



PEGGY'S AFTERNOON NAP.

IT was a blazing afternoon in summer when little Peggy Bevan staggered down the shaggy mountain-side, with a great creel piled high with fresh-cut grass upon her back. She had thought that she would never be able to toil up Cefn Madoc—the sun beat down so, and the creel pulled back so, and the brown grass and the gray stones of the hillside were both so slippery; and now she began to think that she could never reach the valley beneath unless she rolled down into it. There was not wind enough even to wave the pale-blue harebells. Lizards basked on the hot, hoary boulders. The black-faced little mountain-sheep lay panting in hollows that gave them the merest fringe of shade. The black mountain ponies impatiently whisked off the plaguing flies with their long rusty, ragged, bur-buttoned tails. Not a single bird was singing anywhere around. Now and then a rabbit slipped out of the patches of fern and furze, or flung up its heels, as if it were taking a header, as it plunged into them again; but these were exceptionally restless rabbits. The vast majority of their more sensible comrades were napping in the coolest corners of their burrows, postponing frolic until the dew had begun to fall. All the country seemed asleep in the sunshine—the brown hills, the tiny green “parks,” the goldening corn-patches, the clumps of dusky trees, the tumble-down straggling limestone walls, the dogrose-wreathed lime-kilns, the sloping stony bed of the dried-up river, the mossy mottled bridge that spanned it like a V turned upside down, the mouldering village churches nodding over their coffin-shaped flower-beds, the crumbling ivy-clad remnants of the three old ruined castles, the box-like little meeting-houses, the thatched white-washed little cottages and farmhouses with no gates to their farmyards. Everything looked asleep, except far-off where the coal-pits raised their tall chimneys and gibbeted wheels, and blotched the country-side with boils of black rubbish; and, under the thicker

smoke beyond, where the dingy town huddled at the bottom of the long, bright-blue, sail-dotted bay. But the pits and the town were so far off that they only made Cefn Madoc seem all the drowsier to little Peggy Bevan. The very railway at the bottom of the mountain had nothing bustling in it. The rails shone like gold in the sunshine, little blue butterflies were fluttering dreamily over them, and a row of sleepy sparrows stood on one of the up rails as if they were roosting. Peggy meant to ask for a drink at Evan Evans the pointsman's cottage; but when she got there, she found that no one was at home except Evan, and he was lying asleep in his shirt-sleeves, with a half-smoked pipe in his mouth, in the shade of a little grove of hollyhocks that rested their heavy, claret-coloured blossoms on the thatch of the cottage as if they wanted to go to sleep too. So on poor thirsty little Peggy had to trudge with her creel of grass behind her, waddling like a crab covered with shells and sea-weed. The proper crossing was a bridge over the points about a hundred yards from the pointsman's cottage, but Peggy was so tired with her long walk (and she had still to climb up a good bit of the mountain on the other side of the railway before she got home) that she determined to take the shortest cut. There was a gap in the railway fence just at the bottom of Evan's garden, and through that she pushed her wearying load. This was why she was carrying it: Her grandmother's cow, Spot, was ill; and as Peggy had no brothers or sisters, no father or mother—only a grandmother, who was not quite as kind to the little girl as she might have been—Spot was Peggy's bosom friend. She herded Spot on the hill-side, and chopped up her furze and potatoes for her, and put her arms round Spot's neck and cuddled her, and talked to her in the dark little cow-house that joined on to the cottage. As soon as she was allowed to milk Spot, Peggy thought that she