

The girls got flowers: bluebells and white wood anemones. We might have had poppies or buttercups, but we thought the colours might be too loud. We took some books up for Mrs Bax to read in the night. And we took the

"Oh, won't you come inside?" asked Mrs Bax. "Do!"

"No, thank you," said Oswald in calm and mouse-like tones, and to avoid any more jaw he got at once on to the box with Pincher.

The Lady and the License

THE WOULD-BEGOODS BEFORE THE BAR OF JUSTICE.

(By E. Nesbit.)

My Dear Kiddies.—Miss Samdell's married sister has just come home from Australia, and she feels very tired. No wonder, you will say, after such a long journey. So she is going to Lynchurch to rest. Now I want you all to be very quiet because when you are in your usual form, you aren't exactly restless, are you? If this weather lasts you will be able to be out most of the time, and when you are indoors, for goodness' sake control your lungs and your boots, especially H.O.'s. Mrs Bax has travelled about a good deal, and once was nearly eaten by cannibals. But I hope you won't bother her to tell you stories. She is coming on Saturday. I am glad to hear from Alice's letter that you enjoyed the Primrose Fete. Tell Noel that portulaca is not the usual way of spelling the word he wants. I send you ten shillings for pocket money, and again implore you to let Mrs Bax have a little rest and peace.

Your loving FATHER.

P.S.—If you want anything sent down tell me, and I will get Mrs Bax to bring it. I met your friend Mr. Hod House the other day at luncheon.

WHEN the letter had been read aloud, and we had each read it to ourselves, a sad silence took place.

Dickie was the first to speak. "It is rather hoarse-ly, I grant you," he said, "but it might be worse."

"I don't see how," said H.O. "I do wish Father would jolly well learn to leave my boots alone."

"It might be worse, I tell you," said Dickie. "Suppose instead of telling us to keep out-of-doors it had been the other way."

"Yes," said Alice, "suppose it had been, 'Poor Mrs Bax requires to be cheered up. Do not leave her side day or night. Take it in turns to make jokes for her, let not a moment pass without some merry jest!' Oh, yes, it might be much, much worse!"

"Being able to get out all day makes it all right about trying to make that two crows increase and multiply," remarked Oswald. "Now, who's going to

meet her at the station? Because, after all, it's her sister's house, and we've got to be polite to visitors even if we're in a house we aren't related to."

"This was seen to be so—but no one was keen on going to the station. At last Oswald, ever ready for forlorn hopes, consented to go."

We told Mrs Beale, and she got the best room ready, scrubbing everything till it smelt deliciously of wet wood and mottled soap. And then we decorated the room as well as we could.

"She'll want some pretty things," said Alice, "coming from the land of parrots and opossums and gum trees and things."

We did think of borrowing the stuff-



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of wild out that is in the bar at The Ship, but we decided that our decorations must be very quiet, and the wild one, even in its stuffed state, was anything but; so we borrowed a stuffed rouch in a glass box and stood it on the chest of drawers. It looked very calm. Sea shells are quiet things when they are vacant, and Mrs Beale let us have the four big ones off her chiffonier.

quietest ones we could find. Sonnets on Sleep, Confessions of an Opium Eater, Twilight of the Gods, Diary of a Dreamer and By Still Waters were some of them. The girls covered them with grey paper, because some of the bindings were rather gay.

The girls hemmed grey calico covers for the drawers and the dressing table, and we drew the blinds half-down; and when all was done the room looked as quiet as a roosting wood pigeon.

We put in a clock, but we did not wind it up.

"She can do that herself," said Dora, "if she feels she can bear to hear it ticking."



There was something almost awful about the sleek, quiet tidiness of the others.

Oswald went to the station to meet her. He rode on the box beside the driver. When the others saw him mount there I think they were sorry they had not been polite and gone to meet her themselves. Oswald had a jolly ride. He got to the station just as the train came in. Only one lady got out of it, so Oswald knew it must be Mrs Bax. If he had not been told how quiet she wanted to be he would have thought she looked rather jolly. She had short hair and gold spectacles. Her skirts were short, and she carried a parrot cage in her hand. It contained our parrot, and when we wrote to tell Father that it and Pincher were the only things we wanted sent we never thought she would have brought either.

"Mrs Bax, I believe," was the only break Oswald made in the polite silence that he took the parrot cage and her bag from her in.

"How do you do?" she said, very briskly for a tired lady, and Oswald thought it was noble of her to make the effort to smile. "Are you Oswald or Dickie?"

Oswald told her in one calm word which he was, and then Pincher rolled noddily out of a dog-box almost into his arms. Pincher would not be quiet. Of course, he did not understand the need for it. Oswald conversed with Pincher in low, restraining whispers as he led the way to The Ship's fly. He put the parrot cage on the inside seat of the carriage, held the door open for Mrs Bax with silent politeness, closed it as quietly as possible, and prepared to mount on the box.

So that Mrs Bax was perfectly quiet for the whole six miles, unless you count the rattle and shake-up-and-down of the fly. On the box Oswald and Pincher "tasted the sweets of a blissful reunion," like it says in novels. And the man from The Ship looked on and said how well-bred Pincher was. It was a happy drive.

There was something almost awful about the sleek, quiet tidiness of the others who were all standing in a row outside the cottage to welcome Mrs. Bax. They all said, "How do you do?" in hushed voices, and all looked as if butter would not melt in any of their young mouths. I never saw a more soothing-looking lot of kids.

She went to her room, and we did not see her again till tea-time.

Then, still exquisitely brushed and combed, we sat around the board in silence. We had left the tea-tray place for Mrs. Bax, of course. But she said to Dora:

"Wouldn't you like to pour out?"

And Dora replied in low, soft tones, "If you wish me to, Mrs. Bax. I usually do." And she did.

We passed each other bread and butter and jam and honey with silent courteousness, and of course we saw that she had enough to eat.

"Do you manage to amuse yourselves pretty well here?" she asked presently.

We said, "Yes, thank you," in hushed tones.

"What do you do?" she asked.

We did not wish to excite her by telling her what we did, so Dickie murmured:

"Nothing in particular;" and Alice said:

"All sorts of things."

"Tell me about them," said Mrs. Bax invitingly.

We replied by a deep silence. She sighed and passed her cup for more tea.

"Do you ever feel shy?" she asked suddenly. "I do, dreadfully, with new people."

We liked her for saying that, and Alice replied that she hoped she would not feel shy with us.

"I hope not," she said. "Do you know there was such a funny woman in the train? She had 17 different parcels, and she kept counting them, and one of them was a kitten, and it was always under the seat when she began to count, so she always got the number wrong."

We should have liked to hear about that kitten, especially what colour it was and how old, but Oswald felt that Mrs. Bax was only trying to talk for our sakes, so that we shouldn't feel shy, so he simply said: "Will you have some