

Pitt had quite recovered himself.

"And for our sweethearts," he said lightly. Then, with a momentary relapse into his graver demeanour he added, "But mark my words, Trender,

there are stirring adventures in store for some of us."

And he was right.

END OF CHAPTER THE THIRD.

## VILLAGE CHILDREN'S GAMES.



"I HAD A LITTLE DOG."

W. H. B. R. E. Y.



THE UMPIRE.

**I**N speaking of village children's games, I do not intend to refer to the national sports, such as cricket and football, the former of which is played in nearly every country place, but rather to those games which form the principal entertainment at school treats. To an onlooker they are all very similar; the players join hands and circle round one, who stands in the middle; he either chooses another to take his place, or runs off after touching another who catches him, as in the well-known game of "Drop the Handkerchief." But the variety consists in the words chanted, and though the actions remain the same, the

difference in them constitutes the charm of "playing something else," from what has been the former amusement. To give an instance—

There are two forms of "Drop the Handkerchief." In one the individual with the handkerchief goes round outside the group, singing—

"I had a little dog, and he won't bite you, and he won't bite you, etc.; but he will bite you,"

as he lays it upon the child chosen to pursue him; in the other the words are these—

"I sent a letter to my love, and on the way I dropped it,  
One of you has picked it up, and put in his pocket."

The girl or boy with the handkerchief then decides which of those in the circle has found the lost missive, places it on his shoulder, and runs away. To the children the change in the words alters the whole aspect of the game, and when they are tired of the one, they will contentedly turn to the other as something fresh. It is unnecessary here to dwell upon "Gathering Nuts and May," and others as well-known. I will mention some which may not be equally general. Many of these turn upon love, as, for instance, in—

"Sweet love, what are you weeping for, you weeping for?"  
"I'm weeping for my true love, my true love, my true love,  
I'm weeping for my true love, this bright summer's day."

A child kneels in the centre, whilst the others circle round her; she keeps her hands over her face till she raises her head to answer their question, whereupon they bid her

"Rise up and choose another, another, another,  
Rise up and choose another this bright summer's day."

She casts away her grief and selects a companion from around her, and so the game proceeds.

Another of the same style is accompanied by the following:—

Rose, apple, lily, pear, a crown of roses she shall wear,  
Take her by her lily-white hand, lead her over the water,  
Give her kisses one, two, three, I know then whose bride she'll be."

At the close of which the player in the centre chooses a partner, and they kiss and retire hand-in-hand to join the group which surrounds them.

In another game, called "Isabella," which is a great favourite, the whole ceremony of courtship and marriage is represented, commencing with the lovers' first kiss, and ending with the putting on of the ring in church.

There are many others similar to these, but it would only weary the reader to detail them all, though the words which are sung to each have in some cases a very quaint sound.

"Cat and Mouse," in which the cat outside the group tries hard to break in upon the terrified mouse inside, "Puss in the Corner," and "Black Man," as games common to all children, need not be mentioned here.

But there are several others, namely, "Milk-Cans," "In and Out the Window," "Threading the Needle," which it may be interesting to notice.

Of these, the first is simply a series of questions and answers, chanted by those forming the circle and the speaker in the middle respectively, but the words are curious, and one wonders of what the milk-can was made which could necessitate the selling of a feather-bed for its purchase. Perhaps of gold or something more costly?

*Children* (joining hands in a circle).—"Please, mother, buy me a milk-can, a milk can," etc.

*Mother* (in their midst).—"Where shall I get money to buy it with, to buy it with?"

*C.*—"Sell father's feather-bed, please, mother, do, sell father's feather-bed," etc.

*M.*—"Where will the father sleep? the father sleep? the father sleep?"

*C.*—"Sleep in the servants' room, the servants' room, sleep in the servants' room," etc.

*M.*—"Where will the servants sleep? the servants sleep? the servants sleep?" etc.

*C.*—"Sleep in the pigsty, the pigsty, the pigsty, sleep in the pigsty," etc.

*M.*—"Where will the pigs sleep, the pigs sleep, the pigs sleep? where," etc.

*C.*—"Sleep in the wash-tub, the wash-tub, the wash-tub, sleep in the wash-tub," etc.

*M.*—"What shall I wash in? wash in? wash in?"

*C.*—"Wash in a thimble, a thimble, a thimble. Wash in a thimble, please, mother, do."

At this suggestion the distracted mother makes a rush at the children, who scatter in all directions; she gives chase, till she has captured one, who pays the penalty by acting the parent, when the rest again gather round and the same questions are asked.

The second is more elaborate, though the ceremony of the game is, as usual, centred in a circle.

One player commences by working in and out under the arms of those who stand joining hands, and sings, thus:—

"In and out the window, in and out the window,  
In and out the window, as you have done before,"

saying—

"Follow on to London, follow on to London,  
Follow on to London, as you have done before."

He then touches one of the group, who has to leave his companions and march on behind him, whilst they chant, as both walk round outside the ring—

"Round and round the city, round and round the city,  
Round and round the city, as you have done before."

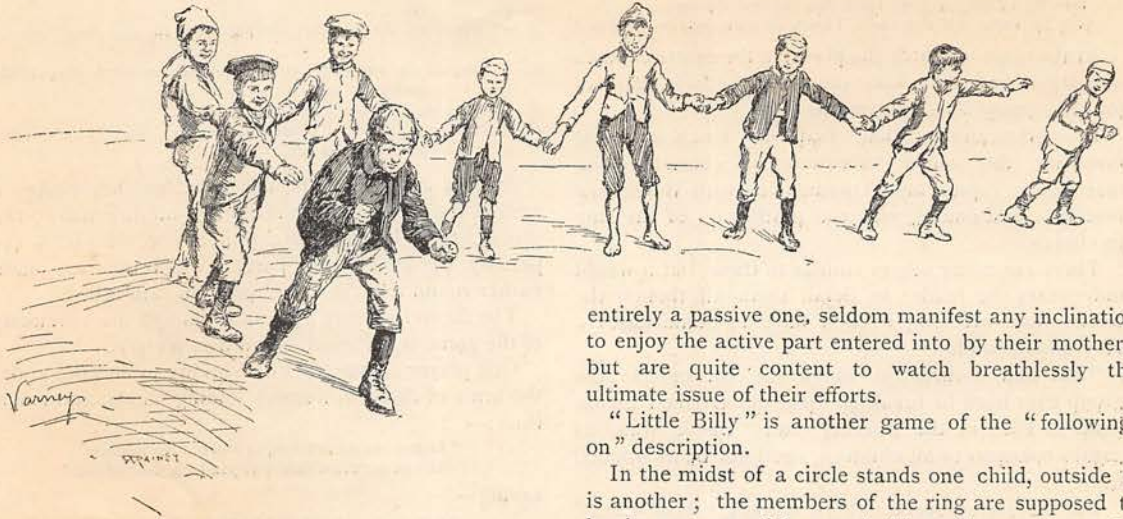
Then both wind in and out among the rest, saying the words as given above, and the leader signs to another to "Follow on to London." Thus the game proceeds, the circle growing ever narrower, whilst the train who push in and out of it increases its numbers, till all the members of the group have been pressed into its service, as one by one each has "followed on to London," and is there lost sight of.

In "Threading the Needle," we have the primitive germ from which doubtless sprang "Tempête," a



Threading  
the Needle

W. A. H. E. Y.



species of country dance, much in vogue at one time for children's parties. The players stand in pairs opposite one another, each holding one end of a handkerchief. The couple at the top of the line represent the needle, through which (*i.e.*, under whose arms, as in "Oranges and Lemons,") all the others pass, till they are left at the end of the row. The game comes to an end when every needle has been duly threaded.

It seems strange to hear country children playing such a game as "Please, mother, will you sell your baby?" It would seem less astonishing were it the grim relaxation of the little ones of the London slums, where, according to all accounts, hiring of infants (if not actually buying and selling) is an every day affair. Yet this is, indeed, one of the forms of recreation remarkable in villages. It is a mixture of the well-known "Pat Back" and "York Threes."

The children stand in pairs, one behind the other, in a circle (not joining hands); in other words, each mother has a baby in front of her. Thus the parents form an outer ring, whilst their offspring make an inside one. As usual, one player is "out," he comes up and asks the question—

"Please, mother, will you sell your baby?"

she replies—

"No, not for thousands of pounds."

The mother then runs round the group in one direction, whilst the would-be buyer runs in the other. If the mother reaches her infant first, she keeps it, but if her adversary's legs are the quicker, she has to give it up, and take her place in offering to purchase some other parent's darling. Great excitement is caused over this game, and the little ones show much anxiety to secure the nimblest of the big ones for their mothers, lest in the competition they should be given up to some stranger.

Strangely enough, the babies, to whom this game is

entirely a passive one, seldom manifest any inclination to enjoy the active part entered into by their mothers, but are quite content to watch breathlessly the ultimate issue of their efforts.

"Little Billy" is another game of the "following-on" description.

In the midst of a circle stands one child, outside it is another; the members of the ring are supposed to be the property of the one inside, and represent cattle, sheep, pigs, hens, etc.

The player inside fancies he hears a noise, and calls out—

"Who goes there?"

whereupon he receives the answer—

"Only little Billy."

Meanwhile "Little Billy," touches one of the group, who follows him, and thus the game proceeds till the owner in the centre finds he has been robbed of all his farm-stock, and gives chase, with the hope of recovering something that may relieve him from his humiliating position. There are plenty of other games played by English village children, many not less uncommon than "Fox and Geese" is common, but I will only mention one more, called "Varney," or the reader's patience may become exhausted. It is a good pastime with which to finish an afternoon, and send home the little guests laughing and happy, if by chance obstacles in their entertainer's grounds render "Blind Man's Buff" dangerous.

The children are scattered running about in all directions; one is set to catch another; then the two join hands and sally forth to capture another member to form their band. In time it becomes quite formidable to the few who have hitherto escaped, especially as the boy or girl at either end may lay hands on a victim.

The whole band, however, must keep hands fast joined; it counts as nothing to seize a fugitive if the line is broken anywhere.

The game ends when there remain no longer any independent individuals, when the renowned one of many hairbreadth escapes has at last succumbed to the power of the band, which, large enough finally to cover the limited breadth of the play-ground, has left him no corner where he may evade their clutches, but has pressed him, all unwilling, into their service, hailing him with the honour which is surely his due.

