifteen of them. She found a large bottle under the wardrobe at one end, and so she told her husband she would put them there. It was not very nice of Mr. Mouse, but he disliked those babies. He thought them hideous, nasty little things, without any hair at all on their bodies, and he thought them horrid for the perpetual squeaking they kept up. He also said that he thought Mrs. Mouse might very well have been satisfied with half the number; but he only said that once, for his wife fired up to such a degree, said he was most unkind, and that he ought to be proud of such a family, for some lady mice had so little pride that they only had six or seven.

"Nobody can say that of me," said Mrs Mouse, hold-

ing up her nose in the air; and poor Mr. Mouse gave in utterly, and only ventured an occasional snort every now and then, when one of the fifteen babies squeaked more shrilly than usual.

Mrs. Mouse put her babies in the bottle, and they grew up into fine big mice, nearly as big as their father. But these young mice were very noisy; they tore about, and squeaked even in broad daylight, so that the cross maid looked crosser, and at last told her mistress.

"Them mice are not to be borne, mum, and I'll set a trap."

The old lady said she would not have a trap put, and the dear little things killed, so for some days the mice continued to squeak and scamper as much as ever. But the maid, thinking matters were going too far, got the trap, without saying anything to her mistress, and putting some toasted cheese in it set it under the wardrobe.

Vainly did Mr. and Mrs. Mouse say to their children, in the most solemn tones, "Don't go near that cage; I don't quite know what it is, but I'm sure it is dangerous." The young ones did

not mind them. They thought they would only go and look at it, and then the toasted cheese smelt so *very* good, it could be no harm just to try and taste it; and so *five* of them were caught, and next morning were given to the cat.

All the other brothers and sisters went into deep mourning, and could be seen wiping their eyes with their tails a great many times during the following days. Then one or two of them thought change of air would be the best thing for them, so they went down stairs for a short time, and when they came back, to Mr. Mouse's disgust, they each brought back a wife or a husband.

Mr. Mouse was quite angry at such an addition to a family already too large he thought, so that evening, instead of staying quietly at home, and watching the young ones run races, he was so disturbed in his mind that he went out for a walk.

The moonlight was coming in through the window and making a long line of light on the floor as Mr. Mouse slowly walked out from under the wardrobe. He stood for some time looking about him, thinking in

which direction should he first go. His bright little eyes twinkled in the moonlight as he looked this way and that, and having made up his mind to go first to the bird-cage and see how the provisions were there he sat down on the floor and scratched his ear slowly with his hind foot. The birds were all asleep on their perches; but to Mr. Mouse's indignation he found that his children, not satisfied with taking all the seed that fell outside, had all but emptied the box in the cage.

"Young scamps," said Mr. Mouse, "they will be getting us into mischief if they eat up everything like this."

From the bird-cage he went on to the old lady's bed, and after running about there for some time went to sleep under her pillow. He found it so comfortable and warm that next night he went back to the bed, but before going to sleep under the pillow he thought he would like to see what the old lady's nightcap tasted like. He nibbled and nibbled until he had made a large hole; and then finding it so amusing and nice he crept under the clothes and ate

several large round holes in her nightgown. But alas for poor Mr. Mouse! The old lady in her sleep

happened to roll over on her side: there was a faint squeak, rather muffled by the bed-clothes, and Mr. Mouse's days on this earth were over.

Next morning the old lady said to her maid, "Brown, I wish you would look at my cap. There was something tickling and pressing my head last night, and also my leg too." Brown looked, and was horrified at the big hole she found on her mistress' cap; but she was speechless when on looking into the bed she found Mr. Mouse's dead body, and two more holes in her mistress' nightgown. She wanted to get a dog or a

cat, and any amount of traps; but the old lady was so sorry for the mouse she had killed that she made the excuse that perhaps he was the only one left, and that they would wait a little longer and see. Brown gave in, as she could not help it, and looked crosser than ever on account of the mice.

Now the young Mrs. Mice were searching for homes for their babies who had come. They could find no place at all, until one day one of them found a hole in the back of the wardrobe, and calling her sister they both with great caution crept in and found just what they wanted. One of them took possession of the old lady's bonnet, one of the old-fashioned big ones, all quilted with satin inside, and the other the muff to match the bonnet. There could not have been more comfortable nests for their babies, when the linings were removed and had all been properly cut up into shreds, then the old lady's muff and bonnet made; so the two young mammas were in high delight, and tucked their babies in that night, feeling they had

been wiser and luckier than any Mrs. Mouse ever had been in getting such a bed for their little ones.

A few days after a young lady came running into the room. She was a very pretty young lady, and she seemed to bring sunshine and happiness into the room with her. "Oh, Grandmamma!" she cried, "you must put on your things and come out. I have brought the carriage for you, the sun is shining so brightly, the wind is from the south, and it is quite summer. It will do you so much good to get some fresh air."

"Oh, Little One, I could not," said Grandmamma, "I have not been out for months, and I don't know where my things are. I don't think I can go out to-day. It does me almost as much good to see your bright face."

"You must come out, Grandmamma; it's no use making excuses," said the young lady, and so the old lady gave in, as everybody did to this sunshiny little woman.

As soon as the two young Mrs. Mice heard the doors of the wardrobe opened they scampered away as fast as they could. The bonnet was taken out and then the muff, and you can think what a scene there was when the nasty hairless little mice tumbled out,

and they found how utterly destroyed both bonnet and muff were.

That was the last of the Mouse family. The old lady moved into another room the next day. Her old room was cleared of furniture, the mouse-holes stopped up, a cat put in at night, and a bull-terrier by day, and traps of all kinds. Every mouse was killed, and not a single one from any other part of the house had courage to go into that room after such a tragedy.

Here ended the story, and it was high time it should do so, for it was some time past the hour at which the children went out for their walk. The rain had ceased even before the story began, and the sun having by this time gone behind the hills, the air was deliciously cool and fresh after the heat and closeness of the day.

CHAPTER X.

DOLLY'S BATH.

"So you won't come out this morning, Principe," said Ria, as she and Topo were going out to play in the garden.

"No, I don't want to come," said Principe, who was half buried in a large arm-chair, his hands in his pockets, and his legs stretched out. Topo was in her favourite position, perched on the edge of the table, her short fat legs dangling to and fro in a way that Nurse declared "set her wild." But Nurse was not in the room, and Topo dangled her legs to her heart's content, as she sat watching Principe's face, trying to make out why he would not come out that morning, and whether he would let her stay with him. Principe, however, had no such intention. "You had better be off now, girls,

or you won't have any time in the garden before the sun is on it, and you know you must not stay then."

"I suppose we had better go, Topo," said Ria; "but I know you want to get rid of us, and be about some mischief while we are gone. Come along, Topo, and let us leave him to himself."

Topo slowly got down off the table, and, passing Principe on her way to the door, she held up her little brown face to him in the hope that he would repent

and ask her to stay; for Topo thought it most unkind of Principe to have any mischief going without her. But Principe only gave the brown cheek a kiss, and said, "Toddle away, little one," so there was nothing for it but to do so.

They went on through one big room after another until they came to the drawing-room, which opened out on to the garden.

"Why, there's one of the red roses on the wall in flower," said Ria, in delight, "I'll get it for Mamma." And off she went as fast as she could, which was not very fast, for she was not good at running. Topo sat down under a pomegranate tree and began to play with her doll, and as soon as Ria had secured the rose she came and joined Topo.

"Look, Ria, is it not pretty. I have powdered Carmelita's hair with the pomegranate flower powder."

Ria thought it lovely, though the doll's head in reality was a bright scarlet from the flower dust. Ria powdered her doll too, and not only its head but its face also, so that it looked as if it had the measles. There they sat and chattered for a long time, while now and

then a flower from the tree overhead would fall with a flop on to the grass; and every little breeze that passed through the branches would bring down showers of the flower dust on to the children.

Their voices were almost the only sound in the garden, for the sun was getting hotter and hotter, and

all the birds were taking their mid-day sleep in the trees; the only other sounds to be heard were the "cree-cree," of the grasshoppers, and the plashing of the fountains. It was a very large garden, and there were no less than three fountains in it, each one surrounded by large

orange and lemon trees in tubs, which were now in beautiful flower. The fountains kept the air so cool that sitting near them you could always feel a little breeze even in the heat of the day. Ria suddenly remembered this, for she was beginning to feel very hot under the pomegranate tree, and said to Topo:—

"Come along to the fountain, Topo; I am so hot under this stuffy tree."

"Hot, Ria," said Topo, laughing, for she liked the heat; "how can you be hot when you have been sitting quietly here, doing nothing at all? Besides you ought not to go to the fountain, Nurse told us not to do so some time ago; she is always afraid we shall fall in."

"Nonsense, Topo, fall in! I don't want to fall in, but I can't stand this heat any longer; I don't know how you manage it? Come along, the fountain won't swallow you up; I'll answer for it."

Topo gave in readily. It was something quite new to her to say, "You ought not," to Ria, who generally had to say it to her; for Topo was always in some mischief or other. Off they went to the fountain that was nearest, which, as luck would have it, was that

which Nurse had particularly told them not to go to, for it was the deepest of them all.

Topo quite agreed with Ria that she was right in moving away from the pomegranate tree. It was delicious beside the fountain. The sun could not get at

them, for the trees were much too thick; live oaks, quite a forest of them, with here and there a cypress shooting up through like a church steeple.

The air was heavy with the perfume of the orange flowers; and as the children lay there, drinking in the rich warm air, and dabbling their hands in the basin, all thoughts of disobedience went clean out of their heads.

"Ria," said Topo, after some time, almost in a whisper, "I am going to give Carmelita a bath; she looks as if she would like it."

"You had better not, Topo," said Ria; "I think it would rather spoil her you know."

"I don't think it will," said Topo; "anyhow she is going to have it."

Off came Carmelita's clothes in a twinkling, and in a minute or so there she lay on Topo's knees without anything on, and what was meant for her skin represented by calico. Her head and shoulders were of china, and she had a beautiful head of fair hair; but her body was of white calico, stuffed with sawdust, which dribbled through the many holes which had been made by the pins Topo cruelly stuck into her on all occasions. Her legs, from the knees down, were of china, and painted so as to imitate shoes and stockings. Topo thought these legs beautiful, and even preferred them to Carmelita's face.

Presently Topo raised Carmelita by one arm, and, dangling her over the basin, gave her a foot-bath to begin with. But the foot-bath was rather slow, so

down went Carmelita with a souse under the water. She looked rather dismal when she came up, the red powder from her hair smeared all over her face in streaks, and the hair itself all limp and out of curl. Topo did not mind; she knew her own hair used to be in just the same state when she came out of her bath in the morning, and as to the face all that red would easily wash off, she thought.

"Topo, don't lean so far over the edge," said Ria, "you may tumble in any minute."

"Oh no, I shan't," said Topo; "but I want to put Carmelita on that big shell that sticks up there. I can just reach it."

"Well, wait a minute, and I'll hold your leg," said Ria, "and then you can't tumble in."

Ria caught hold of the leg, and Topo, raising herself on to the edge of the basin, balanced herself on her stomach and reached out to the shell in the fountain. She put Carmelita sitting on the shell, and very uncomfortable poor dolly looked; so much so, that Topo thought she would do better on a water-lily leaf floating alongside. Poor Carmelita was hoisted off

the shell and put on the leaf. Topo had no sooner let her go than her weight made the leaf sink, which frightened some little fish who were under it so much that they darted out away from it in a great hurry. Topo saw them do so.

"Oh, Ria, such darling little fish! I must catch one."

And the brown arms waved about in the water chasing the fish. She had all but caught one; she saw him at the other side of a water-lily stem, and was sure she would have him in a minute, if she only stretched a little farther, when splash! in she went head over heels, and Ria, holding on tight to the leg in her charge, was dragged in up to her waist too. The fountain fortunately was not very deep; the water only reached up to Topo's shoulders when she picked herself up, as she did in a minute.

"Oh, Topo! I knew you would do it," said Ria reproachfully, when Topo's head appeared over the water; "how could you be so stupid as to go after that wretched fish?"

"I suppose it was stupid," said Topo; "but I

wish I had caught him. He looked like silver all over."

She had seated herself on the shell which had been Carmelita's throne.

"Do you know Ria, it is delicious in here," she went on in reply to Ria's saying she ought to get out. "I don't think I shall get out yet. Why don't you come in and paddle? But where is Carmelita?" she exclaimed, suddenly remembering her poor doll whom she had quite forgotten in her chase after the fish.

"Carmelita went to the bottom long ago," said Ria; "she went down as soon as you put her on that leaf there."

Down came Topo immediately off her perch, and putting the leaf aside poor Carmelita was discovered lying at the bottom in a dreadful state. Topo lifted her up, but as soon as she did so off tumbled both her china legs and one of her arms that were also in china, for they were only glued on, and they came off after being so long in the water. Her beautiful wig of fair hair had floated away, and "What *is* the matter with her body, Topo?" said Ria, as soon as Carmelita

appeared above water. What, indeed? for her nice round body was quite flat in some places, and bulgy in others, besides which all the paint had washed off her face. On seeing such a dreadful wreck of her beautiful Carmelita poor Topo burst into tears; and not caring after this to stay and "dabble" in the basin, picked up Carmelita's two legs and arm and got out of the water in great grief. She was in nearly as bad a state as her doll, except that her arms and legs had not come off, nor her hair floated away; but otherwise she looked nearly as bad. Her hair was out of curl, and her nice white frock was black in front from the mud at the bottom of the basin. Ria was still tolerably clean, though nearly wet through.

At the door of the drawing-room they met their mamma. "My dear children! what have you been doing? Topo, I am sure it is your fault, you are never out of mischief. Where have you been?"

"I wanted to catch a little silver fish in the fountain, mamma," said Topo, still sobbing, "and he ran away; but I thought I could get him, so I fell in. Ria fell in a little, for she was holding my leg."

"It was very disobedient of you to go to the fountain at all," said their mamma; "and you, Ria, ought to have known better."

"Oh, Mamma, it was *so* hot under the trees, and it was deliciously cool by the water; if Topo had only not been so stupid as to tumble in it would have been all right."

Topo thought it very hard to have all the blame put on her, but remembering Carmelita's state she only thought of that and began sobbing again.

"Please, Mother, could you do anything for her?" she said, holding out her dress and showing the various bits that had made up Carmelita.

"Well, Topo, I knew you were mischievous, but I did not think you were so bad as you have been this morning. Why, it is that beautiful new doll your god-mother brought you from Paris only a short time ago, and that was such an expensive one. Well, I suppose it can't be helped now," she went on, seeing poor little Topo's face all red with crying; "leave your doll here and go up stairs, your nurse is waiting to put you to bed for your mid-day sleep. In punishment for your

disobedience in going to the fountain you shall neither of you come out driving this afternoon with me. It was very naughty of you to do so when you had been desired not; so run along now, don't you hear nurse calling? Oh, stop a minute! do either of you know where Principe is?"

"No; he did not come out with us this morning."

"Oh, very well; I suppose he is in the nursery? I have not seen him this morning. Why, it is past twelve o'clock! Be off, my dears. Well, there's a kiss each, so be satisfied, you naughty little things."

CHAPTER XI.

AN EXPERIMENT IN COOKING.

I THINK now we ought to go and see after Master Principe, and learn what he is about; for I am very much afraid Ria was right in saying she thought he was doing some mischief.

As soon as his sisters were gone Principe uncurled himself, got out of his arm-chair, and going to a little drawer in the table he took out something wrapped in newspaper. The something was quite small, and he held it easily in one hand while he groped about behind the wardrobe with the other

"Where can it be, I wonder?" he said to himself. "I remember seeing Nurse put it here a week ago, and I am sure she has not taken it away since. Oh, here it is! Come out, will you?" and giving a tug out the "it" came, which turned out to be a glue-pot.

'I suppose this will do?" said Principe a little doubtfully, "though there is some glue in it still. If I wash it it will be all right." So saying he took it over to the wash-stand and washed the glue-pot, as he thought, thoroughly. But the cold water did nothing towards removing the glue, which was quite hard, though it made the pot otherwise clean from the dust and sootiness which it had from its last boiling.

"Well, if it won't come away with washing, I don't think it will matter," said Principe; "anyhow, I am glad it is such a big one. It is bigger even than I thought it was. Now for the rest of the things."

He made another visit to the drawer, and took out three potatoes wrapped in paper which he had smuggled out of the kitchen the day before.

"That will be one apiece, if they are cooked in time, when the girls come in. I wonder what Topo will say when she finds what I have been doing?"

Now came the question of how his fire was to be made. He had the sticks to make it with, but as there was no fire-place in the nursery where he was it was not so easy to manage. Principe looked here

and looked there, but he was quite puzzled what to do.

"How stupid of me not to think of this before," he said to himself. "I don't know how I shall be able to make the fire after all. I wish Topo were here, she always can find ways to do a thing of the kind." He turned round and round like a puppy after his tail, and at last an idea came into his head. In the corner of the room there was a set of book-shelves filled with the children's books. Now Principe's idea was that he could hang his glue-pot from these shelves, make his fire below, and that, if he could manage it in that way, it ought to answer very well. But it was very much easier to say than to do.

He got his sticks all nicely laid on the floor, but he forgot to put any paper under them; so when he tried to light them they only smoked a little and then went out, leaving Principe very nearly hopeless as to getting his cooking done before his sisters came in.

"I am sure they will be coming in in a minute," he said to himself as he knelt before his sticks, blowing on them till he nearly cracked his cheeks in a vain effort

to make them light. "Pouf! pouf! will they *never* burn up? They burn very well in the kitchen when Beppa blows on them."

Then he suddenly remembered that Beppa not only put paper under her fires, but pine-cones also.

"That's the reason, I know," said Principe in delight; and going out of the room he ran down stairs to the landing near the kitchen where the basket of pine-cones was kept. He filled his pockets with them, and his hands too, in a great fright all the time that his nurse, whose voice he heard in the kitchen, should come out and catch him, for he was not allowed to go down the kitchen stairs on any account.

He stole back again to the nursery in high glee at getting just what he wanted so easily, and putting them down beside the sticks in the corner searched the room for some paper; but at first no paper was to be found.

"Was there *ever* a fire so difficult to make?" said poor Principe to himself, losing patience at all the difficulties that came in his way. After turning the contents of the table-drawer out on the floor he took

the paper that lined it, and also the paper that his potatoes had been wrapped in, and what was round the other parcel too. When he undid the latter, what do you think came out?—a sparrow; and all this fuss and bother Principe was giving himself was to boil the sparrow and potatoes together, which he thought would make a lovely dish. He had managed to pluck the sparrow in a kind of way, but a great many quills were still left in, and, on the whole, the sparrow did not look very nice. Even Principe, when he took the sparrow out of its paper, thought so too, though he would hardly acknowledge it to himself.

"It will look much better when it is boiled," he said; "even fowls don't look nice raw, and I am sure it will be very good to eat."

Now he had got everything he wanted for his fire, so he set to work to make it. He fortunately remembered not to put the fire quite close to the book-shelves, or it is probable he would have set them on fire; but on the marble floor the little fire of sticks would do no harm. However, he put the sticks tolerably close, because he had to hang his glue-pot

over them from a little cane which he fixed amongst the books.

This time his fire succeeded beautifully. When he had it all properly laid, the paper at the bottom, then

the pine-cones, and on top of all the sticks, he set fire to the paper, which, as soon as it blazed up, lit the pine-cones. As soon as they were on fire Principe knew that it was all right, and left off blowing the fire for a minute to settle his sparrow. He nearly filled his glue-pot with cold water, hoping all the time that the glue at the bottom would not matter.

"But I don't think it will," he said, "for it did not come away a bit when I washed it."

Then he put in the sparrow and the three potatoes, and was delighted when he saw that they looked just

as Beppa's things did when she boiled anything. Last of all he hung the glue-pot on to the cane over the fire, and found it answer beautifully.

Principe was getting quite excited now, things were going on so well; so, as he knew he must wait some time before he could expect the sparrow to be cooked, he thought he would look about for something to make plates of.

On Nurse's work-table at the end of the room he knew there was some white and pink calico which she had been making into a frock for Topo; for Topo tore her frocks in such a dreadful way climbing trees, scrambling over walls and through hedges, that her nurse was always making her new ones.

Now Principe thought that it would be no harm to take a piece or so of the calico to make a table-cloth and some dishes; and nothing could be prettier, he thought, than a white table-cloth with pink plates and dishes on it. So leaving his cooking for a moment to look after itself he crossed the room to Nurse's table, and, to his delight, found exactly the sort of square piece he wanted for a table-cloth; and with a little cutting some of the

smaller pieces lying about would do very well for the dishes.

Now in all this Principe knew he was wrong, for Nurse hated having her work interfered with, and often desired the children never to go near her work-table. But Principe wanted the calico very much, and said to himself that Nurse would never be "grumpy" with him for taking a few little bits that were lying about. And after cutting out his dishes he took them and his table-cloth across the room back to his fire, which was in the meantime getting on very well.

He spread his table-cloth beside the fire, and arranged the dishes and plates on it. There was one pink dish for the sparrow at one end, and another for the potatoes at the other; and besides there was a plate each for Principe, Ria, and Topo. When he had finished his table arrangements he began to blow the fire again, thinking it was rather slow work if the sparrow was not cooked soon. He blew, and blew, and blew; he puffed out his cheeks, got his eyes full of the wood-smoke, which made the tears come into them, and made his face dirty and black as well.

"I don't think I'll try cooking again on such a hot day," said he at last, when he stopped blowing for a minute or so to rest himself. Poor boy! he did look uncomfortable, with his face showing bright-red from heat here and there through the smuts which the smoke had left on his face. His clean white suit too was horridly dirty, and as for his hands!—

"Why, there are Topo and Ria!" he exclaimed, as a faint sound of their voices reached him from the large drawing-room, where, as we have seen, they were talking to their mamma.

"And this wretched *fowl* is not yet done, I'm sure," Principe went on, getting quite disgusted at the stupidity of the "*fowl*," as he called it, not being cooked when he wanted it. Just then, however, there was a bubble-bubble in the glue-pot.

"That means that it is done, I believe," said Principe; "anyhow off it comes, done or not."

Off the glue-pot did come, not without his burning his fingers a little. He took it over to the wash-stand and poured most of the water off.

"I must not pour it all away, I should think, some

must be left for sauce," he said; and so he took the sparrow out of the pot and put it on the dish, pouring a little of the "sauce" over it.

He did not stop to look at it, as he heard his sisters' voices in the next room coming towards him, but hurried to turn out his three potatoes on to the other dish. Just as he had done so the door opened and Ria and Topo appeared.

CHAPTER XII.

THE FEAST.

"Oh, what a horrid smell, Principe!" said Ria, as she came in with her sister. "I told you, Topo, he was doing some mischief."

Ria had quite forgotten in this new discovery the little affair at the fountain that morning.

"Mischief!" said Principe, standing up and looking very angry, and rather funny, to tell the truth, with his red and black face, and general smuttiness; "what do you know about it, I should like to know, Ria? As to mischief, I suspect you two have not been altogether out of it this morning, to judge by your looks."

"There, don't be angry, Principe," said Ria, feeling she would get rather the worst of it if it came to comparisons; "tell us what you have been doing instead."

"Do, Principe, dear," said Topo, for she could not quite see what Principe had behind him, as he was standing in front of the table-cloth and all the good things upon it.

"I have been making something nice for you both to eat," said Principe, with a grand air; "and I have a great mind not to give you any, Ria; you don't deserve it. You are always trying to pick holes in me."

Ria looked rather sulky at this, so Principe went on, "Well, I don't mind it this time, so come along and I'll give you both some."

"But what is *that?*" said Topo, pointing to the sparrow that lay in a flabby, helpless state at one end of the so-called "*table.*" It did not look nice, certainly; the glue had melted in the boiling water, and had covered the sparrow in parts with a thick brown coating, which made it look rather unwholesome. The potatoes were in the same state of stickiness.

"That?" said Principe with great dignity, for he felt that the sparrow was not appearing to the best advantage, but that on no account must he allow the others to think so. "*That,*" as you call it, is what you are

going to have. It's boiled sparrow. I don't see why it should not be as good as boiled fowl, which you are both so fond of."

Ria eyed the sparrow all over very suspiciously.

"It *may* be nice, Principe," she said, "but I don't think it looks it."

"If you don't like it don't try it," said Principe. "Come, Topo, you will have some, I know."

"Yes, Principe," said Topo, always ready to follow Principe through thick and thin, "I'll have some. Here's my plate," and she held out the small bit of pink calico.

Principe took the sparrow by a wing, which he proceeded to saw off with his pocket-knife. He gave

Topo the wing; and as Ria put in with, "I'll take a bit to try, Principe," he gave her a small piece which he contrived to get off with a good deal of difficulty, for the sparrow was beginning to stick fast to his fingers. Ria tried it; but no sooner had she taken one mouthful than she jumped up with a howl, and rushing to the window threw it away. Poor Topo, faithful to Principe, munched and munched as he did too, but the corners of her mouth went gradually down, until at last she looked pitifully at Principe, who, catching her looking at him when he was making a wry face himself, immediately bolted the piece he was eating and asked her if she wanted more.

"No, thank you," said Topo, with a little shudder, "I have not quite finished, Principe."

"All right; when you want more say so. Have some gravy? It's not as bad as Ria makes out, is it, Topo?"

"Oh no," said poor little Topo, bravely, wondering all the time if it were possible anything short of physic could be nastier. And the gravy which he spoke of, it was nothing but glue!

"Children, children, where are you?" cried their mamma in the next room; for, Nurse not finding them in the garden, and still calling for them there, their mamma had come to the nursery to find them and send them to her.

"Why, what can this horrid smell be?" the children heard her say, as she crossed the next room, and came to the door of the nursery. "What *have* you been doing?" she said, the first thing that met her eyes being Topo's unhappy face, as she slowly tried to get through her portion of sparrow.

"I've only been boiling a sparrow, mamma," said Principe; "it is not bad, but Ria does not like it; *do* have a bit to try, mamma.

"Oh! Mamma, it's abominable!" said Ria, "it's the very nastiest thing I have ever tasted. Ugh!" and Ria shivered as she thought of the taste of that first mouthful, which she had got rid of so speedily.

"I don't think Mamma would quite like it, Principe," said Topo, "You had better not try it, Mamma."

"I think so too, Topo, to judge by the smell and

the look of it," said her mamma; "what gives your sparrow those queer brown spots, Principe?"

"Those? I think it must be a little of the glue that remained in the pot I boiled it in," said Principe with great reluctance, for he did not like acknowledging there was anything wrong with his sparrow.

"You don't mean to say you've been *eating* it, then, covered with glue as it is."

"Yes, they have," chimed in Ria; "and just look at Topo, she looks quite green."

Poor Topo did indeed feel very uncomfortable; the glue-covered sparrow and potatoes had certainly disagreed with her.

"Why, Topo, you look quite ill, and so do you, Principe, at least what one can see of your face through its smuttiness. You must all of you be off to bed, and stay there, and Nurse will dose you both, Principe and Topo. I don't think there are three such troublesome children in the world; you cannot be left for an hour alone without being in some mischief or other. Remember, I won't have any more of this cooking, dirtying the whole place like this, and making yourselves ill!"

"And they *have* made it in a mess, ma'am," said Nurse, who had just appeared. "Look here, ma'am," holding up Principe's grand table-cloth, soaked with glue and covered with smuts; "this is the front breadth of Miss Topo's new frock, which I had left on my table; and these, I suppose," holding up the dishes and plates of pink calico, "are the bias bits I had left out with it."

"How careless and naughty you are, Principe," said his mother, "and disobedient too, for I have often heard Nurse tell you not to go near her work-table. Now listen to me, all of you; if you are not good all the rest of this week I won't let you go on the picnic we have arranged with Signor Zucchi."

Signor Zucchi was Camillo's father, and not to be allowed to go on this picnic would be a dreadful thing, so all three children went off quietly to bed and submitted to be dosed by Nurse without making their usual strong objections, having quite made up their minds to be "as good as gold" for the rest of the week, and so be able to go on the picnic.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE EXCURSION.

At last the morning of the picnic day arrived. The children had been so excited all the day before that they would hardly go to bed, and when they were safely tucked in at last they did not go to sleep for some time, sending whispers from one little cot to another about the pleasures of next day and what they were each going to do. Their nurse was in the next room, so they did not dare speak higher than a whisper for fear she should hear them. But at last they went to sleep, remembering what Nurse had told them, that if they did not go to sleep soon they would not be able to wake early enough in the morning. They were to get up before four o'clock so as to be ready to set off at five o'clock, for as they were going a long distance

they must get most of it over before the heat of the day.

Since the day of Ria and Topo's falling into the fountain, and Principe's cooking, the children had really been "as good as gold." Their nurse was quite astonished at such wonderful behaviour. There was no stamping and yelling when their hair had to be brushed and combed out of the tangles it always got into, no impatience (or very little) when collars had to be smoothed and neck-ties arranged, no wonderful and ingenious devices on Principe's part to torture the grasshoppers or the cat; in fact, only once in all those four days had Principe been found swinging the kitten round and round in the air by the tail. On that occasion, as it was Topo who found him doing so, and as she was very fond of all animals, especially of this particular black kitten, she fell on him tooth and claw, and a battle-royal was the result, in which the kitten was the chief sufferer and certainly got the most bodily harm. But, excepting this encounter, peace had reigned in the nursery of Casa Webb; in fact, the children's "goodness" was so extraordinary, that Nurse

got very suspicious of mischief, which she was sure they must be hatching, and which would quite account for it all. However, for once Nurse's instinct was wrong; the children knew that if they were not good their mamma would not let them go on the picnic, and that would have been such a disappointment to them that they had really tried to be good, and had succeeded, as most people will, *if* they *really* try as my three children did.

"Topo, are you awake?" whispered Principe from his cot, on awaking very early.

"Yes, and have been a long time," answered Topo. She really had only been awake about five minutes, but she was so impatient to be up, that having to lie still made her believe it must be nearly an hour since she opened her round brown eyes on the opposite wall.

"Is it going to be a fine day, Principe?" Topo whispered. "I cannot see from here, you know."

"Yes, I think it will be, Topo; but how can I tell? the sun has not risen yet, you know," answered Principe, who from his cot could see out of the open

window, over the trees in the garden, and a strip of blue sky beyond it.

"Oh! Principe, do you think we shall be in time to see the sun rise?" asked Topo eagerly, remembering the one she had seen the morning she and Principe and Camillo had been out bird-hunting. "Oh! I hope we shall! It would be like the one we saw that morning, would it not, Principe?"

"Yes, I suppose so, little one; but I don't see them oftener than you do. I don't think we shall see it this morning anyhow, for the pink colour is in the sky already, I see, and the sun comes very soon after that."

"I think it's very selfish of the sun to get up so early," said Topo, disgusted. "I'm sure it would do just as well if he got up at seven, and then everybody could see him."

"Get up, get up, children, it's late; you ought to have been up some time ago," said Nurse, coming into the room. Topo and Principe were only too glad to do so, for they had been awake some time; but Ria always liked to sleep to the last, and even on such a day as

this needed a second summons from Nurse before she would move.

The children scrambled through their dressing as fast as they could. Principe would hardly wait to have his hair properly parted and brushed, for he heard voices down in the hall, and was all impatience to rush away and see what everybody was about.

At last they got free from their nurse's hands, and flew downstairs at a break-neck pace into the hall and out at the front door. Topo was the first out; but she had hardly time to open her mouth to speak before Principe rushed out too, and nearly upset her in so doing.

"Oh! get out of the way, Topo," he said, in his hurry to see everything; "why, this is jolly! why, there are eight donkeys, that is one a-piece, you know!"

"You needn't push so, Principe," said Topo, "you are so rude; I'm not a bit in the way, so why do you say so?"

"Well, I'm sorry I nearly upset you, little one," said Principe, kissing her, for he was very fond of this brown little elf; "but come, look at the donkeys, what a

pretty one this is, is it not? he is so soft and grey, and just look what long ears he has."

"Yes, they are longer than any of the others," said Topo, standing on tip-toe to kiss the donkey's soft black nose. She was not a bit afraid of either donkeys or horses, or in fact of any animals except snakes. So she kissed and stroked the gray donkey's nose, which the donkey-boy, who was holding him, held down so that she could reach it. The donkey seemed quite to understand her petting and be grateful to her for it. It looked so kind and sorrowful out of its large dark eyes, that Topo felt quite pitiful to it, though, if she had been asked, she could hardly have said why she did so. So she rubbed and scratched the donkey's nose, and called him, "Poor old boy!" and the donkey looked at her out of his big sad eyes, flapping his ears backwards and forwards lazily, and seemed rather to like it.

"Come in to breakfast, Topo," called her father from the door-way, "come in, and call Principe, or we shall be late for our start."

Topo ran after Principe, who had wandered off to the edge of the road-side, where he could look down

over the valley and river beneath, for Casa Webb was some little way up the hill, and the road zigzagged up to it. Topo brought Principe back, and they went in to the dining-room, where all the others were assembled at breakfast. The party was only a small one. Besides Mr. and Mrs. Lynne and their children, there were only Mr. and Madame Zucchi, Camillo's parents, Camillo himself, and Principe, Ria, and Topo. "Four big ones, and four little ones," as Ria said when she heard of whom the party was to consist.

"Make haste, children," said Mrs. Lynne, after Principe and Topo had gone round the table and kissed everybody, "make haste with your breakfasts, for we shall soon have to be off; you ought to have come in here when you came down instead of going out."

"Oh! Mamma, there is such a darling grey donkey with long ears!" said Topo, who was sitting beside her mother, "and his eyes are so big, and dark, and sad; oh! oh! you can't think how sad! He seemed quite to like me when I scratched his soft black nose. Do you think I may ride him, Mamma?"

"I don't know, Topo, we shall see about it; the

strongest donkeys must be given to the heaviest people, you know. I think we had better go now, as everybody has done."

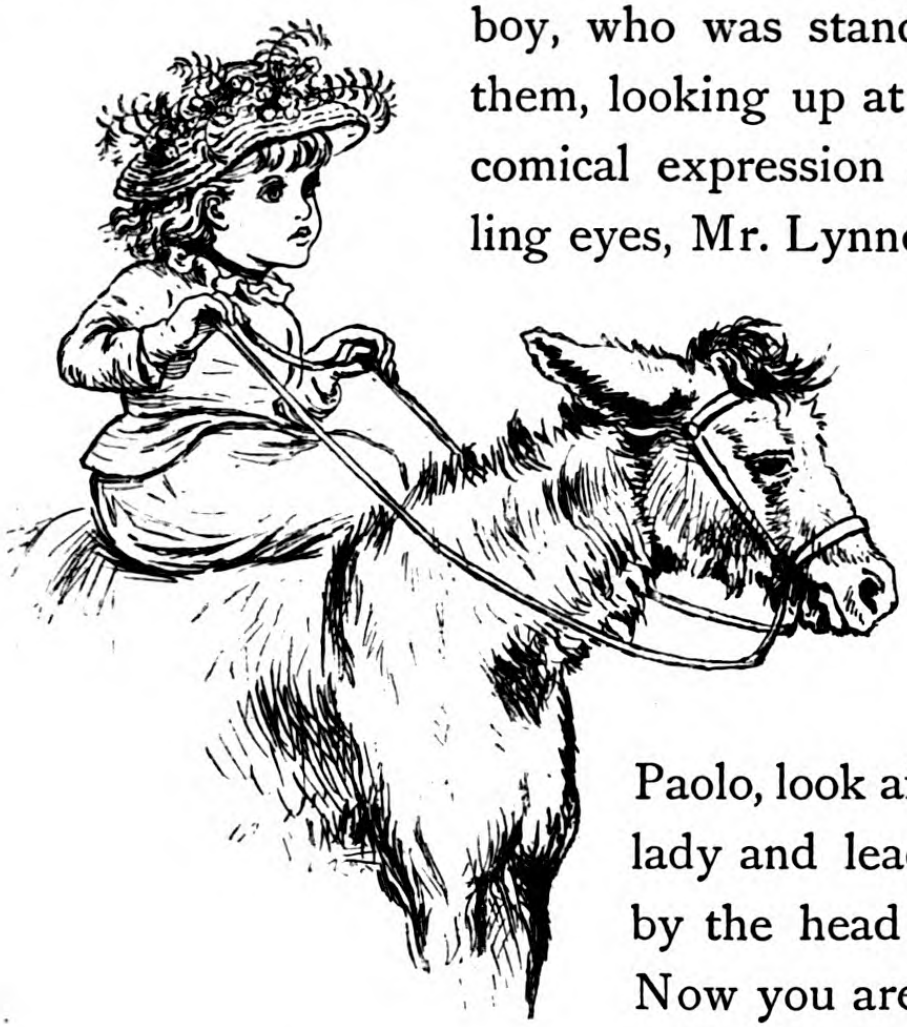
They all went outside, and the donkeys were examined by the gentlemen, as to which donkey was to carry Mrs. Lynne and Madame Zucchi. Topo watched the donkeys with great anxiety; she thought her friend the grey donkey looked at her mournfully out of his big eyes. She ran down the steps to where her papa was standing, and put her hand in his.

"Well, and what must we put my little one on?" said her father, lifting her up in his arms and kissing her, "let's see! we must get the smallest donkey for the smallest little woman, mustn't we? Here you are! I think this is small enough for you!" and so saying, he put her on the very same donkey's back she had been wishing for all along.

"Oh! Papa, may I *really* ride this one," said Topo in great delight; "oh! I am so glad! It is the pretty grey one I was kissing and scratching this morning before breakfast."

"I am glad you are so well pleased with your steed.

Tell him he must carry you well, and behave himself properly in return for it all," said her father as he settled her in the saddle. Then, turning to the donkey-boy, who was standing close by them, looking up at Topo with a comical expression in his twinkling eyes, Mr. Lynne said, "Here, Paolo, look after the young lady and lead the donkey by the head all the time. Now you are all right," he said, giving Topo another kiss, as he left her to put Madame Zucchi up on her donkey.



At last they all set off, the four children in front with

their two donkey-boys, one for each of the little girls, and the papas and mammas behind quite as merry in their way as the children were. Topo was very proud of her donkey; she thought him by far the prettiest of the whole set; his pretty grey coat, relieved by the red leather of the saddle and bridle, looked quite shiny, instead of being rough and bristly, as she declared the other ones were.

"It is all very well to say yours is the prettiest, Topo," said Camillo, who was riding beside her, very proud of a new linen coat and red cravat he had put on for the first time that morning; "perhaps he is, though I don't like that red thing round his jaw; but at all events I'm sure I would beat you in a race."

"Indeed you would not," said Topo, indignantly, "and as to that red thing, as you call it, round his jaw, it is just like your own cravat, so I wouldn't say anything more about it. As to beating him in a race, we'll try if you like."

"All right," said Camillo, who was rather hurt at such a pointed remark on his new tie; "but we cannot race up-hill, you know, Topo. I don't think even your

wonderful animal could manage that. We'll get to a flat bit soon, and then we'll try." Topo felt very much inclined to back *her* donkey to race up the hill; but she looked at the path, and seeing that it was so steep and rough that her donkey-boy had to hold her on for fear of her slipping back over her donkey's tail, she held her tongue wisely.

The path seemed to grow steeper and steeper, and was so narrow that there was only just room for one donkey at a time. They were going up through the chestnut-woods in deep shade, for the sun had only been up a short time and was not yet on a level to send his rays through the stems of the trees. Even at mid-day, shade was nearly always to be found in such a deep wood. The long catkin-like flowers hung from the chestnuts; and if, in climbing the path, the heads of some of the party brushed against an overhanging bough, down would come showers of dust from these long tassels. The children got their donkey-boys to pick a quantity of them, and made long plaits, which they called whips; but though they whipped the donkeys severely with them it did not seem to have much effect, for the

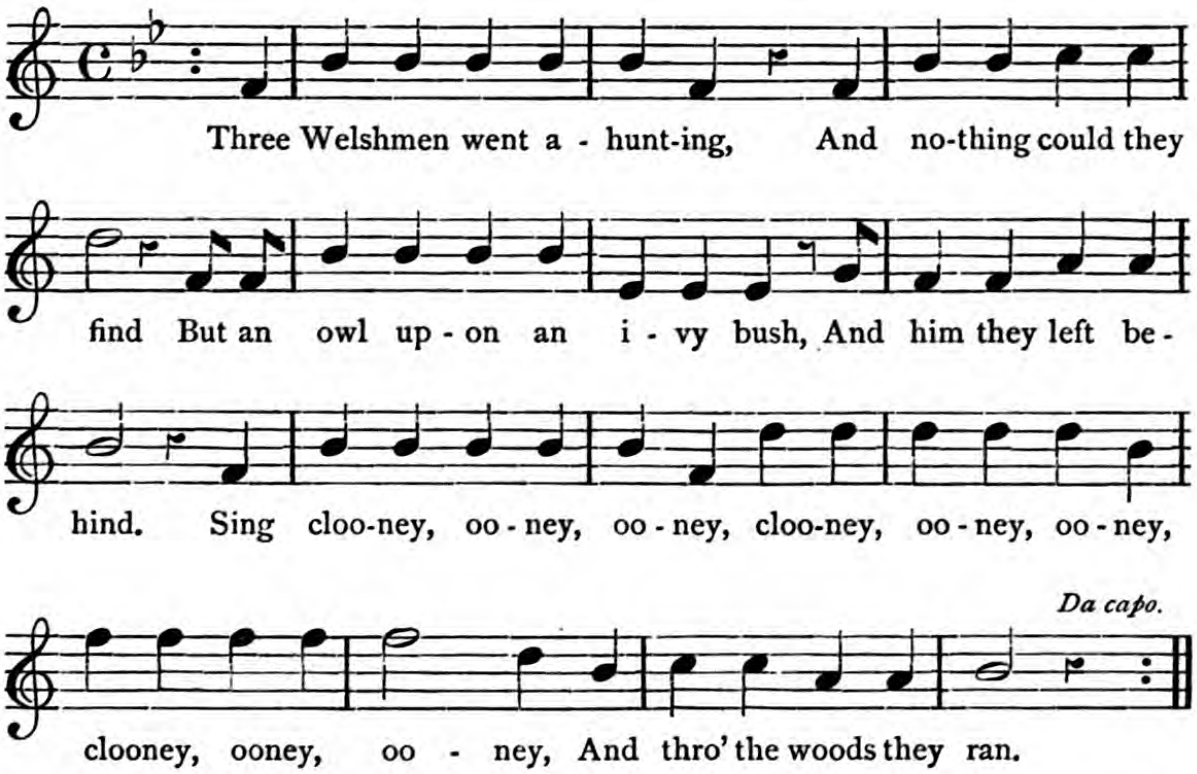
donkeys plodded on in just the same way as before, not even looking round to see if anything was the matter. However, the whips broke under such severe usage, and new ones had to be made, which occupied the children for some time, as the donkeys slowly climbed the stony path.

Topo, as a sign of reconciliation—for she felt she had been rude in comparing Camillo's new cravat to her donkey's bridle—put a long garland of chestnut flowers round his donkey's head. Camillo was very grateful for this mark of friendship, and in return told her to give him her hat and not to look. He quite covered it up with young chestnut leaves, and ferns, and a little ivy, in fact he made it so pretty that Topo almost cried out with surprise when he handed it back to her, and told her to put it on.

Topo's face looked so quaint with all the hanging ferns and leaves drooping over her head and forehead that they all burst out laughing, and her papa just then coming up said, "Why, Topo, you look like 'an owl in an ivy bush.' "

This was out of one of the songs he used to sing

them, and so they all began singing it as loud as they could.



Just then they got to a flat part of the road, and Topo seeing this said, "I may be 'an owl in an ivy bush,' but I won't be 'left behind;' come along, Camillo, I'll race you now."

"I am going to race too," said Principe, who had been employing himself most of the time tickling his donkey's head and ears with a twig, until he had all but made

him kick, in which case Principe thought he might tumble over his tail, so he let him alone.

"And I too," chimed in Ria, "I shall race too, and perhaps I shall beat you all."

"How far shall we go?" said Topo, her eyes dancing at the thought of a race.

"Oh! down the road to that big mile-stone near the bridge," said Camillo.

The road here was a fine broad one, running along the side of the hill down into the valley, which it continued along; but it was only to the bottom of the valley that our party followed it, for then they crossed a narrow little bridge and went up the opposite hill by quite as steep and narrow a path as the one they had just left.

"Now then! are you all ready?" said Camillo, after they had all placed themselves in a row, so as to start fair. Topo and Ria were whispering to Paolo to make the donkeys go as fast as possible.

"Yes, we are all ready," was the answer.

"One! Two! Three! and —— Stop!" shouted Camillo, for Ria, in her haste to be off, had not waited

for the "Away!" but was careering off down the road. When she was brought back they were all ranged in a line again; but then it was found that Principe's shoe was untied and that it would come off if he did not fasten it.

At last, however, they were all really ready: Camillo gave the word, and off they went pelting down the road as hard as they could.

Just at this moment the papas and mammas came out on the road from the wood, where they had stopped for a little to get some rare ferns. They happened to be looking behind them when they came upon the road, but the whoops and yells which the children were making to encourage their donkeys caused them to turn round quickly.

Imagine Mrs. Lynne's horror when she saw her delicate Ria, for whom any exertion was bad, holding on to her donkey's mane like a circus-monkey, while the donkey galloped along as hard as it could, Paolo running beside it, poking its sides now and then to make it go faster.

To tell the truth, Ria was extremely uncomfortable.

Her foot was nearly out of the stirrup, a pin was running into the calf of her leg, the crutch seemed to have rubbed all the skin off the inside of her knee; her petticoats had got loose and were all slipping gradually down, and she had no hand to hold them up with, both being engaged in clutching the donkey's mane to keep herself on. Added to all this she was tired, hot, and out of breath with the bumping. But she was the first at the mile-stone!

Topo was next after her, anything but uncomfortable and looking quite jolly; for after all, she could quite put up with losing the race, as it was not Camillo who won it, besides it was such capital fun to go so fast.

The two boys were rather put out at the girls coming in before them, though they had done their very best to make their donkeys go fast; but they had nothing to poke the donkeys with, so they put down their defeat to that.

Ria stopped as soon as she came to the mile-stone, only too glad to do so; but Topo, thinking that as she had lost the race the best thing to do was to keep going as long as possible, told Paolo she

would go on, so they tore over the bridge and some way up the opposite hill before they at last came to a stop.

Principe and Camillo followed Topo's lead, calling out as they clattered past Ria and the mile-stone: "Bravo! Ria, you have beaten us all, we are going on, good-bye," and off they went over the bridge and up the hill. It was a good thing they did so, for if they had stopped they would have come in for the scolding their mammas fully intended to give them, not so much for themselves, for that did not matter, but for letting Ria exhaust herself in such a way. Poor Ria was really dreadfully tired; so much so in fact, that she had to keep with the elders after that, and not go with Principe, Camillo, and Topo, who rode like mad things whenever they could, and made the hill-sides ring again with their shouts and peals of laughter.

So they went on through the shade of the chestnut-woods, where the moss looked soft and green at the roots of the trees, and the little wild pansies seemed to look up and wink at the children. In return for this, Topo would generally stop and have some of them

picked for her, to put with the rest of her flowers, of which she had her lap full; the bright blue squills ("that's the stuff in the cough mixture, isn't it?" said Ria, when she was told its name) and the pale green hellebore seemed to be playing "hide-and-seek" behind some big fern or tree trunk. All the flowers' hiding, however, did them no good if Topo saw them and wanted them; for besides Paolo, who was there to do what she wanted, there were both Camillo and Principe, who would willingly dismount and get them for her if she asked them. She was such a tyrant; but they were so fond of the little bright brown fairy that they could not resist her when she asked them so prettily.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE VILLAGE.

On through the dark chestnut-woods, through bright sunny vineyards where the sun poured down on them with such heat that the ladies put up their white umbrellas, and hurried on to the shade; on through a thicket of acacia-trees in bloom, the long bunches of white flowers giving a most delicious perfume to the air; on and on and on, until at last they came out on an open space nearly at the top of the last hill they had been climbing, which was the highest one they had come to yet.

There were some little houses upon this open grass plat, nestling under the high straight cliffs that rose up behind them. The cliffs came round to one side also, and it was sheer down from the grass-plat at that side

to the valley so far, far away below. Built out on a little ledge of the cliff, and looking down into the valley, was the little village church and the priest's house. The ledge of rock on which they were built was so narrow that part of the church and house were cut out of the cliff; and to get to the priest's house you had to go through a passage along the outside of the church.

Our party intended lunching in the priest's house, for Signor Zucchi knew him, and knew also that he would be quite offended if they went anywhere else. So they rode up through the little village street, while the handsome peasant women came out to look at them from the doorways, their distaff and spindle going all the time, except when they stopped to raise one sun-burned hand to their eyes to get a better look at the riding party, and exchange a pleasant smile and "Buon Giorno" (good-morning) with them.

They had to dismount at the church-door, and as no service was going on at that hour they went through the church, instead of going by the passage outside. How pleasant it was coming into the deep shade and coolness of the church from the burning heat outside!

Inside it was so dark that it was hard to see at first, until the eyes got used to it. The air was cold, and a faint smell of incense hung about. The candles burned dimly here and there like stars, before the shrines of some wax saint or other.

A peasant-woman could be just seen in one of the little side aisles praying, her head bent forward between her hands. "That is Emilia Micheli," said the old sacristan as he saw Mrs. Lynne look at her; "her only son is dying, and she comes here, whenever she can leave him, to pray for him."

Outside in the shadow thrown by the church were two beggars, one blind, the other a cripple. As soon as they had got the alms they asked for they lay down by the wall again, and dozed off. A little brown-eyed, brown-skinned child, with a scarlet handkerchief on her head, looked wistfully after the strangers as they went into the church, too shy to follow them. Topo came up to her shyly with the little bit of red ribbon she wore round her neck in her hand, and offered it to her. The child's eyes brightened, and she took it eagerly with many thanks; but Topo was frightened at her own

boldness, and as soon as the little girl took her offering, ran away back to her mother, who had been watching it all very pleased.

"You are a good little thing, Topino," she said, bending down and kissing her. "I am glad my little girl thinks of giving pleasure to other people, without being told to do so."

Topo was overjoyed at having pleased her mother without knowing it, and looking back at her little friend at the door she was delighted at seeing her wistful face bright with smiles as she got one of the women standing near to tie the red ribbon round her neck.

The priest's house was charming. The rooms were very small, but so cool from the thickness of the walls and the rock which formed part of them. His little sitting-room was the dearest little room in the world. There was actually a little piano at one side, an unusual sight in these Italian hills; but the priest, Father Pietro, was a cultivated man, fond of music and of reading, which was shown by the book-shelves that lined most of the room. Above the book-shelves on one side was the wall of rock, hewn out smooth and even; the other sides were

white-washed. The window was a long low one from which one could step out upon the balcony, shaded from the sun by a trellis of vines over the top.

The children cried out with delight and clapped their hands when they came out on the balcony. Just under it there was a ledge of grass and flowers; but beyond that the cliff sloped away down, down to the little river running through the valley. The view was exquisite. Far away in the distance on all sides stretched ranges of pale blue mountains with purple shadows; mountains that hardly seemed to be mountains, the outlines were so faint. Before them were the low hills over which our party had ridden this morning, covered with chestnut-woods and vineyards, with here and there patches of late corn-fields, that had not yet been cut. Down in the valley, near the stream, where plenty of water could be had, grew clumps of hemp and Indian corn, waving their long tassels in any chance breath of air that came to them. But breezes at this time of day, when the sun was so hot, were rare in the valley; even up on the shady vine-covered balcony, so far up the hill-side, the air seemed quite

still, and full of the hum and drone of the bees and other insects as they visited the flowers under the balcony. Everything seemed both hazy and indistinct at a little distance, but so wonderfully clear when you came to look at it. Now and then the tinkle tinkle of a cow or sheep bell would break the stillness, or a man would be heard singing a few notes, and then yawning, but they were only exceptions to the general silence. Even the turtle-doves in their wicker-cage at the end of the balcony seemed to have gone to sleep, as everybody and everything had done; and only woke up now and then to give a little laugh and coo to each other. Then they would shake and plume themselves for a bit, and presently down would go the head between the shoulders or under the wing, and they would be fast asleep again.

The children were so tired after their long morning ride that they were quite glad to be told that they were to lie down in one of the little bed-rooms and go to sleep for some time, till the heat of the day should be past.

They were asleep in a very short time, and while they slept Father Pietro entertained his guests in the next room, and now and then Madame Zucchi would sing some soft low song, for she had a most lovely voice. And these low sleepy songs seemed to wind themselves through the children's dreams, mixed with the hum of the bees in the garden below, the cooing of the doves, and the occasional tinkle of the sheep-bells, until at last they got so far into dreamland that they quite mistook it for fairyland, and thought they were getting a peep into that famous country.

After about two hours' sleep they woke up and had luncheon with the old priest, who was quite charmed with his visitors, and made Ria and Topo radiant by giving them a cock and a hen in brilliantly coloured china. Topo got the cock and Ria the hen, and both were delighted with such pretty presents.

Presently the papas and mammas, with Principe and Camillo, started off again to go to the top of the cliff, where there was an old ruined castle, and whence they could get a much finer view than from the village. Topo was dreadfully sorry not to go with them, but

her mother was afraid of its being too much for her, as it was a very steep and fatiguing bit of climbing; besides, there was the ride back in the evening. As to Ria, it was quite out of the question that she should

go, in fact, it was quite an extraordinary feat for her to have undergone so much fatigue already. So they both watched the rest of the party ride off from the church-door; and after Topo had kissed her donkey, and given it some bread she had brought out for it, the old priest

took them again indoors, and letting them each have a knee to sit upon, told them most beautiful stories all the afternoon; real stories, all about the lives and doings of his villagers; and Ria and Topo listened eagerly to as many as he would tell them, which lasted until the party came down the hill, for the old priest was very fond of children, and liked to tell them stories and amuse them.

CHAPTER XV.

THE RETURN.

AFTER they had rested for a short time they said "good-bye" to Father Pietro and rode off down the hill on their way home. They had no adventures on their way back of any kind, for it was now too dark in the chestnut-woods for the children to romp, as they had done coming up. They rode on in silence until they came to a part of the road which was overhung with acacia-trees, and here in the shade there seemed to be thousands of stars dancing about. Here, there, everywhere, the whole place seemed to be filled with sparks from some great fire. Overhead through the gaps in the boughs could be seen some of the real stars, set in the deep blue sky.

"Oh! how beautiful!" everyone cried when they

came under the acacia-trees, that were filling the air with the soft sweet fragrance of their clusters of blossoms.

"It is quite wonderful!" said Signor Zucchi. "I do not think I have ever seen so many fire-flies in one place before; and look, the ground there under the trees is covered with glow-worms."

"Topo," whispered Camillo, who was beside her, "those are all fairies flying about."

"No; are they?" said Topo a little doubtfully, "I thought they were only fire-flies."

"That's true," said Camillo, "but they are fairies really; only when we catch them they turn into fire-flies."

"Poor little things! I don't want to catch them," said Topo.

They passed on through the acacias and came out at the end of the road upon the open space in front of Casa Webb. It was all flooded with moonlight. Everything was quiet except for the cry of the little "chin" owl. Now and then, when the breeze came up like a sigh from the valley, it brought with it the babble

of the little river, and the cries and laughter of the girls bathing in it after the labour and heat of the day were over. It was all so beautiful that they stood there looking far away down the valley; everything nearly as bright as day in that wonderful moonlight.

And here we will say "good-bye" to them all, as they are saying it amongst themselves as well. Time, space, and patience all are wanting to see them further in their happy southern life. For they were as happy as children can be; happy in that climate where it seems to be the greatest of happiness merely *to live* in the summer months.

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