

**Selections from *The Children's Year* (London: Longman, Brown, Green, and Longmans, 1847).**

*This work, which inspired Emma Alderson to begin collecting material for what would become Our Cousins in Ohio, describes a year in the lives of Howitt's two youngest children. Parts were based on accounts by her older son, Alfred William, and it was illustrated by her older daughter, Anna Mary.*

Preface

I have often wished that in books for children the writer would endeavour to enter more fully into the feelings and reasonings of the child; that he would look at things as it were from the child's point of view rather than from his own. There are very few children's books written with this purpose kept in view; but my own knowledge of children, founded upon the every-day experience of many years, convinced me that to write successfully for them we must come down in some measure to their level. I resolved therefore to try the experiment of keeping for one whole year an exact chronicle, as it were, of the voluntary occupations and pleasures, and of the sentiments and feelings, as far as I could gain accurate knowledge of them, of my two youngest children. This little book is the result; every thing which it contains is strictly true.

If some things are childish, let it be remembered that it is of simple, artless childhood that I have written. Had the little chronicle been kept during the present year instead of two years ago, the same character and the same individuality of temperament would be preserved, though somewhat more advanced, and in some cases more strongly developed.

Last year I received, from month to month, precisely the same kind of chronicle from my sister in America of the life and experience of her three children. The record is similar in spirit, but different in character, inasmuch as the life of healthy, happy children on the banks of the Ohio must of necessity be full of a fresher, more physically active, and less sophisticated life than with us.

In a short time I hope to have this work also ready as a companion volume to the present.

CHAPTER I. The Children's Home.

The children were Herbert and Margaret, or Meggy as she was called at home. They were very happy little children; they had kind parents, a pleasant home, a kind brother and sister older than themselves, good health and loving hearts, so that it would have been strange if they had not been happy.

We are going to tell other little children some of the things that they did, and some of the pleasures which they enjoyed for one whole year. All little children who read this book may be quite sure that every thing in it is true; they will see what Herbert and Meggy thought and did for one whole year, and very likely they will find that they have thought and done the very same things themselves.

Herbert and Meggy lived in the outskirts of London. Their house stood on a high road, from which it was separated by a little green paddock and a row of tall old elm trees. Carts and omnibuses were always passing along the road, and gentlemen and ladies riding past on horseback, or driving in gay carriages. It was very amusing to sit at the windows on this side of the house to see all that was passing on the road, though it must be confessed that the leafy branches of the elm-trees made the view much less distinct in summer than in winter. The little paddock, however, was visible both in winter and summer, and it always looked green and pleasant. It was enclosed by neat white palings, and sheep now and then were turned into it to graze, which made it look still more country-like; but that which interested the children still more than the sheep, who might be said to be only occasional lodgers there, was the old couple who lived there every day, and these were a goose and a gander. Those two creatures belonged to a good, old poulterer who lived on the opposite side of the road. Every morning, when Herbert and Meggy were getting up, if they looked out of the window they could see the old goose and gander either waiting to set off, or on their way to this little paddock. ...

This side of Herbert's and Meggy's house which we have described was the front: at the back it was all as green and quiet as in a country village. There was a pleasant garden, in which grew plenty of evergreens; there was a deal of smoothly mown grass in it, on which were many flower borders; there was a greenhouse, on the glass roof of which was trained a beautiful vine that bore plenty of grapes; there were green seats here and there in the garden where people sat in summer. According to Herbert and Meggy's opinion it was the most charming garden that ever was seen.

#### CHAP. XIII: The House in the Garden, and the Misfortunes that Happened there.

The children played now many hours each day in the garden, and as they still had great pleasure in playing at living in a house, they began to consider where their house must be. But there was no long consideration needed for this. There was, in a secluded part of the garden, a little tool-house; there was a little sort of rustic porch to it, overshadowed by a flowery acacia, and the whole front was overrun with ivy and a Scotch rose. It consisted of two rooms, the inner one of which had a little casement window of four panes; here, in former times, Alfred had kept his guinea pigs, but it was now filled with rubbish. This was the place which of all others Herbert and Meggy wished to have for their house, both rooms were so

pleasant. The first looked out from its door under the acacia tree, and the other had such a pretty picturesque window, which would open and shut, and which was surrounded with ivy. The children fancied that the little old woman who lived in the wood with her dog and bird in one of Tieck's fairy tales, had just such a little room and such a little window as this. Nobody can tell how charming it was to Herbert and Meggy to shut themselves up in this pretty little house. They fancied a great many charming things about it which they told to nobody, and as their father saw that they enjoyed it so much, he said that it should be theirs, and that nobody should disturb them in it. ...

It was still a favourite amusement to them to play at having a troublesome and bad neighbour. They played that the same Mrs. Gingham, who had disturbed them so much in their other house, had, like themselves, removed, and that she now lived just by them in the melon-bed, and that whenever their backs were turned, she came and put all their thing into disorder. They pretended that she had a husband as bad as herself, and children a great deal worse.

"Why do you not play that Mrs. Gingham is a good useful neighbour?" asked somebody, one day, "and that she has a friendly husband and good children?"

"It would not be half as funny if she were," replied they, "and then we have always such a deal to do after any of the Ginghams have been."

Pleasant as this playing at a house was, it did not always happen that Herbert and Meggy perfectly and entirely agreed about things; trouble even arose now and then between themselves. Sometimes Meggy wanted the fish-kettle to be on the fire, when Herbert persisted that they had dined, and therefore the tea-kettle must be put on; and if one of them was not in a humour to yield to the other, a deal more would be said about it than such a trifle deserved.