

Tarrididdles.

BILLY'S GHOST.

Billy Bigeyes is always with us, peeping around pot-house corners, or flattening his little upstart nose at confectioners' windows.

As Christ's Birthday comes round, sure as fate Billy will be found standing entranced wherever glistening, realistic trifles are set out behind monster panes of glass. Thus I find myself crushed close to him.

"Ah! Billy Bigeyes," I whisper; "if only a fairy godmother would come along."

Billy's eyes have been put in with smutty fingers, and are startlingly blue as they glance slyly at me.

"Thought as you might be one," he says.

"'Cos why?" "'Cos yer face is full o' sunshine, and reel vilats is growing on yer 'air. I can smell 'em." And then, confidentially, "'Ow much of a fairy are yer? Let's 'ave a peep in yer purse!"

Practical, blarney boy!

We peep.

"Is they fardings or suvrans?" gasps Billy.

"Why, you're a fairy princess!"

We both press closer to the window.

"Now, Billy," I question, falling into the vernacular, "if you was choosing, would yer 'ave that there monkey with the fool's cap and bells on 'is 'ead, or that roaring lion a-lying down with them lambs; or the clown's 'ead with the gaping mouth, ready to swaller yer whole; or —?"

Billy gives me a dig in the ribs with his bony little elbow.

"Oh! that 'monk.' Ain't he balmy? But 'ow about Susie?"

"Who's Susie?"

"My biby, o' course, and she do so 'owl at the sight of wild beasts. Should us choose a dollie wiv a star in 'er 'air?"

"Do you like dollies?"

"What yer tike me for? I 'ate 'em," Billy spits out; "but Susie, she's that set on 'em as nothing can be like it; and I'll tike it to 'er if it's put i' brown piper—'cos o' the other chaps."

"I know—bully boys?"

"Yuss," nods Billy.

"You wait." And into that emporium of heart's delight I quickly go.

Standing within the window, amidst Polar bears and ice caves, palm trees, and all the beasts of the jungle, surrounded by a bewildering maze of glistening garlands, a woolly snowstorm silently descending in one corner, and a shower of fire sparks going up in another, I perceive, glued to the pane, the little white face of Billy, its blue shadows but half hidden by superficial grime, and all the starved soul of the creature straining expectant through the luminous eyes. When the elegant young salesman proceeds to hand me a dollie, a spasm of despair seizes the throat of the boy, and he shuts out the sight of that jaunty "monk." with his tattered coat-sleeve.

Something hot trickles down my nose.

"Oh! Mr. Salesman," I cry in haste, "I want

the biggest and the beautifullest monkey. Oh! the very, very best you have. Price? What is price when hearts are breaking and souls are weeping, and——"

"Necessarily nothing, madam," replies Mr. Salesman, with great dignity and precision. "Spot cash 10s. 6d. I thank you!" and away I hurry with two bulky parcels.

Bigeyes trots at my heels, and we are soon far away from the glaring thoroughfare, and hurrying along the bye-ways which lead to his slum, and then it is that a tale he does unfold.

"Tike these 'ere precious parzils 'ome? Rather not! Why, there's gin in 'em, and cussing and swearing, and black eyes and bloody noses. You don't know my muvver; not right as yer should. But I knows a lidy as lives near by—a real lidy she is. Poor? Yuss—whose odd jobs and arrands I does. She's bedridden, she is; covered wi' scales just like a fish. Skin disease is 'er complaint; as all the doctors carn't cure, but Queen's Nuss comes constant. She'll tike care of this 'ere "monk." and Susie's biby." And here Billy must have seized the treasures, as he turned a somersault under my nose, whirled round a corner, and was out of sight.

Is it possible that I never waited by that toy-shop window after all, and that Billy Bigeyes——?

Anyway, dear reader, will you just spend every "farding" you can spare, come Christ's Birthday, in satisfying little starving souls? Believe me, these crave for make-believe and beauty more than their little empty tummies crave for meat.

E. G. F.

Book of the Week.

BROKEN OFF.*

Mrs. Baillie Reynolds has given us another of her healthy, vigorous pictures of real life. She stands to-day amongst those from whom much is expected because the promise of so much stamped all her earlier work. In this, her latest book, there is not only promise but fulfilment.

To put it briefly, the interest of the story centres in the fact that Thorold Strong, farmer by birth, cultured gentleman by inclination, and enormously rich, falls desperately in love with the Honourable Osmunda Challis, who, under ordinary circumstances, would simply never have looked at him. He is accepted with open arms, however, by Osmunda's people, and it is represented to her that to save her family from the disgrace of bankruptcy, and her profligate brother Egbert from something worse, it is her duty to effect an alliance with the rich man. To do her justice, when eventually she is hounded into the arrangement, Osmunda does not fully realise how little Strong desires her for her position, how much for herself. When she does her repugnance to the engagement gets the better

* Mrs. Baillie Reynolds. (Hodder and Stoughton.)

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