

## CHILDREN'S CORRESPONDENCE COLUMN.

Any boy or girl who likes to become a cousin can do so, and writes letters to 'COUSIN KATE,' care of the Lady Editor, GRAPHIC Office, Auckland.

Write on one side of the paper only.

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Please note, dear cousins, that all letters addressed to Cousin Kate must now bear the words, 'Press Manuscript only.' If so marked, and the flap turned in, and not overweight, they will come for a 1/2 stamp in Auckland, but a 1d from every other place.

## THE 'GRAPHIC' COUSINS' COT FUND.

This fund is for the purpose of maintaining a poor, sick child in the Auckland Hospital, and is contributed to by the GRAPHIC cousins—readers of the children's page. The cot has been already bought by their kind collection of money, and now £25 a year is needed to pay for the nursing, food, and medical attendance of the child in it. Any contributions will be gladly received by Cousin Kate, care of the Lady Editor, NEW ZEALAND GRAPHIC, Shortland-street, or collecting cards will be sent on application.

DEAR COUSIN KATE.—We have had so many subscriptions to make up in Picton lately that I have not been able to get my card filled up. So mother thought it a good plan to get up a concert and give part of the proceeds to the Cot Fund. The £3 I now send you are from the Picton cousins. Hoping little Florrie is getting better, I remain, your affectionate cousin, BELLE.

[Many thanks, indeed, dear Cousin Belle, for your splendid collection. Also please thank your mother very much indeed for her most excellent and kind suggestion about the concert. And, once more, please thank all the generous Picton cousins for their help. I have a photograph of little Florrie, standing so as to show her one leg; it is so intensely pathetic, I am going to put it in the GRAPHIC as soon as I can get it reproduced. Many, many thanks, dear Belle.—COUSIN KATE.]

DEAR COUSIN KATE.—I hope you do not think me lazy in writing, but since I have gone to work I have very little spare time. I went up on Sunday to see Cousin Florrie at the Hospital, and thought her looking a great deal better. I took her the nightgale I had worked for her, and she was very much pleased. I saw her again last Sunday, and took her a box of blocks. I must now conclude as it is late.—I remain, COUSIN DOCY.

[You are very good, dear Cousin Docy, to little Florrie. I am sure she will quite look forward to your visits. But remember it is not at all necessary to take her something each time you go. The nightgale will be most welcome this cooler weather, and as she cannot run about, she will very much enjoy playing with the blocks. I am trying to persuade some of the other cousins to write again. I expect they will soon.—COUSIN KATE.]

## A SANCTUARY OF SHAVINGS.

(BY CHARLES G. D. ROBERTS.)

WHEN John Anderson and his young wife Martha took up their farm in the remotest heart of the backwoods they chose too hastily the site of their log cabin. A green and sheltered glade beside a rippling trout brook tempted them, and there they settled.

But the spot proved damp and depressing. The mould gathered on their modest household effects, and a malarial gloom which even the cheer of their content with each other could not quite dissipate gathered upon their spirits. In the third year they decided to move their dwelling place to a dry and sunny hillside beyond reach of the voice as well as the mists of the brook.

Meanwhile, however, the farm had prospered apace. They found themselves able to afford a small frame house of two stories. Their neighbours came together and helped John put up his frame. Then, with tools which he had bought or borrowed, he went on briskly with his building in the 'spells' which he could snatch from the farm-work. Often he toiled far on into the night by the murky gleam of his lantern.

Late in the autumn the new house was well on toward completion, and John redoubled his efforts, in the hope of being able to move before the setting in of winter. A four-months-old baby now occupied Martha's attention to such an extent that she was not able to give her husband much help.

Suddenly she was seized with a heavy cold, which so pulled her down that John, instead of devoting all his spare time to the building, had to help with the house-work and the baby. This he endured with such assumed cheerfulness as he could muster, till at last, one golden morning in the Indian summer, a happy idea flashed upon him.

'Marthy,' said he when the chores were done, 'what's the matter with me takin' baby over to the new house an' leavin' him there while I work? The hammerin' an' sawin' 'll keep him amused, like as not. An' you can sit a mite of rest while we're gone.'

'Landa, John!' exclaimed Martha, viewing such a novel proposition with natural motherly distrust, 'wherever would you put him so's he wouldn't run or leak? Why, he'd roll himself downstairs, sure!' 'Not by a long chalk,' said John, positively, 'now quite bent upon his project. 'I'll be workin' downstairs this forenoon. An' he'll lie comfortable as you please in the shavin's and watch me. He'll be great company!'

'Well—well! I suppose it'll be all right, if you're set on it,' sighed Martha.

And John, when the child was wrapped up, lost no time in setting out. He strode off, whistling gleefully, through the magical haze of the morning, the delighted baby gurgling on his shoulder.

He soon reached the scene of his pleasant labours. The baby was propped up carefully on the edge of a great pile of shavings, whence it watched with round eyes the long, rhythmic strokes of the plane as the father smoothed the yellow deals for its future home.

An hour or two wore away very pleasantly; and the work grew; and the baby, tired of following the motion of plane and saw, fell asleep. While it lay, warm and secure, amid the shavings, John Anderson went upstairs and set himself to the puzzling out of a bit of awkward carpentry. He was but an amateur carpenter, and some quite simple problems in joining were enough to give him a lot of trouble. With pencil and rule in hand he measured, and figured, and pondered, from time to time giving a loving glance downward to where the little one slept.

At last he got particularly absorbed in a calculation which resulted only in the defacement of a smooth-planed white board with a lot of straggling figures. From his absorption he awoke with a start, suddenly conscious of the soft pattering of feet on the floor below, and a rustling of the shavings.

It is needless to tell the direction in which his eyes at once turned. At the sight which met them he was for an instant frozen with horror. Or perhaps it was a subtle instinct, working more swiftly than reason could act, which forced him to keep still, in spite of the awful fate which threatened his slumbering child.

Beside the baby stood a huge gray wolf. It evidently regarded the sleeping child as a dead body, and was diligently engaged in burying it in the shavings. Providentially the shavings were light and soft, so the little one was not awakened by the process. As soon as the wolf was satisfied that the prey was perfectly concealed he trotted away into the bushes.

John Anderson, recovering from his inaction, swung down to the floor and snatched the baby to his bosom. It half awoke, snuggled into its father's neck with a contented gurgle, and sank to sleep again.

For some reason which he could never afterward explain—instinct again, if you like—John Anderson kicked the shavings back into place just as they had been left by the wolf. Then he clambered upstairs, and sat down on a pile of boards, trembling with excitement. The baby was safe, indeed; but the world seemed to grow black about him with anguish of remorse as he thought how for the moment he had forgotten.

Yes, the baby was safe—but no thanks to its father, thought John Anderson. Instead of hiding it in the shavings, the wolf might have carried it away, or might have killed it on the spot with one crunch of those long, strong jaws. Then, thought John, how could he ever have gone home to the little one's mother and told her the dreadful story?

While John Anderson was thus reproaching himself, and gazing remorsefully at the baby face, he heard a wolf's howl not far off. It was answered in the distance by another, and another, and yet others. Through the chinks of the unfinished walls he saw, presently, no fewer than six wolves come out of the woods and halt for counsel on the edge of the clearing. Then one trotted straight over to the house, the others following confidently at his heels.

'They've come for the little lad!' thought John clutching it close to his heart and seizing his keen broad axe. Then he remembered that as the stairs were not yet built, the wolves could not get up to the second story. In his relief a curious idea struck him.

'What will they do,' he thought, 'when they find there ain't no baby in that there pile of shavin's?'

The better to watch the sequel without revealing his presence, he lay down on the floor and put his eye to a generous crevice.

Following their guide, the wolves all entered the house without hesitation or suspicion. The leader darted forward and pounced with an eager and hungry snarl upon the heap of shavings.

There was a second of hurried scratching, and the floor was laid bare. Then the animal's tail suddenly drew in between his legs, and he cowered, trembling, to the very floor.

His fellows stood in ominous silence, and John saw the hair begin to lift angrily along their necks. They drew a step closer. The leader, however, began to scratch desperately at another portion of the shavings. But in a moment more he realized that his prize had disappeared. He turned with a short yelp of despair, and sprang for the door.

The others were upon him like lightning, and a terrible clamour arose of yelps and snarls. The first wolf made a brave fight, but the odds were too heavily against him. It seemed plain to the pack that he had cheated them, and his punishment was nothing less than to be torn to pieces.

While they were engaged in carrying out this sentence John Anderson resolved to take a hand in the game.

'If I don't give 'em a lesson,' said he to himself, 'this part of the country won't be fit to live in!'

A heavy plank lay close at hand. Laying the baby on one side, he lifted the plank, cautiously approached the stairway, and drove his clumsy weapon down upon the mass of struggling wolves.

One wolf dropped instantly with his back broken. The others turned to look for their assailant. They saw him standing boldly at the head of the stairway, and at once, their victim being dead, they turned their wrath upon this new offender. With a chorus of terrifying snarls they sprang to the attack, and John Anderson congratulated himself that he had so long neglected to finish the stairs.

In fact there was no means of ascent except the serrated frame on which the stairs were to be built. The two nearest wolves failed utterly to mount by these, and fell ignominiously between. But one gaunt brute, with long legs and dripping jaws, was sure-footed as a goat, and mounted nimbly. John met him, ere he reached the

top, with a mighty swoop of the broad axe, and he fell back to the floor almost smothered in two.

Of the original six wolves there were left now but three, and these, after a moment's hesitation, turned and fled. As they crowded through the narrow doorway John hurled his axe upon them with a woodsman's unerring aim.

The shot went home and another wolf fell. The remaining two, leaving their comrade kicking on the threshold, darted away into the woods like gray streaks of shadow.

'That's a good job done!' said John, as he gathered up the baby and climbed down to examine his trophies. 'The varmint won't come around these parts agin in a hurry!'

When he returned to the little cabin by the brook he had a thrilling story to tell Martha. And he had a bunch of wolf-skins to offer her in proof. But, although a truthful man by nature, he discreetly omitted to mention the most remarkable points in the whole affair.

In fact, in his account neither the baby nor the pile of shavings figured at all. It was simply a matter of wolves, a hero and a broad-axe.

## TORE THE WRONG COAT.

ROYALTY dearly loves its fun, and nowhere are practical jokes more in vogue than in the palaces of Old World monarchs. No one, it is said, is fonder of practical joking than the Prince of Wales. His private secretary, Sir Francis Knollys, has, in times gone by, been called upon to endure with good humour and serenity many a trying experience. One day not long ago, Sir Francis got the laugh on the would-be joker and gave him a taste of his own medicine.

Among the prince's friends was a famous sportsman, Capt. 'Bay' Middleton, whose favourite trick used to be to approach from behind some unsuspecting man and seize his coat-tails, which he would wrench apart in such a manner as to split the garment up the back.

At Sandringham Sir Francis took pains to offer himself as the victim and butt for the gallant 'Bay.' When the men retired to the smoking-room after the princess and ladies were gone, he took up his place in front of the fire, bent his head, and appeared entirely lost in thought.

His attitude was too inviting not to appeal to the jocular instincts of Captain Middleton, who, after asking the prince's permission to leave the card-table for a moment, crept up softly to Sir Francis, suddenly seized hold of the tails of his dress-coat, and with a jerk, tore it apart from waist to collar.

Unlike most of Bay's victims, Sir Francis took the matter in exceedingly good spirits. Indeed, he laughed, and appeared greatly to enjoy the fun. Somewhat astonished the prince and the men present inquired how it was that Sir Francis had treated the matter with such indifference.

'That is very easy to explain, sir,' was the reply. 'The coat is not mine. I had heard of Middleton's fondness for this particular form of amusement, and, accordingly, when I came downstairs just now to the smoking-room, I took the precaution of going into his room and putting on one of his dress-coats, which was lying on his bed.'

There was a hurricane of irrepressible laughter as he uttered these words, and the merriment was intensified by the disconcerted appearance of Captain Middleton, who was bitterly annoyed to have thus destroyed one of his best evening coats.

## PILL-MAKING CRABS.

MR COLLINGWOOD, in his 'Rambles of a Naturalist,' gives an entertaining account of these tiny creatures, which are mostly of about the size of a pea, though a few are as large as filberts. He found them abundant on the shores of the Malay Peninsula, his attention being first called to them by seeing the beach, after the going down of the tide, covered with loose, powdery sand and holes of various sizes. Looking more closely, he discovered that little radiating paths converged among the litter of sand to each hole, and that the sand itself was in minute balls.

The instant I approached, a peculiar twinkle on the sand was visible, which required a quick eye to recognize as the simultaneous and rapid retreat of a multitude of tiny crabs into their holes, not a single one remaining visible.

Kneeling down and remaining motionless for a few minutes, I noticed a slight evanescent appearance, like a flash or a burning bubble, which the eye could scarcely follow. This was produced by one or more of the crabs coming to the surface and instantly darting down again, alarmed by my proximity. It was only by waiting like a statue that I could induce them to come out and set to work.

Coming cautiously to the mouth of the hole, the crab waited to reconnoitre, and if satisfied that no enemy was near, it would venture about its own length from its lurking-place; then rapidly taking up particles of sand in its claws, it deposited them in a groove beneath the thorax.

As it did so a little ball of sand was rapidly projected as through its mouth. This it seized with one claw and deposited on one side, proceeding in this manner until the smooth beach was covered with little pellets, or pills, corresponding in size to its own dimensions. It was evidently its method of extracting particles of food from the sand.

I made many attempts to catch one before I succeeded. At last I caught two specimens, which immediately curled themselves up and feigned death.

I put one of them on the sand to see what it would do. At first it did not attempt to move; but after a little, by a twisting and wriggling movement, it rapidly sank into the sand and disappeared.

The other one I put into a hole which already contained a crab; but no visible result followed. I then attempted to dig it up again, but in vain. I dug up many holes; but though I soon arrived at the soft, wet sand underneath, I never succeeded in procuring a pill-making crab by digging it out.