

The Green Sheaf

THE CLAY CHICKENS.



ONCE upon a time there was an old cheese maker who had in his care two orphans, and they all lived in a quiet green valley high up in the mountains.



Their home was a chalet which stood at the edge of the pine trees. It was roughly but strongly built of wood, and stained with a rich brown pickle to keep out the wet.

The orphans, two chubby little boys, were called Philip and Peter. Philip, the elder by a year, was swarthy like the pines and dark haired, while five-year-old Peter was as fair as the sun.

One day came toiling up the mountain path that led to the snow beyond, a traveller—with an enormous white hat. Seeing the old cheese maker busily churning under the shade of the jutting roof he asked of him a drink of milk. Whereupon the old peasant went inside, and presently reappeared with some goat's milk in a clay bowl, red-glazed and gaily coloured.

The boys who had been playing by the stream that ran down the valley, came up and eyed—half timidly—half gleefully—the stranger who sat astride the wood stack that was growing high towards the roof with winter fuel—his wonderful hat thrown carelessly on the ground. He was looking sad and weary as he glanced up, but broke into loud laughter at the sight of the barefooted babes in their blue coats and quaint skull-fitting caps of straw and black velvet with woollen tufts atop. Children of nature, they were quick to recognise a kindred spirit, and before long the maker of cheeses left his churning to hold his aching sides and crow at the unwonted sights he saw.

When evening came the stranger put on his big white hat and swung down the mountain; but many were the days he came again, and the boys looked