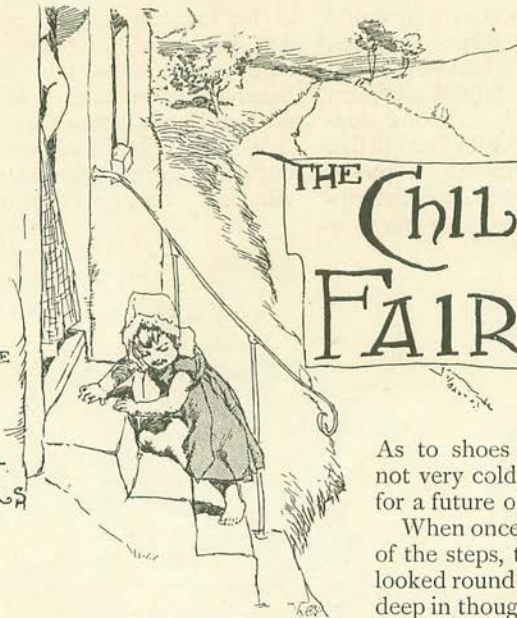


FROM THE
FRENCH
of

SANT-
JURS



THE CHILDREN'S FAIRY

As to shoes and stockings—well, it was not very cold, and so they were put away for a future occasion.

When once she had reached the bottom of the steps, the child stood upright and looked round for a minute or two evidently deep in thought, with her little finger pressed against her face. Play! Yes, it was all very well, but what should she play at?



It was a dull, heavy afternoon, and the long, dusty road looked quite deserted, not a horse or even a foot-passenger in sight. The birds were taking their afternoon siesta, and the leaves were hanging down languidly from the poor trees, which were dying with thirst. There were three solitary-looking, tumble-down cottages on one side of the road, and presently the door of one of them opened, and a woman's voice called out:—

“Come, Yvette, come, go out and play.”

In answer to this summons a little girl of some three or four years old soon appeared, and with great difficulty on all fours began to descend the steep steps from the house to the footpath. It was quite a piece of work, that perilous descent, and it was accomplished slowly, carefully, and very awkwardly by what looked like nothing but a bundle of clothes.

The child had on a little bonnet made of two pieces of figured muslin sewn together, and from which a few tresses of fair hair which had escaped fell over her forehead and down the back of her neck. Her little frock had been lengthened many times, and, consequently, the waist was now up under the arms, like one sees in the Empire dresses.



“HEE”
“DEEP IN THOUGHT.”

At the very time when the poor little mite was turning this question over in her mind, hundreds of other children, accompanied by their mother or by their nurse, would be all out in the gardens or parks, and they would have with them all kinds of games and toys, from the favourite spade and bucket to a real little steam-boat, which would sail along on the ponds. They would have cannons, skipping-ropes, reins (all covered with little bells), hoops, battledores and shuttlecocks, bowls, marbles, balls, balloons, dolls of every description, pistols, guns, swords, and, in fact, everything that the heart of a child can desire.

Then, too, those other children nearly always had little playmates, so that it was easy enough to organize a game.

But, Yvette—on that deserted road, what could she do? Her father, a poor road-mender, earned only just enough to make a bare living for his wife and child, and certainly not a halfpenny could be spared for toys.

Yvette sat down just near a great heap of stones, which her father had to break into small pieces in order to fill in the ruts. When she was comfortably installed, she began to fumble in her pocket, and there she certainly found all kinds of wonderful things: two cherry-stones, a piece of string, a small carrot, a shoe-button, a small penny knife, a little bit of blue braid, and some crumbs of bread. Now, these were all very nice in their way, and were indeed very valuable articles, but somehow they did not appeal to Yvette at all just then. She put them all very carefully back one by one in her pocket.

Then there was a profound silence. Yvette was not happy. The little face puckered itself up into a significant grimace—the little nose was all screwed up, and the mouth was just opening—tears were surely on the way! Just at that moment, fortunately, the Children's Fairy was passing by.

Now you, perhaps, do not know about this Fairy, for no one ever sees her, but

it is the very one which makes children smile in their dreams, and gives them all kinds of pretty thoughts. There is no limit to the power of this Fairy, for, with a stroke of her magic wand, she can transform things just as she wishes. She is very good and kind-hearted, and the proof is that she bestows her favours more generally on the poor and unfortunate than on others.

Well, this good Fairy saw that Yvette was just going to cry. She stretched her golden wand out over the heap of stones and then flew away again, laughing, for she was just as light and as gay as a ray of sunshine.



"SHE STRETCHED HER GOLDEN WAND OVER THE HEAP OF STONES."

Now, directly the Fairy had gone, it seemed to the road-mender's little daughter that one of the big stones near her had a face, and that it was dressed just like a little baby. Oh, it was really just like a little baby! Yvette stretched out her hand, took the stone up, and immediately began to feel for it all the love which a mother feels for her child.

"Ah!" she said to it, cuddling it up in her arms; "do you want to be my little girl? You don't speak—oh! but that is

because you are too young—but I see you would like to. Very well, then; I will be your mother, and I shall love you and never whip you. You must be good, though, and then I shall never scold you. Oh! but if you are not good—you know, I've got a birch rod. Now, come, I'm going to dress you better: you look dreadful in that frock." Hereupon Yvette rolled her child up in her pinafore, so that there was nothing to be seen of the stone but what was supposed to be the baby's head.

"Oh! how pretty she is, dear little thing.



"OH! HOW PRETTY SHE IS."

There, now, she shall have something to eat.—Ah! you are crying—but you must not cry, my pretty one—there, there." And the hard stone was rocked gently in the soft little arms of its fond mother.

"Bye-bye, baby—bye-bye-bye." Yvette sang with all her might, tapping her little daughter's back energetically, but evidently all to no purpose, for the stone refused to go to sleep. "Ah! naughty girl; you won't go to sleep? Oh, no, I won't tell you any more stories. I have told you Tom Thumb, and that's quite enough for to-night. Go to sleep—quick—quick, I say. Oh, dear! dear, naughty child—I've got a knife—what! you are crying again! If you only knew how ugly you are when you cry! There! now I'm going to slap you—take that, and that, and that, to make you quiet. Oh, dear, how dreadful it is to have such a child. I believe I'll change you, and have a boy. Now, just say you are sorry for being so naughty—What! You won't? I'll give

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you another chance. Now—one—two—three. Oh, very well. I know what I shall do. I shall just go and take you back. I shall say: 'If you please, I've got a dreadful little girl, and I want to change her for a nice little boy, named Eugene.' And then they'll say: 'Yes, ma'am; will you have him with light hair or dark?' 'Oh,' I shall say, 'I don't mind, as long as he is good.' 'He'll be very dear, though, ma'am,' they'll say; "good little boys are very rare, and they cost a great deal.' 'How much?' I shall ask. 'Why, one penny, ma'am.' And then I shall think about it— Now, then, are you going to be good, and say you are sorry? No? Oh! very well—it's too late now—I've changed you. I have no little girl now, but a very pretty little boy, named Zizi."

The stone immediately underwent a complete transformation. Just now, when it was a little girl, it had been very quiet and gentle, and had kept quite still on Yvette's lap. Now that it was a boy there was no more peace: it would jump about, and it would try to get away, for boys are always so restless.

"Zizi, will you be still, and will you stay on my lap

instead of tumbling about in the road? There, let me lift you up! Oh, dear! how heavy boys are. There, now, don't you stir, but just eat your bread and milk. It will make you grow, and then when you are big you'll have beautiful grey whiskers, like father. You shall have a sword, too, and perhaps you shall be a policeman. It's very nice to be a policeman, you know, because they are never put in prison—they take other people there if the people make a noise in the street. Oh, Zizi, do keep still. If you don't, I'll call the wolf—you know, the big wolf that runs off with little children and takes them into the woods to eat them up. Wolf, wolf, where are you?"

Just at that moment a dog appeared—a large, well-fed, happy-looking dog, impudent too, and full of fun. He belonged to a carrier who was always moving about from place to place, and the dog, accustomed as he was to these constant journeys, had got rather familiar, like certain commercial

travellers, who, no matter where they are, always make themselves quite at home.

Now, the dog had got tired of following his master's cart, and when he saw something in the distance which was moving about, he bounded off to discover what it was. This something was Yvette and her little boy.

"Look, look!" exclaimed the small mother, and there was a tremor in her voice. "You see, he is coming—the big wolf!"

He *was* coming, there was no doubt about that, for he was tearing along, and his tongue was hanging out and his ears were pricked up.

The little stone boy was not at all frightened, but Yvette began to regret having called the dreadful animal. Oh! if she could only get away now; but, alas! she did not dare to move or even to speak.

The impertinent dog came straight to

rushed to the hedge to bark and wake up all the birds.

As to Yvette, she was hurrying along as fast as her little legs could carry her, for she was in despair, as she thought the wolf was just behind her, and she imagined that she still felt his hot breath on her little hand. She stopped when she got to the steps of her home, for she was out of breath and all trembling with terror, and she felt sure that if she tried to scramble up the steps the wolf would bite her legs. Suddenly the inspiration, which the ostrich once had, came to her, and she rushed into the corner which was formed by the front of the house and the stone steps, and holding her face close to the wall, so that she could not see the dreadful animal, she was convinced that she too was out of his sight.

She stayed there some minutes in perfect anguish, thinking: "Oh! if I move, he'll eat me up!" She was quite surprised even that

he did not find her, and that his great teeth did not bite her, for she always thought wolves were so quick to eat up little girls. Whatever could he be doing? And then, not hearing any sound of him, she thought she would risk one peep round. Very slowly she turned her head, and then, as nothing dreadful happened, she grew bolder and bolder.

The wolf was not in sight, and instead of the barking which had terrified her, she now heard a lot of little bells tinkling, and in the distance she saw a waggon

with four horses coming along.

The sound of the bells was so fascinating that Yvette forgot her duty as a mother, and stood there watching the waggon as it approached.

The horses were all grey, and they were coming so fast. Suddenly the child uttered an awe-struck cry.

Her child, her little son, was under the



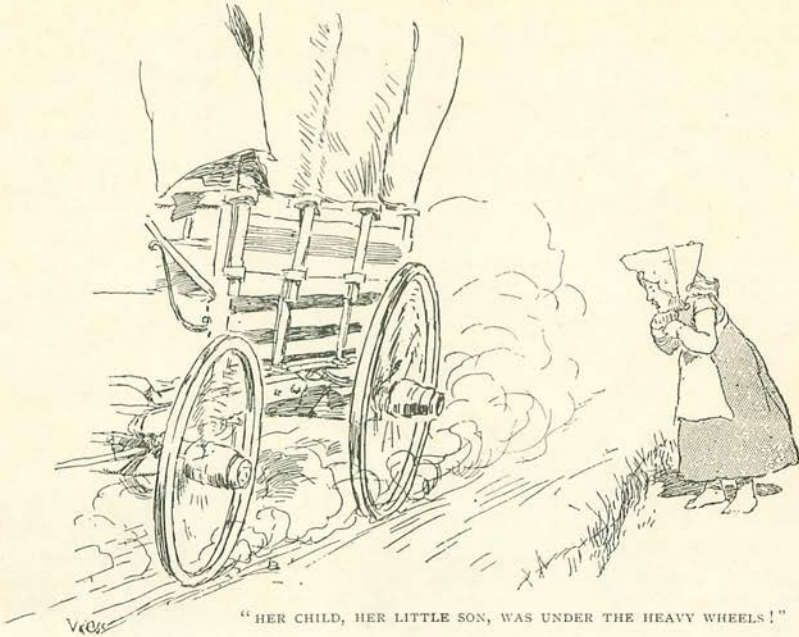
"THE IMPERTINENT DOG CAME STRAIGHT TO THEM."

them. Poor Yvette, half frightened to death, threw away the precious stone baby she had been fondling, and, picking herself up, began to run, calling out: "Mother! mother!"

The dog was quite near her, jumping up at her, and then suddenly he turned to go and sniff at the little stone boy. He probably thought it was a bone or a piece of bread, but he was soon undeceived, and then he

heavy wheels! Crunch! crunch! and it had gone by, the horrible waggon. Yvette went on to the horse-road, and her little heart was

there, then! and, it's a girl this time. I won't have any more dreadful boys to be afraid of wolves, and to go and get them-



"HER CHILD, HER LITTLE SON, WAS UNDER THE HEAVY WHEELS!"

very full; for there, where poor Zizi had been lying, there was only some yellowish crunched stone. Zizi had been ground into powder by the huge wheels. The poor child was in despair, and, with tears in her eyes, she shook her little fists at the carrier, who was whipping up his horses.

"Cruel, wicked man!" she cried, and then her eyes happening to fall on the heap of stones which had supplied her with a family, she saw another stone smiling at her now. She ran quickly to it, picked it up and kissed it affectionately, and then, happy in her new treasure, she cried out defiantly to the carrier, whom she could still see in the distance: "Ah! I don't care! I've got another—

selves killed just to make their poor mother unhappy."

Oh! kind, good Fairy, you who watch over the children and who give them their happiness and console them in sorrow when they are playing at life—oh, good Fairy, do not forget your big children.

Older men tell me that I am young, but the younger ones do not think so; and I, myself, saw, only this morning, a silver thread in my hairs. Oh, kind Fairy, Fairy of the children, help me, too, to believe that the moon is made of green cheese; for, after all, our happiness here below consists in our faith and in our illusions.