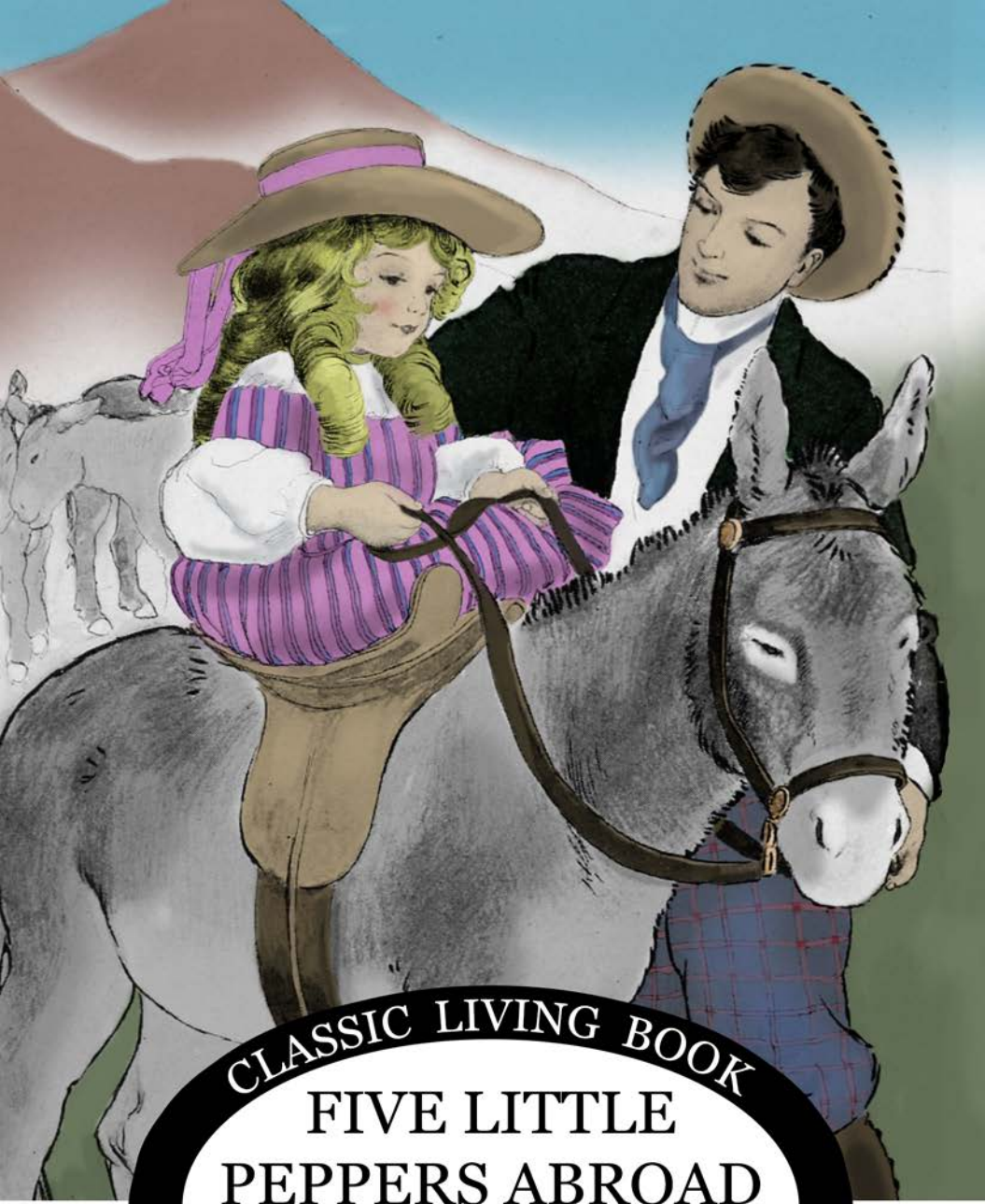

CLASSIC LIVING BOOK

FIVE LITTLE PEPPERS ABROAD

Margaret Sidney

COMPLETE AND UNABRIDGED

Five Little Peppers Abroad

MARGARET SIDNEY

CONTENTS

Chapter III

PHRONSIE GOES VISITING

"Grandpapa," said Phronsie, softly, as she clung to his hand, after they had made the descent to the lower deck, "I think the littlest one can eat some of the fruit, don't you?" she asked anxiously.

"Never you fear," assented old Mr. King, "that child that I saw yesterday can compass anything in the shape of food. Why, it had its mouth full of teeth, Phronsie; it was impossible not to see them when it roared."

"I am so glad its teeth are there," said Phronsie, with a sigh of satisfaction, as she regarded her basket of fruit, "because if it hadn't any, we couldn't give it these nice pears, Grandpapa."

"Well, here we are," said Mr. King, holding her hand tightly. "Bless me—are those your toes, young man?" this to a big chubby-faced boy, whose fat legs lay across the space as he sprawled on the deck; "just draw them in a bit, will you?—there. Well, now, Phronsie, this way. Here's the party, I believe," and he led her over to the other side, where a knot of steerage passengers were huddled together. In the midst sat a woman, chubby faced, and big and square, holding a baby. She had a big red shawl wrapped around her, in the folds of which snuggled the baby, who was contentedly chewing one end of it, while his mother had her eyes on the rest of her offspring, of which there seemed a good many. When the baby saw Phronsie, he stopped chewing the old shawl and grinned, showing all the teeth of which Mr. King had spoken. The other children, tow headed and also chubby, looked at the basket hanging on Phronsie's arm, and also grinned.

"There is the baby!" exclaimed Phronsie, in delight, pulling Grandpapa's hand gently. "Oh, Grandpapa, there he is."

"That's very evident," said the old gentleman. "Bless me!" addressing the woman, "how many children have you, pray tell?"

"Nine," she said. Then she twitched the jacket of one of them, and the pinafore of another, to have them mind their manners, while the baby kicked and crowed and gurgled, seeming to be all teeth.

"I have brought you some fruit," said Phronsie, holding out her basket, whereat all the tow headed group except the baby crowded each

other dreadfully to see all there was in it. "I'm sorry the flowers are gone, so I couldn't bring any to-day. May the baby have this?" holding out a pear by the stem.

The baby settled that question by lunging forward and seizing the pear with two fat hands, when he immediately sank into the depths of the old shawl again, all his teeth quite busy at work. Phronsie set down her basket on the deck, and the rest of the brood emptied it to their own satisfaction. Their mother's stolid face lighted up with a broad smile that showed all her teeth, and very white and even they were.

"Grandpapa," said Phronsie, turning to him and clasping her hands, "if I only might hold that baby just one little bit of a minute," she begged, keenly excited.

"Oh, Phronsie, he's too big," expostulated Mr. King, in dismay.

"I can hold him just as easy, Grandpapa dear," said Phronsie, her lips drooping mournfully. "See." And she sat down on a big coil of rope near by and smoothed out her brown gown. "Please, Grandpapa dear."

"He'll cry," said Mr. King, quickly. "Oh, no, Phronsie, it wouldn't do to take him away from his mother. You see it would be dreadful to set that child to roaring—very dreadful indeed." Yet he hung over her in distress at the drooping little face.

"He won't cry." The mother's stolid face lighted up a moment. "And if the little lady wants to hold him, he'll sit there."

"May I, Grandpapa?" cried Phronsie, her red lips curling into a happy smile. "Oh, please say I may, Grandpapa dear," clasping her hands.

"The family seems unusually clean," observed Mr. King to himself. "And the doctor says there's no sickness on board, and it's a very different lot of steerage folks going this way from coming out, all of which I've settled before coming down here," he reflected. "Well, Phronsie—yes—I see no reason why you may not hold the baby if you want to." And before the words were hardly out of his mouth, the chubby-faced woman had set the fat baby in the middle of the brown gown smoothed out to receive him. He clung to his pear with both hands and ate away with great satisfaction, regardless of his new resting-place.

"Just come here!" Mrs. Griswold, in immaculately fitting garments, evidently made up freshly for steamer use, beckoned with a hasty hand to her husband. "It's worth getting up to see." He flung down his novel and tumbled out of his steamer chair. "Look down there!"

"*Whew!*" whistled Mr. Griswold; "that *is* a sight!"

HE CLUNG TO HIS PEAR WITH BOTH HANDS AND ATE AWAY WITH GREAT SATISFACTION.

"And that is the great Horatio King!" exclaimed Mrs. Griswold under her breath; "down there in that dirty steerage—and look at that child—Reginald, did you ever see such a sight in your life?"

"On my honour, I never have," declared Mr. Griswold, solemnly, and wanting to whistle again.

"Sh!—don't speak so loud," warned Mrs. Griswold, who was doing most of the talking herself. And plucking his sleeve, she emphasised every word with fearful distinctness close to his ear. "She's got a dirty steerage baby in her lap, and Mr. King is laughing. Well, I never! O dear me, here come the young people!"

Polly and Jasper came on a brisk trot up the deck length. "Fifteen times around make a mile, don't they, Jasper?" she cried.

"I believe they do," said Jasper, "but it isn't like home miles, is it, Polly?"—laughing gaily—"or dear old Badgertown?"

"I should think not," replied Polly, with a little pang at her heart whenever Badgertown was mentioned. "We used to run around the little brown house, and see how many times we could do it without stopping."

"And how many did you, Polly?" asked Jasper,—"the largest number, I mean."

"Oh, I don't know," said Polly, with a little laugh; "Joel beat us always, I remember that."

"Yes, Joe would get over the ground, you may be sure," said Jasper, "if anybody could."

Polly's laugh suddenly died away and her face fell. "Jasper, you don't know," she said, "how I do want to see those boys."

"I know," said Jasper, sympathisingly, "but you'll get a letter, you know, most as soon as we reach port, for they were going to mail it before we left."

"And I have one every day in my mail-bag," said Polly, "but I want to *see* them so, Jasper, I don't know what to do." She went up to the rail at a remove from the Griswolds and leaned over it.

"Polly," said Jasper, taking her hand, "you know your mother will feel dreadfully if she knows you are worrying about it."

"I know it," said Polly, bravely, raising her head; "and I won't—why Jasper Elyot King!" for then she saw Grandpapa and Phronsie and the steerage baby.

Jasper gave a halloo, and waved his hand, and Polly danced up and down and called, and waved her hands too. And Phronsie gave a little

crow of delight. "See, Grandpapa, there they are; I want Polly—and Jasper, too." And old Mr. King whirled around. "O dear me! Come down, both of you," which command it did not take them long to obey.

"Well, I never did in all my life," ejaculated Mrs. Griswold, "see anything like that. Now if some people"—she didn't say "we"—"should do anything like that, 'twould be dreadfully erratic and queer. But those Kings can do anything," she added, with venom.

"It's pretty much so," assented Mr. Griswold, giving a lazy shake. "Well, I'm going back to my chair if you've got through with me, Louisa." And he sauntered off.

"Don't go, Reginald," begged his wife; "I haven't got a soul to talk to."

"Oh, well, you can talk to yourself," said her husband, "any woman can." But he paused a moment.

"Haven't those Pepper children got a good berth?" exclaimed Mrs. Griswold, unable to keep her eyes off from the small group below. "And their Mother Pepper, or Fisher, or whatever her name is—I declare it's just like a novel, the way I heard the story from Mrs. Vanderburgh about it all."

"And I wish you'd let me get back to my book, Louisa," exclaimed Mr. Griswold, tartly, at the mention of the word "novel," beginning to look longingly at his deserted steamer chair, "for it's precious little time I get to read on shore. Seems as if I might have a little peace at sea."

"Do go back and read, then," said his wife, impatiently; "that's just like a man,—he can't talk of anything but business, or he must have his nose in a book."

"We men want to talk sense," growled her husband, turning off. But Mrs. Griswold was engrossed in her survey of Mr. King and the doings of his party, and either didn't hear or didn't care what was remarked outside of that interest.

Tom Selwyn just then ran up against some one as clumsily as ever. It proved to be the ship's doctor, who surveyed him coldly and passed on. Tom gave a start and swallowed hard, then plunged after him. "Oh, I say."

"What is it?" asked Dr. Jones, pausing.

"Can I—I'd like—to see my Grandfather, don't you know?"

Dr. Jones scanned him coolly from top to toe. Tom took it without wincing, but inwardly he felt as if he must shake to pieces.

"If you can so conduct yourself that your Grandfather will not be excited," at last said the doctor,—what an age it seemed to Tom,—"I see no reason why you shouldn't see your Grandfather, and go back to your

state-room. But let me tell you, young man, it was a pretty close shave for him the other day. Had he slipped away, you'd have had that on your conscience that would have lasted you for many a day." With this, and a parting keen glance, he turned on his heel and strode off.

Tom gave a great gasp, clenched his big hands tightly together, took a long look at the wide expanse of water, then disappeared within.

In about half an hour, the steerage baby having gone to sleep in Phronsie's arms, the brothers and sisters, finding, after the closest inspection, nothing more to eat in the basket, gathered around the centre of attraction in a small bunch.

"I hope they won't wake up the baby," said Phronsie, in gentle alarm.

"Never you fear," said old Mr. King, quite comfortable now in the camp-chair one of the sailors had brought in response to a request from Jasper; "that child knows very well by this time, I should imagine, what noise is."

But after a little, the edge of their curiosity having been worn off, the small group began to get restive, and to clamour and pull at their mother for want of something better to do.

"O dear me!" said Phronsie, in distress.

"Dear, dear!" echoed Polly, vainly trying to induce the child next to the baby to get into her lap; "something must be done. Oh, don't you want to hear about a funny cat, children? I'm going to tell them about Grandma Bascom's, Jasper," she said, seeing the piteous look in Phronsie's eyes.

"Yes, we do," said one of the boys, as spokesman, and he solemnly bobbed his tow head, whereat all the children then bobbed theirs.

"Sit down, then," said Polly, socially making way for them, "all of you in a circle, and I'll tell you of that very funny cat." So the whole bunch of tow-headed children sat down in a ring, and solemnly folded their hands in their laps. Jasper threw himself down where he could edge himself in. Old Mr. King leaned back and surveyed them with great satisfaction. So Polly launched out in her gayest mood, and the big blue eyes in the round faces before her widened, and the mouths flew open, showing the white teeth; and the stolid mother leaned forward, and her eyes and mouth looked just like those of her children, only they were bigger; and at last Polly drew a long breath and wound up with a flourish, "And that's all."

"Tell another," said one of the round-eyed, open-mouthed children, without moving a muscle. All the rest sat perfectly still.

"O dear me," said Polly, with a little laugh, "that was such a good long one, you can't want another."

"I think you've gotten yourself into business, Polly," said Jasper, with a laugh. "Hadn't we better go?"

Polly gave a quick glance at Phronsie. "Phronsie dear," she said, "let us go up to our deck now, dear. Shall we?"

"Oh, no, Polly, please don't go yet," begged Phronsie, in alarm, and patting the baby softly with a gentle little hand. Polly looked off at Grandpapa. He was placidly surveying the water, his eyes occasionally roving over the novel and interesting sights around. On the other side of the deck a returning immigrant was bringing out a jew's-harp, and two or three of his fellow-passengers were preparing to pitch quoits. Old Mr. King was actually smiling at it all. Polly hadn't seen him so contented since they sailed.

"I guess I'll tell another one, Jasper," she said. "Oh, about a dog, you wanted, did you?" nodding at the biggest boy.

"Yes," said the boy, bobbing his tow head, "I did;" and he unfolded and folded his hands back again, then waited patiently.

So Polly flew off on a gay little story about a dog that bade fair to rival Grandma Bascom's cat for cleverness. He belonged to Mr. Atkins who kept store in Badgertown, and the Pepper children used to see a good deal of him, when they took home the sacks and coats that Mamsie sewed for the storekeeper. And in the midst of the story, when the stolid steerage children were actually laughing over the antics of that remarkable dog, Jasper glanced up toward the promenade deck, took a long look, and started to his feet. "Why, Polly Pepper, see!" He pointed upward. There, on the curve, were old Mr. Selwyn and Tom walking arm in arm.

Chapter IV

STEAMER LIFE

And after that, it was "My grandson, Thomas," on all occasions, the old gentleman introducing the boy to the right and to the left, as he paraded the deck, his old arm within the younger one. And the little, sharp black eyes snapped proudly and the white head was held up, as he laughed and chattered away sociably to the passengers and the ship's crew, at every good opportunity.

"Yes, my grandson, Thomas, is going back to school. We've been running about in your country a bit, and the boy's mother went home first with the other children—" Polly heard him say as the two paused in front of her steamer chair.

"Indeed!" ejaculated Mrs. Vanderburgh, as he addressed her, and raising her eyebrows with a supercilious glance for his plain, unprepossessing appearance. "Yes, Madam, and glad shall I be to set my foot on Old England again Hey, Tom, my boy, don't you say so?"

Tom looked off over the sea, but did not speak.

Neither did Mrs. Vanderburgh answer, but turned her face away in disdain that was very plainly marked.

"Home is the best place, Madam," declared old Mr. Selwyn emphatically. "Well, Old England is our home, and nothing will induce me to leave it again, I can assure you."

Again Mrs. Vanderburgh did not reply, but looked him up and down in cold silence. Old Mr. Selwyn, not appearing to notice, chattered on. At last she deliberately turned her back on him.

"Isn't he common and horrid?" whispered Fanny Vanderburgh, in the steamer chair next to Polly, thrusting her face in between her and her book. And she gave a little giggle.

"Hush!" said Polly, warningly, "he will hear you."

"Nonsense—it's impossible; he is rattling on so; and do look at Mamma's face!"

He didn't hear, but Tom did; and he flashed a glance—dark and wrathful—over at the two girls, and started forward, abruptly pulling his Grandfather along.

"O dear me!" exclaimed Polly, in distress, dropping her book in her lap; "now he *has* heard."

"Oh, that dreadful boy," said Fanny, carelessly, stretching out in her steamer chair comfortably; "well, who cares? he's worse than his Grandfather."

"Yes, he has heard," repeated Polly, sorrowfully looking after the two, Tom still propelling the old gentleman along the deck at a lively rate; "now, what shall we do?"

"It isn't of the least consequence if he has heard," reiterated Fanny, "and Mamma has been frightfully bored, I know. Do tell us, Mamma," she called.

Mrs. Vanderburgh turned away from the rail, where she had paused in her constitutional when addressed by the old gentleman, and came up to the girls.

"Do sit down, Mamma, in your steamer chair," begged Fanny; "I'll tuck you up in your rug." And she jumped lightly out of her own chair. "There, that's nice," as Mrs. Vanderburgh sank gracefully down, and Fanny patted and pulled the rug into shape. "Now tell us, wasn't he the most horrible old bore?"

As she cuddled back into her own nest, Mrs. Vanderburgh laughed in a very high-bred manner. "He was very amusing," she said.

"Amusing! I should say so!" cried Fanny. "I suppose he would have told you all his family history if he had stayed. O dear me, he is such a common, odious old person."

Polly twisted uneasily under her rug.

Mrs. Vanderburgh glanced into the steamer chair on the other side. It had several books on top of the rug. "I don't believe he can take that seat," she said; "still, Fanny, I think it would be well for you to change into it, for that old man may take it into his head, when he makes the turn of the deck, to drop into it and give us the whole of his family history."

"Horrors!" ejaculated Fanny, hopping out of her chair again. "I'll make sure that he doesn't. And yet I did so want to sit next to Polly Pepper," she mourned, ensconcing herself under the neighbouring rug, and putting the books on the floor by her side.

"Don't do that; give them to me," said her mother; "I'll put them in your chair unless Miss Polly will take that place, only I don't like to disturb you, dear," she said with a sweet smile at Polly.

"Why, that would make matters' worse, Mamma," said Fanny. "Don't

you see, then, that old bore would put himself into Polly's chair, for he likes her, anyway. Do leave it as it is."

So Mrs. Vanderburgh smiled again. "I don't know but that you are right," she said, and leaned back her head restfully. "Dear me, yes, he *is* amusing."

"They are terribly common people," said Fanny, her aristocratic nose well in the air, "aren't they, Mamma? And did you ever see such a clumsy thing as that dreadful boy, and such big hands and feet?" She held up her own hands as she spoke, and played with her rings, and let the jingling bracelets run up and down her wrists.

"Fanny, how often must I tell you to wear gloves on shipboard?" said her mother, in a tone of reproof. "Nothing spoils the hands so much as a trip at sea. They won't get over it all summer; they're coarsened already," and she cast an alarmed glance at the long, slender fingers.

"I'm so tired of gloves, Mamma." Fanny gave a restful yawn. "Polly Pepper doesn't wear them," she cried triumphantly, peering past her mother to point to Polly's hands.

Mrs. Vanderburgh hesitated. It wouldn't do to say anything that would reflect against the Peppers—manners, or customs, or bringing up generally. So she leaned over and touched Polly's fingers with her own gloved ones.

"You don't wear gloves, do you, my dear?" she said, in gentle surprise, quite as if the idea had just struck her for the first time.

"No, Mrs. Vanderburgh, I don't," said Polly, "at least not on shipboard, unless it is cold."

"There, now, Mamma," laughed Fanny, in a pleased way; "you'll stop teasing me about wearing them, I'm sure."

Mrs. Vanderburgh turned and surveyed her daughter; but she didn't smile, and Fanny thought it as well to begin again on the old topic.

"They're awfully common people, aren't they, Mamma,—those Selwyns?"

"They are, indeed," replied Mrs. Vanderburgh, "quite commonplace, and exceedingly tiresome; be sure and not speak to them, Fanny."

"Trust me for that," said Fanny, with a wise little nod. "The old man stopped me and asked me something this morning, as I was coming out of the dining room, after breakfast, but I pretended I didn't hear, and I skipped upstairs and almost fell on my nose."

"You were fortunate to escape," said her mother, with a little laugh.

"Well, let us drop the subject and talk of something else much more important. Polly, my dear." She turned again and surveyed the young girl at her side. "You are coming home this autumn, aren't you?"

"Oh, no," said Polly, "Grandpapa expects to stay over in Europe a year."

"Is that so?" said Mrs. Vanderburgh, and her face fell; "I regret it exceedingly, for I should be glad if you would visit Fanny this winter in New York."

"Thank you; but I couldn't anyway," said Polly. Then the colour flew up to her cheek. "I mean I am in school, you know, Mrs. Vanderburgh, but I thank you, and it is so good of you to want me," she added, hurriedly, feeling that she hadn't said the right thing at all.

"I do want you very much, my dear child," said Mrs. Vanderburgh, "and I am very sorry you are to remain abroad over the winter, for your Grandfather would be persuaded, I feel quite sure, to have you leave school for a while, and come to us for a visit."

"Oh, no, he wouldn't," cried Polly, quickly. "I beg pardon, Mrs. Vanderburgh, but I never leave school for anything unless I am sick, and I am almost never sick."

"Well, then, you could come for the Christmas holidays," said Mrs. Vanderburgh, with ladylike obstinacy like one accustomed to carrying her point.

"The Christmas holidays!" exclaimed Polly, starting forward in her chair. "Oh, I wouldn't leave home for anything, then, Mrs. Vanderburgh. Why, we have the most beautiful times, and we are all together—the boys come home from school—and it's just too lovely for anything!" She clasped her hands and sighed—oh, if she could but see Ben and Joel and David but once!

Mrs. Vanderburgh was a very tall woman, and she gazed down into the radiant face, without speaking; Polly was looking off over the sea, and the colour came and went on her cheek.

"We would soon get her out of all such notions, if we once had her with us, wouldn't we, Mamma?" said Fanny, in a low tone close to her mother's ear.

Mrs. Vanderburgh gave her a warning pinch, but Polly's brown eyes were fastened on the distant horizon, and she hadn't heard a word.

"Well, we'll arrange it sometime," said Fanny's mother, breaking the silence; "so you must remember, Polly dear, that you are engaged to us for a good long visit when you do come home."

"I will tell Grandpapa that you asked me," said Polly, bringing her eyes back with a sigh to look into Mrs. Vanderburgh's face.

"Oh, he will fall into the plan quite readily, I think," said Mrs. Vanderburgh, lightly. "You know we are all very old friends—that is, the families are—Mr. Vanderburgh's father and Mr. King were very intimate. Perhaps you don't know, Polly,"—and Fanny's mamma drew herself up to her extreme height; it was impossible for her to loll back in her chair when talking of her family,—"that we are related to the Earl of Cavendish who owns the old estate in England, and we go back to William the Conqueror; that is, Fanny does on her father's side."

Fanny thereupon came up out of her chair depths to sit quite straight and gaze with importance at Polly's face. But Polly was still thinking of the boys, and she said nothing.

"And my family is just as important," said Mrs. Vanderburgh, and she smiled in great satisfaction. "Really, we could make things very pleasant for you, my child; our set is so exclusive, you could not possibly meet any one but the very best people. Oh, here is your mother." She smiled enchantingly up at Mrs. Fisher, and held out her hand. "Do come and sit here with us, my dear Mrs. Fisher," she begged, "then we shall be a delightful group, we two mothers and our daughters."

"Thank you, Mrs. Vanderburgh." Mrs. Fisher smiled, but she didn't offer to take the steamer chair. "I have come after Polly."

"Mamsie, what is it? I'll come," said Polly, tumbling out of her steamer chair in a twinkling.

"O dear me!" exclaimed Mrs. Vanderburgh, in regret, "don't take Polly away, I do implore you, my dear Mrs. Fisher—I am *so* fond of her."

"I must," said Mother Fisher, smiling again, her hand now in Polly's, and before any more remonstrances were made, they were off.

"Oh, Mamsie!" breathed Polly, hanging to the dear hand, "I am so glad you came, and took me away."

"Polly," said Mother Fisher, suddenly, "Grandpapa asked me to find you; he thinks you could cheer old Mr. Selwyn up a bit, perhaps, with backgammon. I'm afraid Tom has been behaving badly again."

"Oh, Mamsie!" exclaimed Polly, in dismay. And then the story came out.

"Grandpapa," said Phronsie, pulling at his hand gently, as they walked slowly up and down the deck, "does your head ache?" And she peered anxiously up into his face.

"No, child—that is, not much," said old Mr. King, trying to smooth

his brows out. He was thinking—for it kept obtruding at all times and seasons—of that dreadful scrap of paper that Cousin Eunice had imposed upon him at the last minute before they sailed, announcing that she had had her way, and would at last compel acceptance of such a gift as she chose to make to Phronsie Pepper.

"If it aches at all," said Phronsie, decidedly, "I wish you would let me rub it for you, Grandpapa. I do, truly."

"Well, it doesn't," said Grandpapa; "that is it won't, now that I have you with me. I was thinking of something unpleasant, Phronsie, and then, to tell you the truth, that old Mr. Selwyn tires me to death. I can't talk to him, and his grandson is a cad."

"What is a cad?" asked Phronsie, wonderingly.

"Oh, well, a boy who isn't nice," said Mr. King, carelessly.

"Grandpapa, why isn't that boy nice to that poor old man?" asked Phronsie, a grieved look coming into her blue eyes.

"Goodness me, child, you ask me too much," said Mr. King, quickly; "oh, a variety of reasons. Well, we must take things as we find them, and do what we can to help matters along; but it seems a hopeless case,—things were in better shape; and now they seem all tangled up again, thanks to that boy."

"Grandpapa," said Phronsie, earnestly, "I don't believe that boy means to be bad to that poor old man, I don't really and truly, Grandpapa," she added, shaking her head.

"Well, he takes a queer way to show it, if he means to be good," said old Mr. King, grimly.

"Oh, is that you, Master Tom?" as they turned a corner to find themselves face to face with Tom Selwyn.

"Mr. King," Tom began very rapidly so that the words ran all over each other, "I'm no end sorry—don't think hard things of me—it's not my fault this time; Grandfather heard it as well as I—at least, I caught a little and he asked me what it was, and I had to tell him, and it upset him."

Old Mr. King stood gazing into the big boy's face in utter bewilderment. "As I don't know in the least what you are trying to tell me, my boy," at last he said, "I shall have to ask you to repeat it, and go slowly."

So Tom tried again to tell his story, and by the time that it was all out, Mr. King was fuming in righteous indignation.

"Well, well, it's not worth thinking of," at last he said at sight of the flashing eyes before him and the angry light on the young face. "You

take my arm, or I'll take yours, Master Tom,—there, that's better,—and we'll do a bit of a turn on the deck. Your grandfather'll come out of it, for he's busy over the backgammon board. But it was an ugly thing to do just the same."

Just then Mrs. Vanderburgh and Fanny passed them, all sweet smiles for him and for Phronsie, but with no eyes for the boy.