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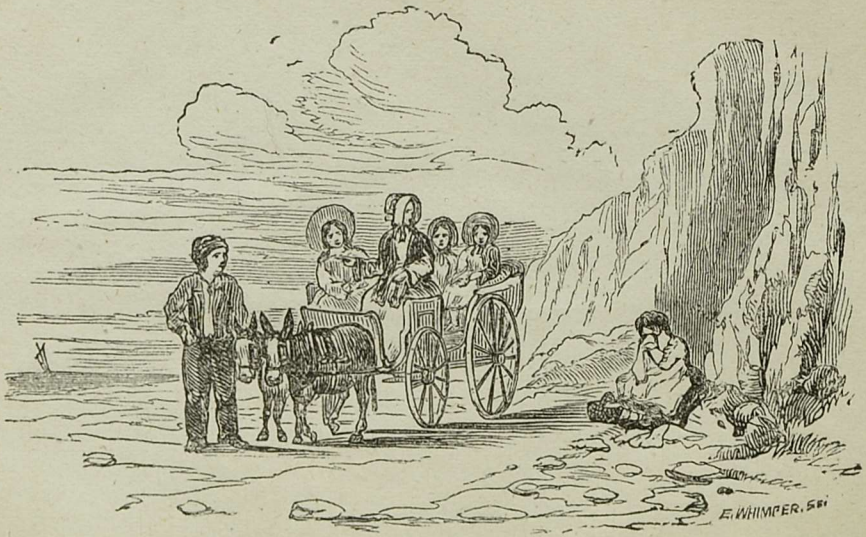
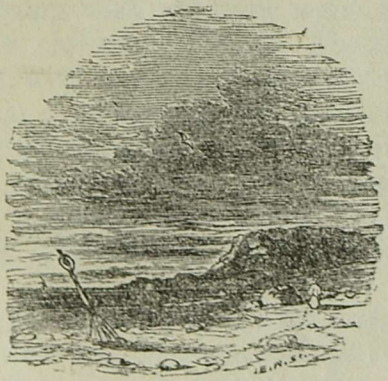


"How much had you in your little bag?"—Page 23.

THE CHILDREN'S VISIT

TO

THE SEA.



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The Children's Visit to the Sea.

One morning in July (it was the most beautiful morning that was ever seen) a party of four little children, Sidney, Freddy, Amy, and Lucy, with their kind elder sister Agnes, set out on a journey to the sea side. The mama of the children did not go with them; she was not very well, and would stay at home in a quiet house, for a house is not often very quiet with four little children in it.

They were all going to the sea side, to Sandgate. Nurse was to go, and Jane the housemaid; and as Jane had never seen the sea, the children were pleased to think how surprised she would be at the sight. They lived in the country, and they had a long way to ride before they came to the railway. At last they were there. Each child had a spade and a basket, but Sidney was rather disap-

pointed to hear an old gentleman in the railway carriage say that spades would be of no use at Sandgate, because there were no *sands* there. The children, however did not think long about it, for, as their sister said, it was one comfort the *sea* would be there, and it was the sea they were going to visit.

The journey was very short by railway, at least it seemed so to all but little Lucy. Lucy was only three years old and wanted to run about, which, in a railway carriage, is not quite convenient. At last they arrived at Folkestone. 'It seems as if we were going to ride quite into the sea,' said Sidney. However, they stopped a little short of the sea at the station, where an omnibus was waiting to take the passengers to Sandgate. A pretty ride it was; the sea on one side and the high green cliffs on the other.

There were many pretty flowers on the cliffs. Besides the beautiful pink and thrift, a tall plant with blue blossoms caught Freddy's eye at once, for he loved flowers. He was rather surprised when Agnes told him its name, which certainly is not pretty, and he said again and again 'Viper's bugloss—but why is it called so, Agnes?' Agnes said

that it was believed in old times to be a sure remedy for a viper's bite, and that the stalk was spotted, and the seed something like a viper's head.

The omnibus at length set down the children quite safely at the door of a nice lodging in the street at Sandgate. At first they were rather disappointed that it was in a street, but they soon found that all their rooms would look upon the sea, and that the door at the back opened upon a nice little grassy plot which sloped down to the beach.

They were very anxious to finish dinner, and Agnes, who knew that they longed to be on the beach, promised to take them all there, leaving nurse and Jane to unpack. The elder children were soon close to the breaking waves, but little Lucy stumbled and tumbled over the shingles so, that Agnes took her in her arms and carried her. As the tide was coming in, and the sea was rather rough, Agnes advised the boys not to go far away. The next morning she said there would be a good beach for walking on.

Everything was so new, and the little ones were so happy, that they thought Sandgate beach, even as it was, quite charming, and

they looked for curiosities very diligently. Amy wanted to find shells, but Agnes told her that she feared it was of very little use shell-hunting. It was not the kind of shore for shells, and those that there were were chiefly broken, because the sea, as it washed them up, dashed them against the sharp pebbles of the beach. A little disappointment again; but Amy was a wise little girl, and said 'Oh, we cannot have everything we like, never mind.' She found a *whelk* shell by and by, which she thought very curious, and a white, very white oyster shell, which she said was 'lovely.' Agnes told Amy that the whelk has a proboscis, or little trunk, armed with tiny sharp teeth, which it uses to bore holes in other shells, and then the whelk sucks out the juices of the fish. They did not find many treasures to-day, but they brought back some large bunches of 'sashes' for Lucy, for so they called the *sea girdle*, or *sea hanger*, with a long difficult latin name which I will not give you here. The children were astonished to hear that in some islands to the north of Scotland, as well as on the coast of France, this sea plant, when quite young, is often boiled and eaten, and that its dried

stalks make capital fires. They had also found a long flat sea weed with a curled edge, and this Agnes told them was the *sea belt*. 'But come, Lucy,—little Lucy, she is almost asleep—darling, we will go home now and we shall be able to have a nice long walk to-morrow.'

They went in to tea. They quite enjoyed the bread and butter and shrimps. Sidney said he should like to see how shrimps were caught, and Agnes promised that he should

some day. It was merry work going to bed in such droll little beds with white hangings, and as they lay on their clean white pillows it was very pleasant to hear the sea roar and break on the beach.

They were all dressed by seven next morning, and whilst Jane was getting breakfast ready, nurse took the children on the beach. Presently, Amy screamed out with joy that she had found something very beautiful. What could it be? All the children were in great glee, and little Lucy said 'Pretty thing.' It lay not far from the water's edge, and had been only just washed up by the tide. It glistened and sparkled in the morning sun's rays. It was long and rather fat, something like a mouse in shape, but not at all like a mouse in other respects. It was covered with a coarse sort of hair and its sides looked quite metallic, and reflected several different colours beautifully.

'What a number of legs it has, too,' said Siddy; 'I believe it has twenty on each side, but I can see neither head nor tail; what a funny little creature.'

They took it up on one of their wooden spades, as nurse told them she feared it

would bite, and ran up to the house to Agnes who was waiting breakfast for them. She smiled when they said they had found something very wonderful, and told them it was a *sea mouse*. Amy hoped there would be no cats at sea, to catch such pretty glittering things, and as Agnes thought the forty-legged mouse would be happier in the sea than on the breakfast table, Freddy ran down to put it in the water, but came back quite out of breath, saying there were several more lying on the stones. If there were such things as sea cats, he thought the mice had been running away from them last night.

When breakfast was over, Agnes told the little boys that they had better sit down for an hour until she was ready to walk out with them. So Sidney took a pencil and tried to draw a boat, and Freddy began to read in the "Children's Year," and was quite delighted to read that Herbert and Meggy had found a sea mouse just like their's. They were much amused, too, in looking at the bathing machine, but they all turned grave when Agnes, leaving off writing, said, 'Mama will be very pleased if I tell her you are going to bathe in the sea.' Sidney, although

the eldest, was not the bravest, and he said he did not think he could promise that. Freddy said he thought he should rather like it, and Amy would *try* if Agnes really wished it. So they all went down to the bathing machine, except nurse and little Lucy. Jane went, too, with brushes, combs, and towels, and very grave Jane looked. She walked a long way off the sea, and kept begging the children to come further from the waves, as if she thought they would be drowned.

Freddy did not like the sight of some children dipped 'over head and ears,' as Jane said: and when they reached the bathing machines, which Amy called 'houses on wheels,' he shrank back. The bathing woman, in her blue cloth gown, came up and said how 'beautiful it was, and how warm the water was that fine morning.' At last Freddy and Amy were prevailed upon to try it, and they had two dips each, but Amy said it seemed as if the sea were all rushing into her ears, it made such a disagreeable sound.

They came out of the machine one after the other, looking so rosy and refreshed, that Sidney almost wished he had bathed too, but

it was too late to wait and bathe for to-day.

Sidney asked an old fisherman who stood by his boat where he could go to see shrimps caught. The fisherman shook his head, and said 'No nigher than Hythe.'

'And where is Hythe?' asked Sidney.

'Out yonder,' said the man; and as 'out yonder' was a long way off, Agnes advised Sidney to put away all thought of shrimping for to-day. One day she would take them to Hythe and show them shrimping, for she knew a nice woman who lived there whose husband was a fisherman.

'I wonder what we should see on those great stones, Agnes,' said Freddy; 'may we go?'

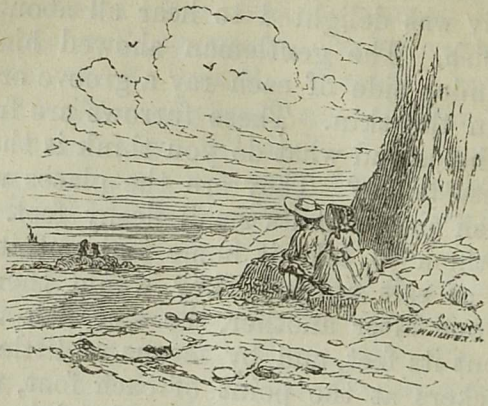
Agnes said 'Yes,' but she warned Freddy that the walking would not be very easy, smooth as it looked. Freddy, however, thought differently, and ran off, but before long he had a sad fall, and a sharp stone cut his leg and made it bleed. Children will not sometimes believe their elders till they try for themselves; this is what we call 'learning by experience.' Freddy cried a little, and sat down on a dry stone to rest, for his leg smarted very much. Amy, who was never happy if her dear brother Freddy were sad, sat down beside him and promised to find him some treasures, whilst Agnes and Sidney went on the rocks. Soon she brought him a queer looking thing with a round body and five arms or rays, its tough pink leathery skin all rough and prickly. An old gentleman who had seen little Freddy's fall, and Amy's kindness in waiting by her brother, came up at this moment and began to talk to them about the *star fish*, for this is the name of the curious creature which Amy found. He told them that the rough feeling

on the skin of the fish was caused by little specks of lime, and round the mouth he showed them also sharp little spikes of lime. Freddy was delighted to hear all about the star fish. The gentleman showed him on the under side of each ray a groove or furrow in the skin. These furrows are full of little holes and what do you think is the use of these holes? They are the places where the fish puts out its small fleshy feet. He told them to take it home and put it in a glass of salt water. They would then see how, one after another, the star fish would put out its feet, and by means of little cups or suckers at the point of each foot, would fix himself on to the smooth side of the glass, drawing himself slowly along. The suckers, too, serve for fishing hooks, their new friend told them; and as star fish are very hungry creatures, they are often in use. They have large gaping mouths and can swallow whole shell-fish of an extraordinary size.

The old gentleman told them he hoped to see them again some day, and bade them good-bye very kindly.

'What *are* Agnes and Siddy looking after,

I wonder?' said Amy, as she saw her sister and brother at some distance on the slippery



rocks, gazing into a pool of clear salt water. 'They will tell us when they come, I dare say; and oh, here is Jane with the basket; that's right. Come along Jane, we are all very hungry.'

They now showed her the star fish, and were rather affronted at her calling it 'an ugly thing;' but when they told her all that the gentleman had just told them, she altered her opinion. By and by Agnes and Sidney came off the rocks. Sidney's trowsers were

very wet and so was Agnes' dress; indeed they looked rather forlorn, but Agnes said she did not mind a little salt water, and told Jane it would not give them cold.

'Oh we have seen such beauties! such beauties!' said Sidney 'have we not, Agnes?'

'What sort of beauties, Sidney?'

'*Anemones*,—sea anemones,—like great splendid flowers! all sorts of colours and sizes; some greenish, speckled with red, some bright red speckled with purple. Oh what a pity you hurt your leg.'

'Why did you not gather some?' said Amy, 'and bring them to poor Freddy.'

'They are not real flowers, dear,' said Agnes, 'they are a class of animals made something like a plant. Don't you remember reading about the radiated animals, in 'Pleasant Pages?' '

'Oh yes, but I did not know they were really like flowers.'

'You shall go on the rocks and see them another day, and we will take one home and put it in some salt water that Amy and little Lucy may see it, but we must bring a knife, for they stick very hard to the rocks.'

They then sat down and ate their buns,

and after another hour pleasantly spent on the shingles, talking of sea anemones, sea mice, and the curious star fish, they went home to dinner.

The wonders of the sea shore seemed daily to increase. The more the children knew, the more wonderful everything seemed, and the more they enjoyed their life. It is only ignorant people, those who are content to look at the outside of a flower or a shell,—who want great things to please and amuse them. If we try to find out the *history* of a plant, an insect, or a place which comes in our way, we shall never be dull. Sidney liked history very much, and was pleased to be told that at Sandgate Castle, against the thick walls of which the sea sometimes washes, Queen Elizabeth was said once to have slept, but on asking to see her room and her bed, the man who lived there shook his head and said 'they were all done for long ago.' No, it was only the castle wall that remained, and that was better than nothing.

One day, as Agnes had promised, they hired a donkey carriage; it was very roomy and comfortable, and was drawn by two donkeys, and she and the three elder children

went to Hythe. They wondered what could be the use of those funny little square towers on the Downs. A man had told them they were *martello towers*, and were built when the English were afraid of Bonaparte coming over.

'But why are they called martello, Agnes?'

Agnes thought, but was not sure, that they were called so from being built like a fort in Mortello, in the island of Corsica. They had a very pleasant ride to Hythe, and they called on the nice kind woman who brought fresh butter, and eggs, and shrimps to their lodg ings. She said her husband was just going out to shrimp, and would take the little gentlemen with him, if they liked to go. Of course Sidney and Fred both wished to go, and Amy was happy enough to stay at the cottage and see the gay garden, the bee-hives, the strawberries, and the chickens. Amy was easily pleased, and she thought this garden, though very different from her own at home, a sweet, pleasant place. Mrs. Graves had three nice clean little girls, and they took Amy up into their bed-room and showed her their doll. It had a monstrous head of wood, very bushy hair star-

ing black eyes, and cheeks as red and much the same shape as an apple; but when Amy said it was not pretty, the little girls looked so vexed that she felt quite sorry, and said she would give them one of hers, which she had at Sandgate, to show them what she called a pretty doll. This set matters quite right. Meantime, Sidney and Freddy were very happy with Mr. Graves, who had great success in shrimping to-day, and he told them as he pushed his net along, that shrimps were of more use than merely for little boys and girls to eat, and asked Sidney if he knew what that use was. Sidney said 'No,' but perhaps his old friends the star fish or the sea mouse, liked shrimps, or if there were any sea cats, they might eat them. Tufty, his cat at home, always ate shrimps when he could get them.

'And what do you think shrimps live on, young master?'

Sidney could not think. Then Mr. Graves told him that they ate up all that was dirty and hurtful in the sea,—remains of dead fishes, bits of dead animals—and that they might indeed be called sea scavengers or cleansers. This was quite news to Sidney,

and he said he did not think that he should ever eat shrimps again. Mr. Graves laughed and said that was very silly. He ate many things besides shrimps that were not nice feeders; ducks, for instance, and pigs; don't master like ducks and pork? Still Sidney could not get over the matter, and made up his mind that he would not eat any of Mrs. Graves's fresh shrimps at tea time.

They saw a great deal that day. They walked to see the ruins of Saltwood Castle, and saw the keep, and the moat, and the dungeons. Sidney wished he had lived in those old times; he thought these great castles must have been famous places to live in. Agnes pointed to the miserable dungeons, and asked him what he thought of these, and then she told him the kind of life children in old times led; how they were brought up in such fear of their parents and elders that they never thought of sitting down in their presence until they were told to do so. Then in times of war, what a dull and anxious life they must have had even in fine parks and castles like that of Saltwood; and the poor mothers, with no books, no amusements but spinning and working, and with

constant fears of hearing news of the death of the husband, or father, or son in battle.

Oh no!' said Amy, 'these are the best days after all. Sidney still thought otherwise, but he said no more. They then went to see the church at Hythe, and the clerk showed them a pile of bones which he told them were those of the Danes, who fell in a great battle close by.

They were to take tea at Mrs. Graves', and she had baked some sweet new home-made bread, and gave them some thick cream in their tea. This they much enjoyed, and to judge of the heads and tails which Sidney left on his plate, he had quite forgotten his disgust at the shrimps.

They went home in the cool of the evening. It was a pleasant ride, the road almost all the way lay along the sea shore. 'What a happy day we have had!' said little Amy, putting her hand into that of her dear sister.

As they came near Sandgate, they saw a little girl sitting by the road side crying. She had an empty basket in her hand, and in the basket was a white cloth. The child looked a little older than Amy, and she wore a blue pinafore with which she was rubbing

her eye very hard. Agnes stopped the donkey-driver, and asked the little girl what was the matter. For a long time the child sobbed so that it was difficult to understand her.

At last she said 'I have lost my money, the money I have got for my shrimps; I had it in a little bag, and I thought I'd go on to the rocks and look for 'nemones;' and I suppose I dropped it there;' and then she cried again.

'How much had you in your little bag?'

'Two shillings and fourpence,' said the little girl, 'and little Willie at home is ill of the measles, and mother wanted the money badly.'

Agnes asked where she lived, and the girl, pointing out a cottage not far off, Agnes gave her the money and promised to come and see if her tale were true the next day, but advised her to tell her mother of her carelessness. The girl was delighted, and scarcely waiting to thank the young lady, ran off as fast as she could. Perhaps after all, this was the happiest part of their day, this opportunity of making that little girl happy; so Amy thought, at least. The next day she brought a sixpence to Agnes, and

told her she wished to give sixpence of her own to the little girl, and Sidney and Freddy did the same, only leaving Agnes tenpence to pay. Agnes took their money; she liked that her little brothers and sisters should learn to be generous. They found on the next day that the child's tale was quite true, and were glad to learn that she had told her mother the whole affair.

I could tell you of many more sea-side wonders and pleasures, but I have not room here. The children's month at Sandgate came to an end too soon, but they were very glad to see home again; and they had many tales to tell papa and mama,—about sea mice and star fish, bathing and shrimping, and other strange things they saw or did at Sandgate.

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