more cake!" and nothing more was said about the kitten.

Mrs. Bax seemed very noble. She kept trying to talk to us about Pincher, and trains, and Australia, but we were determined she should be quiet, as she wished it so much, and we restrained our brimming curiosity about opossums up gum trees, and about emus and kangaroos and wattles, and only said "Yes" or No," or, more often, nothing at all.

When tea was over we melted away, "like snow-wreaths in Thawjean," and went out on the beach and had a yelling match. Our throats felt as though they were full of wool, from the hushed tones we had used in talking to Mrs. Bax. Oswald won the match.

Next day we kept carefully out of the way except for meals. Mrs. Bax tried talking again at breakfast-time, but we checked our wish to listen, and passed the pepper, salt, mustard, bread, toast, butter marmalade, and even the cayenne vinegar, and oil with such politeness that she gave up.

We took it in turn to watch the house and drive away the organ-grinders. We told them they must not play in front of that house because there was an Australian lady who had to be kept quiet. And they went at once. This cost us sixpence, because an organ-grinder will not fly the spot under twopence a flight.

We went to bed early. We were quite weary with being so calm and still. But we knew it was our duty, and we liked the feel of having done it.

The day after was the day Jake Lee got hurt. Jake is the man who drives about the country in a covered cart, with pins and needles and combs and frying-pans, and all the sort of things that farmers' wives are likely to want in a hurry; and no shop for miles. I have always thought Jake's was a beautiful life. I should like to do it myself. Well, this particular day he had got his cart all ready to start, and had got his foot on the wheel to get up, when a motor car went by puffing and hooting. I always think motor cars seem so rude, somehow. And the horse was frightened, and no wonder. It shied, and poor Jake was thrown violently to the ground, and hurt so much that they had to send for the doctor. Of course we went and asked Mrs. Jake if we could do anything, such as take the cart out and sell the things to the farmers' wives.

But she thought not.

It was after this that Dickie said:

"Why shouldn't we get things of our own and go and sell them—with Bates' donkey?"

Oswald was thinking the same thing, but he wishes to be fair, so he owns that Dickie spoke first.

We all saw at once that the idea was a good one.

"Shall we dress up for it?" H.O. asked. We thought not. It is always good sport to dress up, but I have never heard of people selling things to farmers' wives in really beautiful disguises.

"We ought to go as shabby as we can," said Alice; "but somehow that always seems to come natural to your clothes when you've done a few interesting things in them. The clothes we wore at the fire look very poor but deserving. What shall we buy to sell?"

"Pins, and needles, and tape, and bodkins," said Dora.

"Butter," said Noel; "it is terrible when there is no butter."

"Honey is nice," said H.O., "and so are sausages."

"Jake has ready-made shirts and corduroy trousers. I suppose a farmer's shirt and trousers may give at any moment," said Alice; "and if he can't get new ones he has to go to bed till they are mended."

Oswald thought tin tacks and glue and string must often be needed to mend barns and farm tools with if they broke suddenly. And Dickie said:

"I think the pictures of ladies hanging on to crosses in foaming seas are good. Jake told me he sold more of them than anything. I suppose people suddenly break the old ones, and home isn't home without a lady holding on to a cross——"

We went to Munn's shop and we bought needles, and pins, and tapes, and bodkins, a pound of butter, a pot of honey, and one of marmalade, tin tacks, string and glue. But we could not get any ladies with crosses, and the shirts and trousers were too expensive for us to dare to risk it. Instead we bought a headstall for eighteenpence, because how providential we should be to a farmer whose favourite horse had escaped and he had nothing to catch it with. And three can-openers, in case of a distant farm subsisting entirely on canned things, and the only opener for miles lost down the well or something. We also bought several other thoughtful and far-sighted things.

That night at supper we told Mrs. Bax we wanted to go out for the day. She had hardly said anything that supper-time, and now she said:

"Where are you going? Teaching Sunday-school?"

As it was Monday we felt her poor brain was wandering, most likely for want of quiet. So Oswald said gently:

"No, we are not going to teach Sunday-school."

Mrs. Bax sighed. Then she said:

"I am going out myself to-morrow for the day."

"I hope it will not tire you too much," said Dora with soft voice and cautious politeness. "If you want anything bought we could do it for you with pleasure, and you could have a nice, quiet day at home."

"Thank you," said Mrs. Bax shortly, and we saw she would do what she chose whether it was really for her own good or not.

"What about pudding strings? You can't button up puddings as if they were pillows."

She started before we did next morning and we were careful to be mouse-quiet till The Ship's fly which contained her was out of hearing. Then we had another yelling competition, and Noel won with that new shriek of his that is like a railway engine in distress; and then we went and fetched Bates' donkey and cart and packed our bales in it and started, some riding and some running behind, and Oswald and Dickie on their bikes.

Any faint, distant traces of respectableness that being firemen had left to our clothes were soon covered up by the dust of the road, and by some of the ginger beer bursting through the violence of the cart, which had no springs.

The first farm we stopped at the woman really did want some pins, for though a very stupid person, she was making a pink blouse, and we said:

"Do have some tape! You never know when you may want it."

"I believe in buttons," she said. "No strings for me, thank you."

But when Oswald said, "What about pudding-strings? You can't button up puddings as if they were pillows!" she consented to listen to reason. But it was only twopence altogether.

But at the next place the woman said we were "mummickers," and told us to "get along, do." And she set her dog at us, but when Pincher sprang from the inmost recesses of the cart she called her dog off. But too late, for it and Pincher were locked in the barking, scuffling, growling embrace of deadly combat. When we had separated the dogs she went into her house and banged the door, and we went on through the green, flat marshes, among the buttercups and Maybushes.

"I wonder what she meant by 'mummickers,'" said H.O.

"She meant she saw our high-born airs through our shabby clothes," said Alice. "It's always happening, especially to Princes. There's nothing so hard to conceal as a really high-bred air——"

"I've been thinking," said Dickie, "whether honesty wouldn't perhaps be the best policy. Not always, of course, but just this once. If people knew what we were doing it for they might be glad to help on the good work. What?"

So at the next farm, which was half-hidden by trees like the picture at the beginning of Sensible Susan, we tied the donkey to the gatepost and knocked at the door. It was opened by a man this time, and Dora said to him:

"We are honest traders. We are trying to sell these things to help a lady who is poor. If you buy some you will be helping, too. Wouldn't you like to do that? It is a good work, and you will be glad of it afterward when you come to think over the acts of your life."

"Upon my wordan'onner!" said the man, whose face was red and surrounded by a frill of white whiskers; "if ever I see a walkin' tract 'ere it stands!"

"She doesn't mean to be tractish," said Oswald quickly; "its only her way. But we really are trying to sell things to help a poor person; no humbug, sir. So if we have got anything you want we shall be glad. And if not, well, there's no harm in asking, is there, sir?"

The man with the frilly whiskers was very pleased to be called "sir"; Oswald knew he would be. And he looked at everything we'd got, and bought the headstall, and two can-openers, and the pot of marmalade, and a ball of string and a pair of braces. This came to four and twopence, and we were very pleased. It really seemed that our business was establishing itself root and branch.

When it came to its being dinner-time, which was first noticed through H.O. beginning to cry and say he did not want to play any more, it was found that we had forgotten to bring any dinner. So we had to eat some of our stock—the jam, the biscuits and the cucumber.

"I feel a new man," said Alice, draining the last of the ginger-beer bottles. "At that homely village on the brow of yonder hill we shall sell all that remains of the stock and go home with money in both pockets."

But our luck had changed. As so often happens, our hearts beat high with hopeful thoughts, and we felt jollier than we had done all day. Merry laughter and snatches of musical song re-echoed from our cart and from around it as we went up the hill. All nature was smiling and gay. There was nothing sinister in the look of the trees or the road, or anything.

Dogs are said to have inside instincts that warn them of intending perils, but Pincher was not a bit instinctive that day, somehow. He sported gaily up and down the hedge banks—after pretending rats—and once he was so excited that I believe he was playing at weasels and stoats. But, of course, there was really no trace of these savage denizens of the jungle. It was just Pincher's varied imagination.

We got to the village, and with joyful expectations we knocked at the first door we came to.

Alice had spread out a few choice treasures—needles, pins, tape, a photograph frame and the butter, rather soft by now, and the last of the can-openers, on a basket-lid, like the fishman does with herrings, and whitings and plums, and apples. (You cannot sell fish in the country unless you sell fruit too. The author does not know why this is.)

The sun was shining, the sky was blue. There was no sign at all of the intending thunderbolt, not even when the door was opened. This was done by a woman.

She just looked at our basket-lid of things any one might have been proud to buy, and smiled. I saw her do it. Then she turned her traitorous head and called "Jim!" into the cottage.

A sleepy grunt rewarded her.

"Jim, I say," she repeated. "Come here directly this minute."

Next morning Jim appeared. He was Jim to her because she was his wife, I suppose—but to us he was the police, with his hair ruffled, from his hateful sofa-cushions, no doubt, and his tunic unbuttoned.

"What's up?" he said in a husky voice, as if he had been dreaming that he had a cold. "Can't a chap have a minute to himself to read the paper in?"

"You told me to," said the woman; "you said if any folks come to the door with things I was to call you whether or no."

Even now we were blind to the disaster that was entangling us in the meshes of its trap. Alice said:

"We've sold a good deal, but we've some things left—very nice things. These crochet needles—"

But the Police, who had buttoned up his tunic in a hurry, said quite fiercely:

"Let's have a look at your license."

"We didn't bring any," said Noel; "but if you will give us an order we'll bring you some to-morrow." He thought a "licen" was a thing to sell that we ought to have thought of.

"None of your lip," was the unexpected reply of the now plainly brutal constable. "Where's your f'cense, I say?"

"We have a license for our dog, but Father's got it," said Oswald, always quick-witted. But not, this time, quite quick enough.

"Your 'awker's license is what I want, as well you know, you young limb—your pedler's license, your license to sell things. You ain't 'alf so 'alf-witted as you want to make out."

"We haven't got a pedler's license," said Oswald. If we had been in a book the Police would have been touched to tears by Oswald's simple honesty. He would have said, "Noble boy!" and then gone on to say he had only asked the question to test our honour. But life is not really at all the same as books. I have noticed lots of differences. Instead of behaving like the book-Police, this shock-headed Constable said:

"Blowed if I wasn't certain of it! Well, my young blokes, you'll just come along o' me to Sir James. I've got orders to bring up the next case afore him."

"Case," said Dora. "Oh, don't! We didn't know we oughtn't to. We only wanted—"

"Ho, yes," said the Constable; "you can tell all that to the magistrate; and anything you say will be used against you."

"I'm sure it will," said Oswald. "Dora, don't lower yourself to speak to him. Come, we'll go home."

The Police was combing its hair with a half-toothless piece of comb, and we turned to go. But it was vain.

Ere any of our young and eager legs could climb into the cart the Police had seized the donkey's bridle. We could not desert our noble steed, and, besides, it wasn't really ours but Bates', and this made any hope of flight quite a forlorn one. For better for worse, we have to go with the donkey.

"Don't cry, for goodness' sake," said Oswald, in stern undertones. "Bite your lips. Take long breaths. Don't let him see we mind. This beast's only the village Police. Sir James will be a gentleman. He'll understand. Don't disgrace the house of Bastable. Look here. Fall into line no, Indian file will be best—there are so few of us. Alice, if you snivel I'll never say you ought to have been a boy again. H.O., shut your mouth. No one's going to hurt you; you're too young."

"I am trying," said Alice, gasping.

"Noel," Oswald went on, now, as so often, showing the brilliant qualities of

Continued on page 12.