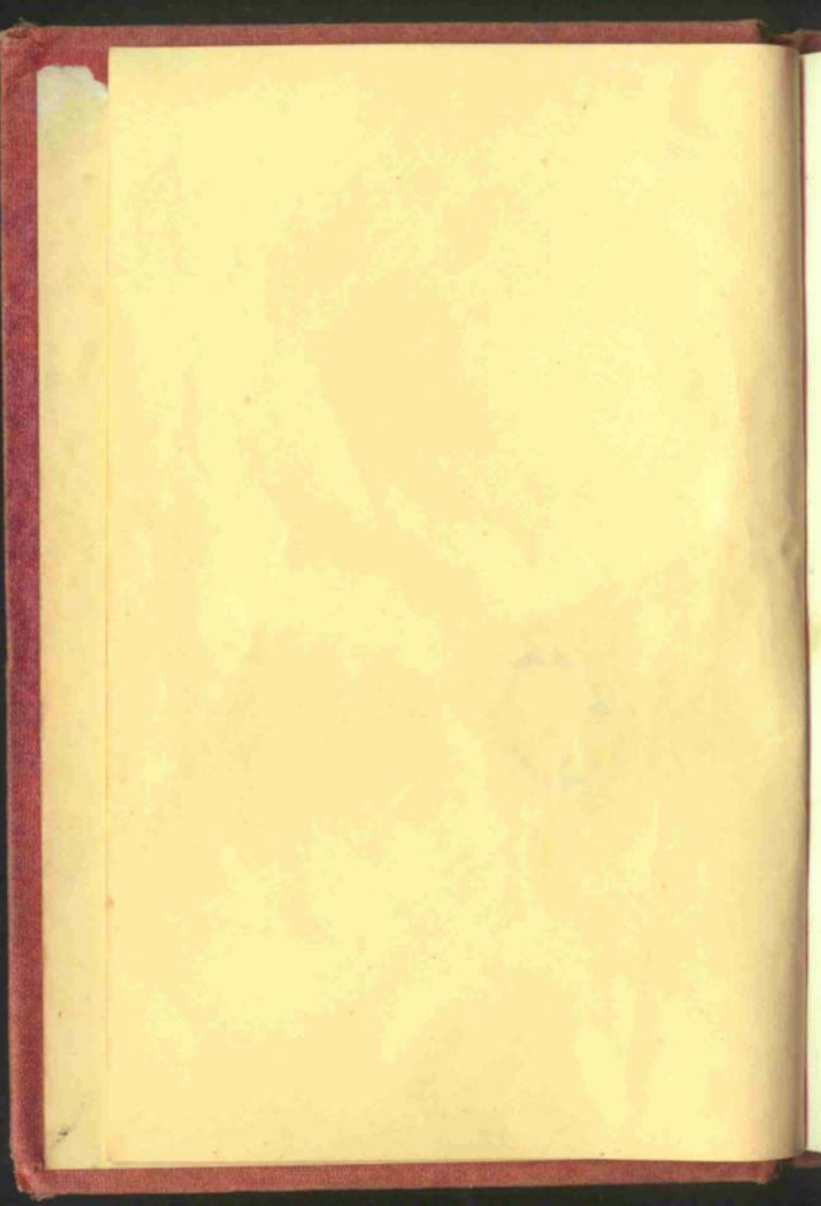


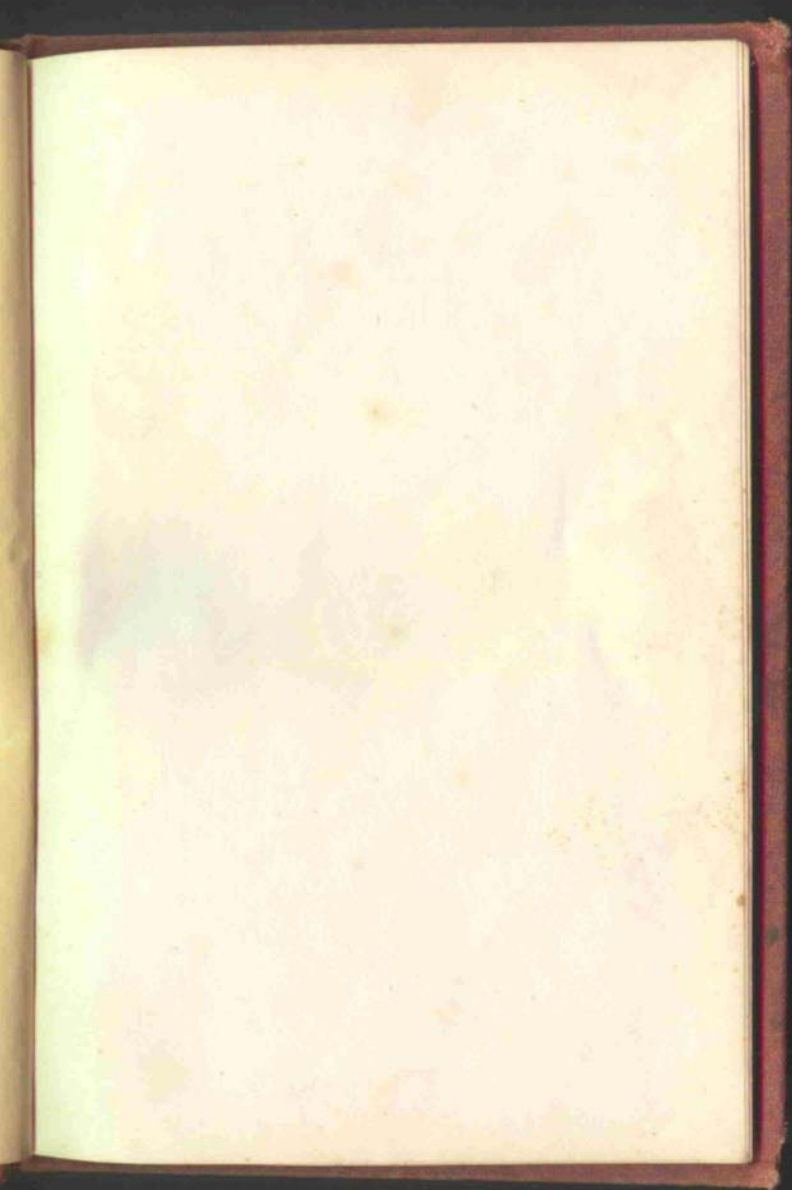
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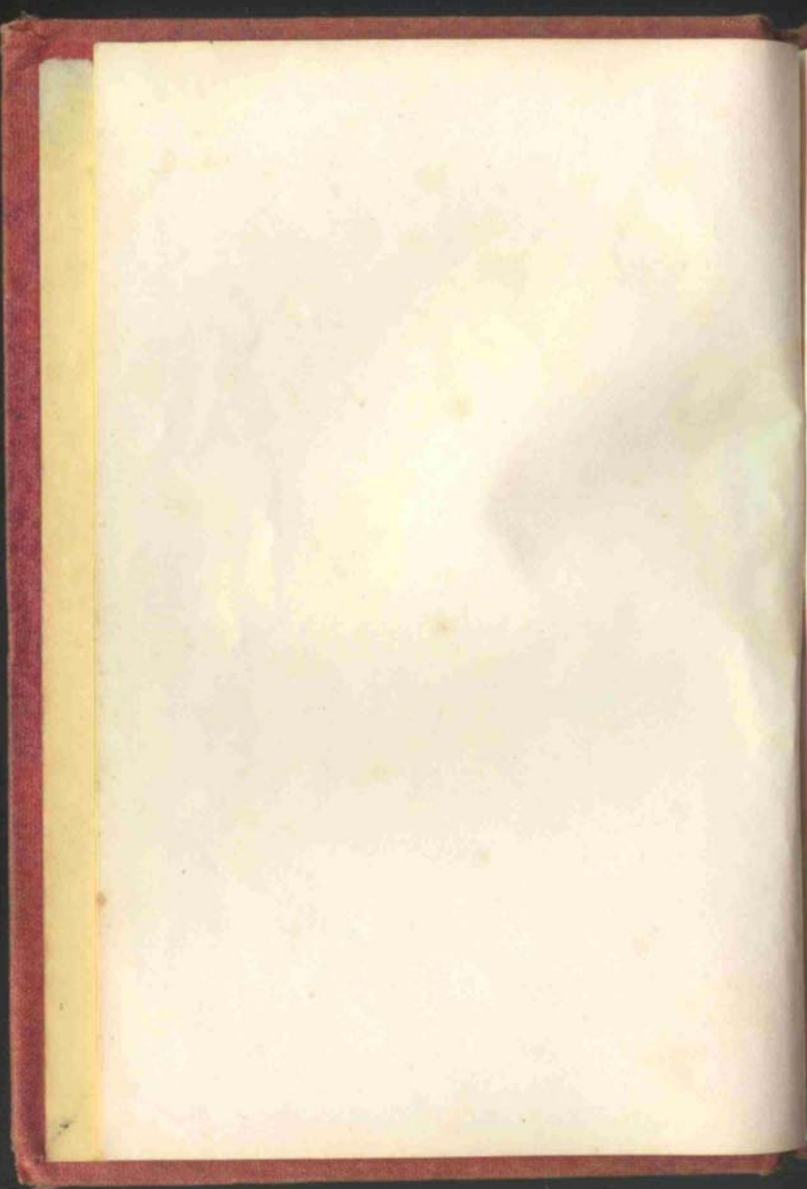
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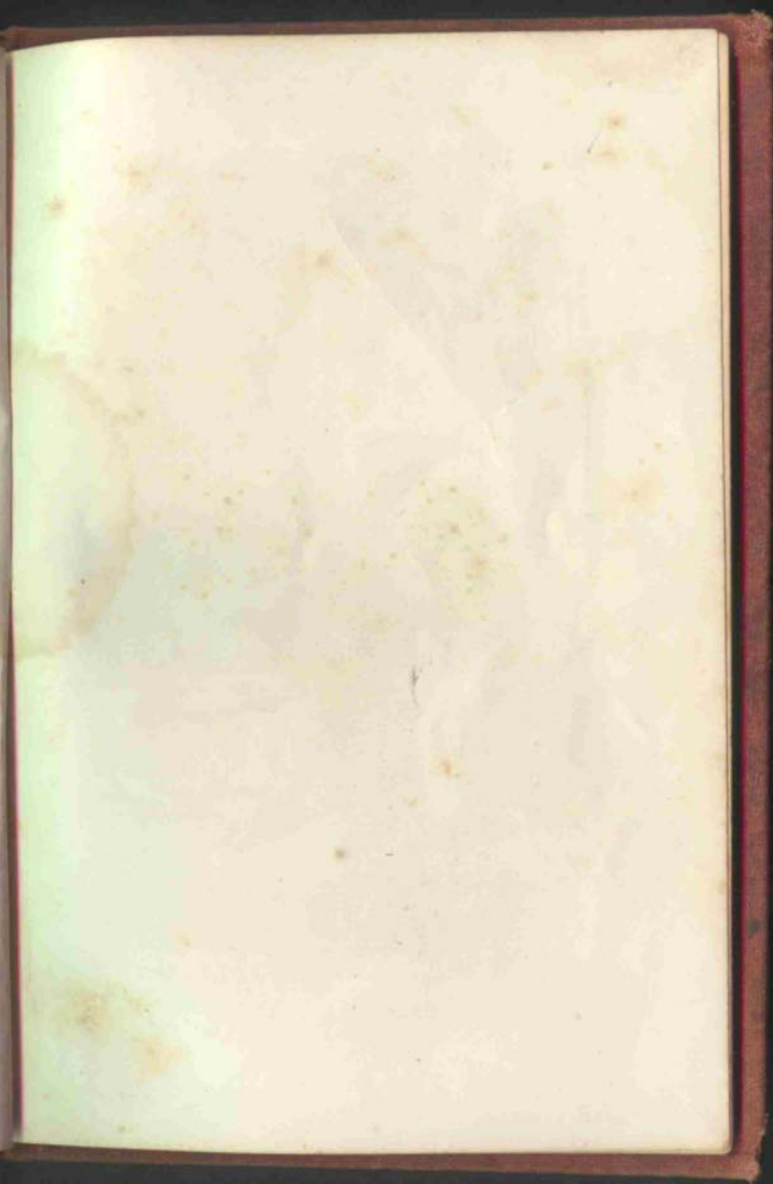
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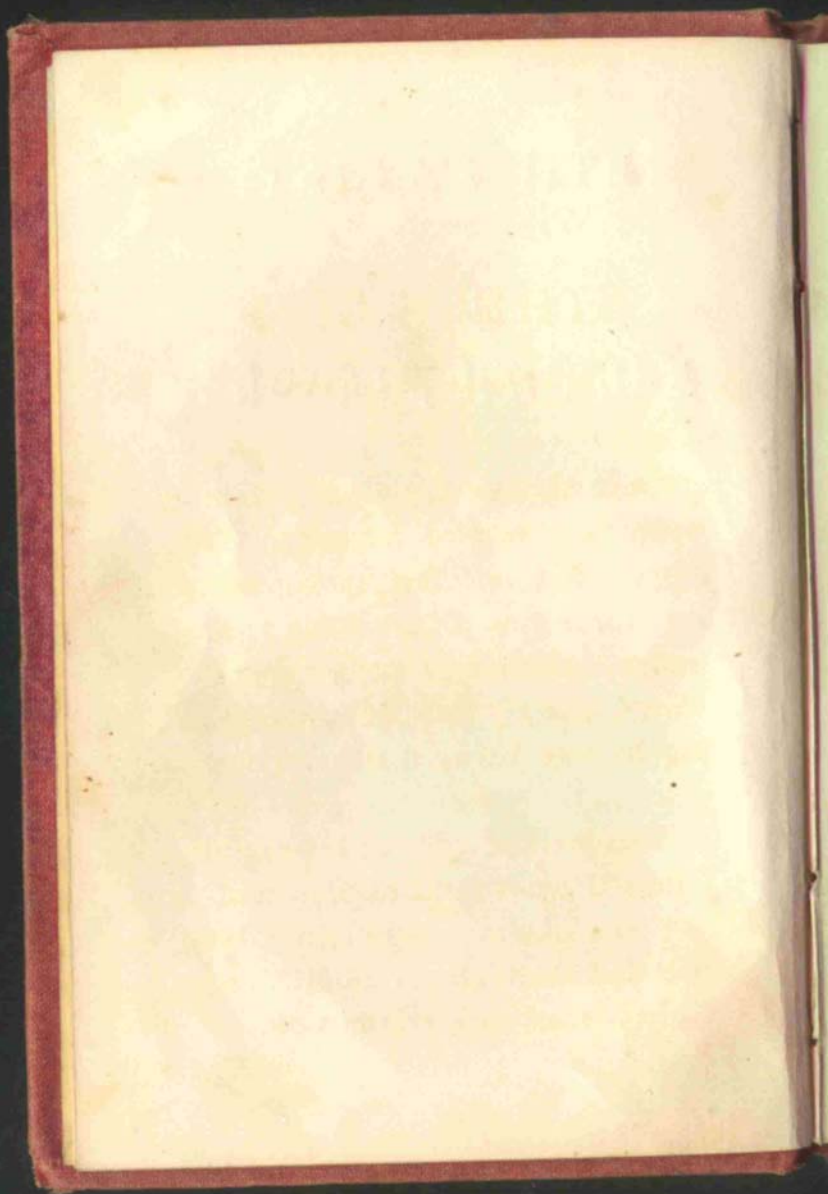




ETHEL'S GIFT:
AND
NELLIE'S MIRACLE.



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ETHEL'S GIFT.

BY REBECCA PERLEY REED.

OLD Mother Gray sat patiently upon her nest of beautiful white eggs. But one fair spring morning, there was a faint little "peep" under Mother Gray's speckled wings, and a yellow bill came pushing its way between the soft feathers.

This yellow bill was presently followed by several besides, and at last six downy, puffy, little balls crowded themselves under Mother Gray's heart, to her infinite joy.

"Patient waiters, no losers," she said to herself in her clucking way. "How I wish I could show my beauties to somebody."

Just here a ray of light fell straight into one of the new mamma's eyes, and the barn-door opened, admitting a bit of a girl some eight years old.

This was by no means the first visit that Ethel had paid Mrs. Gray. She had been waiting and watching as well as she, though not as patiently, for the appearance of the chickens.

Gray greeted the little girl with an exultant and conscious cluck, as if she would say: "Ar'n't they wonderful babies? And they are all my own!"

"Oh, oh, oh!" exclaimed Ethel, and hardly waiting to look at the six little yellow bills, she scampered off to tell her mother of the new arrivals, and take her to see them.

"Mamma, mamma," she said—and her words came so fast that they almost stopped her breath—"what do you think? There are some real live chickens out at the barn, and I saw their bills, and one whole head, and they are so cunning. Do, please, come right away and see them, mamma."

Mamma followed Ethel to the barn and admired the pretty, soft little creatures, even to the child's satisfaction.

Three or four weeks passed, and every day brought new pleasure to

the little girl, in her pets. Her mother had given them all to her, "for her ownty own" as she said, upon the one condition, that she cared for their wants faithfully. Not once, as yet, had she forgotten their meal and water, and the chickens had grown finely.

Ethel had long and grave discussions upon the names which she should bestow upon her pets. She called the beautiful white chicken, "Snowball," which was a most appropriate name for the downy, snow-white little creature. Then there were "Speckle," and "Brownie." As to names for the two remaining pullets, which were jet black, and the lordly cockerel that already began to assume the airs of

"lord of the harem," Ethel was at a loss. She appealed to her mother, who suggested "Jet," as one name. "That is nice, mamma," but there is another chick just exactly as black you know." Mamma laughed.

"I can think of a name for her, but perhaps you wont like it. It is not as poetical as the others. It is 'Charcoal.'"

"Well, that is a queer name, but I think I shall like it," said Ethel. "Now what can I name the rooster?"

"I don't know that we can find anything that is quite grand enough," said mamma. "What do you think of 'Red-Top'?"

"Oh, that is splendid! His comb

is just as red as it can be, and he acts all the time as if he was proud of it.

* * * * *

June had come. The roses were in bloom, and the garden was sweet with their breath.

Ethel lived out-of-doors, almost as entirely as her own dear chickens that were fast forgetting all about chickenhood in their growing feathers and lengthening legs.

It was a lovely morning. Ethel had just fed her pets and stood watching them as they scrambled in their selfish way for the choice bits. This was especially true of the important "Red-Top," who strutted and crowed, scattering the crowd when any especially nice bit

was in question, and greedily taking it for his own use.

Suddenly a small brown face appeared between the bars of the garden fence, with a pair of great black eyes surveying the chickens eagerly. Ethel had seen this child before, only knowing her, however, as one of the poor little heathen who lived at the Red Mills, a miserable settlement in the edge of the village.

"What is your name?" said Ethel to her.

"'Cal'ine,' but they call me 'Mop' mostly," was the answer.

The significance of the latter name was perfectly manifest, for the head of the uninvited guest was a marvel of snarls and dust.

"What did you come here for?" pursued Ethel.

"To see the chickens. I've gone by heaps of times."

"Have you any brothers and sisters?"

"Yes, lots. One of the boys is deaf and dumb. He stays at home a sight, 'cause the boys in the street plague him, and get him raving mad. His name's Tim, but the fine days he sets on the door-steps and watches the young uns play in the dirt."

"Have you any garden?"

"H'm!" was the expressive exclamation. "Reckon you'd think not. There's plenty of chance for mud-pies, if you could make 'em in peace, but there aint a posy, nor a

green thing. I tell you, would n't Tim like to see them chickens?"

"You can bring him up some day," said Ethel, glad to have her pets admired.

"You do n't!" was Mop's reply, as she started from the fence.

Accordingly, bright and early the next morning, two tanned, weather-beaten little faces made their appearance at the gate. Ethel spied them from her chamber window, and ran to ask her mother if she might ask them into the garden. Consent being obtained, she led the way to the stable, and opened the door of the hen-coop, so that she might give the inmates their breakfast.

The four wild black eyes of the visitors danced with delight.

Poor little souls! This garden was to them a very Eden.

The deaf and dumb boy could only express his joy by gestures, keeping his hands and head in constant motion, occasionally uttering a discordant cry, which was meant to express pleasure.

At last Mop's desire could no longer be repressed. Politeness was not her cardinal grace, poor child. The neglected children of the Red Mills lived largely by a hand-to-hand fight among themselves for the miserable privileges their pitiful neighborhood offered. As her acquaintance with Ethel grew, the decorum born of shyness rapidly vanished.

"I wish you would give me

that white chicken," she said abruptly.

Poor Ethel. Her face wore an expression almost comical in its mingled surprise, consternation, and displeasure.

"My white chicken? Why it's the very prettiest one of them all."

"Yes, I know it. That's why I want it," said Mop uncompromisingly.

The tears sprang to Ethel's eyes.

"No, I can't give Snowball away," she answered decidedly.

The look of hope in her visitor's eyes died suddenly, but she manifested no anger, only pouting a little, as she said:

"I wish I was rich, and could have fine things. Then I guess I

would n't grudge a chicken to poor folks, that never could have anything."

Ethel's heart, despite her abused feelings, came up in her throat in an accusing way. If Mop had asked her for the dress she wore, she would most willingly have given it to the needy child, because, of course, she had plenty besides for her own use. Ethel would even have been willing to part with her pretty doll, because, somehow or other, a new dollie was very apt to come to her now and then; but to think of Mop's asking for her very dearest, sweetest, white chicken—it was altogether too much.

The rest of the visit dragged. Ethel did n't feel any happier than

her guests, and at last said: "I think you had better go home now. I am going in to see mamma. You can come again and see the chickens if you like."

Mop and Tim walked slowly down the road, and Ethel with a lump in her throat, went to report to her mother her interview with her visitors.

"Do n't you think they were rude, mamma?" she said, after telling her story.

"Yes, without doubt, my dear."

"And right when I asked them to come up and see the chickens, because they were poor and had n't any," added Ethel, her grievance growing greater as she thought upon it.

"Yes, but if you had been Mop, would n't you have asked for the chicken?"

"No, indeed, I know I should n't," was the response.

"If you never had had a pet in all your life?"

"She might have got one somewhere else."

"And had n't any money!"

"But Snowball is the very prettiest of all. It would n't have been so hard if she had wanted Speckle or Charcoal," said Ethel with a slight relenting in her tone.

"I suppose she liked Snowball for just the very same reason that you like her best—because she is so pretty. Did Tim seem to fancy her too?"

"Oh yes. He jumped right up and down, and clapped his hands, and then tried to catch her."

"Ethel," said mamma, after a little silence, "what do you say to lending one of your chickens to the Lord?"

"What, mamma?"

"Just what I said, dear."

"I don't see how I could, and I don't think He wants one either."

"No, but He has a great many agents in the world that do his borrowing. He says: 'He that giveth to the poor, lendeth to the Lord.' Did you ever hear that verse?"

"Yes 'm, I believe so, but I never thought what it meant before."

"What would you say to giving

one of your chickens to Mop and Tim?"

"O dear!" was the honest response.

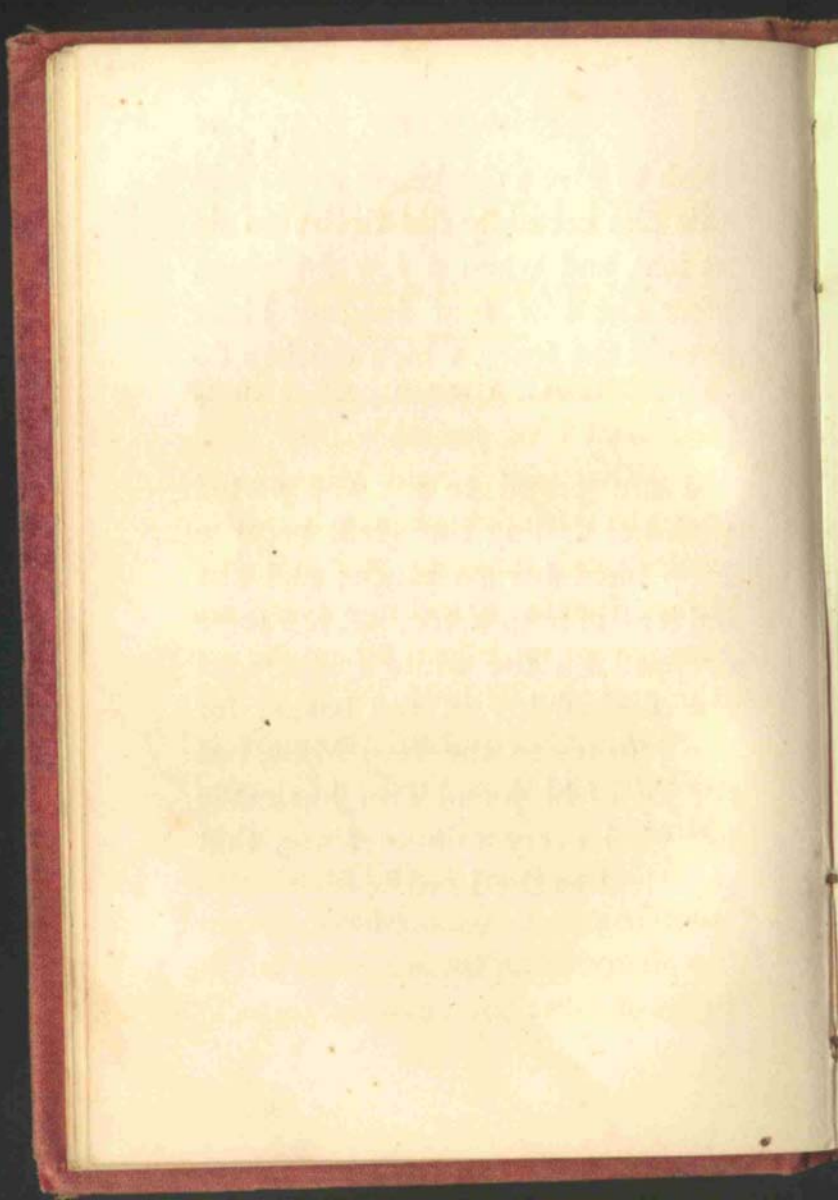
Ethel's exclamation did not arise wholly from selfishness either. She dearly loved every one of her pets, and it really made her heart ache to think of giving one of them up.

"Of course, my little daughter, I don't command you or even desire you to do this, unless you prefer yourself to do so. The chickens are all your own, and you have a perfect right to keep them if you wish. You can think about the matter and decide for yourself."

I will not worry you, children, with a long story of Ethel's contending feelings till she came to

wish to give a chicken to Mop; but this she certainly did desire to do at last, and when a few mornings after she saw four longing black eyes at the fence, which chicken do you guess she decided to give their owners?

I am proud to say she parted with her darling Snowball, because Mop liked her so much; and she did it all of herself, too. A few tears dropped on the white feathers, as she packed her in the basket for her journey to the Red Mills, but the joy of Mop and Tim has made her glad every minute since, that she "lent to the Lord."



NELLIE'S MIRACLE.

BY MISS JOANNA H. MATHEWS.

"MINNIE, Minnie; O Minnie, see what I've found."

"What is it?" said Minnie, running to the spot whence her sister called, and standing still with uplifted hands sparkling eyes, and lips parted in delight when she saw the prize Nellie held.

"Oh, how beautiful! how lovely! Where did you find it?" asked Minnie.

A doll it was; a doll of no great pretensions it would have seemed to many little people; but in the eyes of these two children, unaccus-

tomed to any toys save the rude playthings they made for themselves, it was a marvel of beauty.

"Right down here on the grass by this old tree," answered Nellie. "See its hands and feet all made of china, with cunning little toes and fingers; and its hair so yellow, as yellow as the gold in mother's wedding-ring; and its eyes are so blue, Minnie. Oh how glad I am! how glad I am?"

"And look at its nice dress and pink ribbons," chimed in Minnie, "and its little petticoat and straw hat. How pretty! Was there ever such a pretty dolly?"

"She'll sleep in our bed between us, sha'n't she?" said Nellie. How they kissed it, how they hugged it,

both she and Minnie; how tenderly they handled it, giving it all manner of loving words and looks, other little dollies' mammas may guess.

But suddenly Minnie, who had been bending forward over the doll as it lay on her sister's arm, drew back and sat down upon her feet in the grass, looking at Nellie with a wistful, sorrowful face.

"I'll carry her half the way home, and you shall carry her the rest," said Nellie, looking up and meeting her sister's gaze. "Why, Minnie, what is the matter?"

"She is n't ours, you know," answered Minnie, drawing a long breath. "She is somebody's."

"She is n't," said Nellie quickly,

putting her hand over her treasure as though she thought some one was about to snatch it from her. "She is mine. I mean ours. I found her, so she's mine; but I'm going to let her be half yours."

"But Nellie, you know somebody must have lost her; else how did she come there in the wood?"

The light faded out of Nellie's blue eyes, and her lips took a pitiful, grieved expression, as she looked from the doll to her sister and then about the wood and up toward the sky, of which one could only catch little glimpses through the trees. Then her face brightened.

"Minnie," she said, "I just b'lieve God dropped her down out of the sky so we could find her and have her."

"Oh no, that would be a miracle, Nellie."

"Well, could n't God do a miracle for us?" pleaded Nellie. "When the people that Moses took care of were very hungry God sent them bread out of the sky; and so if he knew how we never had a dolly, a real, true dolly like this, and how much we wanted one, maybe he just sent this one down for us."

Minnie, who was older than her sister, shook her head wisely but sadly.

"I think not, Nellie dear; people don't have miracles in these days. I believe God do n't do them any more."

"But He could if he chose, could n't he?" said Nelly.

"Yes, he could do anything."

"Then I'm going to believe he did this miracle for us," said Nellie, grasping her prize tightly. "We don't know how dolly came here, and we'll think that."

"But, Nellie, when you were behind the brier bushes picking strawberries, little Laura Carroll and her maid passed along the path; and she was drawing a dolly's wagon, and I think this dolly must have fallen out of it, and it is hers. I don't think it came by a miracle."

"O dear, O dear," sobbed Nellie, "must we go and ask? Could n't we think it was a miracle God did on purpose for us?"

"No, Nellie," said Minnie, her eyes filling in sympathy; "we know

it must be Laura's. Anyway, we'll have to ask. I think it would be a very, very wicked thing to say God did a miracle for us, when we are 'most sure the dolly is Laura's; and he would think we were very naughty children."

Nellie pleaded and reasoned, unwilling to believe; but Minnie reasoned in her turn, and at last persuaded her sister to do the right thing. Do not judge little Nellie hardly, dear children, but remember the strength of her temptation.

"Come, then," she said wearily, as if she had been through some great struggle, as indeed she had, "come quick, Minnie, 'cause the more I think about it the more I want it to be a miracle."

They were not long in finding the doll's young owner, for they met Laura and her nurse coming back through the wood to find her. When the children saw them, Nellie stopped, and with one hand laid upon her little beating longing heart, put up a silent petition that Laura might refuse the doll. But that prayer was not to be answered as Nellie wished, for Laura claimed the doll at once, with scarce a word of thanks to the honest little things who had restored it.

With kisses and one last loving look, Nellie laid the doll in its carriage, then raised her head with a look which caused the nurse to ask:

“What ails you, dear; is it the doll, or did you hurt yourself?”

"I did n't hurt myself," said Nellie, "but something hurts me inside of me to give up the dolly. You see I thought maybe God meant to let us have her, but Minnie showed me he did n't."

"And it goes hard with you," said the woman, looking with pity at the swimming eyes and quivering lips with which the two little sisters watched Laura trundle away her doll.

"Well, good-by to you, and thank you kindly. You're honest little folks."

"Minnie," said Nellie, "if we kneel right down here, and ask God to make a miracle for us and send us a dolly of our own, maybe he will. Let's do it."

So yielding to Nellie's pleadings, though without one half her measure of faith, Minnie kneeled beside her sister on the grass, while the latter, joining her little hands prayed simply, "Dear good God up in heaven, if you know how very much we want a dolly of our own and it is not too much trouble to do a miracle for us, please find a way to send me and Minnie one to keep just as long as we live; and help us to feel good about it if you do n't: Amen."

But the week passed by and the "miracle never happened" as Nellie said, though she never went up into the wood without peeping into all possible places where a dolly could have "dropped from the sky."

But one day when she and Minnie came in from strawberry-picking, their mother, taking her arms from the wash-tub, wiped the suds from her hands, and handing them each a box, said: "Mrs. Carroll was here in her carriage and left these for you, saying they were for two honest little girls. I suppose it's some pay for your giving back the doll; but I'd rather my children would earn that name than have ever so fine gifts."

One minute, and both boxes were opened, displaying to the delighted eyes of the children two dolls, larger and prettier than that returned by them to Miss Laura, with white dresses and blue ribbons, straw hats, and all complete.

Nellie clasped her hands, breathless with surprise and joy.

"I b'lieve God did make a miracle for us," she said. "I b'lieve he did, even if he made Mrs. Carroll do it for him. 'Cause he knew how we wanted a dolly and she did n't. And he made the miracle bigger than we asked, 'cause here's two dollies."

But her mother thought Mrs. Carroll had not needed any hint but what her own kind heart had given her.



