

# The Thing in the Box.

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*Illustrated by E. B. Vaughan.*

For the Children.



**T**HIS is an awfully rum-looking box," said Cuthbert to his brother.

"I don't see anything rum about it," responded Jack, taking it in his hand. "Indian, isn't it, by the stink," and he

sniffed gingerly at the lid.

It was the first day of their holidays, which they were spending with their uncle in Auckland.

Uncle James was an Anglo-Indian, a retired officer, who had come to live in New Zealand, and his house was full of delightful curiosities dear to the hearts of boys. Wonderful shields and weapons adorned the walls of the dining-room and hall. Everywhere were cunning swords of Indian workmanship, curious idols and images, pottery, paintings and all manner of things.

Uncle James, whom his two nephews found a pleasant, but somewhat stern, old gentleman, had been obliged to go out on business directly after lunch, and, as it was raining, he had shown the two boys his private sanctum, and told them they might amuse themselves with any thing therein, excepting the contents of a certain cupboard. Their cousin Roderick was due by the six o'clock train that evening, and they were looking forward with pleasure to his arrival.

What possessed Uncle James to ask three rowdy schoolboys to his quiet and orderly home? It would be hard to say. Perhaps it was a sense of duty towards his married brothers, who were well-to-do settlers in different parts of the Auckland province. The last words their father had said to Cuthbert and Jack were these:

"Now mind you behave yourselves. Have a good time, and see everything; enjoy yourselves, but don't get into mischief. Your Uncle James is not used to boys, and he won't stand any nonsense, so mind!"

The rain fell steadily all the afternoon, or the boys would have been out exploring. Cuthbert was desirous of spending most of his time on the wharves, and Jack had a firm intention of doing his duty by the Museum and Art Gallery.

But at present, there being nothing better to do, Cuthbert prowled round and round the room examining everything, while Jack teased Uncle James' dog, which was old and fat, into a perfect frenzy.

Cuthbert was mindful of Uncle James' prohibition at first, but somehow one door of the cupboard came ajar, and the curious little box before mentioned caught his eye, and he pulled it out just to see what it was like.

Once in his hand what more natural than that he should put his finger in the little nick in the lid and draw it back.