A VISIT TO THE DALE FARM

When Dorothy's and Oliver's father and mother had arranged to go abroad for six weeks, the question arose: "What shall we do with the children?" They had many aunts and uncles who would willingly take care of them, but their mother wanted them to be in the country; so, in the end, it was decided to send them with their nurse to stay at a farm, the mistress of which had once been a nurse to their mother, and who was sure to take good care of them.

There was a great deal of excitement and bustle, but at last all was ready, and the day came for them to say good-bye for a short time to their home. Their ponies had already been sent on, and the terrier Patch was to go with them.

Their mother was going with them, and their father saw them off at the station.

When they arrived at the Dale Farm there was a warm welcome for them. Their mother and her old nurse had a lot to talk about, and then they went into the quaint farm-parlour for tea, and how they all enjoyed the honey and cream and hot scones!

After tea they had to say good-bye to their mother, for she had to be driven back to the station.

The following morning the children were wakened by the crowing of the cocks and the cackling of the hens and other noises unfamiliar to them. After breakfast, they went on a tour of inspection round the farm places. They also went to greet their ponies, who seemed quite rejoiced to hear their voices in this strange land. Then they went to see Mrs. Farmer feed her poultry; and what a noise there was among the turkeys, and geese, and ducks, and hens!—all so hungry for breakfast, and all pushing round without the slightest regard for good manners. After them there were the calves to feed. Six long-legged shaky little things—they wondered they could ever grow into anything to be afraid of. Before they had half finished looking round nurse called them to get ready for their ride.

Everything was different from what it was at home, for they were to take their rides without a groom, and across the common, a big place covered with short crisp grass, with occasional clumps of rushes and thistles; and here they could canter, or gallop, or race without fear of harm.

People and animals seemed to do as they liked on the common. Donkeys browsed sleepily, and when the children came near lifted their heads as if to say: "Who are

these strangers? They're not donkeys, so what do they want on our ground?"

Then there were a lot of geese there. Patch thought he would have a bit of fun with the geese one day, so he set off to chase them. There was a great fluster and spreading of wings, and they waddled off a few yards; then they turned suddenly and faced him, stretching out their long necks and hissing, at which Patch turned tail and troubled them no more.

The village children on their way to and from school would linger on the common to chase butterflies or run races. Then the boys found it a capital place for playing at soldiers and leap-frog, and other things.

As it was June the farm people were busy in the hay, so of course Dorothy and Oliver helped. They raked and tossed and gathered it into heaps, and then they grew dreadfully hungry, so they sat under the hedge and ate bread and cheese, which they found was quite the correct lunch for haymakers. Patch sat with them and was having his share, when he suddenly began sniffing and snorting and scratching round a haycock. They thought there must be a rat about, but when they moved the hay they found a poor little creature with a brown plush coat and no eyes! Nurse told them it was a mole, so they put it in a box lined with cotton-wool and gave it lettuce to eat, but it only lived four days. I don't think it would like the most luxurious nest as well as a little hole in the ground.

It would take a long time to tell you about all the children saw and did during their visit to the Dale Farm: how they rode on the hay, then came jogging back in the empty cart for more; how they drove with the farmer in his spring-cart, which was not so very springy; how they learned to milk, and quite got over their fear of cows. Altogether they had such a delightful time that they hope they may go again next year.

When the letter came to say the ship had arrived bringing back their father and mother they were of course delighted, but they were quite sorry to have to say good-bye to all their farm friends, animals as well as people.

So the children went back to their city home, and when their father and mother heard all their accounts of the good time they had had, and saw their tanned and rosy cheeks, they said: "O, you must go again next year."