

Heaven's Nursery

By Bernard Capes

"Sinner, sinner, whence do you come?"
"From the bitter earth they called my home."

"Sinner, sinner, why do you wait?"
"I fear to knock at the golden gate:

"My crimes were heavy; my doom is sure,
And I dread the anguish I must endure."

"Had you ever a child down there?"
"One—but it died, and I learnt despair."

"Here you will find it, behind the gate."
"God forbid! for it felt my hate—

"Shrunk in the frost of my cruelties.
More than the Judge's I fear its eyes."

"Hist! At the keyhole place your ear.
Sinner, what is the sound you hear?"

"Is it ten thousand babes at play?
Heaven's nursery lies that way.

"Through it to judgment all must fare
It was God's pity placed it there."

The gate swung open; the sinner past;
Little hands caught and held him fast.

"While you wait the call of the Nameless One,
There's time for a game at 'Touch-and-Run'

He played with them there in that shining place,
With the hot tears scorching his furrowed face—

Played, till the voice rang dread and clear:
"Where is the sinner? I wait him here!"

Then shouting with laughter one and all
They pushed him on to the Judgment Hall;

Stood by him; swarmed to the dais steps,
A jumble of gleeful eyes and lips.

The Judge leaned stern from His Judgment Throne:
"I gave thee—where is thy little one?"

Wildly the culprit caught his breath:
"Lord, I have sinned. My doom be death."

He hung his head with a broken sob.
There sprang a child from the rosy mob—

"Daddy!" it cried, with a joyful shriek;
Leapt to his arms and kissed his cheek.

But he put it from him with bursting sighs,
And looked on the Judge with swimming eyes;

Stood abashed in his bitter shame,
Waiting the sentence that never came.

From the Throne spoke out the thundered Word:
"This be thy doom!" No more he heard,

For a chime of laughter from baby throats
Took up those crashing organ notes,

Mixed with; silenced them; made them void—
And the children's laughter was unalloyed.

"This be thy doom," came a little squeak,
"To play with us here at 'hide-and-seek'!"

Thrice did the Judge essay to frown;
Thrice did the children laugh Him down—

Till at the last, He caught and kissed
The maddest of all and the merriest;

Turned to the sinner, with smiling face:
"These render futile the Judgment Place.

"Sunniest rascals, imp and elf,
Who think they can better the Judge Himself.

“Sinner—whatever thy sins may be,
Theirs is the sentence—go from Me!”