



By F. C. YOUNGER.

IT was midnight: the Witch was sitting on an upturned basket in the hen-house, staring at the Memory-Saver. No one but a witch could have seen at all inside the hen-house, but this particular Witch had gathered pieces of decayed wood on the way there, lit them at glow-worms, and stuck them on the walls. They burnt with a weird, blue light, and showed the old Witch on the basket scratching her bristly chin; the Black Cock in a kind of faint up one corner, with his eyes turned up till they showed the whites; the empty nest; the halves of a broken egg-shell on the floor; and beside them a tiny round black lump with all sorts of queer little tags hanging on to it, which was staring back at the Witch with two frightened little pink eyes.

"It's quite a new idea," said the Witch to herself. "A Memory-Saver! How thankful

many people would be to get hold of one! But they don't know the way, and they won't ask me. They don't know how to hatch an imp to save your memory from a cock's egg. They even say that a cock never lays eggs. Such ignorance! Cocks always lay them at midnight and eat them before morning; and that's why no one has ever seen one. But if you are careful to sprinkle the cock with Witch-water three nights running, he will lay an egg he cannot eat; and if you bless the egg with the Witch's curse, and roast it three nights in the Witch's fire, when the moon is on the wane, it will hatch a Memory-Saver. But poor mortals don't know this, and that's why they're always worrying and 'taxing their memories,' as they call it, instead of hiring a nice little imp to save them the trouble. Come here, my dear!" she added, addressing the Memory-Saver.

The little black lump rolled over and over

until he reached her feet, then gave a jump and landed on two of the thickest of his tags, which supported him like two little legs. With two others he began to rub his little black self all over, while he shed little green tears from his little pink eyes.

He was a queer little person, very like an egg in shape, with no features but a pair of little pink eyes near the top, and a wide slit which went about half-way round him and served him for a mouth. The Witch regarded him in silence; she knew that inside him was nothing but a number of little rooms, carefully partitioned off from one another, which could be emptied by pulling the tag attached to each outside.

There was no sound in the hen-house but the frightened clucking of the hens, the gasping of the Black Cock in the corner, and the sobbing of the imp, which sounded like the squeaking of a slate-pencil on a slate. Presently the Witch patted the Memory-Saver on the head.

"Don't cry, my dear," she said; "there's nothing to cry about! And don't look at that silly Black Cock in the corner. He isn't your Mother any longer. I'm your Mother now—at least, all the Mother you'll get, and I shall pinch you if you don't work. I'll just see if you are in good working order now."

She lifted the imp in her hand as she spoke, and pulled one of the little tags hanging behind him. The Memory-Saver gave a gasp, and, opening his mouth to its widest extent, he began to repeat, rapidly: "J'ai—tu as—il a—nous avons—vous avez—ils ont."

"Very good!" said the Witch, "the French string is in order. I'll try the poetry."

She pulled another tag as she spoke.

Th'Assyrian came down like a wolf on the fold,
And his cohorts were gleaming like purple and gold;
And the sheen of their spears was like stars on the
sea,
When the blue-waves roll—nightly on deep Galilee

panted the Memory-Saver.

"A little jerky," said the Witch, doubling the strings round the imp and putting him in her pocket; "but it will work smoother in time. It's a splendid idea," she went on, as she buttoned her cloak and opened the door. "A Memory-Saver! Pull the string of the subject you want (the name is written on each tag), and the imp will tell you all about it. Read a set of lessons to him, and then pull the strings belonging to them, and he'll reel them all off word for word. How many

children I know would like to get him to take to school in their pockets! There's little Miss Myra, who is always in trouble about her lessons; she would give all she's got for him. But I'll only part with him at my own price."

The Witch had left the hen-house, and was trotting as fast as she could down a little woodland path. The poor little Memory-Saver was jogged this way and that among the rubbish in the Witch's pocket—queer stones, herbs, little dead toads, pounded spiders, and bats' wings. He would soon have been black with bruises if he had not been black by nature. But the worst pain he suffered was anxiety as to what would become of him. What was the Witch going to do with him? Why had she taken him away from the Black Cock, who at least was friendly if he did gasp and show the whites of his eyes? The imp cried again, and wondered how long he would have to stay in that choky pocket.

He had not long to wait. That very afternoon the Witch saw Myra crying over her lessons at the window. She was kept in to learn them, and was feeling miserable and cross. No one was about, so the Witch crept up to the window, and told her all about the Memory-Saver, ending by producing him from her pocket. Oh! how glad he was to get out! He sat gasping with delight on the Witch's hand, while she explained his talents to someone. Who was it? The imp looked up and saw a little girl about ten years old, with an inky pinafore, and long, tumbled brown curls. She looked so much nicer than the Witch, that the Memory-Saver gazed up in her face with a forlorn little smile—or at least a smile that would have been "little" if his mouth had not been so wide.

"What a queer little thing!" cried Myra. "I should like to have him, only—how *could* he do all you say?"

"Just listen," said the Witch, pulling a string.

"William I., 1066—William II., 1087—Henry I., 1100—Stephen, 1135"

said the Memory-Saver, solemnly.

Myra danced with delight.

"Oh, he's splendid!" she cried. "He's just what I want. I never can remember dates. Oh, how much does he cost? I'm afraid I haven't enough money."

"I'm sure you haven't," said the Witch. "I wouldn't part with him for untold gold."

"Then it's no use," said Myra, sadly. "I

haven't even got *told* gold, only three shillings and twopence-halfpenny."

"You've got something else that will do better," said the Witch, coaxingly. "Hasn't your brother a large collection of moths and butterflies?"

"Yes," said Myra, looking rather puzzled; "but what has that to do with it?"

"Show me the top drawer of his cabinet, dear," said the Witch.

Myra walked to the cabinet, still wondering, drew out the top drawer, and took it to the window.

The Witch looked up and down the long rows of moths, each with its wings outspread on a separate pin. At last she picked out a great death's-head, and looked at it lovingly. It was a beautiful specimen, just

what she wanted for her latest potion, a wonderful mixture that would enable you to turn fifteen cart-wheels on a cobweb without breaking it. "I'll give you the Memory-Saver for this," she cried, eagerly.

"Oh, but it isn't mine!" said Myra, hastily pulling back the drawer.

"It's your brother's, dear," coaxed the Witch. "You know he would not mind."

"He would," said Myra; "it's his best specimen; he told me so yesterday."

"Well, it does him no good in the drawer," pleaded the Witch; "and the Memory-Saver would prevent your being scolded and punished for not knowing your lessons, as you are almost every day. Besides, you could easily save your pocket-money and buy him another moth."

"They're so dear!" sighed Myra. "But grandma always gives me half a sovereign at Christmas. Well, if you like——"

Myra always maintains that she never gave

the Witch permission to take the moth; but, as she spoke, they both vanished, and Myra only saw the drawer with the big gap in its row of moths where the death's-head had been, and the Memory-Saver grinning ecstatically at her from the window-sill. Poor little fellow; he was so glad to get away from the Witch's pocket.

Myra's first thought was to move the pins of the other moths, so as to fill up the big gap.

"Then perhaps he won't notice it's gone," she said to herself; "and, as the Witch said, it didn't do him any good in the drawer."

Then she took up the little Memory-Saver and examined him curiously. He was a funny little creature—funnier than ever just now, for he was trying to express

his joy at his change of mistresses, which produced a violent commotion in all his tags, and considerably enlarged his mouth. Myra couldn't help laughing, but as she was rather afraid of offending the Memory-Saver, she begged his pardon immediately, and made him a comfortable seat on some books on the table.

"Now, Memory-Saver," she said, "I'm going to read my lessons aloud to you, as the Witch told me. Then you'll know them all, won't you?"

The Memory-Saver nodded so emphatically, that he fell off the books. Myra picked him up, examined him anxiously to see if he were hurt, and, finding he was not, sat him down again.

"I've got two lots of lessons to do," she said, mournfully, "yesterday's and to-day's. Could you do both at once, or would it strain you too much?"

The Memory-Saver shook himself off his



"WHAT A QUEER LITTLE THING!" CRIED MYRA.

seat this time, in his eagerness to assure her he could do twenty lots if necessary. When he was once more settled comfortably, Myra began to read. The Memory-Saver sat contentedly absorbing French, and geography, and tables.

"I wonder if you really know it all," said Myra, gravely, when she had finished. "No, don't nod any more, or you will fall off again. I'll just try one string." She took him up, found the one marked "Tables," and gave it a gentle tug.

"Once nine is nine, twice nine are eighteen, three times nine are twenty-seven," said the Memory-Saver, glibly.

"Stop! Stop! that will do!" cried Myra, delighted. "Don't use it all up before to-morrow."

The next thing was to find somewhere to keep her new treasure—some place where no one could find him; for Myra felt certain that the stupid grown-up people would not approve of her imp, or see his usefulness as clearly as she did.

"They always say, 'If at first you don't succeed, try, try again,' and 'You must cultivate your memory,' when I tell them I can't remember my lessons," she said to herself. "They would take the Memory-Saver away from me if they found him. I must put it somewhere so that they *can't* find him."

Such a place was not easy to find, but at last Myra fixed on the top of the wardrobe in her bedroom.

"They only dust there at spring cleaning time," she said to herself, "and I can move him then."

So she filled a box with cotton-wool, put the Memory-Saver in it, and placed it on top of the wardrobe.

"Are you quite comfortable?" she asked; and the Memory-Saver almost nodded himself out of his box in his joy. It was Paradise after the Witch's pocket.

"What a good thing he doesn't want anything to eat," thought Myra, noticing with satisfaction that the woodwork of the wardrobe quite hid him from anyone below. "The Witch said he feeds on the lessons. How horrible! I shouldn't like French verbs for breakfast, and grammar for dinner. They can't be satisfying, but anyhow, they're easy to get. I always have more than I want."

For some days the Memory-Saver was a great success. Myra put him carefully in her pocket before she went to school, and pulled the right string when she was called up to say her lessons. His voice was rather a

sing-song, but that couldn't be helped. Miss Prisms, the schoolmistress, sent home to Myra's delighted mother a report that her little girl was making wonderful progress in everything but arithmetic and writing. In these, alas, the Memory-Saver could not help her. He could say tables, and weights and measures, but could not do sums in his head, for the simple reason that he had no head.

At first he was very happy, for Myra took great care of him; but by degrees she grew careless. She found out he was quite as useful when treated roughly as when treated kindly, and as it was less trouble to treat him roughly, she did so.

"Why can't you do mental arithmetic?" she asked him, severely, one day when she had got into trouble over her sums. "Aren't you ashamed to be so ignorant, you little imp?"

The Memory-Saver waved his little tags in a wild attempt to explain that it was because he hadn't got a mind, only two little pink eyes, a big mouth, and a lot of little partitions inside him to keep the different kinds of knowledge apart. Unhappily the many bumps he had had lately had been very bad for his internal constitution, even if the bruises had not shown outside; the partitions were beginning to leak. All this he tried to explain by waving his little arms and legs. But Myra was unsympathetic and did not understand him. She scolded him heartily, and was not even melted by the little green tears that trickled from his little pink eyes into his big mouth. But she was to be punished for it. The poor little Memory-Saver had to remember all that was said to him whether he liked it or not, and so, when Myra pulled the geography string next morning in school, he began: "England is bounded on the north by Scotland . . . why can't you do mental arithmetic? . . . on the south by the English Channel . . . aren't you ashamed . . . on the east by the German Ocean . . . to be so ignorant . . . and on the west by the Irish Sea . . . you little imp . . . and St. George's Channel."

"Myra!" gasped Miss Prisms, and for at least two minutes could say no more.

"I—I—didn't mean anything," stammered Myra, blushing crimson and ready to cry.

"I should hope not," said Miss Prisms, severely. "You will learn double lessons for to-morrow, Myra."

"It's all your fault!" said Myra, angrily, to the Memory-Saver, when she got home.

"You must learn all the lessons for me, and then I'm going to slap you, do you hear? You horrid little thing!"

The Memory-Saver heard well enough, and understood too. Myra was in a very bad temper. Her brother had discovered that his death's-head moth was missing, and was making what Myra called a "ridiculous fuss"



"HER BROTHER WAS MAKING A 'RIDICULOUS FUSS.'"

about it. He had not asked her if she knew where it was, but she felt very uncomfortable all the same. She did not think he would have minded so much. Being uncomfortable, she was cross; and as she dared not be cross with Miss Prisms, she was cross with the Memory-Saver, and fulfilled her promise of slapping him when he had done the double lessons for her. She was too absorbed in her own trouble to notice that his box was half off the wardrobe top when she put him—not over-gently—into it; and the bump with which she landed on the floor as she got down from the chair on which she had been standing quite drowned the bump the box made, as it fell behind the wardrobe. The poor little Memory-Saver fell out with a crash, and lay half stunned, feebly waving his little tags. No one came to pick him up, so he lay there all through the long, dark night. He was cracked all over, and something very peculiar

had happened to his interior. In fact, though he did not know it, all the partitions had at last given way, and the French, history, spelling, geography, and tables had run into one another, and were now all mixed in one great pulpy mass inside him. No wonder he felt uncomfortable!

When Myra came for him in the morning she found out what had happened. She fished him out from behind the wardrobe with a good deal of difficulty, and looked at him in consternation. He was sticky all over with the tears he had shed, was very soft and limp, and, worst of all, was leaking the Wars of the Roses and the chief towns of France from more than one crack. However, Myra was late as it was; she had no time to examine him carefully. She put him in her pocket, and ran off to school. She put her hand in her pocket to feel if he were safe as soon as she got to her seat. He felt softer and stickier than ever. Would he be able to say the lessons? Myra felt doubtful, but as she did not remember a word of them herself, she was obliged to trust to him. Trembling she pulled the "Poetry" string, when Miss Prisms called on her for her lesson. The

Memory-Saver gasped and began; each word hurt him very much to bring out, but as they came he began to feel strange and light, happier than he had ever felt before. This is what he said: "A chieftain to the Highlands bound—cries—the feminine of adjectives is formed by adding eleven times nine are Rouen, former capital of Normandy, and heir presumptive to the throne by his descent from the son of Edward III., eleven times twelve are le père, the father, la mère, the mother—Oh, I'm the chief of Ulva's isle, and this, Paris on the Seine . . ."

"Myra, stop at once!" cried Miss Prisms, angrily; but Myra, or, rather, the Memory-Saver, could not stop. His internal partitions were gone, and whichever string was pulled, he was obliged to let out all that was inside him. So for ten dreadful minutes he went on, pouring out French, geography,

history, and tables in one terrible mixture, while Myra wished she could sink through the floor, the girls tittered, and Miss Prisms' anger changed to anxiety. She began to fan

he said; "let her stay away from school for a week, and send for me if another attack comes on."

Myra was not sorry for the holiday; it gave her time to examine the Memory-Saver carefully. She ran through the garden to a little nook by the duck-pond, where no one could see her, before she dared take him out of her pocket and look at him! Poor little Memory-Saver! She could hardly recognise him as the round, plump, cheery little fellow who had first beamed at her from the window-sill. He was quite flat, for Myra had sat on him in her excitement; he was soft and pulpy; his little pink eyes had re-

treated and lost colour, and his great mouth opened and shut in gasps, like that of a fish out of water.

Myra gazed at him horrified. What could she do to revive him? She turned him over and fanned him with a dock-leaf, but he only gasped. Then she tried the effect of a little geography, but the result was disastrous; as fast as it entered the poor little imp, it oozed out again all over him, and he turned almost green with pain.

"Why are you tormenting my offspring?" said a sharp, angry voice at Myra's elbow. "Leave him alone, or give him to me; I'm hungry!"

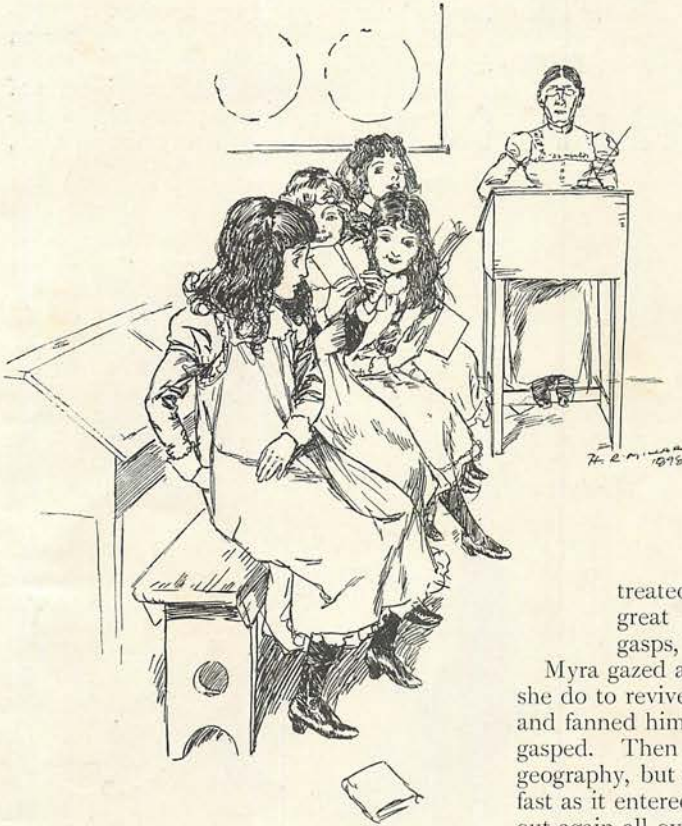
It was Myra's turn to gasp now; the Black Cock had never spoken to her before, and she did not even know he could talk. She looked at him more than half-frightened.

"He—he isn't yours, he's mine," she stammered.

"Yours, indeed!" crowed the Black Cock, indignantly, "when I had all the trouble of laying him! Wasn't he hatched from one of my eggs at midnight, and stolen by the Witch?"

"I didn't know he was," said Myra.

"Well, now you do!" retorted the Cock, "Give him up! Didn't I tell you I was hungry?"



THE GIRLS TITTERED."

Myra with an exercise-book, begged her to be quiet, and assured her she would be "better directly." At last, however, the Memory-Saver came to an end; he would have been much longer, but a great deal had leaked out of him in the night.

"Twelve twelves are a hundred and forty-four—Bayonne, at the mouth of the Adour, mounted the throne as Henry VII.," he concluded.

Myra burst out crying. Miss Prisms made her take sal-volatile and lie on the sofa in her sitting-room. As soon as school was over, she took Myra home herself, and told her mother the little girl must be going to have brain-fever. The doctor was called in and shook his head, looking very wise, although he could find nothing at all the matter with Myra. "It is a curious case,"

"But you wouldn't eat your own child?" cried Myra, aghast.

"Child or not," said the Black Cock, "no kind of beetles come amiss to me."

"He isn't a beetle, he's a Memory-Saver," said Myra. The Black Cock laughed, and Myra shrank back; she had never heard a Black Cock laugh before, and felt she would not be sorry to never hear it again; it was not a pleasant sound.

"I don't know anything about Memories," said the Black Cock; "but look at him, and then tell me he's not a beetle!"

Myra looked anxiously. Certainly something very curious was happening to the Memory-Saver: his little tags had arranged themselves in rows underneath him; he was growing longer, he was very like a beetle. *He was a beetle!*

Myra, who could not bear beetles, rose with a scream and threw him out of her lap on to the mud. The Black Cock rushed at him as he scuttled towards the water, but Myra drove him back, and allowed the Memory-Saver time to reach the pond. She gave a little sigh of relief as he disappeared, while the Black Cock gave an angry crow, turned his back on Myra, and stalked back to the poultry yard. He never spoke to her again, but whether it was because he was too offended, or for other reasons, Myra never knew.

"After all," she thought, as she went home, "I'm glad he turned into a water-beetle. It must be much more comfortable than always being full of lessons. I suppose he'll live on mud now. I hope he'll be happy. He was a good little fellow, and I wish I'd been kinder to him. How interested they will all be at home when I tell them about him!"

But they were not. They said she must be going to have brain-fever, and sent for the doctor again. The only part of her story they believed was that she had taken her brother's moth from the cabinet, and this they said was naughty, and she must save up her pocket-money and buy another.

"I'll never, *never* tell a grown-up person anything again!" thought Myra.

As for the Memory-Saver, at the bottom of the pond he met a pretty young lady water-beetle, and asked her to marry him at once,



"SHE THREW HIM OUT OF HER LAP."

which she did. He raised a large family, and lived very happily ever after. None of the ducks dare touch him for fear of the Witch, so that he found life much more pleasant than when he was a Memory-Saver. Myra often walked round the pond, looking for him, but she never saw either him or the old Witch again.