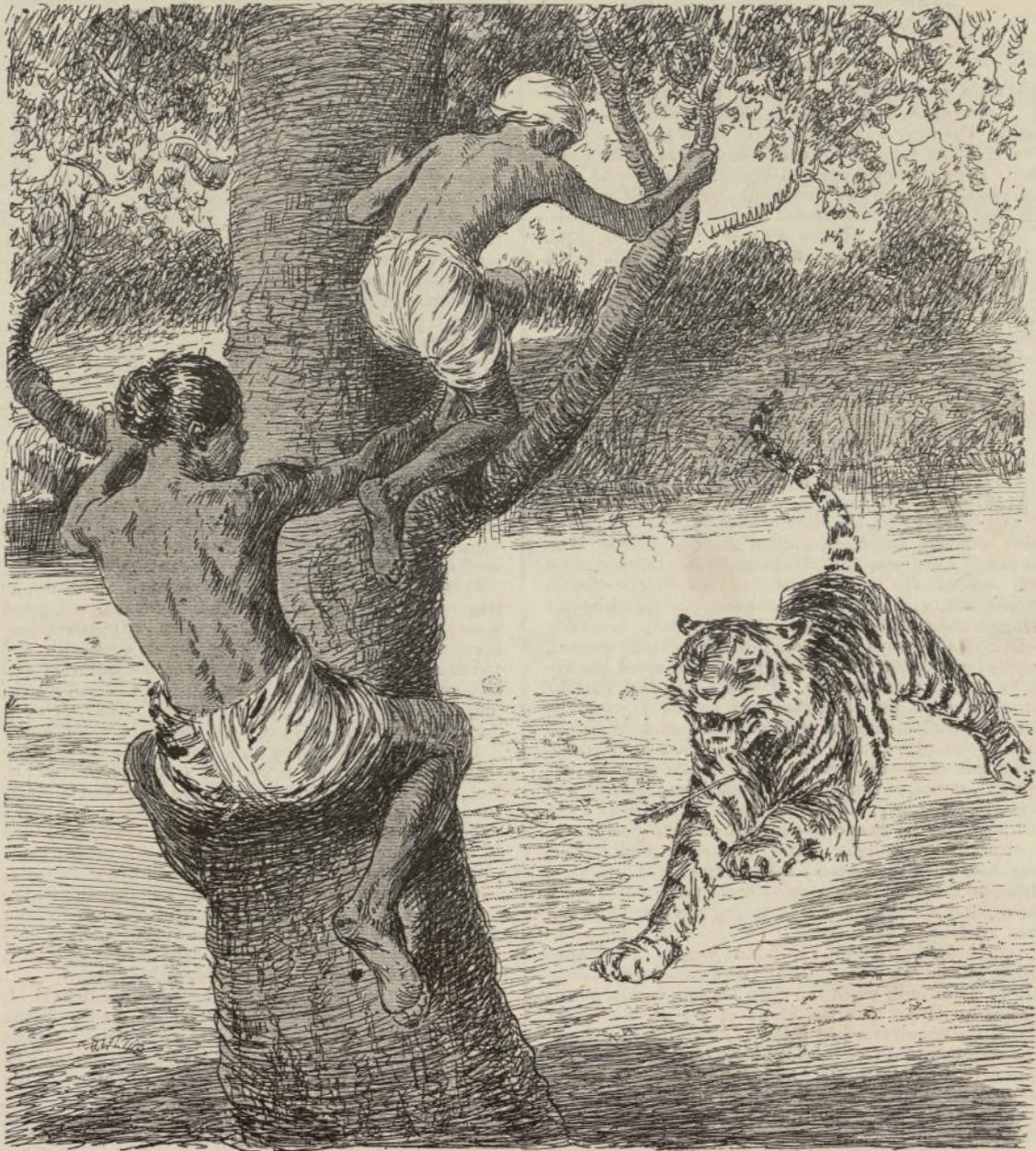




CHATTERBOX,

A PLACE OF REFUGE.

Ayuntamiento de Madrid



“Up the tree! Up! Up!”

I

CHINNA.

BY MRS. HOBART-HAMPDEN,
Author of 'The Secret Valley, etc., etc.'

(Continued from page 111.)

CHAPTER X.

FOR a moment Brian returned the stare, as a bird returns the stare of a cat it knows is about to spring on it. The tiger was scarcely fifty yards away; and, so powerful and huge he looked, it seemed as if he could easily cross that distance at a bound. And now he gave utterance to a loud and threatening growl, and lowered his head a little, and switched his tail from side to side.

And Brian heard Chinna whisper: 'Keep still, child, keep still! In a moment the sun sets. It needs but a little patience.'

The whisper seemed to break the spell that held Brian, and he, too, glanced quickly at the horizon, following Chinna's lead. The sun had almost disappeared; only a red rim showed, and then that red rim dipped. And, as it dipped, came the twang of a bowstring, and the swish of a winged arrow, cleaving the air. Straight and true the arrow sped to bury itself deep in the tiger's chest.

And now Chinna's hand was gripping Brian's shoulder, and now the little man was shouting: 'Up the tree! Up! The poison works but slowly. Lo! he comes! Up! Up!'

And, with a roar, the tiger came, covering the ground with amazing swiftness, despite the fact that still he limped. And from the village a wailing shriek arose and echoed the roar. And from every door heads looked out, and frightened, eager eyes watched the struggle between the hunter and the hunted.

Brian had always been proud of his climbing powers, but he had no idea he could climb as well or as quickly as he did at that moment. Perhaps the fact that he wore no shoes, and that, therefore, he could grasp the branches with his toes as well as with his hands, helped to some extent. But he felt he could have climbed the sheer side of a precipice, so urgent was the need that drove him on. And Chinna pushed and pulled and tugged at the boy, climbing himself as easily as a cat climbs. And the mango-tree branched low, happily, with a succession of boughs leading upwards. And thus it was that, when their enemy reached the foot of the tree, Brian and Chinna were already some twelve feet from the ground. The tiger came snarling to a standstill, and eyed his foes vindictively.

'Up higher! Up higher!' Chinna urged. 'He cannot climb, but he can spring.' And the words were scarcely out of his mouth when the tiger leapt upwards, and it seemed to Brian that the claws of the great forefeet grazed the tree-trunk just below his own toes. And he was sure he could feel the hot breath of the beast on the bare calves of his legs. And he climbed in a yet more rapid fashion until he was as high up the tree as he could possibly get. And then it was the sound of Chinna laughing which alone stopped him from climbing on towards the sky, and breaking the tree-top, and falling with it to the ground. But, somehow, that laugh was so gay and so careless that Brian's fears took flight suddenly, and he slid to a sitting position on a branch, clinging tightly to the tree-trunk. Beside him he found Chinna was perched, swinging his legs in careless ease.

'We are safe—we are safe,' Chinna chanted, laughing. 'And he, our enemy, must perish. Indeed, the spirit blessed the bow and sped the arrow. The victory is with us.' And then, at the top of his voice, he sang—

'O Lord of power,
 The deed is done
 As thou foretold,
 At set of sun
 The striped one was slain.'

But the tiger was by no means dead yet. Again he sprang; again and again, until it seemed as if the very roots of the mango-tree must be torn from the ground. And the great claws scored deep grooves in the bark, and Brian clutched Chinna in renewed alarm. But still the little man laughed and sang, shouting his triumph joyously in the very face of his furious foe. And he added new verses to the song, invented specially for the occasion, and each more insulting than the last.

The tiger still sprang from time to time, but gradually the force of those springs weakened. And, presently, he sprang no more, but sat growling at the foot of the tree. And he began to gnaw fiercely at the arrow, and to try and draw it forth with his teeth. But, so deeply was it embedded, he only succeeded in breaking it in two, and driving the point yet further in. And, at last, he rose somewhat unsteadily to his feet; and round and round in twisting circles he went, as though to keep still was impossible. And he seemed to forget all about his enemies in the tree, and gnawed at his own feet in his pain. And Chinna whispered to Brian: 'The poison works. Lo! the end is near. The poison works.'

Round and round the tiger went until, suddenly, he staggered, recovered himself again, turned, staggered again, and pitched forwards. And he lay outstretched, his limbs twitching violently, until gradually the twitching ceased, and only the tip of his tail rose and fell, and then that, too, was quiet. And Chinna, watching, called gleefully: 'Now all is over. The victory is ours. Now we will call the news and claim the reward.'

It was almost dark by this time; so dark that the tiger scarcely seemed more than a greyish-white blur. But Chinna sent a shout across the pool, and a shout from the villagers came in answer. And lights began to dance down the street from blazing torches, carried in men's hands. And, in a great crowd, people came pouring towards the mango-tree, very brave outwardly, but really ready to flee at a second's notice should the tiger prove to have the least breath of life left in him. And Chinna, well aware of this, growled in such realistic fashion that the villagers did turn and run for a moment, but returned, shamefaced, at his laugh.

'Approach, O timid ones!' he cried. 'Behold, I, Chinna, have slain your enemy for you.' And he began to descend towards the ground. He whispered to Brian to remain in the tree for the present, for Chinna was afraid the village people might try to tempt away the white boy who was so plainly a luck-bringer.

'Wait thou until the reward has been given me, and speak to none,' he whispered. And Brian was by no means sorry to remain for a little while longer safe above the ground. It seemed impossible that the tiger, so tremendously alive a few minutes before could already be quite dead. Brian felt as if a sudden jump, a sudden roar, must surely send all these presumptuous enemies flying.

But never again would the tiger put his foes to rout;

never again would he rule in insolent strength. Already his strong and supple limbs were stiffening, his fierce eyes glazing. And the villagers, led by Chinna, danced in a circle triumphantly round his body. They were almost mad with joy, for, for three days, the tiger had held them at his mercy, and they had nearly starved within their houses while he fed on the fattest of their flocks. And, all the while, they had known that, at any moment, he might choose to feed on man instead, and that, one by one, their lives might pay forfeit. And so they shouted and danced, and the children pulled the long striped tail, and made mock of the foe they had never dared to mock in his lifetime, until Brian, in a queer kind of way, was almost sorry for the tiger, and felt that it was really only Chinna who had just cause to triumph.

It seemed that this was Chinna's view of the matter also, for presently he stopped leading the dance, and signed to the merry-makers to stand still. And, in a somewhat contemptuous voice, he said: 'Now give me my reward, and I will return to my own place. Bring forth the axe and the silver, the kid and the hens, and let me depart in peace.'

(Continued on page 127.)

THE DAINTY DAFFODILLIES.

THE dainty daffodillies
Come with the Spring to town,
When blithe March winds blow keenly
O'er coppice, dale, and down;
In woodlands and in pastures,
Where fresh green grasses grow,
In silken yellow kirtles
The pretty blossoms blow.

And as the winds pipe shrilly,
They dance a measure gay,
They bend and bow and curtsy
Through all the live-long day;
And bright Spring sunbeams flicker
Upon the pastures green,
And make their silken dresses
Glow with a richer sheen.

The earliest bees that venture
To leave their Winter home
Rejoice to see the blossoms,
As through the fields they roam;
And village children straying
Beneath the budding trees,
Are glad when daffodillies
Dance lightly in the breeze.

MAUD E. SARGENT.

THE SWINGING GATE.

IT is the little things that count, and we all know the proverb about the 'stitch in time.' Here is an anecdote which well illustrates the truth of that saying.

At a certain country farm, a gate intended to enclose the cows and poultry was, owing to a broken latch, continually on the swing. Every time a person went out, it was swung open, and as it did not so readily close, much poultry was lost from time to time. No one would take the trouble to repair this gate, though it needed only the outlay of a very few pence and the labour of a few minutes to put the thing right.

At last came a day of dire disaster. A fine young pig escaped through the open gate, and all the family, as well as the cook, the milkmaid, and the gardener, turned out to hunt for him.

The gardener was the first to catch sight of the runaway, and in leaping a ditch in order to reach the animal, the poor man got a sprain which kept him in bed for a fortnight. The cook, on her return to the house, found the linen which she had hung in front of the fire to dry all ablaze. With difficulty she put out the flames, but not before the linen was completely ruined. The milkmaid, in her haste, had forgotten to tie up the cattle properly in the cow-house, and one of cows, having got loose, had broken the leg of a colt which was kept in the same shed. The burnt linen, and the enforced idleness of the gardener, represented a loss to the farmer of at least five pounds, while the colt was worth nearly double that sum. Here, then, was the loss in a few minutes of a lot of money—a quite preventable loss, entirely due to a very small neglect.

A YEAR IN A GARDEN.

IV.—APRIL.

I THINK the most delightful feature about the rock garden was the path across the 'Alips,' as Babe called them. The little clumps of thyme soon took firm root-hold, and during the summer they would be covered with their exquisite tiny purple flowers. Next spring the forget-me-nots edging the path would be almost the first flowers in the garden. As the bank sloped to the level ground, the little path came down too, and gradually ran into the wider gravel path. Later it would run, as Billy had planned, all round the edge of the pool. For the present it stopped at a boggy place where the children had planted some water soldiers. Here was a low stone seat, and under the seat a frog had already come to live. He must have been living in this damp part of the garden quite a long time, for he was very tame, and seemed to know the children perfectly well. During the warm days of April, when they brought their books and sat on the stone seat, he would come out and sit quite still, just behind their feet.

They always called April the bird month. There were several wrens' nests in the summer-house amongst the ivy, and every year at least one family of young ones was brought up, and came popping out of the small round hole of the warmly lined and beautifully made nest. In the second week of the month the children found a linnet's nest in a furze-bush on the common, with six blue, brown-spotted eggs in it. Already on the lawn young blackbirds and young song-thrushes were hopping about, and soon the thrushes would begin cracking snail-shells on stones, and trying to imitate their parent's cry—'Deal o' wet! Deal o' wet!'

One day, in a dark corner of the tool-shed near the window, Babe was delighted to discover two cocoons, about an inch long. They were dark-coloured, and seemed to be made of tiny hairs and silk, and the red chrysalids inside were easily seen. In triumph she carried them to Billy, who believed they belonged to white ermine moths. They placed them carefully in a small box, and the next half-holiday they employed in making a new home for them. When this was finished, it was a box eighteen inches square and one foot high.



"A Frog would come out and sit quite still."

There was a little glass door, and the sides contained strips of fine perforated zinc to admit air. This box was slightly different from the caterpillar boxes the children had made during the winter; these latter had little zinc-lined drawers filled with soil and moss, in which the grubs could bury themselves for their winter



A Wren's Nest.



"A Linnet's nest in a furze bush."

sleep. But of course the chrysalids needed nothing of that sort. Their next change would be into moths, and, when their wings were strong and dry, and when Billy



A Thrush Hunting.

had found out their name, they would be given their liberty, and would be allowed to fly away into the garden.



“Standing on the castle walls, sword in hand.”

A WOMAN-WARRIOR.

A WOMAN-WARRIOR, of whom very little would be known, had not a ballad been written during her life-time, was Mary Ambree, born in the

sixteenth century, who distinguished herself as a soldier and self-made captain.

‘Was not this a brave bonny lass, Mary Ambree?’ the ballad-maker asks at the close of almost every one of the twenty-two verses of his song; and if the history

that he gives us is to be relied upon, then indeed every one would agree with him.

In 1586 Mary Ambree, that she might not be parted from her lover, Sir John Major, joined the army as a common soldier, and marched unsuspected in the foremost battle-line to the siege of the City of Gaunt. Here her lover was killed, 'treacherously slain,' as the ballad says; but his death did not cause Mary to leave the ranks and return home. Instead, she vowed to revenge him, and clothing herself in a shirt of mail and a helmet, and taking her 'sword and target in hand,' she called for as many soldiers as would come and serve under her.

'A thousand and three'—as the ballad says, came to her call, rallied round her, and vowed to follow the brave woman-warrior wherever she might lead. Whether they knew who she was when they promised is hard to know, but it is certain that the enemy had no idea that the brave and valorous captain who led up her soldiers in battle-array was none other than a 'poor simple lass.' And it is little wonder that they did not guess, for her valour equalled any deeds of prowess that a seasoned warrior might have carried through.

She knew no fear, apparently, but led her men against numbers three times as great as their own; she must have been a stranger to weariness and fatigue since she thought nothing of fighting for seven hours at a stretch, filling the 'skies with the sound of her shot, and her enemies' bodies with bullets so hot!

Thus the old ballad-singer chants of her prowess. Then he tells of how a false gunner once tried to deceive her by stealing her powder and shot for his own interests. What did the woman-warrior do then? Neither mercy nor compassion did she feel, but 'straight with her keen weapon she slashed him in three!' It is plain that the offender did not get the better of his Captain, woman though she was!

Yet at last Mary Ambree was forced to retire; the enemy offered bribes, which some of her men were false enough to accept, and at first it seemed that her game was played, and that she must give herself up into their hands. Not so, Mary Ambree! Instead, she retired to a castle with her soldiers, and prepared for a siege; and even when her enemies outside prepared to batter down the walls she took her stand on the walls themselves, and cried to the rival captains to aim at her.

They called on her to surrender. 'Now say, English Captain,' they cried:

'What wouldst thou give

To ransom thyself, which else must not live?

Come, yield thyself quickly, or slain thou must be!'

Then came Mary Ambree's moment: standing on the tottering castle-walls, sword in hand, she answered them, and told them that she was no captain, but a woman, who had been seeking to revenge the death of her lover:

'No Knight, sirs, of England, nor Captain you see,

But a poor simple lass, called Mary Ambree!'

Very little of the rest of her life-story is known; only that she returned to England, respected by her enemies for her bravery and daring, and remembered with affection by the men she had led. To them, no doubt, we owe the spirited ballad that bears her name, and which was sung by soldiers on the march. It goes with a swing and spirit that would be hard to match in any of the marching songs of our day.

ETHEL TALBOT.

THE GHOSTIE-GANG.

(Concluded from page 107.)

III.

RAB found the chase more difficult than he had expected; the frightened little dog sped ahead through the faint dawn-light, and would not return for all the boy's calling.

'Nix! Nix!' he cried at last for the hundredth time.

The little creature—as the boy could see in the faint light—stopped, pricked up its ears, and then sped on again in the direction of the peat-bog.

'The beastie will come to hurt,' said Rab as he hastened after him, feeling anxiously that duty was calling him in two ways. At home, Moll must be still sitting guarding the door: here, ahead of him her pet scampered gaily into danger. 'Nix! Nix!' he called again.

The little creature, as if in answer to his fears, turned suddenly from the track that led to the bog, took the path leading to the moor, and was off again, while Rab hurried after, heaving a sigh of relief. 'Twill be easy to overtake him now,' he said, drawing his plaid closer, for the dawning was cold. 'Nix! Nix!'

But still the dog sped on.

'Moll herself would not like the way he's going,' laughed Rab, as he hurried after it. 'He will be passing Auld Janet's cottage, and it's well the lassie's not here to see!'

He stopped suddenly, for an unexpected sight met his eyes, and he gaped with surprise. A light seemed to come from the hut, and Nix stopped to sniff expectantly outside; and then—the dog disappeared within!

'Losh! I must be dreaming!' said Rab to himself. 'Sure, Auld Janet's up betimes if her door's ajar!' He softly crept up to the cottage and peered round the corner of the door.

By the light of the fire within he could see the old woman; close to the stove she stood, busy baking. Rab's eyes opened wide with amazement as he saw her turning scones; he almost forgot his quest—forgot that the little dog had disappeared into the house, until Auld Janet's words, as she turned suddenly to find Nix sniffing at her skirts, reminded him.

'Ah, ye ill-conditioned beast! I'll not have *this!*' she shouted. 'Off wi' ye!' The appearance of the little creature at this hour had plainly frightened her.

But Nix refused to go.

'Into the cupboard with ye, then!' shouted the old woman. She flung a crust towards the wall-cupboard, and Nix, with excitement, ran for the prize; then with a thrust the old woman shut the door and imprisoned him. 'He's not canny!' she kept repeating, as Rab could hear. 'I'm afraid to harm him, but I'll shut him up!'

By this time Rab himself was just as excited as a boy could be. Why was Auld Janet cooking scones at this early hour? It could not be much after two o'clock, and surely no time for baking! 'It must be as folk say,' he said to himself; 'she is beyond herself! But what will she do with them all?'

For a rapidly growing pile of scones stood beside her; Rab stared with amazement. It was not until a sad whining and scratching began inside the cupboard that he thought of Nix again.

'Tis a strange turn that things have taken,' he

thought to himself; 'but I must, nevertheless, rescue the wee dog, and that quickly,' he added to himself, remembering that little Moll was probably still watching on the stair.

But somehow or other he did not want to knock on the door and ask for Nix. He was growing more and more sure that Janet was 'not canny'; little Moll's belief that she must be a witch recurred to him, and, though he was too sensible a boy to believe *that*, he had begun to have a pretty shrewd idea that something strange was brewing in the little cottage on the moor.

But how to find out? Just as he was thinking over a possible way, there came an opportunity. Auld Janet left her scones, and, turning her back, bent over a stew that was simmering on the fire. 'She's deaf as a post!' said Rab, and was in at the cottage door and inside the cupboard with Nix, the dog, before the old woman had returned to her baking. 'Now, my wee beastie!—he hugged Nix close to him—'rest there snug and warm, whilst I watch and see!'

The little dog snuggled down; he was well accustomed to sleeping in Moll's arms, and he ceased whining, licked Rab's face, and lay quiet. Rab lay still, too, and listened hard.

And as he listened he heard sounds—muffled sounds of voices. He raised himself on his elbow and peered through the crack of the half-open door, wondering where could the noises come from. Auld Janet was still baking, and yet the sound of voices went on. There was no room above in this tiny crofter's hut; there could be no room below, for it was built on the very side of the moor. And yet the droning sound of voices—men's voices—continued. What could it mean?

Rab's excitement rose; he was sure he must be on the verge of discovering some mystery; could it be—he held his breath—the Ghostie-gang! His blood froze at the thought of them, but he lay still, though his heart pounded with excitement. Then, just as his wonderings reached their height, a strange thing happened.

Auld Janet came close to the kist door; lifted cautiously a large stone. 'Are you awake?' she whispered: and it seemed to Rab, in his amazement, that she let down a pile of smoking scones into the earth below!

IV.

'AYE, Laddie,' said Farmer Robertson, 'tell us the tale again. 'Twill bear the telling, aye, from the first to last!'

'Yes, Cousin Rab, repeat it,' said little Moll, clasping Nix to her heart.

Rab's mother said nothing. It was the following evening, and though the events of that day had been wonderful past belief, she could think of nothing but the fact that her laddie had been through dreadful danger, and was at last here in the house again safe and sound. She busied herself over the supper things as Rab told his tale.

'Twas beyond belief!' he said excitedly; 'twas the sounds below that set me wondering—deep sounds as of men's voices, grim and harsh; and then, when Auld Janet came close,' continued Rab with his eyes flashing, 'with her heap of smoking scones, I fairly could not believe my eyes to see her. She lifts up the stone, a mighty big one, and I doubt one of the gang helped her from below; then she lets down the stuff, fairly into the moor!'

'What a wicked woman!' said little Moll, vehemently, clasping her dog.

'Hush!' said her aunt. 'Laddie, 'tis an awfu' tale. The Ghostie-gang hid beneath Auld Janet's hoose. I canna—'

'Twas from that minute,' went on Rab, excitedly, 'that I guessed the truth. 'Tis the Ghostie-gang, and no mistake, I thought, and I lay and listened. I noted that the sounds grew louder when the stone was removed, for the auld body was ganging to and fro with scones. I could hear well, then, that there were men below. Aye, I heard them use right evil words, and—'

'Oh, tell us, Cousin, how you got away with this rascal of a dog!' burst in Moll.

'Twas later. Auld Janet, being wearied with baking, and eager to sleep, had started a-snoring in the ingle-nook; I gripped wee Nixie and ran—I knew that were I to be found by the gang——' Rab broke off as his mother gave a half-groan.

'Ah, laddie,' she said, 'you have much to be glad for——'

'And I knew, too, that I must go fetch——' began Rab again.

'Aye,' said Farmer Robertson, breaking in, 'the laddie speaks sense. When he came running and shouting to the homestead I made sure he was demented. But on hearing all he had to tell——'

'It was fine!' broke in Rab. 'They got together twenty men, sturdy farmers from the countryside, Mother, and the robbers were smoked out! Ten of them—and the ruffians! Oh, never before——'

'Oh, Rabbie, lad,' said his mother, clasping her hands, 'may they have mercy! 'Twas an awful, awful case!'

'Twas justice they needed, mistress!' said the farmer, gravely, 'and justice they will have. Fine they'd settled a hiding-place beneath Auld Janet's hut: scoop'd out, if you'd believe it, mistress, is a cave, the like of which I've never seen before. Rounded it is, like the moon at her first quarter, in its shape, and over sixty feet in length. Tall, too, mistress, that a man may stand upright there. Aye, the ruffians o' the Ghostie-gang had a hiding-place indeed!'

'And they came and went beneath the big stone,' broke in Rab; 'and they was smoked out one after another! Oh!——'

'But Auld Janet, sure the auld body was afraid to disobey them,' said his mother; 'twould not be her blame!'

'Ah, methinks 'twas an evil woman,' said Farmer Robertson, quietly; 'and justice must be done. Mayhap she will be leniently dealt with, but—'tis sure that never will she return to her cottage again.'

'I couldn't help thinking of wee Moll sitting guarding the door all the while I was in the kist,' said Rab.

'And there I found her, poor maizie,' said Moll's aunt, affectionately, 'when I rose in the morn for the milking, fair stiff with cold, but still guarding the door!'

'Sure, 'twas my foolish fault that led Cousin Rab to danger,' said little Moll. 'Twas but little that I did. Ah, she tapped Nix gently with her finger, 'twas a naughty dog, to bring Cousin Rab to danger!'

'Methinks we owe much to Nix!' laughed Rab: 'he aye seemed to ha' an uncanny instinct for Janet. 'Twas he, in truth, that found the hiding-place of the Ghostie-gang!'

E. TALBOT.



“‘Into the cupboard with ye, then!’”