



CLASSIC LIVING BOOK

THE
WOULDBEGOODS

Edith Nesbit

COMPLETE AND UNABRIDGED

The Wouldbegoods

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1. THE JUNGLE

“CHILDREN are like jam: all very well in the proper place, but you can't stand them all over the shop—eh, what?”

These were the dreadful words of our Indian uncle. They made us feel very young and angry; and yet we could not be comforted by calling him names to ourselves, as you do when nasty grown-ups say nasty things, because he is not nasty, but quite the exact opposite when not irritated. And we could not think it ungentlemanly of him to say we were like jam, because, as Alice says, jam is very nice indeed—only not on furniture and improper places like that. My father said, “Perhaps they had better go to boarding-school.” And that was awful, because we know father disapproves of boarding-schools. And he looked at us and said, “I am ashamed of them, sir!”

Your lot is indeed a dark and terrible one when your father is ashamed of you. And we all knew this, so that we felt in our chests just as if we had swallowed a hard-boiled egg whole. At least, this is what Oswald felt, and father said once that Oswald, as the eldest, was the representative of the family, so, of course, the others felt the same.

And then everybody said nothing for a short time. At last father said:

“You may go—but remember—” The words that followed I am not going to tell you. It is no use telling you what you know before—as they do in schools. And you must all have had such words said to you many times. We went away when it was over. The girls cried, and we boys got out books and began to read,

so that nobody should think we cared. But we felt it deeply in our interior hearts, especially Oswald, who is the eldest and the representative of the family.

We felt it all the more because we had not really meant to do anything wrong. We only thought perhaps the grown-ups would not be quite pleased if they knew, and that is quite different. Besides, we meant to put all the things back in their proper places when we had done with them before any one found out about it. But I must not anticipate (that means telling the end of a story before the beginning. I tell you this because it is so sickening to have words you don't know in a story, and to be told to look it up in the dicker).

We are the Bastables—Oswald, Dora, Dicky, Alice, Noël, and H. O. If you want to know why we call our youngest brother H. O. you can jolly well read *The Treasure Seekers* and find out. We were the Treasure Seekers, and we sought it high and low, and quite regularly, because we particularly wanted to find it. And at last we did not find it, but we were found by a good, kind Indian uncle, who helped father with his business, so that father was able to take us all to live in a jolly big red house on Blackheath, instead of in the Lewisham Road, where we lived when we were only poor but honest Treasure Seekers. When we were poor but honest we always used to think that if only father had plenty of business, and we did not have to go short of pocket-money and wear shabby clothes (I don't mind this myself, but the girls do), we should be quite happy and very, very good.

And when we were taken to the beautiful big Blackheath house we thought now all would be well, because it was a house with vineries and pineries, and gas and water, and shrubberies and stabling, and replete with every modern convenience, like it says in Dyer & Hilton's list of Eligible House Property. I read all about it, and I have copied the words quite right.

It is a beautiful house, all the furniture solid and strong, no casters off the chairs, and the tables not scratched, and the silver

not dented; and lots of servants, and the most decent meals every day—and lots of pocket-money.

But it is wonderful how soon you get used to things, even the things you want most. Our watches, for instance. We wanted them frightfully; but when I had had mine a week or two, after the mainspring got broken and was repaired at Bennett's in the village, I hardly cared to look at the works at all, and it did not make me feel happy in my heart any more, though, of course, I should have been very unhappy if it had been taken away from me. And the same with new clothes and nice dinners and having enough of everything. You soon get used to it all, and it does not make you extra happy, although, if you had it all taken away, you would be very dejected. (That is a good word, and one I have never used before.) You get used to everything, as I said, and then you want something more. Father says this is what people mean by the deceitfulness of riches; but Albert's uncle says it is the spirit of progress, and Mrs. Leslie said some people called it "divine discontent." Oswald asked them all what they thought, one Sunday at dinner. Uncle said it was rot, and what we wanted was bread and water and a licking; but he meant it for a joke. This was in the Easter holidays.

We went to live at Morden House at Christmas. After the holidays the girls went to the Blackheath High School, and we boys went to the Prop. (that means the Proprietary School). And we had to swot rather during term; but about Easter we knew the deceitfulness of riches in the vac., when there was nothing much on, like pantomimes and things. Then there was the summer term, and we swotted more than ever; and it was boiling hot, and masters' tempers got short and sharp, and the girls used to wish the exams, came in cold weather. I can't think why they don't. But I suppose schools don't think of sensible things like that. They teach botany at girls' schools.

Then the midsummer holidays came, and we breathed again—but only for a few days. We began to feel as if we had forgotten

something, and did not know what it was. We wanted something to happen—only we didn't exactly know what. So we were very pleased when father said:

"I've asked Mr. Foulkes to send his children here for a week or two. You know—the kids who came at Christmas. You must be jolly to them, and see that they have a good time, don't you know."

We remembered them right enough—they were little pinky, frightened things, like white mice, with very bright eyes. They had not been to our house since Christmas, because Denis, the boy, had been ill, and they had been with an aunt at Ramsgate.

Alice and Dora would have liked to get the bedrooms ready for the honored guests, but a really good housemaid is sometimes more ready to say "don't" than even a general. So the girls had to chuck it. Jane only let them put flowers in the pots on the visitors' mantel-pieces, and then they had to ask the gardener which kind they might pick, because nothing worth gathering happened to be growing in our own gardens just then.

Their train got in at 12.27. We all went to meet them. Afterwards I thought that was a mistake, because their aunt was with them, and she wore black with beady things and a tight bonnet, and she said, when we took our hats off, "Who are you?" quite crossly.

We said, "We are the Bastables; we've come to meet Daisy and Denny."

The aunt is a very rude lady, and it made us sorry for Daisy and Denny when she said to them:

"*Are* these the children? Do you remember them?"

We weren't very tidy, perhaps, because we'd been playing brigands in the shrubbery; and we knew we should have to wash for dinner as soon as we got back, anyhow. But still—

Denny said he thought he remembered us. But Daisy said, "Of course they are," and then looked as if she was going to cry.

So then the aunt called a cab, and told the man where to drive, and put Daisy and Denny in, and then she said:

“You two little girls may go too, if you like, but you little boys must walk.”

So the cab went off, and we were left. The aunt turned to us to say a few last words. We knew it would have been about brushing your hair and wearing gloves, so Oswald said, “Good-bye,” and turned haughtily away, before she could begin, and so did the others. No one but that kind of black, beady, tight lady would say “little boys.” She is like Miss Murdstone in *David Copperfield*. I should like to tell her so; but she would not understand. I don’t suppose she has ever read anything but *Markham’s History* and *Mangnall’s Questions*—improving books like that.

When we got home we found all four of those who had ridden in the cab sitting in our sitting-room—we don’t call it nursery now—looking very thoroughly washed, and our girls were asking polite questions and the others were saying “Yes” and “No” and “I don’t know.” We boys did not say anything. We stood at the window and looked out till the gong went for our dinner. We felt it was going to be awful—and it was. The newcomers would never have done for knight-errants, or to carry the cardinal’s sealed message through the heart of France on a horse; they would never have thought of anything to say to throw the enemy off the scent when they got into a tight place.

They said, “Yes, please,” and “No, thank you”; and they ate very neatly, and always wiped their mouths before they drank, as well as after, and never spoke with them full.

And after dinner it got worse and worse.

We got out all our books, and they said, “Thank you,” and didn’t look at them properly. And we got out all our toys, and they said, “Thank you, it’s very nice,” to everything. And it got less and less pleasant, and towards tea-time it came to nobody saying anything except Noël and H. O.—and they talked to each other about cricket.

After tea father came in, and he played “Letters” with them and the girls, and it was a little better; but while late dinner was

going on—I shall never forget it. Oswald felt like the hero of a book—“almost at the end of his resources.” I don’t think I was ever glad of bedtime before, but that time I was.

When they had gone to bed (Daisy had to have all her strings and buttons undone for her, Dora told me, though she is nearly ten, and Denny said he couldn’t sleep without the gas being left a little bit on) we held a council in the girls’ room. We all sat on the bed—it is a mahogany four-poster with green curtains very good for tents, only the housekeeper doesn’t allow it, and Oswald said:

“This is jolly nice, isn’t it?”

“They’ll be better to-morrow,” Alice said; “they’re only shy.”

Dicky said shy was all very well, but you needn’t behave like a perfect idiot.

“They’re frightened. You see, we’re all strange to them,” Dora said.

“We’re not wild beasts or Indians; we sha’n’t eat them. What have they got to be frightened of?” Dicky said this.

Noël told us he thought they were an enchanted prince and princess who’d been turned into white rabbits, and their bodies had got changed back, but not their insides.

But Oswald told him to dry up.

“It’s no use making things up about them,” he said. “The thing is: what are we going to *do*? We can’t have our holidays spoiled by these snivelling kids.”

“No,” Alice said, “but they can’t possibly go on snivelling forever. Perhaps they’ve got into the habit of it with that Murdstone aunt. She’s enough to make any one snivel.”

“All the same,” said Oswald, “we jolly well aren’t going to have another day like to-day. We must do something to rouse them from their snivelling leth—what’s its name?—something sudden and—what is it?—decisive.”

“A booby trap,” said H. O., “the first thing when they get up, and an apple-pie bed at night.”

But Dora would not hear of it, and I own she was right.

"Suppose," she said, "we could get up a good play—like we did when we were Treasure Seekers."

We said, "Well, what?" But she did not say.

"It ought to be a good long thing—to last all day," Dicky said; "and if they like they can play, and if they don't—"

"If they don't, I'll read to them," Alice said.

But we all said: "No, you don't; if you begin that way you'll have to go on."

And Dicky added: "I wasn't going to say that at all. I was going to say if they didn't like it they could jolly well do the other thing."

We all agreed that we must think of something, but we none of us could, and at last the council broke up in confusion because Mrs. Blake—she is the housekeeper—came up and turned off the gas.

But next morning when we were having breakfast, and the two strangers were sitting there so pink and clean, Oswald suddenly said:

"I know; we'll have a jungle in the garden."

And the others agreed, and we talked about it till brek was over. The little strangers only said "I don't know" whenever we said anything to them.

After brekker Oswald beckoned his brothers and sisters mysteriously apart and said:

"Do you agree to let me be captain to-day, because I thought of it?"

And they said they would.

Then he said: "We'll play jungle-book, and I shall be Mowgli. The rest of you can be what you like—Mowgli's father and mother, or any of the beasts."

"I don't suppose they know the book," said Noël. "They don't look as if they read anything, except at lesson times."

"Then they can go on being beasts all the time," Oswald said. "Any one can be a beast."

So it was settled.

And now Oswald—Albert's uncle has sometimes said he is clever at arranging things—began to lay his plans for the jungle. The day was indeed well chosen. Our Indian uncle was away; father was away; Mrs. Blake was going away, and the housemaid had an afternoon off. Oswald's first conscious act was to get rid of the white mice—I mean the little good visitors. He explained to them that there would be a play in the afternoon, and they could be what they liked, and gave them the jungle-book to read the stories he told them to—all the ones about Mowgli. He led the strangers to a secluded spot among the sea-kale pots in the kitchen garden and left them. Then he went back to the others, and we had a jolly morning under the cedar talking about what we would do when Blakie was gone. She went just after our dinner.

When we asked Denny what he would like to be in the play, it turned out he had not read the stories Oswald told him at all, but only the "White Seal" and "Rikki Tikki."

We then agreed to make the jungle first and dress up for our parts afterwards. Oswald was a little uncomfortable about leaving the strangers alone all the morning, so he said Denny should be his aide-de-camp, and he was really quite useful. He is rather handy with his fingers, and things that he does up do not come untied. Daisy might have come too, but she wanted to go on reading, so we let her, which is the truest manners to a visitor. Of course the shrubbery was to be the jungle, and the lawn under the cedar a forest glade, and then we began to collect the things. The cedar lawn is just nicely out of the way of the windows. It was a jolly hot day—the kind of day when the sunshine is white and the shadows are dark gray, not black like they are in the evening.

We all thought of different things. Of course first we dressed up pillows in the skins of beasts and set them about on the grass to look as natural as we could. And then we got Pincher, and rubbed him all over with powdered slate-pencil, to make him

the right color for Gray Brother. But he shook it all off, and it had taken an awful time to do. Then Alice said:

“Oh, I know!” and she ran off to father’s dressing-room, and came back with the tube of *crème d’amande pour la barbe et les mains*, and we squeezed it on Pincher and rubbed it in, and then the slate-pencil stuff stuck all right, and he rolled in the dust-bin of his own accord, which made him just the right color. He is a very clever dog, but soon after he went off and we did not find him till quite late in the afternoon. Denny helped with Pincher, and with the wild-beast skins, and when Pincher was finished he said:

“Please, may I make some paper birds to put in the trees? I know how.”

And of course we said “Yes,” and he only had red ink and newspapers, and quickly he made quite a lot of large paper birds with red tails. They didn’t look half bad on the edge of the shrubbery.

While he was doing this he suddenly said, or rather screamed, “Oh!”

And we looked, and it was a creature with great horns and a fur rug—something like a bull and something like a minotaur—and I don’t wonder Denny was frightened. It was Alice, and it was first-class.

Up to now all was not yet lost beyond recall. It was the stuffed fox that did the mischief—and I am sorry to own it was Oswald who thought of it. He is not ashamed of having *thought* of it. That was rather clever of him. But he knows now that it is better not to take other people’s foxes and things without asking, even if you live in the same house with them.

It was Oswald who undid the back of the glass case in the hall and got out the fox with the green and gray duck in its mouth, and when the others saw how awfully like life they looked on the lawn, they all rushed off to fetch the other stuffed things. Uncle has a tremendous lot of stuffed things. He shot most of

them himself—but not the fox, of course. There was another fox's mask, too, and we hung that in a bush to look as if the fox was peeping out. And the stuffed birds we fastened on to the trees with string. The duck-bill—what's its name?—looked very well sitting on his tail with the otter snarling at him. Then Dicky had an idea; and though not nearly so much was said about it afterwards as there was about the stuffed things, I think myself it was just as bad, though it was a good idea too. He just got the hose and put the end over a branch of the cedar-tree. Then we got the steps they clean windows with, and let the hose rest on the top of the steps and run. It was to be a water-fall, but it ran between the steps and was only wet and messy; so we got father's mackintosh and uncle's and covered the steps with them, so that the water ran down all right and was glorious, and it ran away in a stream across the grass where we had dug a little channel for it—and the otter and the duck-bill thing were as if in their native haunts. I hope all this is not very dull to read about. I know it was jolly good fun to do. Taking one thing with another, I don't know that we ever had a better time while it lasted.

We got all the rabbits out of the hutches and put pink paper tails on to them, and hunted them with horns, made out of the *Times*. They got away somehow, and before they were caught next day they had eaten a good many lettuces and other things. Oswald is very sorry for this. He rather likes the gardener.

Denny wanted to put paper tails on the guinea-pigs, and it was no use our telling him there was nothing to tie the paper on to. He thought we were kidding until we showed him, and then he said, "Well, never mind," and got the girls to give him bits of the blue stuff left over from their dressing-gowns.

"I'll make them sashes to tie round their little middles," he said. And he did, and the bows stuck up on the tops of their backs. One of the guinea-pigs was never seen again, and the same with the tortoise when we had done his shell with vermilion paint. He crawled away and returned no more. Perhaps some one col-

lected him and thought he was an expensive kind, unknown in these cold latitudes.

The lawn under the cedar was transformed into a dream of beauty, what with the stuffed creatures and the paper-tailed things and the water-fall. And Alice said:

“I wish the tigers did not look so flat.” For of course with pillows you can only pretend it is a sleeping tiger getting ready to make a spring out at you. It is difficult to prop up tiger-skins in a life-like manner when there are no bones inside them, only pillows and sofa-cushions. “What about the beer-stands?” I said. And we got two out of the cellar. With bolsters and string we fastened insides to the tigers—and they were really fine. The legs of the beer-stand did for tigers’ legs. It was indeed the finishing touch.

Then we boys put on just our bathing drawers and vests—so as to be able to play with the water-fall without hurting our clothes. I think this was thoughtful. The girls only tucked up their frocks and took their shoes and stockings off. H. O. painted his legs and his hands with Condyl’s fluid—to make him brown, so that he might be Mowgli, although Oswald was captain and had plainly said he was going to be Mowgli himself. Of course the others weren’t going to stand that. So Oswald said:

“Very well. Nobody asked you to brown yourself like that. But now you’ve done it, you’ve simply got to go and be a beaver, and live in the dam under the water-fall till it washes off.”

He said he didn’t want to be beavers. And Noël said:

“Don’t make him. Let him be the bronze statue in the palace gardens that the fountain plays out of.”

So we let him have the hose and hold it up over his head. It made a lovely fountain, only he remained brown. So then Dicky and Oswald did ourselves brown too, and dried H. O. as well as we could with our handkerchiefs, because he was just beginning to snivel. The brown did not come off any of us for days.

Oswald was to be Mowgli, and we were just beginning to

arrange the different parts. The rest of the hose that was on the ground was Kaa, the Rock Python, and Pincher was Gray Brother, only we couldn't find him. And while most of us were talking, Dicky and Noël got messing about with the beer-stand tigers.

And then a really sad event instantly occurred, which was not really our fault, and we did not mean to.

That Daisy girl had been mooning indoors all the afternoon with the jungle books, and now she came suddenly out, just as Dicky and Noël had got under the tigers and were shoving them along to fright each other. Of course, this is not in the Mowgli book at all: but they did look jolly like real tigers, and I am very far from wishing to blame the girl, though she little knew what would be the awful consequence of her rash act. But for her we might have got out of it all much better than we did.

What happened was truly horrid.

As soon as Daisy saw the tigers she stopped short, and uttering a shriek like a railway whistle, she fell flat on the ground.

"Fear not, gentle Indian maiden," Oswald cried, thinking with surprise that perhaps after all she did know how to play, "I myself will protect thee." And he sprang forward with the native bow and arrows out of uncle's study.

The gentle Indian maiden did not move.

"Come hither," Dora said, "let us take refuge in yonder covert while this good knight does battle for us."

Dora might have remembered that we were savages, but she did not. And that is Dora all over. And still the Daisy girl did not move.

Then we were truly frightened. Dora and Alice lifted her up, and her mouth was a horrid violet color and her eyes half shut. She looked horrid. Not at all like fair fainting damsels, who are always of an interesting pallor. She was green, like a cheap oyster on a stall.

We did what we could, a prey to alarm as we were. We rubbed her hands and let the hose play gently but perseveringly on her



WE LET THE HOSE PLAY PERSEVERINGLY

unconscious brow. The girls loosened her dress, though it was only the kind that comes down straight without a waist. And we were all doing what we could as hard as we could, when we heard the click of the front gate. There was no mistake about it.

"I hope whoever it is will go straight to the front door," said Alice. But whoever it was did not. There were feet on the gravel, and there was the uncle's voice, saying, in his hearty manner:

"This way. This way. On such a day as this we shall find our young barbarians all at play somewhere about the grounds."

And then, without further warning, the uncle, three other gentlemen, and two ladies burst upon the scene.

We had no clothes on to speak of—I mean us boys. We were all wet through. Daisy was in a faint or a fit, or dead, none of us then knew which. And all the stuffed animals were there staring the uncle in the face. Most of them had got a sprinkling, and the otter and the duck-bill brute were simply soaked. And three of us were dark brown. Concealment, as so often happens, was impossible.

The quick brain of Oswald saw, in a flash, exactly how it would strike the uncle, and his brave young blood ran cold in his veins. His heart stood still.

"What's all this—eh, what?" said the tones of the wronged uncle.

Oswald spoke up and said it was jungles we were playing, and he didn't know what was up with Daisy. He explained as well as any one could, but words were now in vain.

The uncle had a Malacca cane in his hand, and we were but ill prepared to meet the sudden attack. Oswald and H. O. caught it worst. The other boys were under the tigers—and, of course, my uncle would not strike a girl. Denny was a visitor and so got off. But it was bread and water for us for the next three days, and our own rooms. I will not tell you how we sought to vary the monotonousness of imprisonment. Oswald thought of taming a mouse, but he could not find one. The reason of the

wretched captives might have given way but for the gutter that you can crawl along from our room to the girls'. But I will not dwell on this because you might try it yourselves, and it really is dangerous. When my father came home we got the talking to, and we said we were sorry—and we really were—especially about Daisy, though she had behaved with muffishness, and then it was settled that we were to go into the country and stay till we had grown into better children.

Albert's uncle was writing a book in the country; we were to go to his house. We were glad of this—Daisy and Denny too. This we bore nobly. We knew we had deserved it. We were all very sorry for everything, and we resolved that for the future we *would* be good.

I am not sure whether we kept this resolution or not. Oswald thinks now that perhaps we made a mistake in trying so very hard to be good all at once. You should do everything by degrees.

P.S.—It turned out Daisy was not really dead at all. It was only fainting—so like a girl.

N.B.—Pincher was found on the drawing-room sofa.

Appendix.—I have not told you half the things we did for the jungle—for instance, about the elephants' tusks and the horse-hair sofa-cushions and uncle's fishing-boots.

2. THE WOULD-BEGOODS

WHEN we were sent down into the country to learn to be good we felt it was rather good business, because we knew our being sent there was really only to get us out of the way for a little while, and we knew right enough that it wasn't a punishment, though Mrs. Blake said it was, because we had been punished thoroughly for taking the stuffed animals out and making a jungle on the lawn with them, and the garden hose. And you cannot be punished twice for the same offence. This is the English law; at least I think so. And at any rate no one would punish you three times, and we had had the Malacca cane and the solitary confinement; and the uncle had kindly explained to us that all ill-feeling between him and us was wiped out entirely by the bread and water we had endured. And what with the bread and water and being prisoners, and not being able to tame any mice in our prisons, I quite feel that we had suffered it up thoroughly, and now we could start fair.

I think myself that descriptions of places are generally dull, but I have sometimes thought that was because the authors do not tell you what you truly want to know. However, dull or not, here goes—because you won't understand anything unless I tell you what the place was like.

The Moat House was the one we went to stay at. There has been a house there since Saxon times. It is a manor, and a manor goes on having a house on it whatever happens. The Moat House was burned down once or twice in ancient centuries—I don't remember which—but they always built a new one, and Cromwell's soldiers smashed it about, but it was patched up again. It is

a very odd house: the front door opens straight into the dining-room, and there are red curtains and a black-and-white marble floor like a chess-board, and there is a secret staircase, only it is not secret now—only rather rickety. It is not very big, but there is a watery moat all round it with a brick bridge that leads to the front door. Then, on the other side of the moat there is the farm, with barns and oast-houses and stables, or things like that. And the other way the garden lawn goes on till it comes to the church-yard. The church-yard is not divided from the garden at all except by a little grass bank. In the front of the house there is more garden, and the big fruit-garden is at the back.

The man the house belongs to likes new houses, so he built a big one with conservatories and a stable with a clock in a turret on the top, and he let the Moat House. And Albert's uncle took it, and my father was to come down sometimes from Saturday to Monday, and Albert's uncle was to live with us all the time, and he would be writing a book, and we were not to bother him, but he would give an eye to us. I hope all this is plain. I have said it as short as I can.

We got down rather late, but there was still light enough to see the big bell hanging at the top of the house. The rope belonging to it went right down the house, through our bedroom to the dining-room. H. O. saw the rope and pulled it while he was washing his hands for supper, and Dick and I let him, and the bell tolled solemnly. Father shouted to him not to, and we went down to supper. But presently there were many feet trampling on the gravel, and father went out to see. When he came back he said:

“The whole village, or half of it, has come up to see why the bell rang. It's only rung for fire or burglars. Why can't you kids let things alone?”

Albert's uncle said:

“Bed follows supper as the fruit follows the flower. They'll do no more mischief to-night, sir. To-morrow I will point out a

few of the things to be avoided in this bucolic retreat.”

So it was bed directly after supper, and that was why we did not see much that night.

But in the morning we were all up rather early, and we seemed to have awakened in a new world, rich in surprises beyond the dreams of anybody, as it says in the quotation.

We went everywhere we could in the time, but when it was breakfast-time we felt we had not seen half or a quarter. The room we had breakfast in was exactly like in a story—black oak panels and china in corner cupboards with glass doors. These doors were locked. There were green curtains, and honeycomb for breakfast. After brekker my father went back to town, and Albert’s uncle went too, to see publishers. We saw them to the station, and father gave us a long list of what we weren’t to do. It began with “Don’t pull ropes unless you’re quite sure what will happen at the other end,” and it finished with “For goodness’ sake, try to keep out of mischief till I come down on Saturday.” There were lots of other things in between.

We all promised we would. And we saw them off, and waved till the train was quite out of sight. Then we started to walk home. Daisy was tired, so Oswald carried her home on his back. When we got home she said:

“I do like you, Oswald.”

She is not a bad little kid; and Oswald felt it was his duty to be nice to her because she was a visitor. Then we looked all over everything. It was a glorious place. You did not know where to begin.

We were all a little tired before we found the hay-loft, but we pulled ourselves together to make a fort with the trusses of hay—great square things—and we were having a jolly good time, all of us, when suddenly a trap-door opened and a head bobbed up with a straw in its mouth. We knew nothing about the country then, and the head really did scare us rather, though, of course, we found out directly that the feet belonging to it were

standing on the bar of the loose-box underneath. The head said:

“Don’t you let the governor catch you a-spoiling of that there hay, that’s all.” And it spoke thickly because of the straw.

It is strange to think how ignorant you were in the past. We can hardly believe now that once we really did not know that it spoiled hay to mess about with it. Horses don’t like to eat it afterwards. Always remember this.

When the head had explained a little more it went away, and we turned the handle of the chaff-cutting machine, and nobody got hurt, though the head *had* said we should cut our fingers off if we touched it.

And then we sat down on the floor, which is dirty with the nice clean dirt that is more than half chopped hay, and those there was room for hung their legs down out of the top door, and we looked down at the farmyard, which is very slushy when you get down into it, but most interesting.

Then Alice said:

“Now we’re all here, and the boys are tired enough to sit still for a minute, I want to have a council.”

We said, “What about?” And she said, “I’ll tell you. H. O., don’t wriggle so; sit on my frock if the straws tickle your legs.”

You see he wears socks, and so he can never be quite as comfortable as any one else.

“Promise not to laugh,” Alice said, getting very red, and looking at Dora, who got red too.

We did, and then she said: “Dora and I have talked this over, and Daisy too, and we have written it down because it is easier than saying it. Shall I read it? or will you, Dora?”

Dora said it didn’t matter; Alice might. So Alice read it, and though she gabbled a bit we all heard it. I copied it afterwards. This is what she read:

“NEW SOCIETY FOR BEING GOOD IN

"I, Dora Bastable, and Alice Bastable, my sister, being of sound mind and body, when we were shut up with bread and water on that jangle day, we thought a great deal about our naughty sins, and we made our minds up to be good forever after. And we talked to Daisy about it, and she had an idea. So we want to start a society for being good in. It is Daisy's idea, but we think so too."

"You know," Dora interrupted, "when people want to do good things they always make a society. There are thousands—there's the Missionary Society."

"Yes," Alice said, "and the Society for the Prevention of something or other, and the Young Men's Mutual Improvement Society, and the S. P. G."

"What's S. P. G.?" Oswald asked.

"Society for the Propagation of the Jews, of course," said Noël, who cannot always spell.

"No, it isn't; but do let me go on."

Alice did go on.

"We propose to get up a society, with a chairman and a treasurer and secretary, and keep a journal-book saying what we've done. If that doesn't make us good it won't be my fault.

"The aim of the society is nobleness and goodness, and great and unselfish deeds. We wish not to be such a nuisance to grown-up people, and to perform prodigies of real goodness. We wish to spread our wings"—here Alice read very fast. She told me afterwards Daisy had helped her with that part, and she thought when she came to the wings they sounded rather silly—"to spread our wings and rise above the kind of interesting things that you ought not to do, but to do kindnesses to all, however low and mean."

Denny was listening carefully. Now he nodded three or four times.

“Little words of kindness” (he said),
“Little deeds of love,
Make this earth an eagle
Like the one above.”

This did not sound right, but we let it pass, because an eagle *does* have wings, and we wanted to hear the rest of what the girls had written. But there was no rest.

“That’s all,” said Alice, and Daisy said:

“Don’t you think it’s a good idea?”

“That depends,” Oswald answered, “who is president, and what you mean by being good.” Oswald did not care very much for the idea himself, because being good is not the sort of thing he thinks it is proper to talk about, especially before strangers. But the girls and Denny seemed to like it, so Oswald did not say exactly what he thought, especially as it was Daisy’s idea. This was true politeness.

“I think it would be nice,” Noël said, “if we made it a sort of play. Let’s do the ‘Pilgrim’s Progress.’”

We talked about that for some time, but it did not come to anything, because we all wanted to be Mr. Greatheart, except H. O., who wanted to be the lions, and you could not have lions in a Society for Goodness.

Dicky said he did not wish to play if it meant reading books about children who die; he really felt just as Oswald did about it, he told me afterwards. But the girls were looking as if they were in Sunday school, and we did not wish to be unkind.

At last Oswald said, “Well, let’s draw up the rules of the society, and choose the president and settle the name.”

Dora said Oswald should be president, and he modestly consented. She was secretary, and Denny treasurer if we ever had any money.

Making the rules took us all the afternoon. They were these:

RULES

1. Every member is to be as good as possible.
2. There is to be no more jaw than necessary about being good. (Oswald and Dicky put that rule in.)
3. No day must pass without our doing some kind action to a suffering fellow-creature.
4. We are to meet every day, or as often as we like.
5. We are to do good to people we don't like as often as we can.
6. No one is to leave the Society without the consent of all the rest of us.
7. The Society is to be kept a profound secret from all the world except us.
8. The name of our Society is—

And when we got as far as that we all began to talk at once. Dora wanted it called the Society for Humane Improvement; Denny said the Society for Reformed Outcast Children; but Dicky said, "No, we really were not so bad as all that." Then H. O. said, "Call it the Good Society."

"Or the Society for Being Good In," said Daisy.

"Or the Society of Goods," said Noël.

"That's priggish," said Oswald; "besides, we don't know whether we shall be so very."

"You see," Alice explained, "we only said if we *could* we would be good."

"Well, then," Dicky said, getting up and beginning to dust the chopped hay off himself, "call it the Society of the Wouldbegoods and have done with it."

Oswald thinks Dicky was getting sick of it and wanted to make himself a little disagreeable. If so, he was doomed to disappointment. For every one else clapped hands and called out, "That's the very thing!" Then the girls went off to write out the rules, and took H. O. with them, and Noël went to write some poetry to put in the minute book. That's what you call the book

that a society's secretary writes what it does in. Denny went with him to help. He knows a lot of poetry. I think he went to a lady's school where they taught nothing but that. He was rather shy of us, but he took to Noël. I can't think why. Dicky and Oswald walked round the garden and told each other what they thought of the new society.

"I'm not sure we oughtn't to have put our foot down at the beginning," Dicky said. "I don't see much in it, anyhow."

"It pleases the girls," Oswald said, for he is a kind brother.

"But we're not going to stand jaw, and 'words in season,' and 'loving sisterly warnings.' I tell you what it is, Oswald, we'll have to run this thing our way, or it'll be jolly beastly for everybody."

Oswald saw this plainly.

"We must do something," Dicky said; "it's very hard, though. Still, there must be *some* interesting things that are not wrong."

"I suppose so," Oswald said, "but being good is so much like being a muff, generally. Anyhow I'm not going to smooth the pillows of the sick, or read to the aged poor, or any rot out of *Ministering Children*."

"No more am I," Dicky said. He was chewing a straw like the head had in its mouth, "but I suppose we must play the game fair. Let's begin by looking out for something useful to do—something like mending things or cleaning them, not just showing off."

"The boys in books chop kindling wood and save their pennies to buy tea and tracts."

"Little beasts!" said Dick. "I say, let's talk about something else." And Oswald was glad to, for he was beginning to feel jolly uncomfortable.

We were all rather quiet at tea, and afterwards Oswald played draughts with Daisy and the others yawned. I don't know when we've had such a gloomy evening. And every one was horribly polite, and said "Please" and "Thank you," far more than requisite.

Albert's uncle came home after tea. He was jolly, and told us

stories, but he noticed us being a little dull, and asked what blight had fallen on our young lives. Oswald could have answered and said, "It is the Society of the Wouldbegoods that is the blight," but of course he didn't; and Albert's uncle said no more, but he went up and kissed the girls when they were in bed, and asked them if there was anything wrong. And they told him no, on their honor.

The next morning Oswald awoke early. The refreshing beams of the morning sun shone on his narrow, white bed and on the sleeping forms of his dear little brothers, and Denny, who had got the pillow on top of his head and was snoring like a kettle when it sings. Oswald could not remember at first what was the matter with him, and then he remembered the Wouldbegoods, and wished he hadn't. He felt at first as if there was nothing you could do, and even hesitated to buzz a pillow at Denny's head. But he soon saw that this could not be. So he chucked his boot and caught Denny right in the waistcoat part, and thus the day began more brightly than he had expected.

Oswald had not done anything out of the way good the night before, except that when no one was looking he polished the brass candlestick in the girls' bedroom with one of his socks. And he might just as well have let it alone, for the servants cleaned it again with the other things in the morning, and he could never find the sock afterwards. There were two servants. One of them had to be called Mrs. Pettigrew instead of Jane and Eliza like others. She was cook and managed things.

After breakfast Albert's uncle said:

"I now seek the retirement of my study. At your peril violate my privacy before 1.30 sharp. Nothing short of bloodshed will warrant the intrusion, and nothing short of man—or rather boy—slaughter shall avenge it."

So we knew he wanted to be quiet, and the girls decided that we ought to play out of doors so as not to disturb him; we should have played out of doors anyhow on a jolly fine day like that.



‘LITTLE BEASTS,’ SAID DICK

But as we were going out Dicky said to Oswald:

“I say, come along here a minute, will you?”

So Oswald came along, and Dicky took him into the other parlor and shut the door, and Oswald said:

“Well, spit it out: what is it?” He knows that is vulgar, and he would not have said it to any one but his own brother.

Dicky said:

“It’s a pretty fair nuisance. I told you how it would be.”

And Oswald was patient with him, and said:

“What is? Don’t be all day about it.”

Dicky fidgeted about a bit, and then he said:

“Well, I did as I said. I looked about for something useful to do. And you know that dairy window that wouldn’t open—only a little bit like that? Well, I mended the catch with wire and whipcord and it opened wide.”

“And I suppose they didn’t want it mended,” said Oswald. He knows but too well that grown-up people sometimes like to keep things far different from what we would, and you catch it if you try to do otherwise.

“I shouldn’t have minded *that*,” Dicky said, “because I could easily have taken it all off again if they’d only said so. But the sillies went and propped up a milk-pan against the window. They never took the trouble to notice I had mended it. So the wretched thing pushed the window open all by itself directly they propped it up, and it’s tumbled through into the moat, and they are most awfully waxy. All the men are out in the fields, and they haven’t any spare milk-pans. If I were a farmer, I must say I wouldn’t stick at an extra milk-pan or two. Accidents must happen sometimes. I call it mean.”

Dicky spoke in savage tones. But Oswald was not so unhappy, first because it wasn’t his fault, and next because he is a far-seeing boy.

“Never mind,” he said, kindly. “Keep your tail up. We’ll get the beastly milk-pan out all right. Come on.”

He rushed hastily to the garden and gave a low signifying whistle, which the others know well enough to mean something extra being up.

And when they were all gathered round him he spoke.

"Fellow-countrymen," he said, "we're going to have a rousing good time."

"It's nothing naughty, is it," Daisy asked, "like the last time you had that was rousingly good?"

Alice said "Shish," and Oswald pretended not to hear.

"A precious treasure," he said, "has inadvertently been laid low in the moat by one of us."

"The rotten thing tumbled in by itself," Dicky said.

Oswald waved his hand and said, "Anyhow, it's there. It's our duty to restore it to its sorrowing owners. I say, look here—we're going to drag the moat."

Every one brightened up at this. It was our duty and it was interesting too. This is very uncommon.

So we went out to where the orchard is, at the other side of the moat. There were gooseberries and things on the bushes, but we did not take any till we had asked if we might. Alice went and asked. Mrs. Pettigrew said, "Law! I suppose so; you'd eat 'em anyhow, leave or no leave."

She little knows the honorable nature of the house of Bastable. But she has much to learn.

The orchard slopes gently down to the dark waters of the moat. We sat there in the sun and talked about dragging the moat, till Denny said, "How *do* you drag moats?"

And we were speechless, because, though we had read many times about a moat being dragged for missing heirs and lost wills, we really had never thought about exactly how it was done.

"Grappling-irons are right, I believe," Denny said, "but I don't suppose they'd have any at the farm."

And we asked, and found they had never even heard of them. I think myself he meant some other word, but he was quite positive.

So then we got a sheet off Oswald's bed, and we all took our shoes and stockings off, and we tried to see if the sheet would drag the bottom of the moat, which is shallow at that end. But it would keep floating on the top of the water, and when we tried sewing stones into one end of it, it stuck on something in the bottom, and when we got it up it was torn. We were very sorry, and the sheet was in an awful mess; but the girls said they were sure they could wash it in the basin in their room, and we thought as we had torn it any way, we might as well go on. That washing never came off.

"No human being," Noël said, "knows half the treasures hidden in this dark tarn."

And we decided we would drag a bit more at that end, and work gradually round to under the dairy window where the milk-pan was. We could not see that part very well, because of the bushes that grow between the cracks of the stones where the house goes down into the moat. And opposite the dairy window the barn goes straight down into the moat too. It is like pictures of Venice; but you cannot get opposite the dairy window anyhow.

We got the sheet down again when we had tied the torn parts together in a bunch with string, and Oswald was just saying:

"Now then, my hearties, pull together, pull with a will! One, two, three," when suddenly Dora dropped her bit of the sheet with a piercing shriek and cried out:

"Oh! it's all wormy at the bottom. I felt them wriggle." And she was out of the water almost before the words were out of her mouth. The other girls all scuttled out too, and they let the sheet go in such a hurry that we had no time to steady ourselves, and one of us went right in, and the rest got wet up to our waistbands. The one who went right in was only H. O.; but Dora made an awful fuss and said it was our fault. We told her what we thought, and it ended in the girls going in with H. O. to change his things. We had some more gooseberries while they were gone. Dora was in an awful wax when she went away,

but she is not of a sullen disposition though some times hasty, and when they all came back we saw it was all right, so we said:

“What shall we do now?”

Alice said, “I don’t think we need drag any more. It *is* wormy. I felt it when Dora did. And besides, the milk-pan is sticking a bit of itself out of the water. I saw it through the dairy window.”

“Couldn’t we get it up with fish-hooks?” Noël said. But Alice explained that the dairy was now locked up and the key taken out.

So then Oswald said:

“Look here, we’ll make a raft. We should have to do it some time, and we might as well do it now. I saw an old door in that corner stable that they don’t use. You know. The one where they chop the wood.”

We got the door.

We had never made a raft, any of us, but the way to make rafts is better described in books, so we knew what to do.

We found some nice little tubs stuck up on the fence of the farm garden, and nobody seemed to want them for anything just then, so we took them. Denny had a box of tools some one had given him for his last birthday; they were rather rotten little things, but the gimlet worked all right, so we managed to make holes in the edges of the tubs and fasten them with string under the four corners of the old door. This took us a long time. Albert’s uncle asked us at dinner what we had been playing at, and we said it was a secret, and it was nothing wrong. You see we wished to atone for Dicky’s mistake before anything more was said. The house has no windows in the side that faces the orchard.

The rays of the afternoon sun were beaming along the orchard grass when at last we launched the raft. She floated out beyond reach with the last shove of the launching. But Oswald waded out and towed her back; he is not afraid of worms. Yet if he had known of the other things that were in the bottom of that moat he would have kept his boots on. So would the others, especially Dora, as you will see.

At last the gallant craft rode upon the waves. We manned her, though not up to our full strength, because if more than four got on the water came up too near our knees, and we feared she might founder if over-manned.

Daisy and Denny did not want to go on the raft, white mice that they were, so that was all right. And as H. O. had been wet through once he was not very keen. Alice promised Noël her best paint-brush if he'd give up and not go, because we knew well that the voyage was fraught with deep dangers, though the exact danger that lay in wait for us under the dairy window we never even thought of.

So we four elder ones got on the raft very carefully; and even then, every time we moved the water swished up over the raft and hid our feet. But I must say it was a jolly decent raft.

Dicky was captain, because it was his adventure. We had hop-poles from the hop-garden beyond the orchard to punt with. We made the girls stand together in the middle and hold on to each other to keep steady. Then we christened our gallant vessel. We called it the *Richard*, after Dicky, and also after the splendid admiral who used to eat wine-glasses and died after the Battle of the *Revenge* in Tennyson's poetry.

Then those on shore waved a fond adieu as well as they could with the dampness of their handkerchiefs, which we had had to use to dry our legs and feet when we put on our stockings for dinner, and slowly and stately the good ship moved away from shore, riding on the waves as though they were her native element.

We kept her going with the hop-poles, and we kept her steady in the same way, but we could not always keep her steady enough, and we could not always keep her in the wind's eye. That is to say, she went where we did not want, and once she bumped her corner against the barn wall, and all the crew had to sit down suddenly to avoid falling overboard into a watery grave. Of course then the waves swept her decks, and when we got up again we said that we should have to change completely before tea.

But we pressed on undaunted, and at last our saucy craft came into port under the dairy window, and there was the milk-pan, for whose sake we had endured such hardships and privations, standing up on its edge quite quietly.

The girls did not wait for orders from the captain, as they ought to have done; but they cried out, "Oh, here it is!" and then both reached out to get it. Any one who has pursued a naval career will see that of course the raft capsized. For a moment it felt like standing on the roof of the house, and the next moment the ship stood up on end and shot the whole crew into the dark waters.

We boys can swim all right. Oswald has swum three times across the Ladywell Swimming Baths at the shallow end, and Dicky is nearly as good; but just then we did not think of this; though, of course, if the water had been deep we should have.

As soon as Oswald could get the muddy water out of his eyes he opened them on a horrid scene.

Dicky was standing up to his shoulders in the inky waters; the raft had righted itself, and was drifting gently away towards the front of the house, where the bridge is, and Doar and Alice were rising from the deep, with their hair all plastered over their faces—like Venus in the Latin verses.

There was a great noise of splashing. And besides that a feminine voice, looking out of the dairy window and screaming: "Lord love the children!"

It was Mrs. Pettigrew. She disappeared at once, and we were sorry we were in such a situation that she would be able to get at Albert's uncle before we could. Afterwards we were not so sorry.

Before a word could be spoken about our desperate position, Dora staggered a little in the water, and suddenly shrieked, "Oh, my foot! oh, it's a shark! I know it is—or a crocodile!"

The others on the bank could hear her shrieking, but they could not see us properly; they did not know what was happening. Noël told me afterwards he never could care for that paint-brush.

Of course we knew it could not be a shark, but I thought of

pike, which are large and very angry always, and I caught hold of Dora. She screamed without stopping. I shoved her along to where there was a ledge of brickwork, and shoved her up, till she could sit on it, then she got her foot out of the water, still screaming.

It was indeed terrible. The thing she thought was a shark came up with her foot, and it was a horrid, jagged, old meat-tin, and she had put her foot right into it. Oswald got it off, and directly he did so blood began to pour from the wounds. The tin edges had cut it in several spots. It was very pale blood, because her foot was wet, of course.

She stopped screaming, and turned green, and I thought she was going to faint, like Daisy did on the jungle day.

Oswald held her up as well as he could, but it really was one of the least agreeable moments in his life. For the raft was gone, and she couldn't have waded back anyway, and we didn't know how deep the moat might be in other places.

But Mrs. Pettigrew had not been idle. She is not a bad sort really.

Just as Oswald was wondering whether he could swim after the raft and get it back, a boat's nose shot out from under a dark archway a little further up under the house. It was the boathouse, and Albert's uncle had got the punt and took us back in it. When we had regained the dark arch where the boat lives we had to go up the cellar stairs. Dora had to be carried.

There was but little said to us that day. We were sent to bed—those who had not been on the raft the same as the others, for they owned up all right, and Albert's uncle is the soul of justice.

Next day but one was Saturday. Father gave us a talking to—with other things.

The worst, though, was when Dora couldn't get her shoe on, so they sent for the doctor, and Dora had to lie down for ever so long. It was indeed poor luck.

When the doctor had gone Alice said to me:

“It *is* hard lines, but Dora’s very jolly about it. Daisy’s been telling her about how we should all go to her with our little joys and sorrows and things, and about the sweet influence from a sick bed that can be felt all over the house, like in *What Katy Did*, and Dora said she hoped she might prove a blessing to us all while she’s laid up.”

Oswald said he hoped so, but he was not pleased. Because this sort of jaw was exactly the sort of thing he and Dicky didn’t want to have happen.

The thing we got it hottest for was those little tubs off the garden railings. They turned out to be butter-tubs that had been put out there “to sweeten.”

But as Denny said, “After the mud in that moat not all the perfumes of somewhere or other could make them fit to use for butter again.”

I own this was rather a bad business. Yet we did not do it to please ourselves, but because it was our duty. But that made no difference to our punishment when father came down. I have known this mistake occur before.