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ACERVO DE LITERATURA

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University Press
JOHN WILSON AND SON, CAMBRIDGE, U. S. A.

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A BRAVE COWARD.

PART I.

"THE question is," said the elf, "whether a thing can be good and bad at the same time."

The "elf" was the name by which Beatrix Belfast was often called, on account of the trickiness of her disposition, and a certain oddity in her appearance. Sometimes she was called Bee and sometimes Trix; but she discouraged the use of her baptismal name, saying it was too good for every-day, and she liked to keep it in the box with her best hat.

She had a small, pale face, with dark brows, and eyes so heavily lashed as to make one uncertain whether they were blue, gray, or black. Perhaps the color changed with her mood, — in which case it were well

to drop the question at once. There was nothing uncertain, however, about the color of her hair, which was quite black, — the dusky black that is never smooth, — and so thick that it shaded the face beneath, making it seem even smaller than its true size.

The moonlight streamed across the long piazza where the children sat, Harold swinging in the hammock under the vines, and Bee on a rug, with her knees drawn up to her chin, looking like a grotesque little heathen idol.

"The question is, whether a thing can be good and bad at the same time," she repeated.

"Of course not," said Harold, with a comfortable decision of tone. "Good is one thing, and bad is another; that's all there is about it. What stupid things you do say, Trix; and yet I heard Dr. Waters tell grandpapa that you are the brightest child he ever saw. Don't see where it comes in, I'm sure."

Bee sat silently thrusting her slim fingers through her hair, making it bushier than ever, — a sign with her of great perplexity. Finally she said:—

"Well, I think he made up his mind to

that the other day, when I was teaching him how to draw a dog. You should see the one he drew, with four loops for the legs, and as stiff as if it had been cut out of gingerbread. I should think any goose could have done better; even you, Harold, can draw a better one than that. And he makes a tree with two straight lines for a trunk (he means them for straight), and a lot of threes, turned every which way, for the foliage. What did grandpapa answer?"

"Oh, he said that you are not as bright as I am," said Harold, who was not to be led from a truthful statement of facts by any feeling of false modesty. "He said that you were only — oh, pshaw! I've forgotten what he said; it was a stupid, grown-up word, anyhow."

"I love grown-up words," cried Bee; "they make foolish things sound so well. Was it *progressive*? — that's a favorite word of grandpapa's."

"No; it was pre— something. I tell you I can't remember what; but I can tell you what it *meant*. It meant that, although you show off very well now, you're going to fizzle out in the end."

"Oh, I *hope* I sha'n't fizzle out in the

end!" Bee spoke with fervor, hugging her knees closer, and gazing up to the stars. "When I grow up, I mean to do some great thing, that will make your eyes just jump out of your head; and grandpapa will beat his breast all day long, and say, 'Oh, why, why, *why* was I ever such a goose as to say my wonderful granddaughter, that I'm so proud of now, was pre— something, and would fizzle out in the end!'"

"Pooh! how silly! I think I see grandpapa beating his breast all day! Now, Bee, as usual, you are edging away from the subject," said Harold, sternly.

"Well, then, I stick to it that a thing can be good and bad at the same time; and in one way 't was a good thing when I let the squirrel out. There's rain, for instance: it's bad if you are at a picnic, but very good if the flowers need watering, and you're tired."

"Dodging *again*. What's rain got to do with it? I never saw such a girl as you are for crawling out of things; you'll never own that you're in the wrong."

Bee laughed. She had an easy, gurgling little laugh, with a gleeful note, that was very exasperating in a culprit, and at this

time Bee was on trial for her sins. As a usual thing, the elf's tricks delighted Harold, who was not such a stern moralist as may appear from the foregoing conversation; but they were not often played upon himself. That morning, however, Bee had freed a squirrel that their cousin Francis had caught, and Harold meant to make a pet of.

"The rain was just an illustration, as grandpapa says," Bee went on. "What I did, you see, was bad for you, perhaps, but it was very good for the squirrel."

"You did n't care a straw for the squirrel," retorted Harold.

"I did, I did!" cried Bee, and then added, honestly, "I cared *most* for the fun of the thing; but it was just as good for the squirrel. Oh, Harold, did you hear *that*?"

Bee jumped up, clasped her hands over her breast, and looked wildly up into the sky.

"Yes, it was thunder;" answered Harold. "There's going to be a shower, and I'm glad of it, for a big scare will do you good."

"It's going to be terrific." Bee always made some such prophecy on the approach of a shower, from an unreasoning, supersti-

tious feeling that the more she feared it the lighter it would be. A thunder-storm was one of the many things that terrified her; and now, as she watched the gradual darkening of the heavens, her teasing mood was succeeded by one of sober silence.

The brother and sister were as unlike as one child can be to another. Harold was a splendid young animal, blond and courageous; whereas his sister was a dark, airy-delicate little creature, of a nervous organization, and capable of an infinite variety of sensations such as had never entered into the boy's consciousness. Her mood changed at a breath; while Harold was of an even, unexcitable temper. His mind was slow, but clear and strong, and he could give a reason for his opinion that at least always satisfied himself; while poor Bee's head was filled with fantastic ideas, that, for all her gift of language, she could not make reasonable to any one. Harold's admirers always said that he was a delightfully natural boy, while Bee's best friends were obliged to admit that she was an odd child, that would not quite fit into any of the recognized types.

The children were orphans, and lived with

their grandfather, Colonel Stacy, a retired army officer, who had taken care of them since the death of their own father, who also had been in the army. With his whole heart Colonel Stacy loved the boy, from whose frank blue eyes the daughter he had lost seemed so often to look at him, and whose simple, fearless nature, akin to his own, he was able to understand; but Beatrix, with her incomprehensible moods, her odd, unchildlike speeches, and, above all, her great timidity, reminded him too unpleasantly of his son-in-law, for whom he had ever had a secret contempt. Captain Belfast had once, through the delicate nervousness of his organization, been guilty of an act of cowardice; it had been sequelled by a splendid career of sustained self-command, but the old colonel had never forgiven the offence.

Notwithstanding the seven years that had passed since their father's death, Beatrix remembered him perfectly; but, although he was a year the older of the two, Harold had but a dim mental picture of him, and even that he could not be sure was of memory's painting, rather than the impression left by Bee's frequent descriptions.

Bee was fond of talking of her father; but at such times she was careful to be out of ear-reach of her grandfather, who, although nothing to this effect had ever been told them, the children instinctively felt had disapproved of his son-in-law.

"I am sure he could not have liked him," Bee once said, "because he never speaks of him, and he so often talks to us about mamma. Don't you know, Harold, how sometimes he draws you on his knee to kiss you, and says, 'You are like your mother, boy'? and then he generally looks round at me, and cries out, 'You horrid little black thing, *you* are like your father! go away!'"

"Now, Bee, you know perfectly well he has never said anything of the kind," Harold, much horrified, had exclaimed.

"Not with his tongue; not with his tongue; but his eyes said so, and that's just the same," insisted the elf. "Pooh! I don't mind; I'd really rather look like papa than anybody. Don't you remember how handsome he was?"

"Well, not exactly. Was he as handsome as grandpapa?"

"Much handsomer. He had great soft-looking dark eyes, that were n't seeing

things all the time, like grandpapa's; and he had a smile that was like music, waking you up suddenly when you are most asleep, or some one coming and kissing you, when you feel that the world is too big,—like any pleasant thing that's unexpected," Bee hastened to explain, with a certain appealing glance with which she always met the disapproval her flights of fancy occasioned. "And his voice was lovely, you know, and sounded after he had stopped speaking."

"What nonsense!" Harold broke in, having struggled in vain to restrain his disgust.

"I tell you it *did*, just as bells do!"

"Only in empty heads."

"When he looked at you," Bee went on, "you wished you were good and beautiful; when grandpapa looks at you, you only wish to please him."

"Well, it's easy enough to please him," Harold put in.

"For *you*," said Bee, rather sadly; "but I could n't please him."

"Yes, you could, Trix, if you would only change about some few things; if you would only try to be braver; and if, for instance, you would not seem so sleepy the minute he comes into the room."

"Why, I can't help that. The minute grandpapa comes near me, I feel as if I was shutting up, like caterpillars when you touch 'em."

"And you say such silly things, — like that, now. He does n't like it."

Bee sat quiet for a long time, and meditated, perhaps, on this advice; for when she got up, it was with the remark that she supposed her grandfather might come to like her very much, if she would only leave off being Beatrix Belfast.

PART II.

THE clap of distant thunder that struck such terror into Bee's heart heralded an unusually heavy storm. The lightning grew sharper and sharper as the clouds extended over the soft summer sky, until neither moon nor stars were visible. All at once the rain came down in pelting drops, and the wind tore through the trees and slammed the doors and shutters. Long before this, however, Bee had fled into the house, and curling up on the sofa in the parlor, had buried her head in the cushions. Harold was now obliged to follow her, and stood by one of the long windows, making discouraging comments on the progress of the storm, apparently enjoying Bee's agony.

"I tell you, we are going to catch it this time," he said. "Hear that clap! Ah, it's coming nearer every moment."

"Oh, Harold, *dear* Harold, *don't* stand by the window!" implored Bee, in a muffled voice. "I'm sure you'll be struck."