

WHAT THE POSTMAN BROUGHT.

BY ETHEL TURNER.

Illustrated by FRANCES EWAN.

TWICE a day a train went past Wingadee — a morning one rushing down to far-off Sydney; an afternoon one climbing up and away to places of even greater quiet and loneliness than this little mountain perch where the air blew so sweetly.

There had arrived lately the mother of a family, with her five year old little son, for whom the doctor had ordered this wonderful air after an attack of scarlet fever.

The woman at the post-office said she had no recollection of a time when so many letters had come for Wingadee. She grew quite interested in those which passed through her hands for these two visitors. The up train always brought one thick letter with masculine writing upon it, and a still thicker one addressed in a pretty girlish hand, and containing several separate communications.

Sometimes, also, there was a dirty-looking envelope, with the address in an unmistakable schoolboy's hand. Sometimes there was an untidy one, in a schoolgirl's round characters, with various little postscripts outside, only remembered when the flap had been sealed. And sometimes there was a very little pink envelope, with a green bird flying merrily over the initial "B" at the back. The writing on this one looked as if some very little hand had been guided, and the stamp had the appearance of having been licked very freely and hammered on to preclude the possibility of it becoming ungunmed.

Here are four of the letters brought one morning, exactly as the mother read them aloud to "Little Boy Blue," as she called him. The fifth, the "father letter," she used to read to herself, and only tell Boy Blue little bits from it, with the messages and kisses that referred especially to himself.

"MY DEAREST LITTLE MOTHER" (wrote Allie, the nineteen year old, eldest of the family),—"I am so glad to hear the wretched headaches have kept away, and that darling Boy Blue is getting so rosy. We have all been so afraid the long journey might have

thrown him back. Do take care of your precious little self, and *do* look out for snakes; this is just the time of year for them, and there have been some dreadful cases in the paper. How careless of me to have forgotten Boy Blue's other singles! I quite thought I had packed them at the bottom of the little tin trunk or the brown portmanteau. I have made them into a parcel, however, and father will send it to you on his way to town to-morrow.

"Well, now, of course you want to know how everything is going on. I feel very responsible, of course, and almost afraid to leave home for a minute. I don't know how you manage to make things run so smoothly and get time for all you do.

"Bridget is very inclined to be impudent; I shall get father to speak to her. I told her yesterday (Monday) to make an apple pie, and she turned round and said, 'Shure, Miss Alice, the missus never has pastry on wash day—you might pop a rice pudding in the oven yersilf.' Of course I had forgotten it was wash day, but when she spoke like that I wouldn't go from what I had said.

"I expect an apple pie to be on the table by six o'clock," I said, and walked majestically out of the kitchen. And what do you think? When pudding time came, 'shure' enough, there was an apple pie, at which I breathed freely, for there was a visitor here—Mr. Heriot. But when I served it out, first father put down his spoon and fork and looked at me comically, and then Nessie put her table napkin to her mouth and rushed out the room in her usual boisterous way. I heard that wretched Jimmie whisper to Mr. Heriot, 'It's Allie's own making—isn't she a first-rate cook?' and Mr. Heriot actually ate two spoonfuls.

"Then I tasted it myself very gingerly, and there was a most horrible flavour of soap in it. I rang the bell; you can imagine how my cheeks burned.

"Bridget," I said, when she came in, looking as wooden-faced as usual, 'what can you have done to the pie?—there is soap in it.'

"Miss Allie," she said, packing the plates

together, 'such accidents will 'appen even in the best reggilated families if you *will* have pastry made on washin' day.'

"What would you have done? If I had really been head of the house I should have dismissed her at once; but I remembered what a good servant she was, and how well you got on with her, so I only gave her a lecture. And I must add this to her credit, that when she had removed the pie she brought in a lovely creamy rice pudding, so we had not to go hungry. After dinner Mr. Heriot asked Nessie and me to walk round the garden. I was wearing my blue sprigged muslin; it looks so pretty since I put a chiffon ruffle to it.

"I get hopeless about Jimmie sometimes; I seem to be always sending him to wash himself, and yet he never is clean. The other night, when Mr. Heriot came to dinner, I was quite ashamed—his hands were like coals, and his neck! well, it was so grimy that, just before the bell rang, I dragged him in front of the glass and made him look at it. 'Oh!' he said, 'that's nothing; I can easily put a higher collar on.' What *am* I to do with him?

"Nessie is more shockingly untidy than ever, and really dreadfully hard to manage. I know I'm not as patient as I might be when she gets in one of her tantrums, but I really do try, mummie dear; indeed, I try so hard that if you stay away another month I might possibly by then be beginning to succeed a little. And, with all her faults, she is so true and warm-hearted that I feel ashamed of myself when I have been horrid to her. Mr. Heriot says she has the makings of a very fine woman in her. Baby is just the same dear, delightful little torment as ever; I don't know what I should do without her. But at the same time I often don't know what to do *with* her. She insists upon doing everything that I do.

When I do the flower vases, *she* does a flower vase, and invariably spills the water and scatters the petals on the carpet, and not infrequently breaks the vase. And when she has crammed red geraniums, and sunflowers, and blue irises, and magenta pig's-face altogether, nothing will do but that her vase shall have the post of honour on the most prominent table in the drawing-room. It is of no use humouring her, either, and taking



“She insists upon doing everything that I do.”

it off after a little time and before visitors can come; she dodges in and out of the room all day to see if I have moved it. At present she is writing to you—that, of course, since I am doing so. She is at the end of the table in her high chair, and she has the box of little pink envelopes and paper father brought her. I've tucked a piece of black stuff round her, rolled up her sleeves, and turned the cloth back, for she considers a pencil is beneath her dignity, and insists upon writing

in ink. She has filled two sheets of foolscap with scribble; presently she will condescend to let me guide her hand on the pink paper. Oh, I wish you could see her this minute; her cheeks are pink, and her darling curls bunched up out of the way of the ink; her eyes are exceedingly serious, and her wee red tongue is stuck out in her funny little way, for the task is laborious. Of course, she is grasping the pen with the whole of her hand, occasionally with both, and, of course, she has just broken the nib—the fifth this afternoon—and is climbing down to come to me to fit another one. Mr. Heriot seems very fond of her, and often brings her chocolates and little toys.

“Good-bye, my own little mother. Nessie will say I am greedy if I write any more, for her letter has to come yet, and I don’t want it to be overweight. The postage to you is becoming a serious item, madam mother; last week I had to leave the milk bill unpaid as we had used so many stamps. I try to impress baby with the fact that it costs

twopence to send a letter to you, and that we mustn’t get them too heavy. There’ll be an outcry presently, when I tell her I can’t send all that foolscap she has scribbled on. All day she keeps running to me with things she wants sent in letters to you; pansies out of her garden, the pictures off the chocolate boxes Mr. Heriot gave her; sheets of pink blotting paper, a gingerbread rabbit Jimmie

brought her, the doll’s bonnet Nessie has made her. ‘Touldn’t you wite on ze ombrellope zat it’s from *me* to mamma,’ she says. ‘Zen ze post-office will let it go, I know’—showing you the young person has a full sense of her own importance in the world.

“I *must* stop; the gate has banged, and there is a clatter in the hall, so you know Nessie will be taking up the thread of the

discourse in a minute. Father is going to take us to the Philharmonic to-night, and Mr. Heriot is going too. I *wish* you were here to ask whether I look better in my pink nun’s veiling or my cream cashmere. I like the pink myself, but the cream fits better. Once more, good-bye. Kiss darling Boy Blue a hundred times, and make him kiss you a thousand for
“Your lovingest of daughters,
“ALICE.”



“I was crawling home, a feeble wreck after all the storms and vicissitudes of the day.”

the mystic words, “Bottom in French this week,” in one corner, and “Can I join the Girls’ Cricket Club?” in another; both sentences in a hand so small that it seemed to indicate the wish that the post-office authorities should delicately refrain from reading it, and only the mother’s eyes discover it. On the flap, that had plainly been twice opened since it was stuck down, were

black crosses and dots that told their own tale of the love within; also several pieces of gummed stamp edges that performed no mission of security, but merely clung there vaguely.

“OH, YOU MOST PRECIOUS OF MOTHERS” (the inside ran),—“How *could* you go away and leave your wicked second daughter exposed to all the temptations in the world? If you don’t come back soon, I’m afraid I’ll be too black and bad for anything.

“Everything goes wrong, and then I rage, and there’s no one to smooth me down and make me feel I want to kick myself. Not that Allie isn’t the best old sister in the world; indeed, she is beginning to turn the other cheek to me so often that I get an irresistible desire to smack it even harder than the other one. It’s a great deal more satisfactory when she flames out, too.

“But there’s no one like you, you sweet, precious little mother, for making one feel, just after they’ve been in a temper, that they want to die and go to heaven with a smile on their face, they are so filled with longings to be good. Oh, that Allie! She got the best of me yesterday, and that’s a fact. I hadn’t done my French, and I got up so late I couldn’t practise my new piece for Miss Rap-your-knuckles, and a big hole went and tore itself suddenly in my stocking, and Jimmie had taken my *Principia* because he couldn’t find his, and baby was worrying round at such a rate, I really had to give her a little shake to let off my fireworks. And then old Al comforted her so beautifully, and looked so patiently picturesque and beautifully forgiving, I had to have a go at her. I said that, whatever else I did, I didn’t doll up and do my hair fifteen times before I was satisfied, and walk round the garden with heretics (meaning by that Mr. Heriot—it’s a joke of my own); and even then she didn’t say anything, only got red and looked for half a minute as if she’d cry. I ought to be killed off, oughtn’t I? Well, just as I was setting off for school, she followed me to the door. ‘On your way home,’ she said, ‘please get a bottle of Green’s cough stuff for baby, and also’—she gave me a piece of paper—‘get this prescription made up.’

“Of course, it was an awful day at school; they rowed me about my French, and I was reported over my music, and kept in for leaving my *Principia* behind, and reprovèd gravely for my untidy appearance. Well, at last it was over, and I was crawling home, a feeble wreck after all the storms and vicissi-

tudes of the day. At the chemist’s I turned in and got the cough stuff, and handed up the prescription. But the man giggled and gave it to someone else to read, and the someone else tittered and gave it to someone else. I began to think I had given him a bit of my French declension, or a note from one of the girls, only I saw it was on the pale green paper Allie loves. He brought it back to me at last, still giggling. ‘We don’t keep the ingredients,’ he said; ‘we only wish we did, for we’d make our fortunes.’ And *what* do you think? When I got outside and opened it, this was the prescription your eldest daughter had written, thinking I should look at it myself: ‘Two drachms of preserved good temper, one drachm of patience, a drachm of forbearance. Mix altogether with the milk of human kindness. Take the mixture three times a day, shaking the bottle well.’ I laughed to myself all the way home.

“Oh, but, mother mine, you mustn’t stay away much longer. Fathers are the blindest things alive. There’s a man who has begun to come here lately—Mr. Heriot; and just because he seems deeply interested in dear old dad’s boxes of beetles and other squirmies, and smokes with him, of course the dear, blind old fellow thinks the wretch has no other motive. He doesn’t take *me* in, though. He doesn’t make *me* believe that he jogs baby on his knee, and gives her chocolates and little dolls’ tea-sets, just for love of her. He doesn’t get *me* to believe that he ‘was passing, and just dropped in to see if Jimmie’s Latin wanted a bit of help.’ Oh, no; not at all. This daughter of yours doesn’t imagine he does wretched French exercises for her out of genuine love for the language. (All the same, this last is not unacceptable.) My beloved parent, that wretch has got his eye on our dear, pretty little Allie. How would it be if you sent for her up to you? Nip it in the earliest bud, I say. I’ll look after the housekeeping, and be a perfect cherub and seraph in my temper if you only will. Or, couldn’t you write and forbid him the house? There isn’t a man in the world good enough for our little Allie (though I did, half an hour ago, tell her I’d shoot myself if I had a temper like hers). I haven’t anything very particular against the heretic; he isn’t very bad, I suppose—as men go—but he’s not coming poaching here if I can help it. *Do* write for her to come to you to-morrow. I know he’ll be dangling about in the evening, if you don’t, and it’s moonlight, and moonlight is dangerous. I’ll

stay from school, and be the most perfect and blameless housewife in Australia.

"Oh, you dear one, if *only* I could have an hour with you, I think I could be good for a week. I feel perfectly angelic all the time I'm just writing to you. Bless our little Bo-Peep, baby is dreadfully lonely without him; and I get a lump in the throat myself when I see his empty cot, and remember it's no good to go there for a good-night romp. Good-bye, darling, darling, darling! Say very long prayers for me every night.

"YOUR OWN LITTLE BLACK SHEEP."

"DEAR OLD MOTHER" (ran Jimmie's note),—"How are you getting on I hope Teddie's legs are getting fatter, tell him he'll never get in the football team if he comes back with sticks like he had before. We had a cricket match against Walker's school on Saturday and I'd have got a lot of runs only Sam Brown boled me one of his grounders that no one can take. But I'll get more next time. We don't have very nice puddings now but I suppose old Al does her best. Such larks, old Briget went and cooked a lot of soap in the apple pie and Allie was as mad as she could be. There's a very nice man comes here now, Nessie calls him the herrytick but his real name is herryut. He's done my latin exercise every night this week, he's awfully fond of latin. You needn't go and think I tell old Peters stuffers like I used to and say I haven't had any help; old Peters never asks us now so it doesn't matter. Mr. herryut can do sums too, and he often does Nessie's french for her. Don't be vexed mother corse I couldn't help it this time. I suppose Allie or Ness have told you all about it. I *had* to fite Tommy Brooks twice this week, he gives you awful cheek if you don't fite him and I can see out of my eye quite well again now so Allie needn't have made such a fuss. Tommy Brooks daren't say nothing to me now when I go by and he's stoped throwing stones at our fence so it's a good thing I did, he might have smashed one of your winders some day if I hadn't made him leave off. My pidgeon with the blue wing that you like layed two eggs, tell old Teddie I'll give him one of the young ones. Don't you believe old Al if she goes and tells you I have a dirty neck, every morning I wash it, you can't wash your neck twice a day when you've got to go to school and do homelessons and change your coat and everything. I wish you'd tell her to let me alone, I do wash my hands twice nearly

always. If there are any blue mountain parots up there or woloroos or things I wish you'd bring me some. I suppose you couldn't get me a young walaby, the shed in the padock would be a great place to keep it in and it would amuze baby very much

"I remain

"Your afecshunate son

"JIMMIE REDMOND WALTERS."

"MY DEAR MAMMA" (said the little pink paper),—"I hope you are quite well. I am quite well. I hope Teddie is quite well. I hope Teddie can eat things again. I have not been naughty for a long time. I hope Teddie has not been naughty for a long time. We had apple pie for dinner on one day. There was soap in the apple pie we had for dinner. I have a new tea-set. I have two little dolls' chairs, and I have a Chinaman doll. Mr. Heriot gave them to me. He has got a fat face and teeney little eyes, and his legs are dingle-dangly." (Added later in Allie's own writing: "The Chinaman doll, please, not Mr. Heriot, who has large, very nice eyes, and a thin, refined face, and carries himself like a soldier.") "I have got my pink dress on. And I haven't got it inked a bit. Teddie's letter was only in pencil, I can use ink. Good-bye, my dear mamma, I will be very good. Jimmie had a fight, he was not good. All his eye is spoiled. My eyes are not spoiled. I hope Teddie's eyes are not spoiled. The pansy is for you, and the bit of pink soap is for Teddie. Mr. Heriot gave me soap that you wash with, but it is just like an apple. The bit is for Teddie, when you come home I'll let you wash with it. The kisses on this side are for you. The kisses on the other side are for Teddie.

"I remain,

"Your loving little girl,

"BABY."

Two days later the only letter the post brought was a bulky one from Nessie, with "In haste," "Deliver immediately," and "Urgent," written on one side of the envelope, and on the other side, in a screwed-up hand, "Write by next post." Second thoughts had crossed out this request and put instead, "Try to catch the next train back."

The mother tore it open anxiously.

"Oh," began Nessie's unique scrawl, "I've made the awfulest mess of everything. The very worst has happened. I want killing, it's all my fault. I ought to be thrashed every time I'm careless—if you won't thrash me I'll thrash myself. If I hadn't been careless none of this would have happened.



“‘Out came Allie with her new white cloud round her head.’”

I know you'll never forgive me. This is what I did. You never wrote for Allie to come up as I asked you, though I told you about it being moonlight. Well, father was out, and all that evening she and the heretic were walking about in the garden. I made Jimmie come out, too, but even then when he said good-night he held her hand twice as long as he held mine or Jimmie's. Well, the next day came and you never wrote about it again, so I thought my letter had gone wrong and I'd better take things in my own hands, as father was as blind as ever and had

"Well, that was alright, of course. But at the same time I was writing another letter to you, and this is part of what I said—I needn't go over it all. I said I was sure Allie was beginning to care for the wretch, for every night when she went to bed she sat staring out of the window at nothing for a long time, and that she blushed every time his name was mentioned, and that one time I came upon her unexpectedly and she was at the little box she always keeps locked, and she had a fearfully sentimental look on her face, and I ran up very quickly to her, and before



"He looked as if he was going to throw something."

actually asked the wretch to come in again in the evening at eight o'clock. Well, I just knew what you would have done, so I thought I'd better do it. I wrote a letter to him and told him I didn't think he was a gentleman, acting as he was doing, and if he had any honour at all he would not come near the house again till you came back. That he seemed to think just because father was interested in beetles and things he could take any advantage of him, and that he ought to remember that you didn't know him, even if you did know his father and mother.

she could bang the lid down I saw the envelope of a letter the heretic had written about beetles to father, a red withered-up rose he had climbed up on the stable roof to get for her last week, and a photo of the wretch that she had cut out of the cricket team pictures published in a paper the other day. I think that's all I said that matters.

"And now comes my wicked carelessness. I had told Jimmie a little about it so that he could help me not to leave them alone a minute. Well, just then he came in—it was seven o'clock—and said the heretic was

moonng about just outside in the shadow of the trees, and watching Allie's window—I suppose he hadn't the cheek to come *another* night as early as seven. Well, I popped the letters into envelopes and told Jimmie to take one to Mr. Heriot. I suppose I was excited at hearing he was hanging about again, for—oh! you can't hate me as much as I hate myself—I put them into the wrong envelopes, the one to you in the heretic's, and the heretic's in yours. Jimmie took it out to him, and from the balcony I watched him striking matches and reading it. But then very quickly he sent Jimmie back to me to say, 'Wasn't there some mistake? did I really mean him to read it? he had only read a line or two, so far.'

"Oh, why *didn't* I take the note from Jimmie and look at it? 'Tell Mr. Heriot there is no mistake,' I said, 'and that I wish him to read every word of it!' So Jimmie went back, and of course the wretch read right to the end. He sent Jimmie to say he wanted to speak to me, and I went out meaning to give him a piece of my mind since he wouldn't go off quietly. And there was the big silly looking quite white and trembly. He caught hold of my hand before I could say anything. 'Oh! do you really think there is any hope for me—oh! Nessie, do you *really* think she cares? I thought she seemed to try to avoid me.' His hand was shaking like anything. The next second, before I could say what I was boiling to, out came Allie with her new white cloud round her head. The second he saw her he bolted up to her and began to talk of the fine evening and idiotic things like that. Well, I got hold of Jimmie, and we walked up and down and everywhere with them, hanging on to Allie's arm. After about an hour he walked into the summer-house, and she went in too, and sat down. And Jimmie and I couldn't do anything but stay just outside as there is only room for two. At last I whispered to Jimmie that he was to sit on the doorstep and keep talking while I went in and found father. There seemed nothing else in the world to do to stop him proposing, as I knew he was dying to do. Well, I hunted all over the house for dad, and even went next door to see if he'd gone there for a smoke, but I couldn't find him. So I rushed back to the summer-house. And there was Jimmie playing marbles, quite alone. I am never, never never going to speak to him as long as I live. The heretic had given him half-a-crown not to tell where they had gone, and though I begged and implored him and tried to show

him how serious it was, he just kept hitting his silly marbles and saying 'Mum's the word.'

"I hunted and hunted all over the place, but couldn't find Allie and the wretch anywhere. But I found father at last, and explained it all to him, but he just went on sorting his stupid beetles as if he didn't care a bit. I nearly rushed off and telegraphed for you straight away—everyone else seemed so callous. At last we saw Allie and the heretic coming from behind the tree-ferns near the rockery. Father called to them to come in, but Allie just ran through the study and upstairs; you never saw anything so red as her face was. And the heretic stayed in the study with father till eleven o'clock; and when he came out, instead of father kicking him down the steps, as he should have done, they shook hands twice, and father asked him to come to dinner to-morrow. Oh, for heaven's sake, mother, come home and put your foot on it! I feel nearly mad with the worry of it all. It is simply awful to feel I brought it all on by being careless over those envelopes.

"Your miserable

"NESSIE."

And this is Jimmie's version of the matter:—

"MY DEAR OLD MOTHER,—Such larks. Old Al and the man Nessie calls the herry-tick went and got engaged the other night. Nessie was very ofishus, and kept folowing them round when they didn't want her. Well, I didn't see why I should as well, so I didn't, and when Ness went in mr herryut gave me harf-a-crown and wispered to me not to tell her where they went. Why shouldn't you get harf-a-crown when you can; there's an awful stunning cricket bat at Brownses for five shillings and I'll soon get the rest now he's engaged,—he'll often be wanting me to keep Nessie off I spose.

"Old Al is jolly nice now I can tell you; she gave me fore tarts left from dinner and never says anything about my neck. Nessie is pretty horrid to her though, I wish you'd tell her to mind her own bissness. It'll be jolly nice I can tell you to have a man that can do Latin and sums coming here every day.

"I've not had any fites at all this week hardly. Tommy Brooks was going by and he looked as if he was going to throw something but I gave him one little thump and he ran away.

"Your afecshunate son,
"JIMMIE REDMOND WALTERS."