

**GREAT MYSTERIES
AND
LITTLE PLAGUES**

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Great mysteries and little plagues by John Neal

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JOHN NEAL

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CHILDREN — WHAT ARE THEY GOOD FOR?

“I’ll give oo a *kid* if oo want one!” — PAGE 31.

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LITTLE PLAGUES.

BY

JOHN NEAL.
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PREFACE.

I HATE prefaces; and the older I grow, the more I hate them, and the more unwilling I am to transgress—in that way—with my eyes open.

But something must be said, I suppose, if only by way of an advertisement, or warning.

When I had finished what one of my daughters persists in calling my "NAUGHTY-BIOGRAPHY," and the other, "PERSONALITIES"—while my hair has grown visibly thinner, I will not say under what kind of domestic remonstrance from another quarter, and a very amiable, though witty somebody writes it "*Maundering Recollections*"—I had an idea that, if I went further, I might be found "painting the lily, gilding refined gold," etc., etc., and so I pulled up—for the present.

But this little book was already under way. I had promised it, and such promises I always keep—and for the best of reasons: I cannot afford to break them.

When I turned out the original of "Children—What are they good for?" some forty years ago, or thereabouts, I had never met with, nor heard of, anything in that way. Children were overlooked. Their droppings were unheeded—out of the nursery. But now, and in fact very soon after my little essay appeared in the "Atlantic Souvenir," if I do not mistake, the papers and magazines, both abroad and at home, were continually brightened up with diamond-sparks and with Down-easterly or "Orient pearls, at random strung," which seemed to have been picked up in

play-grounds, or adrift, or along the highway; and itemizers were seen dodging round among the little folks, wherever they were congregated, or following them as the Chinese follow a stranger, if they see him make wry faces.

For amusement only, and to keep myself out of mischief—I hope I have succeeded—just after the fire, not having much to do beyond twirling my thumbs, and trying to whistle “I cares for nobody, and nobody cares for me,” I began collecting such as fell in my way.

My first idea was to call them “KINDLING-STUFF,” or “OVEN-WOOD,” as characteristic, if not of them, at least of the compiler; but finding the collection grew upon me, and myself growing serious, I adopted “PICKINGS AND STEALINGS,” which, on the whole, I think still more characteristic, beside being both suggestive and descriptive.

“GOODY GRACIOUS, A FAIRY STORY,” I wrote for the purpose of showing—and *proving*—that fairy stories need not be crowded with extravagant impossibilities, to engage the attention of our little folks; and that if they are so contrived as to seem true, or at least possible, they need not be unwholesome. Am I wrong?

And furthermore saith not, as Jacob Barker used to write, at the bottom of his letters,

“Your respected friend,”

J. N.

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