

A YOUNG FOLKS STORY.

THE FOUR-AND-TWENTY EVIL-HEADED BLACKBIRDS.

Once upon a time there lived a king and a queen who had no less than twenty-six children, six girls and twenty boys. To save the trouble of inventing names for so many, the parents simply called them by the letters of the alphabet—thus, the girls were A, E, I, O, U and Y, and the boys were B, C, D, F, G, H, and so on.

By these names they were known all over the kingdom, though B was so like R that they were often mistaken for each other. J, too, was very slim and elegant for a boy, and if you did not look at his dress, you might have supposed him to be his sister I. A and W were easily distinguished from the rest, because they were much fatter. F's voice was very like V's, but their faces were quite different. In the same way, when B and P had a cold in their heads, you could not have told which was speaking.

They were all very good children except A, who was a very bad boy, and was a family so kind to each other. When A lost himself, as he often did, the rest all ran to find him. When R got into a scrape, as he sometimes did, his brothers and sisters would come and beg that they might be punished instead of him, especially W, who was his chief enemy, and used to do some of his hard exercises for him. If C and K, who did not always agree, began to fight, their brothers always tried to separate them. And when O cried, as she was fond of doing, her sisters did all they could to comfort her. They were always either at their lessons or playing together, and their favorite game was spelling. It was very pretty to see them running into rows as to make up such words as less, beauty, hope, joy, sun, wisdom, and so forth. They did not care to have any other playmates, but sometimes they wished there had been two P's among them, for then they would have been able to spell Pudding, which was what they all felt from morning till night.

All P's, there was one who was not good, nor happy either, and that was crooked Z, who, being the youngest, had been spoiled, and had grown up selfish and ill-tempered. From the time he was able to walk, he had been discontented with every thing, though he was petted by every body, and had not nearly so much to do as the rest. He wanted to be grown up and have plenty of money, as his papa had, and he was able to eat as much bread and honey as he pleased, like his mamma. He was angry because he was crooked and ugly, and because he could not play at spelling so well as his sister E, who was the most active of all in these games, and the greatest favorite with every body. He made himself very unhappy by thinking that he was the youngest, and by carrying his eldest brother, W, who would become king in good time after their father. He should have taken a lesson from his sister Y, the next above him in age, who was always very happy, and whose little Grecian nose was poked into every thing merry and lively which went on; indeed, she was such a romp that people sometimes said she was more like a boy than a girl. But no—poor Z took no pleasure except in being miserable, and he wanted to be like his brothers and sisters because they were not so miserable as himself. Then a dreadful thought came into his mind. If he could but get rid of all the rest, he would be left the only one left, and the kingdom would all belong to him when his father died.

Now it must be known that each of the princes and princesses had six pence a week given to him or her royal highness for pocket-money. Most of the time the children were together, and they used to get their six pence in the savings-bank to buy a present for the king and queen on their birthdays, but Z was very greedy, and generally went at once to spend his six pence at a sweet-shop near the palace, kept by an ugly old woman who had lately come to the town. This old woman was really a very wicked and powerful witch, who hated all the men and women in the world, and especially the children, to whom it was her great pleasure to sell a sort of poisoned cake, called "evil-doer's bread," which, when eaten, would make the eater sick, and taking her how much he could pay for it, she would give him a piece of "evil-doer's bread."

"Would you really like to get rid of them?" said she, one day, when he was talking to himself.

any thing. Without a word of thanks, she seized the plate from Y's hands and began to gobble up its contents. But before she had quite finished, what was Y's joy and amazement to hear her give a dreadful shriek, and then to see her suddenly changed into a green ugly bird, which it was enough to make any child shudder even to look at!

The little princess did not wait another moment, but ran home as fast as she could to tell her brothers and sisters what had happened. But when she got to the palace, they were nowhere to be seen. She searched out-of-doors, indoors, up stairs, down stairs, in the garden, in the shrubbery, in the school-room, in the nursery, but all in vain. The maid, who was in the garden hanging up clothes, helped her to look, and when they could see nothing of any of the children, they began to feel frightened, and fetched the nurse, but old Dame Eteetera was no more able to find her young charges than they had been. Then they went to tell the queen. She was in the parlor eating bread and honey; but when she heard what had happened, she hastened to the king, who was employed in his favorite occupation of counting his money. He too was greatly alarmed, and at once counted out several bags of half crowns, which he ordered to be offered by public proclamation to any one who should bring back his children safe and sound. All the police of the kingdom were sent for to aid in the search, and before the evening every body within ten miles of the palace was talking of this dreadful thing that had happened, and doing his best to find the young princes and princesses, who were beloved by all the nation.

But imagine the grief of all in the palace! The queen bitterly reproached herself for eating too much bread and honey, and not looking after her children enough; and the king vowed that he would give half his treasures to see his sons and daughters come back safe and sound. As for little Y, she did nothing but cry all the evening. She was allowed to come down to dinner, and without having her hair curled, too; indeed, her mother, after what had happened, would not let her only remaining child out of sight for a single moment. But none of the royal family cared to eat, and dinner was sent down unattended, to the great sorrow of the cook, who thought her royal master could not bear up against his trouble if he did not take some food.

"I must do him some dainty dish for supper," said she. "Let me see! What is he fond of?" At that moment one of the pages came into the kitchen carrying a cage full of blackbirds. He had seen a flock of them twittering at the window of the palace nursery, and had caught them by putting salt on their tails, little thinking who they were.

"The very thing!" cried the cook. "His majesty likes nothing better than a blackbird pie. Polly, put the kettle on, and fetch me out the rolling-pin." Then she proceeded to make the blackbirds—four-and-twenty there were of them exactly—into a pie, paying no attention to the way in which they scratched and hopped about and looked up to her face, trying to let her know that they were the young princes and princesses.

In the meanwhile messages were arriving every five minutes at the palace, cabs, letters, telegrams, couriers, but none brought good news. The royal children were nowhere to be found, and it was supposed that they had all gone to slide and fallen into the water. Many persons, however, did not believe this, as it was the height of summer and there was no ice. Some suggested that they had gone out in a boat, but there wasn't a boat within twenty miles of the palace. Then, again, it was mentioned as likely that they had been caught by a wild beast, though wild beasts were not known in that country, except at the Zoological Gardens. Four regiments of infantry, two of cavalry, and twenty cannons were sent out at once to scour the woods, and nobody in the palace would go to bed until something was known for certain of the fate of the poor princes and princesses.

At length, in spite of his grief, the king began to feel rather hungry, and supper was ordered. Among other things, the blackbird pie was put on the table, and the Lord High Chamberlain took a knife and fork, and set to work cutting it open to the sound of slow music, as was the custom at all the royal banquets. And now a most extraordinary thing happened.

Four-and-twenty blackbirds popped their heads out of the dish, and began to sing so beautifully and tenderly that all present would have been delighted if they had not been so much alarmed. The ladies of the court shrieked, the lords stared and grasped the hilts of their swords. The king and queen started up in amazement, asking each other what this might mean. Only little Y recognized the voices of her brothers and sisters, and bent over the pie, crying bitterly.

And now was seen a still more extraordinary thing—the most extraordinary thing that ever happened in that country. As fast as Y's tears fell on each of the birds their human shape came back to them, and soon the whole four-and-twenty princes and princesses were kneeling round their father and mother and thanking Y for having set them free from any terrible enchantment. It was Y who had done it, for the tears of love and pity are far more powerful than the strongest arts of the most wicked witches.

Now, imagine the delight of every body; how the king and queen kissed their children a thousand times; how all the royal family sat up to supper, and had cake and honey and lemonade; how the bells were rung for joy over the whole kingdom; how soldiers and policemen who had taken part in the search were treated to beef and beer in the kitchen of the palace; how it was ordered that in honor of the event the school-boys and school-girls throughout the land should from that day have three months' extra holidays every year; and how their young royal highnesses grew up without any further misfortune, and lived happily all the rest of their days. It is supposed that they were the original inventors of "Spelling Bees," which should properly be called the game of Spelling Blackbirds.—*English Magazine.*

The Queen's Home at Balmoral. Inside the castle (Balmoral) as well as outside, every thing is in the most perfect order, and displays the possession of great taste and skill on the part of those who designed and carried out the arrangements. The ball-room is the most conspicuous apartment, and is profusely adorned with Tartan ornaments and hangings, and deer-heads, and old armor of various descriptions. The library is well supplied with all the standard literature, bound in the richest style. Like the rest of the royal apartments, the floor is covered with carpets in Tartan patterns, and the effect is very pretty. The dining-room is not large, and is furnished with tables and chairs of good solid oak. The drawing-room and sitting-rooms were just as the Queen had left them a few hours before. What appeared so strange was the plain manner in which the woodwork in all the rooms was finished. Pine, simply varnished, and looking as clean and fresh as if it had left the hands of the painter and joiner but yesterday, was made into doors and windows, and the halls and corridors were papered and varnished. The bedrooms and sitting-rooms for the ladies and gentlemen in waiting were finished and furnished in the same natural wood, and with beech and birch highly polished. One can see by a glance at the royal apartments that the chief object aimed at is domestic comfort rather than an attempt at show. Here, as on every occasion, when she has the management under her own control, the Queen shows strong common sense, and a desire to make every thing contribute to the happiness of all concerned.—*St. John's Telegraph.*

The Language of Rings. In the case of a gentleman wishing to marry—literally "in the market" with his heart—he wears a plain gold ring upon his first finger of the left (or heart's) hand. When success attends his suit and he is actually engaged, the ring passes to the second finger. After marriage it passes to the third finger. If, however, the wearer desires to tell the fair ones that he is not only "in the market," but that he does not design to marry at all, he wears the signet upon his little finger, and the ladies may understand that he is out of their reach. With the fair sex the "laws of the ring" are: A plain or chased gold ring on the little finger of the right hand implies "not engaged," or, in plainer words, "ready for proposals, sealed or otherwise." When engaged the ring passes to the first finger of the left hand. When married the third finger receives it. If the fair one proposes to defy all sledge to her heart she places the rings on her first and fourth finger, one on each, like two charms to keep away the tempter. It is somewhat singular that this disposition of rings is rare.—*Rochester Union.*

Carrying His Head in His Hand. Count Paul de Gabrisse publishes the following reminiscence of Lima: "One day when dining with the French Consul 'The Man with the Silver Head' was announced. He was a Frenchman, owning a small property near the city. While taking a walk some months ago he heard cries of agony, and, hastening in the direction from which they came, surprised three brigands, one of whom had a traveler's head between his knees, while another cut his ears off and a third stabbed him. The unfortunate Frenchman killed one of the villains, whereupon the other two fled. At this moment, and while attending to the dying traveler, Peruvian gendarmes appeared, one of whom, thinking the Frenchman a murderer, with a powerful horizontal blow of his sword cut the top part of his head clean off, laying the brain bars. The Frenchman, after laying an hour unconscious, revived, picked up the upper part of his head, walked home in the broiling sun and had a silver plate made in lieu of the original scalp, which had shrunk too much."

A PHILOSOPHICAL woman writes to inquire "Why it is that just at the moment when a young man finds out that his girl will leave him he wants to back out of the engagement?" We give up the conundrum.

HERE AND THERE. A PHILADELPHIA fashion-writer remarks that not one woman in a hundred had a neck and shoulders fine enough to show.

THE best summer-hotel business this year is done at Long Branch. The fashionable who gather at Newport live in cottages.

GREAT quantities of soap are made from the soap weed that grows in New Mexico, but the native greasers know nothing about its use.

A YOUNG Canadian has recently walked on the water of Ontario River. He had a large pair of shoes, after the style of snow-shoes, which enabled him to keep afloat and not lose his balance.

THE completion of the Inter-Colonial Railroad, in the Dominion of Canada, to Riviere du Loup, marks another important point in Canadian progress. The road is 687 miles in length, and the interest of the Government in it represents an investment of nearly \$20,000,000.

Four hundred Icelanders arrived at Quebec on the 23d and proceeded to the colony set apart in Manitoba for an Icelandic settlement. Four hundred more Icelanders are also on their way, which will make the population of the Icelandic settlements in the Northwest about 2,000 souls.

A WRITER on club life, in the *Galaxy*, says that for from forty to seventy-five dollars per annum a young man is furnished the year round with luxurious rooms, gas, fire, daily papers, magazines, books, and admirable attendance. Clubs originated in London, and are rapidly becoming a thorough American institution.

JEREMIAH WHALEY, aged 92 years, who lives at Narragansett Pier, R. I., had never seen a train of railroad cars until a few days ago, when he saw the locomotive used in laying the track on the new Narragansett Pier Railroad. What makes this case more remarkable is that he lives within a few miles of the Stonington Railroad.

THE exhibition of newspapers and manuscripts soon to be opened at Prague, will contain much of interest. Seven thousand articles have already been contributed, many of them rare and curious. Among them is a Lord's Prayer in 324 languages from the Imperial Academy of St. Petersburg. There is also a very valuable collection of autographs.

Business Hours in England and America. There are few facts in the business life of America which strike an Englishman so forcibly as the absorbing character of each man's pursuits and the severity of the labor to which he subjects himself. In London the tradesman can scarcely be said to have commenced the business of the day before 9 a. m., the only exceptions being those who minister to the early breakfast wants of the community. The merchant is rarely at his office before 10 in the morning, and the clerks and secretaries in the Government establishments are not at their posts much before 11 a. m. The amount of work accomplished by the two last named classes is interrupted by a frequent gossip, the perusal of a newspaper, and a prolonged lunch, and nearly all quit their desks for the day at 4 p. m. The American employee, on the other hand, is often at his office at 8 a. m., many tradesmen open their office at 6 or 7 a. m., and during a long day the attention to duty is incessant, only broken by half an hour allotted to lunch. Perhaps there is too much work done on one side and too little on the other. In America we press into the 24 hours, as much severe labor as the human frame can bear; in England men do as little as they possibly can.

My personal experience of the public offices is not great, but I accepted a position in the India Office for a few months during the tenancy of the Secretaryship of the Duke of Argyll, and this is how the work is done: On entering upon my duties I inquired at what hour I might be expected to be present. The Assistant Secretary turned to the senior assistant clerk of the department, and asked him what hour he usually came in. "Oh," he replied, "about 10—say 10—say half-past 10." "Good," I rejoined. "I will be here at half-past 10." The next day I was at my post. Not a soul had arrived. There is an office for the messengers, as they are called, in each corridor, of which there are six in the India Office. I asked the head messenger, an old man of 60, when the clerks might be expected. "Sir," he answered, "they rarely come before 11 o'clock, and often later." Sure enough, it was a quarter past 11 before they began to drop in. To change their coats, arrange their papers and interchange mutual civilities occupied the time until noon. Then, the work began.—*Galaxy for August.*

Wonderful Career of a Cripple. English papers give interesting particulars of the success which has marked the life of Mr. Walter Wren, who has come prominently into public notice by the great success which has attended his pupils in their competition for the India civil-service. His prosperity is the more remarkable as he has long been a hopeless cripple. Recently, while canvassing Chelsea for an election to Parliament, Mr. Wren in the course of a speech which he made mentioned that his condition was due to a kick which he received from a bull at school for whom he was fagging. He did not, however, mention all the facts. Soon after he received the blow it was found that he was most seriously injured, and his prospects seemed utterly blighted. He refused, however, to admit that he was beaten in the battle of life, and rejected an offer of £2 a week which was made to him: He determined to proceed to the University and become a "coach" if he succeeded as well as he hoped to do. At Cambridge he acquitted himself with great credit, and since he left the banks of the Cam for the banks of the Thames he has become the most successful "crammer" of the day. He is wheeled from room to room; and although he can walk a little his favorite position is to lie horizontally on a couch. He married very well and has a family of six or seven children, and besides a very good house in London he has an estate in Berkshire.—*Boston Journal.*

Dog Bites. Mr. Masdonald, in *Land and Water* says: I beg to invoke the powerful aid of your columns to dispel the silly delusion that a person bitten by a dog will die of hydrophobia, should the animal go mad afterward. Many people of nervous temperament have actually died of this fear alone, while a lamentable amount of ignorance on the subject is still allowed to grow up. When a dog bites he is instantly suspected of madness, although not one in a thousand of the offenders is rabid, consequently, numbers of our canine friends are cruelly sacrificed in mere panic. Moreover, hundreds of other unprofitable fellow-creatures once bitten, live in a horrible suspense, believing that they must die of the dreadful malady. Now, the bite of a sound dog is no more fatal than the scratch of a child. Furthermore, a competent authority states that, even when rabid dogs bite, only one case out of a thousand is followed by hydrophobia.

Electroboering in Georgia. The Augusta (Ga.) *Chronicle* prints the following: Hon. Augustus R. Wright, of Rome, who is spoken of as a probable independent candidate for Governor of Georgia, is a patron of the fine arts. A young lady of that place having painted a portrait of Judge Wright, "simply as a pastime," he wrote her a note, (which, with her reply, is published,) saying that though he considered the nose a little too small he would give her \$50 for the painting and help her to a husband. The fair artist wisely accepted the cash and dismissed the consort, saying that husbands sometimes prove troublesome comforts, and so long as a woman remains independent she had better continue single.

Box-Grabs at night has become a standard amusement in Clark County, Ky. Ladies participate in the sport. A company of six ladies and six gentlemen, most of them married people and related to each other, were out after a fox on one occasion until 2 o'clock in the morning.