

THE KITCHEN BALL.

The ground was white with drifting snow,
 Beneath the cloudy sky,
 And cold and chill, with bitter blast,
 The wintry wind swept by.

Within the farm house, quaint and old,
 The kitchen fire burned low,
 And, from the open chimney shown,
 With warm and fitful glow.

The kettle sat in mild content
 Upon the hearth that night,
 And, suddenly, in gleeful way,
 It sang with all its might.

When louder shrieked the wind without,
 The kettle chimed within,
 Till through the room were ringing sounds
 Of such a merry din,

That all the shining little sparks,
 In eager, restless play,
 Went dancing, dancing in the air,
 With gleam and twinkle gay.

And quickly flames went darting up
 The chimney, wide and deep,
 Still higher, higher up they flew
 With wild and joyous leap.

Across the smooth, long, yellow floor
 The flying shadows sped;
 Upon the ceiling, o'er the wall,
 The twilight dance they led.

They sprang from out the corners dim,
 They darted swiftly round,
 And, lightly flitting to and fro,
 In gliding chase they wound.

They danced around the sleeping puss,
 Who, curled up in a chair,
 Ne'er dreamed that merry shadows sly
 Were joined in frolic there.

But wide awake, upon its shelf,
 The clock stood in its place
 And, marking time with steady ticks,
 Looked down with cheerful face.

But not a sound of softest tread
 Within the room was heard,
 No voices rang in mirthful laugh
 Or breathed in whispered word.

O, long the tireless dancers flew,
 The flames and shadows tall;
 So still they were that no one knew
 They led the kitchen ball.

—MARY FRENCH MORTON.

IS CHILDHOOD THE HAPPIEST TIME OF LIFE?

(A. T. Quiller-Couch, in March Pall Mall Magazine.)

I wish those whose business it is to arrange the next Census would insert a question "Were you happier as a child or as a grown-up?" I distrust the vulgar and easy assumption that childhood is the happiest stage of life. It ought to be, perhaps; but on the question of fact I find the friends I ask by no means unanimous, and it seems to me that the balance of honest opinion would be worth taking. We are misled by middle-aged sentimentality; by the *I remember, I remember* business, and that regret for a lost innocence which survives as a last sign of grace in the most materially minded. But innocence and happiness, though they subscribe to each other's support—earn a precarious livelihood, so to speak, by taking in each other's washing—are by no means convertible terms. Distinguished moralists have a bad habit of confusing them. The wise John Earle, for example, assures us that the child "is purely happy because he

knows no evil, nor hath made means by sin to be acquainted with misery." I fancy the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children could say something to that. "His father hath writ him as his own little story, wherein he reads those days of his life that he cannot remember, and sighs to see what innocence he hath outlived." How nice of papa! And what a blessing, perhaps, that he cannot remember! And how fond we all are of innocence—in other people! "Be innocent, my child, and you will be happy." "But, father dear, I am innocent: only by the merest accident I knocked over a vase, and you clouted me upon the head for it." "It will teach you to be more careful next time." "No doubt: but the point is that, though innocent, I am not happy." "Bosh, my son: you must be. Is it not in your copy-book? Take it down, and inscribe this in your best handwriting—*The Child who Begins by knocking over a Vase may go on to Upset a Syllogism.*"

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