

LITTLE PILKINS.

From Sunday Afternoon for July.
In a certain June that has long gone by, late on a balmy afternoon, I sauntered forth to make the tour of my garden.

Now the fashion of the garden was on this wise: It lay in the angel of two streets, with a very good width in front, but stretching back still farther along the unpretentious little thoroughfare at the side, until it abutted upon a row of small but decent dwellings in the rear. A high board fence enclosed the greater part of it, but on a line with the middle of the house this ugly, impervious barrier sloped gradually down into a low, green, open paling.

It was dewy morning when I had last seen my cinnamon pinks and pansies, my yellow roses, and the beauteous big-shaft of double white rocket; and it will never do to leave flowers 'too long by themselves; they need looking after and talking to very often, to keep them in their first perfection—persuasive admonitions twice a day, at least.

As I wondered leisurely from plant to plant and from shrub to shrub in a meditative way, I became suddenly aware of a strange sound of labored breathing, and directly I discovered a little plump, pink face pressed in between the palings, on fat hand grasped a slat on either side, the eyes were tight shut, the mouth was puckered to a mere point, and the little bud of a nose was quite engrossed in sniffing up the air most assiduously, and then exhaling it again with a long sigh of satisfaction.

"Fine or superfine?" pondered I. "Snips and snails" or "sugar and spice?" Boy or girl? But the question speedily answered itself, for behind the pinks I caught sight of two sturdy little legs in gray stockings and knickerbockers, and out of one side-pocket peeped a blue-edged handkerchief, and out of the other the apex of a top. Still the little bud of a nose kept sniffing on and on.

"Well, well!" I said at last very gently, so as not to frighten away my little visitor; "what kind of a nice little boy is that looking through my garden fence?"

"It's a boy coll'd Ev'ett," was the response, in a tone more gently still. "A boy coll'd Ed'ard Ev'ett. A boy coll'd Ed'ard Ev'ett Pilkins," he repeated; and still his eyes were shut and still his nose went sniffing on.

"And what are you doing?" I asked again, "that makes you look so funny, I can't help laughing?"

The eyelids opened and disclosed a pair of mild, pale blue eyes, and the puckered mouth relaxed into a smile as he answered, "Oh, I'm only smellin' up this good smell in here. It smells so dreadful splendid in here that I stop and smell it up every day when I go to school, and every day when I come home again. Then he shut his eyes and puckered up his mouth, and went to sniffing again.

"Why don't you come inside?" I asked.

"Darsent do it, ma'am."

"Why not?"

"Might get turned out and taken up." "O, not when you are invited. If you would like to come in I will open the side gate for you."

"Wouldn't I though?" and this time he opened his eyes for good, and his whole face was one big smile. "Wouldn't I, though, like to get nearer to those posies that smell so dreadful fine?"

In a minute more he was among the flowers.

"Well, well, well!" he said softly, "I never, never 'spect to be inside of this. Which do you think smells the very best of all, ma'am?"

"I don't know, for I love them every one; but perhaps this bed of pinks may please you best."

The child took one snuff at the mass of pinks, and then went plump down on the gravel walk one hands and knees, and hung over them as one bewitched.

"Oh! oh! I never, never!" he ejaculated at last in his little gentle way; "no, I never, never! I can't breathe it in fast enough, nor hard enough, nor long enough."

"Oh, you need not feel so discouraged about it," I answered; "you shall have plenty of time, and some of the pinks, too; put them in water when you get home, and they will keep fresh for a long time. When they wither come back and get some more."

"Thank you, ma'am," he answered with a little blush. Maybe that wouldn't be manners. Maybe my farer wouldn't let me.

"You can tell him I asked you, any way," said I, gathering the pinks.

"Now they'll know I've been in here, won't they?" he asked with a radiant gleam in his eyes. "Cause how could I get the flowers if I wasn't? I never, never 'spect I'd come inside! It wasn't wicked I guess to smell 'em through the fence. Farer says what you can carry away in your eyes and ears isn't stealing, and the same to your nose I guess. It looks 'zactly like heaven in here, don't it ma'am?"

"Does it?" I answered laughing; "what do you know about heaven, little man?"

"Oh, lots and lots," he replied serenely. "I'm glad you do, but I think heaven has far more beauty and pleasantness than even my dear garden."

"Maybe so; but this is the highest to it that I ever saw."

"Now hold the flowers, Edward, as I cut them."

"Yes, ma'am; but I ain't coll'd Edward."

"Oh, I thought that was your name."

"Yes, ma'am, so it is; but an Ed'ard coll'd Ev'ett."

"All right, sir; we'll make no more such mistakes. Everett it shall be."

As I gave the boy the pinks, I saw that he put first one in his right hand and the one in his left, with perfect regularity. "Pinks to the right of me; pinks to the left of me!" thought I to myself; "into the valley of bloom rode the young Everett!" When I cut the roses they were sorted in a similar fashion, and the geranium leaves, also, went their diverse ways. "There," said I at last, "you have two gay little bouquets, indeed! And now tell me who told you so much about Heaven."

"Oh, diff'ent ones; Joey, and the minister, and my Sunnel-school teacher, and my farer mornin' anybody."

"It isn't every boy that has a father like that; you are fortunate."

"Yes, ma'am. Farer says a poor man with a big family can't do much for his children, but he can try to give 'em religion; 'cause religion's cheap in this country, if anything is; so he's tryin' very hard to give us all religion 'fore we grow up."

"Well, how is it turning out?"

"Joey's got it, and Marty's got it, and Nelly hasn't got it yet, and Florry and me's a-tryin', and the baby's too little to pick from it the biggest and reddest, it comes."

know much, and the speck of a new baby can't do anything but sleep."

"You must have a good father, Everett; I hope his best wishes will all be fulfilled."

"Yes, ma'am; I've got a good mover too, only she's so busy she can't talk much;" and then my little visitor departed with his twin bouquets and a radiant face.

It was only a few days later when I saw the pleasant little visage thrust through the palings again.

"Oh, I'm glad to see you!" I cried; "Do come in!"

"Thank you, ma'am. Can't do it."

"Why not?"

"Got up in the closet last time."

"For what, pray?"

"Coming in without being washed and scrubbed." Farer says a poor man with a big family can't do much for his children, but he can make 'em clean, for water is cheap in this country, if anything is."

"Well, then, you can't get washed and scrubbed?"

"Yes, ma'am; Joey'll do it."

"Fly home then, like a bird, and I'll wait here for you."

When he came back there was an extra glow out that round and ruddy countenance; it gleamed like a red-cheeked apple just polished for the fruit basket. He went down on his knees again over the bed of pinks, and seemed like one reassembled. As I cut the flowers and gave them into his hands we fell into conversation as before.

"I'm so sorry you were put in the closet for coming here, Everett," I said. "It was a very unpleasant ending to the afternoon."

"No ma'am, not so very," he answered serenely. "Ought to have minded what I was told. Besides, I just shut my eyes and thought of the pinks till Joey let me out."

"Are the others at home as fond of flowers as you are?"

"They like 'em very much; they thought what I took home from here was awful nice, and they knew I'd been in here. The first thing Joey said when farer come home was, 'Oh, farer! farer! what do you think? Ev'ett's been in the Garden-Edena, and here's some flowers that grew there!'"

"Then the flowers were always for her, and these cherries, too?"

"Yes, ma'am, and everything I get. I always want her to have her half first, so as to get the best, and she always wants me to have the best, and sometimes we can't tell which is the best, and that makes us laugh."

"Is Florry your favorite, then?"

"Yes, ma'am," he answered very gently; "Florry is my favorite."

"Why?"

"Because Florry's sick. She's very sick. She can't get well. She's too sick to stay here much longer. She's got a 'suspicion, and she can't live long."

"You never told me that, Everett!"

"No ma'am; you never asked me."

"But my dear little man, you must tell me what ever you want to, without asking."

"Must I?"

"Certainly; don't fail to do so."

"Then I'll tell you something now; shall I am?"

"Of course, my dear."

"Florry wants very much to see the lady that lives in the Garden-Edena before she goes away. Florry's my dearest pet. Half of all I have is Florry's. Half of all I ever had, except you, I've seen you and talked with you and been in your Garden-Edena, and Florry hasn't. You have been just as sweet as an angel to me, and smiled at me ever so many times, but not at Florry. She calls me 'Eddy.' Almost every day she says, 'Eddy, dear, I want to see that lady that lives in the Garden-Edena before I go.'

She smiled in return. "I thank you, ma'am," she said; "I thank you very much, but I can't talk much; my breath goes so fast."

"I came to talk to you," I answered, "as long as you want me, and about anything you like."

"Tell me about your Garden of Eden, please. I'd like to hear all about that. How it's shaped out, and where everything grows."

The little Carlo was nestled down by her side in the bed. Everett climed up and rested near him leaning on his elbow, looking part of the time at Florry and part at me. I laid the flowers in one of her little thin hands, and took the other in mine.

"It's so strange and so nice to see you," she said, stopping between every few words to breathe. "I've wanted it so much and now I've got it. Almost everything comes just as I want it. I wanted to see Carlo, and Carlo's here, and loved me already. I wanted to see you, and you're here. I was afraid my white dress wouldn't be ready, but mother washed it, and Joey ironed it and sewed a frill in, and that's ready. They all wear white there, don't they?"

"I think so," I answered slowly. "Of one kind or another. Do you care so much for the dress, dear?"

"Have you a good doctor for her?"

"Yes, ma'am, so am I," he answered softly, while the tears welled up in his eyes; "but it can't be helped. Farer says, when you can help a thing help it, and when you can't then bear it with patience. Farer says a poor man with a big family can't do much for his children, but he can teach 'em to do without, and have patience, 'cause patience is cheap, if anything is in this country."

"Sound doctrine," I answered, "but sometimes hard to practice. Give your Florry my kindest wishes, and tell her the minute she wants me, I will come."

"I will, ma'am, and thank you too; and he went away happy in his double treasure of flowers and fruit.

It is not within the power of words to describe the exceeding mildness of this little child. His most joyous joys seemed subdued; his troubles appeared to leave him quite untroubled; his strongest enthusiasms were completely under control. We have seen saintly mothers and grandmothers, like good vessels that have breasted the waves, and been tossed by the tides and have bowed to the gales, at last floating into quiet harbors, in the sunset sun; but it is rare to meet such ripe serenity in youth or childhood.

My little Pilkins seemed even to be aware of and to contemplate his own small linguistic deficiencies with an untroubled unconcern.

It would have been gratifying to know why, but I did not ask him, for I respect the plans and purpose of little heads, and know that little hearts have often "long, long thoughts" in them. Not that I approve for an instant of the wild and cataclysmal doctrine of Budge-and-Toddyism, which, if once permitted to prevail, would sweep the entire American nation from the face of the earth within six months, and leave the great Bird of Freedom himself, only a plucked, denuded fowl upon a barren strand. No, never that, for a moment; but a feeling that there is an individuality in the little people as well as in the larger ones that deserves consideration. Perhaps the feeling has been strengthened by the still vivid memory of sundry sore-hearted hours, when the "Pshaw! psaw!" the "Tut! tut!" or the "What's the good of it, child?" of an older will, went like the bosome of destruction straight through certain little cob webby plans that had been long a weaving.

During that beautiful early summer Everett and I had many a pleasant meeting. Two or three times a week he came to see me; we always fell into conversation on matters grave or gay or lively or severe; I always cut a nosebag of flowers for him, and he always divided them in his own little way. One day in mid-July I said to him:

"I have something this morning I know you will like. Almost all boys would like them better than flowers."

"I don't know what it is yet," he answered softly, "but I like everything ... here."

"It's cherries! That's what it is! Cherries are ripe! cherries are ripe! children can have some! Come into the house and get them." And I showed him the way up a half dozen miniature steps tucked deftly into a small corner, that led from the garden into the bay window of the library.

"Oh what a nice chirly step!" ejaculated Everett gently. "There's everything strange and pretty and nice like fairy tales in this Garden-Edena."

"All right, sir; we'll make no more such mistakes. Everett it shall be."

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with the longest stems,—for a stemless cherry is an imperfect treasure; half the fun is to shake and dangle it and twirl its ruby roundness before eating;—and as I gave them to him his eyes shone with pleasure, but not one was put in his mouth. One cherry went into his right hand and one into his left. I tried him with pair devoid of stems. The result was the same. One was enclosed by the palm of one chubby hand, the other by the palm of the other. Verily, thought I to myself, this is growing uncanny. The boy behaves as if he were a fairy himself, and some inexorable ogre compelled him to go through with this unmeaning pantomime. If he does so the next time I see him, I will surely ask the reason why, and break the wicked spell.

And when I saw him a few days later, I gave him first flowers and then cherries, and found that he did just as before, dividing them with exactitude into two portions. I fulfilled my vow.

I'm right o' am; you shall; I'll bring it over and show it to you."

On the following Thursday, therefore, he came to me all aglow with the mild radiance, and told me that his birthday present had arrived. "It's here!" he cried jubilantly. "It's here, and Florry likes it!"

"How very pleasant," I replied.

"Yes, ma'am, very pleasant; and if you will let me, I'll run and get it, and show it to you. Nelly's holding it for me outside the gate."

And in a moment he had fled and returned, bringing with him a profusely woolly white poodle, which he sat down on the floor between us. It was so shaggy there was no knowing how from stem until it walked, and it looked like a little sheep-skin door-mat that had suddenly rolled itself up and determined to be somebody.

"Oh, that's it," I exclaimed with a sigh of relief.

"Yes ma'am, that's it; that's my Collo-coddles. All that kind of dogs is called 'coddles, but this 'coddle's own name is 'coll'-Collo.' " "Carlo! Carlo!" I said, "come and get a neck-tie," for I just thought me of a sky-blue ribbon in the library drawer. We tied it on, Everett and I, with a stylish bow behind his left ear, and then Everett kissed him over and again with chastened rapture. "The only matter of Collo-coddles," said Everett with a gentle sigh, "is that