Title: Parables from Flowers

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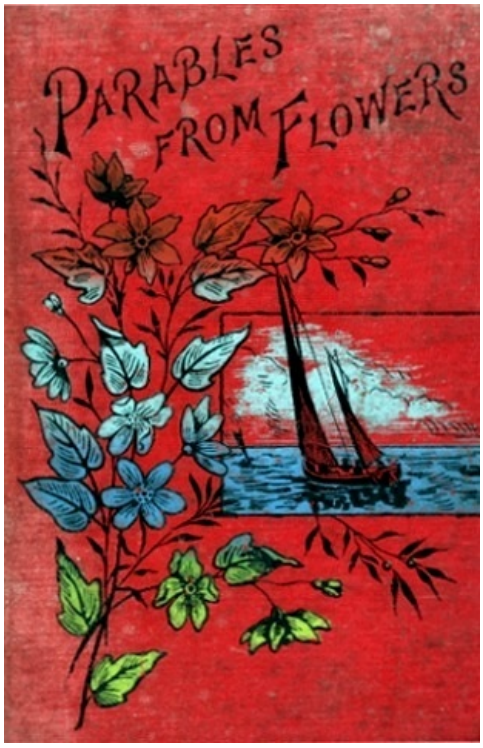
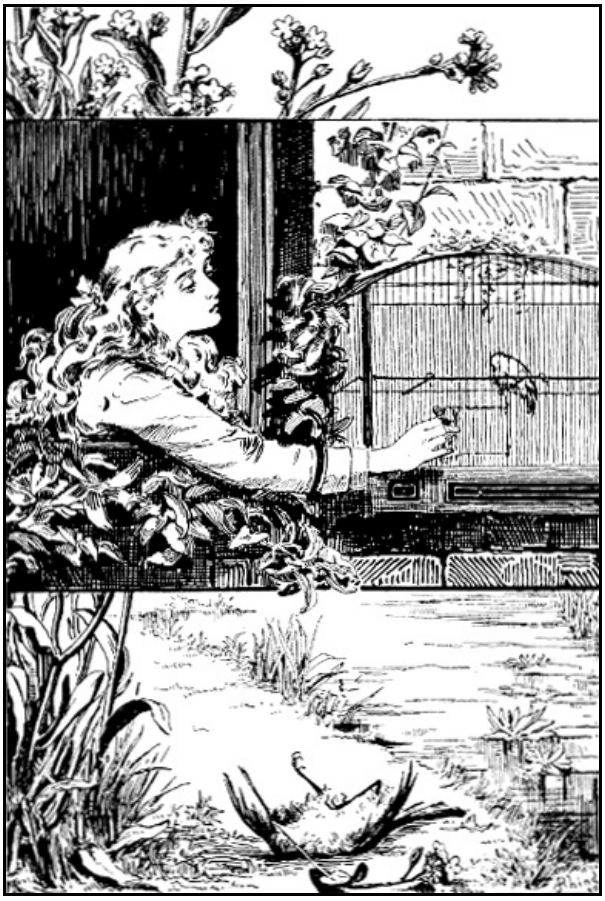
Release date: January 6, 2009 [eBook #27718]

Language: English

Credits: Produced by Chris Curnow, Meredith Bach, Lindy Walsh and
the Online Distributed Proofreading Team at
http://www.pgdp.net

PARABLES FROM FLOWERS.





PARABLES FROM FLOWERS.
Frontispiece.

PARABLES FROM FLOWERS.

BY

GERTRUDE P. DYER,
AUTHOR OF 'LITTLE POLLIE,' 'ARMOUR-CLAD,' ETC. ETC.

Doth not thy heart throb with emotions of thankfulness to God for making the earth so fair, so redolent of beauty in its garniture of flowers, and for having scattered these silent teachers up and down the world?

EDINBURGH:
W. P. NIMMO, HAY, & MITCHELL.

TO

MY DEAR LITTLE FRIENDS,

CONTENTS.

PARABLES FROM FLOWERS.

PARABLE FIRST.

THE FORGET-ME-NOT—FIDELITY.

IN the days of the long-ago, my ancestors did not dwell as we do now—in brooks or [7]
by the banks of shallow streams, but grew in wild luxuriance beneath the shade of overhanging trees, and under the wayside hedgerows.

We were always a quiet, unassuming race, and, indeed, I am fain to confess, were not held in more esteem by mortals than are our sweet cousins whom children call 'Bird's-eyes.' But some one made known to the world that pathetic 'Legend of the Rhine,' in which we are described, then people began to perceive that we were pretty,lovely indeed,—and to make a great fuss about us; but such is the way of [8]
the world!

Yet, though that legend is tenderly beautiful and thrilling, it is almost too romantic to please the taste of simple flowers, therefore I will tell you the true story how we acquired our name. That

shall be my parable—see what it will teach!

We grew there, unheeded and unsought, on soft mossy banks, not the less lovely because unknown, and just above our dwelling-place a large oak spread abroad its leafy branches. It was a favourite tree of the birds, they felt so secure there, sheltered from prying eyes by its protecting leaves; besides, its branches were so firm and strong, they resisted bravely the fury of the storms that swept over them. What bird, then, would fear to build its nest there? And often have we listened to their sweet songs as they perched above us, and many times lifted our heads and gazed upon the happy inmates of those simple homes.

But there was one family among them that interested us even more than others, though all were dear to us. It was a pair of wrens who had by some strange accident taken up their abode in our oak, instead of a yew-tree as they generally do; and not only my family, but the whole colony of [9] birds, old inhabitants of the tree, many of them, felt great interest in the new-comers, assisting them with advice, as they were but young.

Then, when building time came, how kind they all were! indeed, though it was a busy season with every bird, each anxious to finish its work, yet I heard an old Rook one day ask little Jenny Wren 'if he should help her,' as he met her trying to drag a large wisp of straw with all her tiny strength.

'No, thank you,' she gently replied; 'I must try to do it. We must all learn to bear our own burdens.'

But many times, however, I have seen the larger and stronger birds bring materials for making the nest close to the spot they had chosen, to save the little strangers weary journeys; and at last, after much patient labour, the home was finished, to the intense delight of the two builders, for both took their share in the work; but the joy was greater, when, after some time, three little birds made their appearance in the compact and cosy nest.

The event caused quite a sensation among the other dwellers in our old tree. Jays were constantly inquiring how the nestlings were getting on, an inquisitive Magpie peeped into the [10] nest, trying to get a glimpse of the pretty ones, and received a sharp peck from the angry father as a reproof for the intrusion; as to the motherly Rooks, who were supposed to care for nothing save their own family concerns, they kindly advised the young parents how to rear the brood, saying, 'Care, care,' was all that was necessary; nay, it is even recorded, as an undoubted fact, that an old Owl, who had lived for ages in a hole in the tree, actually opened her eyes quite wide when the news was first told to her, although it was broad daylight! You may imagine, then, how happy they were, surrounded thus by kindness and love; and yet—I suppose it is but right there are ever shadows as well as sunshine, and, sad though it seems, every life must have bitters mingled with the sweets; still they were so joyous in that tiny nest! Why, ah, why was their happiness to be clouded? Alas, it grieves me even now to tell, though many long years have since then passed away!

One day the father-bird went from the nest, and never returned!

Long and patiently waited his little mate, hoping each moment to hear his welcome note, as [11] swiftly he winged his way back to her. But the day wore on, the evening sun grew golden, then faded in the purple west—but still he came not! The other dwellers in the oak returned to their homes, yet they brought no tidings of the wanderer. After a while their happy voices were hushed in sleep, the Blackbird ceased to warble his evening hymn, and all were buried in slumber, and at rest!

All? Ah, no! the lonely mourner was waking still, gazing up with sad, sad eyes at the starry heavens above, asking the night-winds as they moaned around:

'Will he not return to me?'

Days passed, slowly dragging their length wearily on for the lonely bird in that desolate nest. Yet, though her heart was breaking, she tended her tiny nestlings, neglecting none of her daily duties; for his dear sake she loved them yet the more, hoping as each day came it would bring him back, and striving to imagine his delight when he returned, and found his young ones almost fledged. But still the days dawned, the weary hours went by, the sickness of hope deferred would fall upon her loving heart, crushing it almost to breaking; yet bravely she struggled with her woe. It was [12] when the holy stars shone down, gazing pityingly at her meekly raised eyes, and she was alone in stillness with her great sorrow, that then would she murmur with a bitter cry,—

'When will he come home to me again?'

Yet still he came not!

Then her brave heart gave way. In vain the other birds tried to comfort her; she could not be comforted, for he she so dearly loved 'was not.'

'Do not grieve, do not grieve—cheer thee, che-eer thee,' sang the Robin, as he perched beside her.

Or the Thrush tried to advise, saying, 'Don't fret, don't fret; 'tis a pity, 'tis a pity!'

But one bright sunny day a Swallow came flying along. He had just returned from far distant lands, and all the other birds gathered chittering around him, eager to hear the news he had

brought. He told them of much he had seen whilst on the wing; also that he was the pioneer, his brothers would soon rejoin him, for Summer was coming; he had heard her heralds in the fields and groves, had marked her flower-decked path in forest and in lane. But what was summer to the heart-broken Wren? There would be no sunshine for her, since *he* was not there—he who was her all. [13]

'Oh, Swallow,' she timidly asked, 'have you seen my own love?'

Then the eyes of the Swallow became tear-dimmed, as sadly he replied,—

'Little Jenny Wren, I have!'

'Where—oh, where?' she cried in thrilling accents.

He hesitated a few moments, though to her impatience it seemed hours; he wished to spare her further agony if he could—but the truth must be told.

'Tell me, tell me,' she pleaded, impatient at the delay.

'In a prison,' was the reply.

'In a prison!' she repeated, horror-struck at the disclosure; then she added, 'I will go to him, and share his captivity.'

'Nay, nay,' remonstrated a motherly Sparrow; 'your little ones—think—think—see—see!'

Sadly she drooped her head upon her breast; her heart was divided between a mother's duty and a wife's love.

'I will take care of the nestlings,' said a young Linnet; 'they shall feed with my little ones, I will shelter them under my wings.' [14]

Gratefully the poor wee bird looked at her generous friend; words were not needed to express her thanks.

'Take me to him,' she piteously asked, turning to the Swallow.

'I shall pass that way to-morrow,' he said, 'for I must go and meet my comrades, to guide them here. You can go with me; I will take you to where he is imprisoned.'

The next morning, before the sun had risen, away flew the Swallow, and with him the little Wren. She heeded not that the valleys were still shrouded in mist, or that the cold grey dawn yet lingered in the skies; was not her sunshine coming? should she not soon see him who was her brightness? The day wore on, and onward still by the Swallow's side, she, with untiring pinions, winged her way; she suffered not from noontide heat, she felt not even the pangs of hunger or thirst, for her heart was filled with hope. But towards evening her pitying guide led her over a hot, murky town; the very sky above it was hidden by the thick atmosphere of smoke which seemed completely to envelope it; the two birds could scarcely breathe, the air was so dense with poisonous gases. [15]

'It cannot be here?' she gasped, as suddenly the Swallow paused in his rapid flight.

'See, see!' was his exclamation.

Then, raising her heavy eyes, she saw, suspended from a high window, a small wire cage, and in it—her long-lost mate!

He was resting on a low perch, with his poor aching head beneath his wing; his pretty brown feathers were no longer smoothly plumed, but hung ragged and tattered around his wasted form, so different to the bright, bonnie bird of the long-ago! But she heeded not the change; to her he was as beautiful, ay, and more dear than ever, so, flying up, she clung with eager feet to the cruel bars which kept her from him, and, pressing her beak as close as possible to the cage, she murmured,—

'I am here, love!'

At the sound of that sweet voice, so well remembered by the captive, he raised his drooped head, and, gazing at her with all the old loving tenderness, whispered feebly,—

'Is it you, Jenny? Ah, I knew you would come!' [16]

And every evening found her there. Patiently would she stay near the prisoner throughout the dark watches of the night, cheering her loved one because she was near; but when the grey dawn came stealing over the skies, away she would fly back to the nest in the oak, and during the day would carefully tend her little ones, fulfilling thus her double duty as wife and mother. Then when the evening star appeared, telling her of the gloaming, she would hush her nestlings with a soothing lullaby, and, when they were sleeping, would swiftly fly to her imprisoned mate, bearing in her beak a sprig of moss, or a leaf from the well-remembered spot where they had been so happy in the spring-time of their life; and when she reached the prison, if her loved one was grieving, pining for the liberty he had lost, the home ties thus rudely broken, her sweet voice murmuring, 'I am here, love,' seemed to bring comfort to that poor failing heart; and as she tenderly pressed her cool, fresh beak to his, so parched and dry, he would reply, striving to be gay for her dear sake,—

'Ah, Jenny, you have brought on your wings some sunlight from our old home, my darling.'

One evening, when as usual she flew to the prison, she found him lying at the bottom of the cage, [17] speechless and motionless. Frantically she tore at the cruel bars, beating them with her wings in an agony of despair.

'My own love, my own love!' she cried aloud in her anguish; 'speak to me once again!'

Her beloved voice seemed to possess the power to recall him back to life, for he heard her, though the shadows of death were stealing over him.

'Jenny, darling,' he feebly whispered, as she bent low to catch the faintest word, 'they have broken my heart. Ah, why did they keep me thus captive?'

'Oh, do not die!' she moaned; 'think how lonely I should be in this wide world without you.'

'If I were but free, we should be so happy again, love,' he said, gasping painfully for breath as he spoke.

'I will release you,' she cried, and strove with all her strength to unfasten the prison door, but in vain—it resisted all her efforts.

'What shall I do? what shall I do? He will die, and I cannot help him,' moaned forth the poor Wren in accents of despair.

'My sweet one,' he murmured, 'do not grieve so bitterly. Death were better far than life if [18] separated from you; but, before I close my eyes for ever upon this world which the good God who loveth us hath created so beautiful, bring me just one spray of those little blue flowers.'

'I know them!' she eagerly cried; 'a cluster grew beneath our nest.'

'Yes,' he continued; 'and when I used to return home I could see them afar off, and would think, "Jenny is there, and their blue eyes are looking upon her." Bring me one tiny spray, darling, and if I die when you are from me, we shall not seem so very far apart, for those sweet flowers will whisper to me of you.'

She waited no longer, but flew rapidly away to bring the blossoms on which he wished to look once again; but she had not long gone when a young girl came to the cage, and saw the poor captive bird as Jenny had found him—still and motionless as though dying, and her heart was filled with tender pity, that its brief life should thus be so soon ended.

'Poor birdie! I fear it is dying,' she said. 'I will unfasten the cage; perhaps the fresh air will revive him, and bring back his failing strength.' [19]

And with kindly hands she opened the prison door, thus giving him liberty.

The cool, fresh air, stirring his drooping feathers, aroused him from his lethargy; at first he could not believe that the door was open, that he was free. It was almost too much happiness for the poor sick bird to bear; yet it was true—freedom was his, and his first thought was of Jenny.

He would fly to meet her, as he knew she would soon return, bearing with her the blue flowers he loved, and then, when she saw *him* coming towards her,—free, yes, free!—would not all past sorrow be forgotten in the ever-present joy? So, with a twitter of gratitude to the girl who had opened his prison door, he fluttered his wings, just to try their strength, poised a while in the air, then away he flew with unerring instinct towards his dear home in the old oak tree.

But of Jenny?

With a sad weight upon her poor little heart, crushing it with the iron grip of despair, she reached the spot where the flowers grew, plucked a few blossoms from the stem, then away again, without pausing to rest, bearing the prized flowerets in her beak. She felt not fatigue; [20] though her weary pinions sometimes faltered, still she heeded it not, still struggling on, eager to reach where he lay dying. Her only thought was:

'If he were to die, and I not with him.'

But slower and slower grew her flight; strength at last was failing, for it had been too severely tried; her breath came quick and fast, in short, fitful gasps, and her heart beat heavily beneath her quivering breast.

'Oh, but to see him once more!' she moaned, as she felt her weary wings failed to do her bidding. She tried to fly yet a little farther, in vain; her tired pinions fluttered for a while, then down she sank, slowly, slowly, on to the calm bosom of a rippling stream that was flowing on over its pebbly sands with soothing melody.

'Jenny, Jenny, my own love, where are you? I have sought you so long, my darling,' she heard the well-known voice exclaiming.

She raised her dying eyes, and saw her loved mate hovering above her in the summer air.

'I am here, love,' she faintly murmured.

Then with all the old love-light beaming from her soft, gentle eyes, she turned to gaze at her poor [21] desolate mate, who was rending the air with his piteous cries, then closed them for ever, with a

look of perfect peace, murmuring softly,—

'Dearest, forget me not.'

And the rippling stream bore her gently away echoing with a plaintive wail her dying words:

'Dearest, forget me not.'

The poor widowed bird caught the flowers as they were floating away on the breast of his lost love, and carried them to his now desolate home; but one little blossom, in tender pity for sweet Jenny Wren, detached itself from the others to linger still with the poor dead bird; and when the stream had carefully borne its precious burden to a shady nook, where she could rest, for ever freed from sorrow and pain, the flower was carried with her, and, taking root above the spot where she lay buried, put forth its blue blossoms in loving remembrance of that fond, faithful heart.

And thus it is how we became dwellers close to tranquil streams, and why our name is still 'forget-me-not.'

PARABLE SECOND.

THE SNOWDROP—FAITH.

MY life has been so tranquil, that I fear it will not possess much interest; for, when [22]
first recollection dawned, I remember finding myself far down in the earth—a small bulb, not much to look at, I am thinking. But very happy were the days spent there with my companions. We in our ignorance deemed the world a dreary place, and wished we could for ever stay where it was so cosy and warm; but our Mother Earth was carefully instructing us, teaching us the same precious lessons she unfolds to her other children, if they will but read the ever-open book, by man called 'Nature.'

I know not how long it was that the Frost King kept the land bound captive in icy chains, but at last the signal for freedom came. The trees awoke from their winter sleep, and, [23]
casting off their sombre garments of sheathed leaves, came forth in vestments of tender green; the bees, too, sent out their pioneers, who hastened back to the hives with the glad tidings of the sunshine and of awakening flowers. The birds flew hither and thither on joyous wings, twittering their simple gratitude to Him who 'heareth the ravens cry;' for they indeed were thankful that the dark days were past, and that 'the time of the singing of birds had come.' As to the little brooks and streams, how rejoiced were they to be free once more! they bounded away over the sandy shallows or pebbly beds, laughing for very gladness, and kissing the green banks whose fresh verdure they laved, whilst murmuring to them their gladsome song:

'I'm free! oh, joy! I am
free once again!
  I have burst with
delight my icy chain,
And gaily I flow to the
open sea,
  Joyously singing, I'm
free! oh, I'm free!

I kiss the green banks
as I glide along,
  I woo the birds with
my peaceful song;
The sunbeams they
dance to my joyous
strain,
  Whilst gaily I fling

And for us also came the appointed time, when we too had to leave the home in which we had been so tenderly nurtured; we were to go, ready prepared to do the work marked out for us. [24]

But I did not wish to go; I feared to face a world unknown to me, and fain would have lingered in the home so loved.

'Why must I leave you?' I asked of our gentle parent. 'I cannot bear the separation.'

'My child,' she replied, with something of reproach in her soft voice, 'have you so soon forgotten the lesson I taught you, that He who created all things, createth nothing in vain? Go forth upon the earth, and speak in parables of His glorious works.'

'What can I teach?—I, so small, and of no repute!' I asked, still doubting.

'Some lesson of His goodness to the children of men,' was her reply.

'But everything on earth appears to have its appointed mission; there seems no work for me,' I urged in excuse.

'God will find something for even you to do,' she said; 'it may be only a message from Him.'

'A message!' I repeated. 'What could I say to others? Already have all the flowers their symbols: the Violet is the Hope flower, the Heart's-ease speaks of Thought; what can we Snowdrops tell?' [25]

Our mother did not answer—she left us to find what lessons we best could teach.

So day by day we grew, stronger and stronger, gradually becoming better fitted to perform the work allotted; until at last I appeared above the ground—a slender green leaf!

Never shall I forget how cheerless looked the earth when first I came above it, so dull and black, save where a few snowflakes had been drifted by the wintry winds; all else was bleak and bare. There was not a gleam of sunshine athwart the leaden sky to cheer us, nor a bird to meet us with a friendly greeting, for even the robins kept so near the houses for warmth and shelter, they came not to the spot where we grew, alone and sad; and as to the trees, they as yet stood silent above us, only the Holly was still decked with gay scarlet berries, enlivening up the gloomy landscape with a little bright colour. But the Holly smiled not on us; armed at all points in his glossy coat of shining mail, he was so lofty and grand, and we were only—Snowdrops! [26]

But I grew on, cherished by our great Mother Nature, who careth for all her children, and loves them tenderly, be they humble Daisies or the queenly Rose; and at last I became a perfect flower, taking my pure white tints from the snow around me, and borrowing just a faint tinge of green from the young grass that was now bravely struggling to appear.

By and by, a Blackbird, with golden beak and shining coat, found me out as he was seeking a convenient tree in which to make a nest, and, bowing politely, exclaimed,—

'Welcome to you, fair Snowdrop! I am rejoiced to see you, for you bring us the assurance that spring is on the way, and we shall be glad, for the winter has been long and dreary.'

Then he having communicated the glad tidings to the other birds, they also came to greet me, cheering my loneliness with their sweet songs. Yet still I pined to return to earth again; I cared not to look upward, but hung my head, murmuring sadly,—

'Oh, Mother Earth, take home thy child! she is so weary of her life here.'

Was I wrong? Perhaps so, but I owed my existence to that which mortals deem so cold and dark; I loved it with the affection of a loving child, and longed to rest again upon the dear bosom that had sheltered me when I was but a frail bulb. [27]

Besides, it seemed to me that I was doing no good. Why was I sent here, if only to bloom and then die? I had been told that nothing was created in vain; was I doing the work for which I had been sent upon the earth?

Whilst thus repining over my useless life, a poet passed by chance—stay, was it chance? nay, there is no chance! He was one who as yet had met with but little success; I am told there are many such among earth's children. We know that it is said:

'Many a flower is born
to blush unseen,
And waste its sweetness
on the desert air;'

yet the sweetness is not *lost*, for it speaks with a perfumed voice to the creatures of the air; but among mortals, many fade away into utter oblivion, breathing only their sad, sweet heart-songs to the listening winds around.

And this poet of whom I speak, he felt within himself the inspiration of genius, that innate love of the beautiful and true which comes from God alone; but the world looked coldly on him, and he [28]

was struggling with what seemed endless disappointments, battling with them bravely, yet almost sinking amidst the strife. His very heart was beginning to fail him, his noble courage to give way, when he saw me there, blossoming alone in that quiet nook.

'Oh, God!' he cried, as, with clasped hands and eyes raised heavenward, he sank beside me on the sod,—'oh, God, forgive me that I should dare to doubt Thy loving care, when this fragile, fragile flower, sheltered by Thee, has braved the wintry storms, while the cold winds pass tenderly over its bowed head. A bruised reed Thou wilt not break; Thou carest for the lilies of the field,—why then should I fear when adversity assails me? Art Thou not still above, though heaven seems so far off, and oh, so cold and pitiless! I will have faith in Thy divine and fatherly love, and accept the lesson this sweet flower hath taught me.'

Yes, faith—faith in God, was the parable I was sent to teach, and I also have learned to know that, [29] though the skies may be dark and the winds—oh, so cold! yet if we only wait, and trust Him, the sunshine will come at last, and the breath of heaven never visit us too roughly.

PARABLE THIRD.

THE FOXGLOVES' STRATAGEM—GRATITUDE.

E lived on the garden wall of an old-farmhouse, over which the vines grew in [30] rare luxuriance, covering it with their climbing tendrils and leaves; and in the autumn the purple and white grapes peeped from beneath their leafy shelter, mocking the thirsty throats of the village lads who passed that way, and who looked longingly up at the ripe clusters.

It was a very old place, I am told, and had been inhabited by the same family for many successive generations. Fathers had tilled the soil, then laid aside the plough for ever. Sons had sprung up to take their place, and they too, in their turn, were gathered in, when the bearded grain was ripe for the sickle of the great 'Reaper, whose name is Death,' leaving the old homestead to others of the same name and [31] race, who loved the home in which they were born, and wherein those they most cherished had lived and died.

The Swallows, too, loved it, returning year after year to their nests under the eaves, and from early dawn 'to dewy eve,' all through the warm summer days, flew hither and thither with swift, untiring wing, chasing each other, as it were, or teaching their young to fly. As to the Robins, they hopped in at the open door under the rustic porch, just as if they belonged to the place, and were sure of a welcome, which indeed they were! And that porch—what a cosy corner it was, with seats on either side, inviting weary feet to rest! the sunbeams were always playing bo-peep through the leaves which hung clustering around; the Honeysuckles and Clematis decking it, too, with their blossoms, scattering their delicious perfume the while. But I always thought the spot looked brightest when little Susie was there—she who was the very sunshine of the old home! And how they all loved her, from the white-headed grandfather down to the little ploughboy, who brought her all the poor motherless or sick creatures he found on the farm, were it but a half- [32]

fledged bird or a stray kitten, certain of her thanks, and a sweet smile; and as to her three big brothers, who had such influence over them as little Susie? for even when they were disputing as to whose turn it was to ride Brown Bess (the joint property of the children), Susie was always chosen umpire to decide the important question, and they abode by her decision.

Why, it was Susie who saved us from being ruthlessly destroyed! for it happened that one day old Peter was at work in the garden, and, to make the place 'a bit more tidy,' as he said, was proceeding to cut us off from the wall.

'They bain't o' much account,' he muttered, sharpening his hook; 'not loike them there Roses maister sets sich store by, and thinks so much on.'

Certainly it seemed very sad that, because we were merely 'common flowers,' our lives were to be cut short long before the appointed time; we had endeavoured to bloom as brightly as our more refined sisters, and in sunshine or shower had tried our best to look gay, and, I think, had succeeded, for we do not shut our petals as if we were sulking when dark clouds come, but keep [33]
them always open. But the fiat had gone forth—old Peter was the stern arbitrator of our destinies! and, feeling that our fate was inevitable, we sighed a last long farewell to each other, just as we saw him raise his sharp hook to cut us down. At that moment, so 'big with fate' for us, who should come into the garden, singing for very gladness like the birds themselves, but little Susie; the sunlight was playing with her waving hair, her eyes sparkled as the dewdrops in the sun, and her tiny feet skipped lightly along as she came dancing up the pathway.

That prolonged our lives! Old Peter dropped his hook to turn round and look at his young mistress.

'What are you going to do, Peter?' she inquired, as she drew near, and saw him take up his tools to resume work.

'Whoy, lop doun these 'ere things, Miss Zusie,' he replied, pointing at us contemptuously.

'Oh, please don't destroy them! they are so pretty!' was her eager exclamation.

'Purty, missie!' the old man repeated, with astonishment; 'whoy, them be wild loike.' [34]

'But I love them dearly,' she persisted; 'so please leave them there.'

'But the maister?' pursued Peter, rubbing his rough head in his perplexity; 'he told me to clear roight up.'

Peter, it must be observed, was 'the odd man' about the farm; there is always one.

'Father will say you did quite right to let them live,' replied the little lady; 'he likes them as much as I do, for he says he remembers them always growing here, coming up year after year without troubling any one to look after them, and making the old wall a very flower-garden.'

'Well, Miss Zusie, if so be ye sez so, I s'pose I must,' he acquiesced, though I think he was greatly disappointed that he could not have his own way about it; so there we were left, and we bloomed more than ever, striving to do our best in gratitude to the little maiden.

Now, I have noticed, as a rule,—mind, every rule has exceptions,—that good deeds, like good seed, seldom fall to the ground and wither away. Both may lie fallow, for a while at least, but the flower comes up after a while, and 'with what measure ye mete, it is meted to you again.' You [35]
may not have remarked this, perhaps, but the fact holds good, proving most emphatically the sacred truth, 'Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy.'

Now, when Susie saved our lives, she never thought that simple flowers could ever repay her kindness, and for some time, it is true, we did nothing, only strove to make the garden wall look gay with our sturdy buds and blossoms.

But one day, I remember, Susie sat on the lawn close by the wall on which we grew, very busy making a smart new dress for her doll, Miss Arabella, who sat propped up by a work-box at her back, with her arms straight out, and her toes turned in, but with a sweet smile upon her waxen face. They were evidently engaged in earnest conversation, for Susie kept speaking in her own voice for herself, and using a very shrill falsetto for Arabella, who, by the bye, appeared to reply only in monosyllables.

In the midst of this very entertaining discourse I heard another voice exclaiming,—

'Look 'ee 'ere, Miss Zusie, this vowl 'ave airt her vut;' and the small ploughboy I before mentioned [36]
came in at the garden gate, holding a hen in his arms.

'Oh, give it to me, Joey,' cried the little girl, full of sympathy for the wounded bird. 'How did it happen? Poor dear, poor dear!'

With that Joey poured forth a long account of the accident, to which she listened attentively, all the while soothing the lamed hen, and wrapping it up in her soft frock.

'I will bathe its poor foot in warm water, and try to get it well,' she said, after thanking Joey for bringing it to her; and she went into the house, leaving Arabella alone on the lawn, cautioning her, however, 'to be a good child until mamma returned.'

It was some days before we again saw the hen, and then she was quite restored, and had been

given to Susie as her 'very own' because of the care she had bestowed upon her; indeed, she had become quite a pet, actually was allowed to roam about the flower-garden and lawns; and some one had given her the name of 'Zenobia,'—an inconvenient name to call when in a hurry, but Susie was very satisfied with it, and so, I suppose, was the hen, who seemed to love her little mistress, following her wherever she went, eating from her hand, and even perching on her [37] shoulder! After some time Zenobia was to be seen walking about, followed by a family of nine chickens; and really I cannot tell which was most proud of the young brood, Susie or the hen. Susie called them 'loves' and 'beauties,' and the hen, she clucked, and made a great fuss over them, and, as if determined that their bed should be of roses, insisted on roosting every night under a rose-bush which grew near the garden gate, instead of the cosy coop with which she had been provided.

Well, one moonlight night we, of course, were awake, though the church clock had long since struck the hour of midnight; and it was so still, only the voices of the night murmuring among the trees, though occasionally we could hear the soft crooning of the hen, as she hushed her little family to sleep beneath the rose-bush. Suddenly we heard the sound of stealthy footsteps creeping under the wall.

'It is only Dash, the house dog,' whispered a sister-flower, who grew on the same stem as myself. [38]

'Dash does not steal along in that crafty manner,' said another.

'Perhaps it is a rabbit,' suggested one, 'or a cat taking a walk.'

'It may be a rat.'

Various conjectures were hazarded by those who grew low down on the wall, but I was higher up than they, so, looking cautiously over, what should I see but a Fox creeping along, and scenting his prey, with his sharp nose close to the ground.

'Good evening!' I called out to him.

He started with alarm, for great rascals are always great cowards.

'Oh, good evening, my friend,' he replied, very blandly. 'Charming evening this for a walk.'

'Yes,' I answered sharply; 'but rather late for respectable folks to be abroad!'

'Ah yes, just so,' was his response; 'but, you see, my doctor has advised me to take quiet rambles.'

'It was not Dr. Quack, was it?' I asked; 'because, poor fellow, he came to an untimely end the other night,—had his head bitten off, and his body was then dragged across the yard, as I suppose you already know?' [39]

'Dear me!' he ejaculated, with affected pity, and glancing slyly up at me out of the corner of his red eyes; 'but how should I know, my friend?'

'Oh, because some of your family are strongly suspected,' was my reply; 'indeed, our Dash is on the watch, so I would advise you to'—

'Good-night, good-night,' he hurriedly exclaimed. 'I feel the winds are becoming very chilly.'

So saying, he shuffled off as fast as possible, more especially as at that moment Dash began barking furiously, as though he scented a foe. How we laughed to think we had frightened the artful fellow away, and some of us thought we should never see him again; but we were mistaken, for, a few nights after, there he was creeping along so stealthily outside the garden wall.

'What do you want?' I called out to him.

'Nothing, my friend, nothing,' was his answer.

'Well, since we do not keep that article here, you had better seek it elsewhere,' interposed a brother of mine who is rather saucy.

The Fox paused for a moment, as if hesitating what to say; at length he began, in a whining tone of voice,—

'My beloved friends, I perceive I must take you into my confidence. The fact is, my worthy doctor [40] says I am in delicate health, and has therefore directed me'—

'Well,' I said, seeing that he hesitated; 'what of that?'

'Simply this; he has ordered me to eat only light, digestible food, such as chicken,' he went on to say.

'Oh, has he?' I remarked; and then I thought to myself, 'Now can your craftiness be seen through: you are after Zenobia; but Susie saved our lives, she shall not find the poor despised Fox-gloves ungrateful. We will save Zenobia!'

However, Mr. Reynard had not guessed our thoughts (for we all thought alike on the subject), but continued,—

'Now, charming friends, I know you have a most delightful hen in this garden.'

'Oh yes, and nine such plump chickens!' cried my brother.

'Oh dear, how very nice!' exclaimed the Fox.

'And I have no doubt,' continued my brother, whilst we could hardly restrain our mirth, 'but that Zenobia would willingly give them up to you, for the honour of being devoured by so distinguished a personage.' [41]

'Would she really?' he cried, swallowing this piece of flattery as greedily as he would the chickens.

'Oh yes,' I chimed in; 'but there's one thing I would mention. Grandees like you must be formally introduced. Zenobia would be horrified were you to appear before her so unceremoniously; she might even refuse your request for one of the chickens.'

'What shall I do, then?' he eagerly questioned.

'Why, dress yourself of course, appear *en grande toilette*,' I replied; 'brush up your whiskers a little more, make your coat look glossy, and, above all, put on a pair of gloves!'

'Gloves!' he repeated. 'I have not a single pair; tell me where I can purchase them?'

'Leave that to us,' said my brother, bursting with glee. 'Originally, you must know, we were Fox-glovers, but somehow we have lost our ancient privilege; therefore have the supreme graciousness to restore it to us, and we will be only too proud to serve you.'

'Oh, certainly,' assented the Fox, assuming at once an air of patronage that was highly amusing. 'I take six and three-quarters,' extending his forepad. [42]

'No, surely not!' protested my merry brother; 'you must be mistaken; such a pretty little paw as yours cannot possibly require such a large glove. Allow me to suggest six and a quarter.'

The Fox agreed to the size named.

'If you will condescend to call here to-morrow night about this time, they shall be ready for you,' one of us declared.

'Thank you,' he said loftily, as though he was conferring a favour upon us, and off he went, no doubt congratulating himself on his diplomacy. As to us, we laughed heartily, knowing how the crafty old fellow would be caught in his own toils.

The next day, when we saw Susie feeding and caressing Zenobia, how we longed for the power to tell her of the danger that so fearfully menaced her pet, but we could not; for, though there is a 'language of flowers,' it does not discourse on such a topic as this, therefore we were compelled to keep silence; but we were determined to do our best to guard little Susie's treasure. Night came, and dark and dreary it was too, with heavy clouds drifting across the moon, almost hiding its brightness; and it grew so late, past twelve, we began to think Mr. Reynard suspected us, and would not come. But he did, looking so sleek and shiny, with his coat all spick and span, being freshly brushed, I expect. [43]

'Here I am, my friends; it has taken me so long to dress,' he said, panting with the haste he had evidently made. 'Is Zenobia—what a sweet name, to be sure!' he added in a fawning voice,—'is she here?'

'Of course she is,' I replied; 'can you not hear her crooning to her *nine* children?' with a strong emphasis on the number.

'Sweet, tender creature!' he exclaimed. 'Oh, but to know her yet more intimately! Let me jump over the gate to her!'

'What! without your gloves on?' cried several of us at once; 'consider how very vulgar you would look.'

'Dear, dear, I quite forgot,' he ejaculated rather impatiently; evidently he wanted his supper.

'Here they are,' said my brother; 'pray allow me the honour of putting them on for you.'

He saw the fox was all impatience; however, he was obliged to consent, and my brother proceeded forthwith to fit on a pair of Fox-gloves made expressly by us. [44]

'They are rather a tight fit,' he nervously remarked.

'Rather,' we cried, as my brother held him fast by the paws, and we went to assist him in keeping the scoundrel a prisoner.

He saw, when too late, the trap into which he had fallen, and struggled hard to get free, even trying to pull us from off the old wall in his futile efforts to escape. But we were too securely fixed there for his strength to be of any avail; our roots were the growth of years, and, besides, we clasped him so tightly—for unity is indeed strength—that at last the cowardly fellow roared aloud with mingled pain and fright; perhaps he thought to startle us, and make us lose our hold. But we knew better than that—*we* only gripped him the faster; but the noise aroused Dash, who came bounding to the spot (he was always unchained at night), and, flying at Mr. Reynard's throat, he soon pinned him to the ground.

The farmer and his sons must have heard the cries of the Fox and the baying of Dash, for

presently they came running as fast as possible to the spot, armed with all sorts of weapons, and soon despatched the rascal. [45]

And it would have pleased you to have heard the praises bestowed upon the brave old dog for his courage, which praise he most certainly deserved; but no one thought of us. However, we had our reward in feeling that we had done our duty, and tried to repay our debt of gratitude to little Susie; that was recompense enough for us, nor did we wish for more, for—

'On their own merits
Modest men are dumb;'

and so say we simple Foxgloves.

PARABLE FOURTH.

THE LITTLE MINER AND HIS FLOWER—TRUST IN GOD.

I DO not think any of us would care to pass the greater part of our days down in a coal mine, or even to live in the vicinity of one. For miles around the country is barren of trees or flowers; even the grass does not grow there; the very air is dense with black smoke from the numerous chimneys, so that the sky is hidden, as it were, by a thick, murky veil. But, if thus dreary by day, how much more dreadful does it look at night, when the lurid glare from the furnaces lights up the sky with a red gleam, which can be seen far and wide! it has then in it something terrible. [46]

As I said just now, not a flower can thrive in such a close and heavy atmosphere; not even a blade of grass can push its way up through the coal-encrusted soil which covers the earth. Well may it be called the 'Black Country;' and yet there are brave, good men living, ay, and working there, day after day descending those dark shafts and in the underground of the mines living out their hard, laborious lives, braving dangers innumerable, to provide for the wants of their fellow-men; yet I wonder how many of us, as we gather round the cosy fireside of home, ever think of the hardy miners. All honour, then, to that Christian man, whose noble heart thought so much of them and of the risks they encounter in the deep mines; his mighty genius studied to avert the dangers to which they are exposed, and by his clever invention many thousand lives have been saved. Statues are raised to soldiers and statesmen, and their deeds are chronicled all over the world, yet the simple-hearted Cornish chemist has done more for England's glory than all her greatest warriors or statesmen! [47]

Sometimes, it is true, terrible accidents happen even now, and indeed, had any one passed through a certain coal district on the day of which we speak, a scene of desolation and misery would have presented itself; for there had been a colliery accident!—a fearful explosion in a mine through some (as yet) unknown cause, and they were now bringing up the dead and dying. We too often, alas! read these sad accounts in the newspapers, but cannot fully realize the intense anguish and despair among the mining population when such a calamity befalls them. Try to picture, then, the men, women, and even children, who were gathered in anxious groups around the mouth of the pit, eagerly waiting to see if any of their kindred were among the hapless [48]

victims; and when the brave rescue party would appear above the shaft, bearing in their arms the sufferers, wailing cries would rend the very air, as some poor woman recognised her son or her 'good man' in the crushed and mangled form they laid so tenderly down!

There was a little cottage standing among others of the same class, but which from its appearance seemed to betoken the residence of one more refined than the rest, for snowy curtains draped the windows, the panes of which were scrupulously clean, and the doorsteps were as white as hands could make them. Going now towards this cottage, a group of men might be seen, carefully carrying a heavy burden, over which a sheet was spread. It was their foreman [49] —a man loved and respected by them all, and the hearts of these rough colliers beat sadly, as they bore him thus towards his once happy home!

The rumour of the catastrophe, and of her husband being one among the many poor sufferers, had burst upon his wife like the surging of an angry wave, overwhelming her with its force, and she sat with ashen cheeks and quivering lips, listening with bated breath for that which she knew must come, the while convulsively clasping in her arms their only child, their fair-haired Davie. But when at last she heard the measured tread of those who bore him coming nearer and nearer to her door, she rose, with a shivering sob, to meet him, as she had ever done, with a loving smile, though now her heart was full of anguish. And he knew her, for he put out his poor crushed hand for her to take, faintly murmuring,—

'My poor, poor girl!'

Tenderly, as with the gentle touch of woman, those rugged men laid him upon the bed from which he had risen in full health and strength, and the wife's hand was firm, as softly she [50] removed the garments from his mangled limbs. Ah, little had she thought, when she bade him 'Good-bye' that morning, his return would have been thus. He had said to Davie in his merry way, laying his hand on the boy's curly head,—

'Ah, young man, soon you will be the bread-winner; your old father will then be able to sit idle by the ingle and smoke his pipe, whilst mother looks on.'

He had returned to the ingle, but Davie was still a child!

A few anxious days, and all was over; the end had come, and he and his fellow-sufferers were laid to rest beneath the fresh green turf in a distant churchyard, and the poor young widow was alone in the wide world, with only little Davie!

But the poor have no time to spare for mourning or regrets; they must be up and doing, even though their hearts fail them for very sorrow; yet none save those who have suffered can know the utter desolation of heart, crushing the very soul to the earth with despair, when the father, 'the bread-winner,' is taken from their midst, and those who are left know not where to look for [51] help or guidance; and so this poor widow sat by the fire-light, with her boy's hand clasped in hers, gazing into the glowing embers as if trying to read the future therein. The past had been very happy, for her girlhood was spent in a far different sphere, but she had freely given up all for him who was now no more, and had never repented of the sacrifice made; but, alas! he was gone, leaving her alone, and her heart was like to break. And, musing thus, she recalled the tones of the dear voice that had ever comforted her when in sadness, now silent for ever!—the brave heart so firm of purpose that had ceased to beat!—and as she thought of him who had been so kind, so true, her courage gave way, and, burying her face in her hands, she sobbed aloud, saying,—

'Oh, Davie, Davie! who will care for us now father is gone?'

The child put his arms lovingly around her bowed head, as though it was his place to be the comforter.

'Mother darling, the Lord will care for us. He is the friend of the widow and fatherless.' [52]

There was something in the boy's voice that struck the mother's ear, for she removed her hands from before her face, and, drawing him nearer to her, gazed earnestly into those clear blue eyes.

Sudden sorrow often changes the entire nature of people, and the events of the last few days had, as it were, transformed little Davie from a mere child into a thoughtful boy. Like his namesake of old, 'he was of a beautiful countenance,' and as he caressingly smoothed his mother's pale cheeks with his soft, gentle hands, she felt she was not desolate, since he was left to her. Long they sat in silence. At last the boy said,—

'Mother dear, Mat Morgan says that, as I am now ten years old, it is time for me to begin work like the other lads about here.'

'How, Davie?' she dreamily questioned, for her thoughts were wandering far away, so that she scarcely heard what he said.

'In the pit with him,' was the reply; 'he is so kind and good, I know he will take great care of me.'

'No, no!' she cried, clasping him yet closer to her; 'not in the cruel mine that has robbed us of

father!—no—not there!' [53]

'Nay, mother darling,' the boy gently urged; 'it was God who took father home—and he was ready to go! Besides,' he continued, with all the hopefulness of youth, 'I could earn some money every week, and only think how useful that would be!'

'But your poor father did not wish you to be a miner; he hoped you would become a great and clever man,' the mother replied.

He hesitated for a moment. Bright visions had filled his young head of gaining riches and honours 'some day,' that glorious time of the young, and he had thought how proud they both would be of him, and they should neither of them work any more, but live in a lovely home of *his* providing, and never know care any more. And now!—he clenched his small hands together, and choked back the big lump rising in his throat as bravely he exclaimed,—

'And I will be a clever man, for I will learn at night when I come home, and who knows what I may be one day. Mat Morgan says our manager was only a poor collier lad once, and look at him now. Besides, they are all so good to us here; they loved father dearly.' [54]

So the boy prevailed over her fears, and in a few days he took his place by the side of his old friend Mat Morgan, who grew to love him as his own child. But the mother's heart was grieved when at night her boy returned with the fair golden hair rough and tangled, the once delicate hands torn and hardening with toil; yet the child gave no thought to that. True, this was not the life he would have chosen, for he was a studious boy, but still, was he not 'the bread-winner'? and it was a proudly happy day for him when he laid his first earnings in her lap, and felt her tears upon his cheek as she kissed and blessed her boy.

But the hour he loved the best was when, casting aside all care, he sat on a low stool at her feet, and, with his head resting on her knee, listened as she read aloud their evening chapter from the Book of Life; he was then the child again, not the toiling little miner-lad!—and oh, it was so peaceful!

'"Consider the lilies of the field, they toil not, neither do they spin,"' read the mother one evening.

'But, mother, what are lilies like? I have never seen one, you know,' asked the boy, when she had [55] ceased reading and had closed the book.

In simple language, she endeavoured to describe to her town-born child the exquisite beauties of the flowers of the field, and he, with an innate love of the beautiful, caught readily at all she said, and seemed as though he saw them all as she depicted.

'How I should love to be where there are always flowers!' he exclaimed; 'it must be like paradise! But those I have seen always close up at night. I wish there was one here that opened of an evening, as if to greet me when I come home!'

I know not how it happened, but the next night, when little Davie entered his home, a delicious perfume filled the air, and standing in the cottage window was an Evening Primrose, with its petals fully expanded.

'Mother, mother,' cried the boy, 'my wish has come true! here is a flower opening its blossoms to bid me welcome home;' and in excess of delight he knelt and kissed his treasure again and again. And words cannot express the love he bestowed upon the plant; it was to him an unfeigned joy to [56] watch the growing of each leaf, the gradual unfolding of each fresh bud; and every night, on his return from work, his first thought, after the thought for his mother, was of his sweet Evening Primrose.

Those who gather flowers at will, prize them for a while, then cast them carelessly aside, can form no idea of the all-absorbing love the little miner lad evinced for his one fair flower; it was his sole treasure, and he ever watched and tended it lovingly and well.

But time passed on, and it was Davie's last day in the coal-mine. He was going to exchange that toilsome life, so uncongenial to his taste, but which stern necessity had made him adopt, for a new and brighter occupation, one, too, for which he had always ardently longed. The manager of whom he had spoken to his mother had frequently noticed the gentle, fair-haired boy; prosperity had not hardened *his* heart (as it so often does), and recollections of the long-ago flashed ever across him, when he saw Davie bravely striving to do his best to help his mother bear her burden of sorrowful poverty. He too had been a collier lad in those far-off days, and 'the only son of *his* [57] mother, and she was a widow.' The grass was green above that dear mother's grave, whose latter years had been cheered and comforted by his tender, fostering love; but his thoughts were of her, as, laying his hand upon the lad's curly head, he kindly asked,—

'Would you like to leave the pit-work, David, and go into the engineers' department?'

'What! and become a great man like Stephenson and Brunel? Oh yes, sir!' the boy joyfully exclaimed, for, like all youthful ambitions he vaulted at once to the highest pinnacle of greatness —there is no midway for the ardent young.

The manager smiled at his enthusiasm, as he replied,—

'You can but try, my lad, to be as great and good as they were;' and he added, 'You can enter upon your new work next week; there is a vacancy for you.'

'But, sir,'—and the boy paused,—'shall I earn wages like I do now? because'—

And his voice failed him, he could not utter the thought of his heart,—should he still be able to help his mother? [58]

The gentleman understood his hesitation, for he said kindly,—

'Yes, my little man, you will earn good wages, and, if you are only good and steady like your poor father before you, I've no doubt but that you may become a great man one day;' and he smiled encouragingly into the boy's upturned face, a face which was beaming with hope and happiness.

As to Davie, he raised his generous friend's hand to his lips, for he could not speak for very gratitude; then, with his blue eyes sparkling with joy, ran quickly home to tell the blissful news.

'Mother, mother!' he cried, bursting in upon her as she sat at work; 'I *shall* become a great man now, and you shall ride in a carriage, and never work any more;' and then, with his arms around her neck and his curly head resting lovingly upon her shoulder, he poured forth his bright hopes for the future.

So the last day came for working in the dark mine, and to-morrow—oh, to-morrow!

'But I'll miss ye, Davie,' Mat Morgan observed, as he and his little friend trudged on side by side to work; 'ye be bright and cheery-like down there,' pointing with his pipe towards the pit. 'And maybe ye'll forget the missis and me when ye gets to be a great man, as ye says ye'll be one day, and I makes no doubt but ye will be too. Ye be summat like yer poor fayther, my lad; he were allers above we.' [59]

'Nay, Master Morgan!' cried the boy reproachfully; 'were you not my first friend, when dear father died? You don't mean that, I know! looking up at his old friend's rugged face with eyes full of tears. Then, brushing them away with his jacket sleeve,—it was not manly to cry, he thought,—he continued, 'No, when I am rich, you and Mrs. Morgan shall both live in a big house with mother and me; we will ride in a grand carriage, and be so happy all together, and never look at black coals except to burn them.'

The old miner smiled as he listened to the boy's bright day-dreams, yet still he could not help feeling somewhat sad, for he dearly loved the lad, and knew how much he should miss his merry chatter and song, which so beguiled the time while they worked together down in the mine. [60]

But the time passed on much as on other days; when, just as they were preparing to leave off work, and another gang was coming to relieve them, a low, rumbling sound was heard. One or two of the men ran to the entrance of the working, Mat Morgan among the number, and his face was blanched when he returned to his comrades.

'What is it, Master Morgan?' asked Davie, looking up at him with an undefined dread.

'My lad,' was his reply, and his voice was very calm, 'there has been a landslip in the sidings, and we are shut in.'

'But can we not get out?' he questioned.

'No, never again, unless help comes,' he hoarsely whispered, for his brave heart stood still at the terrible danger they were in.

Indeed, no pen can express the terror that filled the hearts of these brave and hardy men at the thought of being thus entombed in a living grave; they quailed not when meeting death face to face, but shrank in dread at the slowly advancing foe. [61]

All but the boy!

The light from the flickering lamps the miners carried fell upon his delicate features; but his eyes brightly gleamed, as, laying his hands on the bowed head of his old friend, he softly said,—

'Master Morgan, let us not fear; our God is with us still!'

'Maybe He has forgotten us, Davie,' the man pitifully moaned, for even his strong courage had broken down in face of this calamity.

'No, no,' soothed the boy. '"Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for Thou art with me:" is it not so?'

There was something so calm, so trustful in the child's faith in God's mercy, that the poor stricken men listened as he tried to cheer them with thoughts of that Power who is mighty to save.

The weary hours dragged their slow length along, and, though help came not yet, his perfect trust in God never wavered. Some of the men gave themselves up to despair, and lay down where they had sat cowering, prepared to die. The lamps went out by degrees as the oil was expended, adding to the horror of the situation by leaving them in utter darkness. And yet, though death appeared so near, it had no terrors for little Davie, for God was nearer still. [62]

'Shall I sing to you, Master Morgan?' the boy asked, as he laid his weary head down upon his friend's broad shoulder.

'Ay, ay, my lad,' was the sole reply the poor man could make.

Then through the awful silence and darkness of this fearful grave rang the sweet, clear tones of the child's voice, singing—

'Rock of Ages, cleft for
me,
Let me hide myself in
Thee.'

'Hark!' he cried, suddenly pausing in the hymn; 'they are striving to clear the working—I hear the sound of their picks! We are saved! we are saved!' he joyously shouted.

With the sense of hearing preternaturally sharpened, these poor men, who had given themselves up for lost, also listened; those who had lain down to die rising up and listening with every nerve acutely strained to catch the faintest sound. Yes, they could hear their deliverers bravely working to set them free. [63]

Then arose as with one voice their glad song of deliverance,—

'Thou canst save, and
Thou alone!'

Tenderly they bore him home to his mother, that brave, noble child, whose simple trust had sustained their failing hearts in that hour of trial and suffering.

But reaction had set in, and he was weak and fainting when they laid him in her arms, yet he feebly murmured, striving for her sake to appear still strong,—

'Oh, mother darling, I am so glad to be at home again! I thought I should never more see you, nor my Evening Primrose. But, mother, why is it still so dark?'

She glanced in terror at his soft blue eyes, which to her looked as clear as ever. But why was it that, though the morning light was streaming in through the open window, to him it still was dark?

She breathed not one word of her fear to him, though the icy dread chilled her to the heart, but, laying him gently down in his own cosy bed, Soothed him with loving caresses, bidding him— [64]

'Try to sleep, and forget it all!'

Then, when sleep came to the over-wrought brain, she left him in the care of a kindly neighbour, and went tremblingly forth to seek her child's trusty old friend.

She found Mat Morgan seated in his arm-chair (for, like the rest of the miners who had been in this imminent peril, he had escaped unhurt), recounting to a group of neighbours the wonderful faith of little Davie, whose trust in God never failed, even when the shadows of the dark angel's wings had hovered so closely over them.

'Oh, Master Morgan!' the poor mother cried, as with clasped hands and quivering lips she overheard him thus dilating on her boy's noble fortitude and humble Christian faith; 'my darling Davie! he will never, never look on us again this side the grave. He'—

'He be no dead, ma'am!' exclaimed the old man, starting from his chair, while sympathizing friends gathered round her with words of tender pity.

'No, no, not dead, thank God!' she sobbed; 'but blind, I fear. Oh, my little boy, my Davie!'

'Maybe not,' he replied, endeavouring to comfort her. 'I'll jest go wi' ye. I've known sich things afore, when men have been shut up in the dark some hours,—and *we* were nigh upon three days in the pit, mind ye—the shock of seein' the daylight kind o' dazes the sight for a while. So ye must not greet, but hope and trust in our heavenly Father, as your little lad ever does, I'm thinkin'! Come along.' [65]

How eagerly did she hasten home, all anxiety to prove if the old miner's opinion was right, and 'hoping against hope' that the child's sight had become cleared while he slept, and that when he awoke he would look upon her with unclouded eyes. Her heart beat so violently she could scarcely speak, as, standing by his bedside, she saw his blue eyes were unclosed and apparently gazing upon her where she stood with Mat Morgan by her side.

'Davie,' she whispered softly, bending over him and kissing the parted lips, 'here is Master Morgan come to see you.'

'Where is he?' the boy joyfully cried. 'He is not hurt, then? Oh, I am so glad! But, mother dear, I cannot see him, nor you; there seems like a shadow over my eyes. Oh, mother,' he piteously moaned, as the sad truth appeared to strike him, 'tell me, I am not blind, am I?' [66]

Then, as she could not for very anguish reply to his eager question, his noble courage gave way, and, throwing himself upon his pillow, he uttered a piercing cry of untold despair.

The poor mother knelt beside him with arms closely folding him to her heart, unable to soothe, save with loving caresses, her child's unutterable anguish.

'Nay, Davie, my man,' cried the old miner, wiping his eyes with the back of his rough hand, 'ye did no greet when death a'most stared us in the face; why do ye sorrow now, my brave lad?'

'Oh, but then I should have been with God! Now'—and his sobs redoubled—'I shall never see mother's dear face again, nor yours, Master Morgan; and for me my Evening Primrose will never open its buds again. And oh, if I am blind, I can never more be mother's little bread-winner.'

The parable is told!

Little Davie eventually recovered his sight, thanks to the generous kindness of the manager, who spared no means to procure the best surgical aid for the poor little lad; and in the years that quickly followed, he became the stay and comfort of his widowed mother, retaining ever his filial affection for her, and cherishing fond recollections of those early days when his only treasures were her love and his Evening Primrose. [67]

PARABLE FIFTH.

THE LITTLE SEED—KINDNESS.

'WHY, what have you got in your beak?' asked a dingy London Sparrow of another, just as dingy as himself. [68]

'Well, I hardly know,' replied his friend, laying down the article in question, and surveying it critically with his head on one side; 'but it seems to me as though it is a seed—of some sort!'

'So it is,' assented the other, as he hopped nearer and attentively examined the treasure-trove. 'Yes,'—as if the idea had suddenly suggested itself,—'yes, it *is* a seed. Where did you find it?'

'I did not steal it,' exclaimed the owner of the property, who evidently resented a something in his companion's manner of questioning; 'I honestly picked it up in a garden, where it was lying on the *top* of the earth, not *in* it,' he added, with emphasis. 'I expect the wind blew it there, for the gales have been very high these last few days.' [69]

'Yes, yes,' replied the questioner with alacrity; perhaps he feared he had wounded his friend's feelings, and dreaded lest there might ensue a squabble, for sparrows, it must be confessed, are easily affronted over trifles, though, as a rule, they are good-tempered little fellows enough, putting up with scanty fare and homely lodgings very contentedly and cheerfully. 'I wonder what kind of seed it is, do you know?' he still further questioned, being of an inquisitive turn of mind.

'No, I do not,' replied the finder.

'Ah,' he said, with a sigh that ruffled all his feathers, 'if we did but live in the beautiful green hedgerows, instead of dwelling among town chimneys, we should soon know what it was; our country cousins would be able to tell us in a moment if it was good to eat or not. By the bye, shall you eat it?' he pursued, eyeing his friend in the same keen way as he eyed occasional crumbs of bread, his sharp little eye glancing quick and bright whilst waiting for the reply.

'No,' answered the other; 'I shall give it away.' [70]

'Give it away!' he repeated, in utter astonishment at the idea; 'who to?'

'Why, in my travels about this city, I have noticed a small window up among the chimneys in the East End of London—it's a mere garret, I expect.'

'Well?' ejaculated the listener, somewhat impatiently.

'I have also observed,' pursued his companion deliberately, 'that on the ledge of this window there are two or three flower-pots with some tiny pieces of green trying to shoot out of the dry mould.'

'What have those flower-pots and the dry mould to do with this seed?' was the question he sharply put.

'I think,' continued the other Sparrow, not heeding the interruption, 'this must be a flower-seed, since I found it in a garden well known to me for its loveliness,—for, as a rule, I go about with my eyes open,' he added. 'Now at this attic window of which I spoke,' he went on saying, 'I have seen a poor pale-faced girl for ever bending over needlework, although sometimes, but very rarely, I have observed her carefully watering and tending those flower-pots with their feeble attempts at [71] greenery.'

'Have you nearly finished your touching description?' asked the friend, with a sneer.

'Now,' went on the Sparrow, as though he had not heard this remark, 'the soil does not look very inviting, yet I have been thinking that, as there has been rain during the night, the mould may be a little softened perhaps; so if I alight on the window-sill, and drop this seed into one of those pots, a pretty flower *might* come up in time, and then how glad the poor girl would be!—why, it would actually give her happiness.'

And the reflection merely of this hoped-for pleasure so brightened up the little bird that he looked positively lovely! Not even a bird of paradise could have appeared more glorious, dingy brown though our tiny hero's plumage was; but good deeds and kind words always bring a brightness with them.

'Oh, that is what you intend doing!' remarked the other, who had been pruning his flecked feathers whilst listening to this delightful plan;—perhaps he might have imagined the treasure would come to him, since his friend was not going to keep it himself. 'You are very generous,' he [72] added, with a slight touch of sarcasm.

But the kind little Sparrow did not mind; his heart was too full of noble intentions to notice trivial things. He merely said,—

'So now I'm off! Good-bye for the present. I shall be back in time for roost.'

'Oh, you are going, are you?' was the comment, as his friend picked up the seed again in his beak and flew away.

But, as he darted off, a sunbeam peeped round a corner just to see what the dear little fellow looked like, and this very sunbeam threw such a halo around him, you would have thought his feathers had been burnished gold. Then his voice, too, sounded so cheerily, as, with a merry 'Twit-twit-twee,' he disappeared from view, intent on his errand of kindness.

'I'm sure I should not have troubled myself to carry that burden so far, but should have eaten it for my dinner,' muttered the one sitting on the water-spout. 'Dear me, what's that?' as he caught sight of a shadow round an angle of the roof. 'Oh, gracious!' and he gave such a jump in his terror, as he recognised Pussie taking a walk on the tiles, looking out for her dinner, no doubt. [73]

You may be quite sure Mr. Sparrow did not wait until Pussie came up to him, but flew away to a safe distance.

Meanwhile the other bird was speeding on his errand of kindness. He did not feel the weight of his burden, but went bravely on, only occasionally resting on a water-spout or a parapet, just for a second or two, but never losing sight of his precious seed; though sometimes he was sadly annoyed by other Sparrows coming up, and, with great fuss and chatter, inquiring as to what he was so carefully carrying. But he was very cautious, and always kept an eye upon his treasure (answering their questions curtly), for London Sparrows have the character of being not *too*

honest, with what truth it cannot be said; let us hope the charge is unfounded. Still our hero thought it advisable to be watchful; therefore, after satisfying all curiosity on the subject, as much at least as he deemed needful, he flew off again on his mission—without telling them the ultimate destination of his seed, fearing, perhaps, they might be unable to resist the temptation of picking it out of the mould into which he intended to drop it. [74]

By and by he left the more respectable part of the city, and winged his way as near as he could remember towards the attic window, where he had so often seen the poor work-girl busy at her weary task. But a heavy cloud of smoke darkened the air, and a perfect forest of masts bewildered him, for he had come to that part of London where the ships are to be seen—thousands of vessels from all countries of the world. Still, though he was puzzled for a while, yet he felt sure the house was near this place, as he recollected having seen these docks before. What should he do? He paused for a bit upon a slanting roof just to look around. Oh, the smuts, how they settled upon his feathers! he was obliged to preen himself, he felt so dirty; if his coat was a dingy brown, there was no occasion for its being dirty also! All at once, as he paused during the process of preening, he saw the very window right in front of him,—he recognised it by its cleanliness, such a contrast to the squalor around. Yes, there it was, the polished panes of glass glinting in the gleams of light that came now and then through the murky atmosphere; and [75] there were the three flower-pots. Why, actually they had been washed, they looked so freshly red!—or perhaps painted.

Away he joyfully flew, his task was nearly done; but alas for hopes of birds or people! Just as he was about to alight upon the window-sill, a tiresome bird—a Sparrow—came flying towards him, exclaiming,—

'Hallo! who are you, I should like to know?' and so startled was he when accosted thus abruptly, that in his fright he dropped his dear and precious treasure.

Down, down it fell upon a deal case a man was wheeling on a truck. The man did not notice the tiny grain that fell; perhaps, had he done so, would merely have thought it was a particle of dust; but the poor bird's heart was sorely grieved as he saw it disappear, after all the trouble he had taken to bring it thus far, and he sat upon the window-ledge of the girl's room with ruffled plumage and dim eyes, utterly crushed by this untoward loss. It was too bad!

But after a while he took heart, and looked the disappointment boldly in the face, which is always the better plan than brooding over it. [76]

'It can't be helped,' he said wisely, rousing from his sorrowful reflections, and giving his feathers a shake together. 'I did my best, and could do no more. It is a loss certainly, but no doubt there are other flower-seeds to be found, so I'll go to-morrow morning to that same garden, and see if there are any more to be had. Dear me!' he continued, glancing up with his now bright eyes at the sky; 'why, it is getting late. I must make haste home, or else my friends will be anxious, and fear that I have come to grief.'

So saying, he flew away, not without a note of farewell to the girl, who had been looking at him all the time he sat there so disconsolately, wondering in her own mind why he was perched there so ruffled and sad, little dreaming of his kindly intentions towards her—how should she?—so away he went, and reached his place of abode just as his brothers and friends were going to roost.

You may be quite sure he was received with a perfect volley of questions.

'Where have you been?' asked some who were ignorant of his scheme. [77]

'How did you manage?' questioned others who knew.

'What sort of a place is it?' inquired several.

Poor little bird! he was obliged to confess his failure, which he did with reluctance; yet still he bore his disappointment so cheerfully and bravely, they could not help sympathizing with him, promising to help in the good work next time. Even the Sparrow who had jeered somewhat at him was really sorry, and consoled him so kindly, that he went to sleep with his head tucked under his wing, in a far happier frame of mind than he could have supposed possible, after such a grievous sorrow.

And the seed?

As it was being jostled on the top of the packing-case, it thought to itself:

'There's an end to me, I suppose. I shall be shrivelled up to nothing for want of nourishing earth, and shall do good to no one. What a pity that dear little Sparrow's kind intention was frustrated by that meddlesome and inquisitive bird! I am sure I would have done my duty to the utmost, and realized his wish by growing as fast as possible, and looking cheerful and gay when in flower. [78] Well, well, it is no use being unhappy; I must only wait patiently, hoping that a chance of doing good may occur. Who knows what may happen?'

And at that very moment, the truck the man was wheeling gave a lurch, and in consequence the tiny seed rolled along until it slipped down a crevice in the lid, and found a comfortable resting-place inside amongst some soft hay with which the case was packed.

'This is cosy,' it remarked, nestling in the warmth; 'perhaps after all I am reserved for some good

purpose. I had become desponding, but there is always a brightness behind the darkest cloud.'

So it cuddled down contentedly, not knowing or heeding whither it was taken, only resting satisfied with the reflection that whatever happened was for the best. And so the packing-case was put on board one of the great ships in the docks, and in a few days away sailed the ship, packing-case, and little seed, far over the ocean, leaving England many thousand miles behind.

Not having been to Australia, we cannot describe what the little seed next beheld. But when the [79]
sun once again shone upon it, it was in a very different country to this dear land of ours.

The case had been emptied of its contents, and the hay and straw with which it had been packed was thrown aside upon the ground, and there lay the seed, so tiny that it was quite unheeded, indeed it is to be doubted whether it was even seen; but the loving God, who has created nothing in vain, had still a use for the small grain. A soft wind came and carried it to some moist earth, into which it sank, thankful for the rest and quiet after the past turmoil.

But its work was not finished.

By and by came up a little slender green shoot, then a leaf or two, and after a while, in due season, some pretty bell-shaped flowers, almost white, with just a tinge of delicate purple, made their appearance, and there they swayed in the breeze—English Wood Anemones in a distant land.

And in this distant land a young English girl had her home; and bright and beautiful it was, with
huge trees and gorgeous flowers, unheard of and unseen in the country village from which she [80]
had come. But, bright and beautiful as her new home was, she often sighed for the green hedgerows and sweet wayside flowers of dear old England; not that she murmured because God had sent her thither, only the love of her old home and old home memories yet lingered in her heart.

Think, then, what her joy was, when, one day as she wandered alone, gazing on gorgeous blossoms rich in brilliant colours, down at her feet she spied, waving its delicate-tinted elf-bells in the warm, soft breeze, the Wood Anemone.

Could it be possible? That well-known English flower blooming there! How could it have come across the ocean?

Ah, how often had she seen it at home—for England is ever home to those who are far away—seen it in the early spring days clustering thickly in the woods and copse, heralding the cuckoo, and bringing with it a promise of summer days to come.

'Dear, dear little flower!' she cried, kneeling down and kissing, in excess of joy, its delicate
petals. 'Welcome a thousand times, for you bring with you memories from the old land. I will not [81]
gather your pretty flowers, nor take them away to myself, but will leave you here, so that others, perhaps more home-sick than I, will take heart, and be cheered by your soothing though silent message.'

And the young girl was right.

Others passing by—some poor wanderers, footsore and weary—were cheered by the bonnie wild-flower, which, happy in giving happiness to others, swayed its tiny bells as it danced in utter gladness, whispering to the wild bees who also came to visit it,—

'I thought at one time, when the Sparrow let me fall, that there was no more use for me in the world, that my work was finished; but God had still a mission for me, and I have done what others equally small can do—given happiness, and cheered those who came across my path. It is not much to do,' it continued meekly, 'not great and glorious deeds at which the world stands amazed; but it was all I could do, and was the work He meant for me—we must not despise the
day of small things. The acorn is very small, yet look at the oak. A gentle word, a bright smile, is [82]
not hard to bestow, but oh, the blessing they can be to hearts pining perhaps for kindness!'

So the Sparrow's good intention was carried out after all.

PARABLE SIXTH.

THE CROWN IMPERIAL—HOPE.

HAVE you ever seen a Crown Imperial, that lovely flower which comes in the early [83]
spring-time, just after the Snowdrops have gone? You will not find it in *new* gardens, I fear; but in those delightful shady nooks and corners where the old-fashioned flowers seem to come and go just as they please, there it is to be found, coming up year after year in all its beauty, and yet, though so lovely, meekly drooping its velvet petals, upon which tear-drops are ever resting.

It has been said that it droops thus in humiliation, because its pride was once rebuked; but I do not think that aught so lovely could be unduly proud! Even the [84]
acknowledged queen of the garden, the stately Rose, is gentle in her beauty; and 'Consider the lilies,' though 'Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed' like them, yet how meekly they bloom beneath our feet!

Then shall the Crown Imperial tell its tale to you, and see what lesson we can learn from it? No, an old yew tree shall relate the story. Listen to what it says:—

'Many, many years have I stood on this spot, from the time that I was a tiny sapling until now, when my branches spread far and wide, covering the earth beneath with shadow. Summer sunshine has touched with its fiercely scorching breath, and winter snows have shrouded me in fleecy garments, but the old yew tree has weathered so far the storms of life, growing year by year more twisted and gnarled as time passed on. I have seen the song-birds come and depart; some have even built their nests within my leafy branches. I have watched sweet flowers blossom, then fade, but among the many lovely flowerets I have loved—for the old dry tree has a tender heart, my children—there was one whose very gentleness made me love it even yet more [85]
dearly. It was a Crown Imperial.

'The spring was commencing to gladden the earth when first I perceived it, forcing its way timidly through the soft grassy lawn of an old, old garden. Who had placed the parent bulb beneath that turf was never known, for the owners of the estate had passed with their generation from the land, and strangers had come to reside in the ancient homestead, but there was this fragile plant, outliving, as it were, those who had planted it, and coming up, year after year, to gladden other eyes than those which had first beheld its beauty—like good actions and gentle words—imperishable!

'So day by day I watched it grow, stronger and stronger, higher and higher, and, as it grew, spreading gradually its beautiful, shining leaves; but when it had reached its full height, behold, it was crowned with a diadem of the softest green—an emerald crown worthy the brow of a queen!

'Then by degrees I saw its blossoms begin to unfold, the velvet petals richer far than the feeble looms of man can weave; but, as they unclosed, to my intense surprise, they were not uplifted to the sunshine and blue sky, but meekly bowed—drooping earthward. [86]

'"They will gaze upward by and by," I said to myself, "and, when they know and feel the power of their beauty, will court the admiration they are sure to win."

'But I was wrong.

'Pride had no place within their lowly hearts—never were their flowers lifted up—their glances were ever bent in sweet humility towards the green sod from which they had sprung, and, as I gazed upon them, I saw that on each lovely petal there ever rested a tear.

'"Why this sadness?" I mused. "Surely so lovely and guileless a flower can know no sorrow, since sorrow often goes hand in hand with sin; this Crown Imperial must surely be as faultless as it is beautiful!"

'Yet I hesitated to ask the reason; there was a gentle and reserved timidity about it, that checked all questionings. The cause of this unspoken grief would be revealed to me sooner or later, I felt

convinced.

'The days passed on with sunshine and shadows, and, as the hours fled, I saw with regret that stern Time had relentlessly breathed with his withering breath upon my much-loved flower! [87] Gradually and slowly its blossoms pined, the lovely colours faded,—almost imperceptibly, 'tis true, still they faded,—its fresh green crown became less purely bright, and I knew with anguish my sweet one was dying.

'Then, and not till then, did it raise its faint eyes heavenward—they were tearless now. I could restrain my wonder no more.

'"Why, oh, why wert thou weeping and gazing ever earthward when in thy peerless beauty, sad and disconsolate—and now that thou art fading from us thou art happy?" I asked in my sorrowful regret; perhaps reproach was mingled with my complaint.

'"Is it not ever so?" the gentle flower replied. "Whilst burdened with Life's sorrows, our eyes are tear-dimmed. The cares of this world press heavily upon our hearts, so that we scarce can lift our thoughts from this earth—cold and weary though it is—to gaze upward. It is only when we are passing from all shadows into the Divine Light that we can look heavenward, yet even then the tear-drops linger. But when earthly sojourners have passed through the dark valley into the [88] Eternal Brightness, then, and only then, will they be freed from anguish; then, and only then, will eyes be no longer dimmed by sorrow—for God Himself shall wipe away all tears!"'

PARABLE SEVENTH.

THE TWO LEAVES—DISCONTENT.

ONCE upon a time, as the good old fairy tales always begin, there grew by the side [89] of a little brook a large Oak tree.

The brook was a bright, sunlit stream, gliding along so cheerfully to join the river, between grassy banks, kissing the willows which bent down towards it, or whispering softly to the blue Forget-me-nots; and so clear was it, you could see the smooth pebbles lying at the bottom, and the fish skimming along gaily, as if there were no such things in the whole world as fishing-rods.

All through the day it rippled merrily, catching every ray of sunlight that flickered through the trees or the blue sky above; but if an angry black cloud ever chanced to see itself reflected in its clear mirror, it scudded away as if ashamed of looking so dark. [90]

But at night, when the holy stars were shining, ah, how softly the little brook murmured to them! you could almost fancy it did not babble so loudly as in the day-time, for fear lest it should wake the sleeping flowers on its mossy banks.

It was a happy little stream, so calm, so placid, no angry ripples ever disturbed its pure surface, over which the Swallows lightly skimmed. And it meandered along for many miles; sometimes you would lose sight of it altogether, then out it would come from some quiet, grassy nook, gaily sparkling, and glide with a merry sound, as if laughing, towards the steady rushes, and they would sway to and fro at its approach, dancing to its rippling music.

But, as I was saying, a sturdy Oak grew by the side of the brook; it had sprung from an acorn

many hundred years ago, now it was very old. Wintry storms had vainly tried to subdue it; many a time they had bent its branches, plucked at its roots, but fruitless was their fury, for the noble tree firmly held its place, rearing its proud head more loftily than ever; and so the storms, finding [91] their power availed them nought, passed away over the land, howling with rage at their failure.

Then, oh, how the birds loved the clear old tree! Summer after summer did they return to build nests among its moss-grown branches; and the branches, glad that the songsters had come back again, would put forth green leaves to hide them from prying eyes, so that they could rest there securely. Can you wonder, then, that they sang sweet songs of gratitude to it, and that the little brook should murmur her sweet melody as she glided along at its feet?

On the opposite bank grew an Aspen.

It was not so old as the Oak, who had seen it grow up from a mere sapling; still they had been neighbours for many years, and the graceful Aspen looked with love and reverence upon her aged friend's sturdy face and form. Often, in the calm summer nights, the Oak would talk to her of the days of the long-ago; you would have thought it was merely the breeze sighing amidst the branches, but it was the voice of the Oak telling of the past.

Many of the birds imagined the Aspen to be a weak, trembling tree, quivering always with fear at [92] the slightest wind that ruffled its branches.

'Scarcely safe to build a nest in!' so said an old motherly Rook, who had reared many a brood.

But the fairies who danced beneath its shade on bright moonlight nights knew better; they knew that the fragile-*looking* tree never trembled with fear; they had often seen it meekly bend beneath the sway of the fierce wintry blasts, knowing full well whose hand guided the storm; and when the summer came they knew that then it quivered with happiness at being created on so fair an earth, and that its leaves only shook with quiet laughter as it listened to the merry chatter of the brook.

Well—winter had passed with his frosts and snows, and spring was scattering her flowers everywhere. The Cuckoo was calling aloud, 'Cuckoo, cuckoo,' all day long, never heeding the young folks who mocked his song; even the Swallows had returned from the warm, sunny South, and were for ever skimming over the brook, just dipping their wings into its limpid waves, then off again with the joyous 'Twit, twit, twit.' The meadows, too, were yellow with buttercups, in [93] which the cows waded knee-deep. Talk of the Field of the Cloth of Gold! Francis the First would have been a clever man could he have made such an one!—no earthly king could create golden fields like these.

All nature was rejoicing in earth's brightness, and our old friends the Oak and the Aspen as much as any. They had put forth their fresh green leaves, and beneath their shade many a tired traveller rested from the noonday sun, thanking them both in his heart for the welcome shelter.

During the winter the Oak had not been idle, for it had extended its branches far and wide; one, indeed, stretched right across the brook, in fact, almost touched its opposite neighbour, and the Aspen welcomed it gladly. You would have thought it great happiness to live in such a lovely spot, I know, but there is never perfect bliss, and if little folks *will* be discontented, they make the prettiest place appear wretched and miserable.

Now, among the leaves of the Oak there was one that was always restless and fidgety. In vain the sweet birds perched near and sang to him, and the gentle brook murmured tales of other scenes —he never seemed happy. The fairies, too, as I before said, danced by moonlight at the very foot [94] of the parent tree, yet even that brave sight gave him no pleasure, though his brother and sister leaves would clap their tiny hands in ecstasy.

'It disturbed his sleep,' he said. 'Why could they not dance in the day-time?—not when all respectable leaves and flowers were sleeping! making such a noise, especially that mischievous Puck!'

And, unfortunately, he grew on the branch nearest to the Aspen, and his constant grumbles made them quiver with sorrow and pain at such incessant complainings. As to his own relatives, they would not listen, but frisked about merrily enough when the zephyrs came and played with them.

'Alas!' said he one day to a little Aspen leaf that grew on a branch close by, and who had patiently borne with his ungrateful complaints; 'how sad is our lot! Here we are always attached to the same place, in a state of cruel bondage; everything around us moves: the birds, happy in their liberty, fly here and there, singing ever their songs of joy; even the beasts of the forests are free [95] —whilst we—ah me!—we never lose our galling chains but in dying!'

'Why do you murmur thus?' asked the Aspen leaf in a sweet, tremulous voice; 'why are you not contented?'

'Oh, it is all very well for you to preach contentment,' it pertly replied, turning up its point with contempt. 'I am a leaf of intellect. I hate this aimless, monotonous life; it does very well for such silly, trembling things as you and yours,—not for me!'

For a moment the little Aspen leaf felt its pride wounded by the contemptuous speech of its neighbour, and was strongly disposed to answer in the same strain; but fortunately, a fairy who chanced to be passing at the time laid her silver wand lightly on its lips, so with a smile she

merely said,—

'Yes, I know I am timid, and cling to my parent tree for security and protection. What would you do if you were free? We are so happy here, I would not leave my home; the soft breezes are ever among us with cheerful stories of the countries they have visited to amuse us; and as to the birds, why, all the day long they are singing their sweetest melodies to gladden our hearts and cheer us.' [96]

'I have heard their songs until I am quite tired of their sameness,' was the ungrateful response; 'besides, in a few months the cold winds will be here, and then we shall fall to the ground and be trodden under foot—that will be the end of us. So I am determined to see something of the world before that time comes. I shall go off with the first north wind that visits us—so I tell you. You will not reason me out of my plan.'

'Oh, stay, stay with us!' cried the trembling listener; 'you cannot surely know the sorrow you would cause, nor the troubles you would have to endure. It is true we leave our kind branches but to die, but we are not carelessly trodden on; the rustling of we poor faded leaves beneath man's feet recall to his mind pure and holy thoughts of the unknown future, filling his heart with unuttered prayers to the Great Power who changeth not. Then, if we poor leaves can teach a lesson, we have not lived in vain. Do not murmur at your humble fate, dear friend, but stay with us, contented with your simple destiny and the goodness of God.'

The Aspen leaf ceased speaking, overcome by its emotion, whilst the little grumbler, silenced, but not convinced, turned sulkily away. It did not relish the kind advice of its true friend, nor did it at all intend to follow it, but still it settled down on its tiny twig so very quietly, that all its relatives firmly believed it had given up its foolish scheme of imaginary happy freedom; but they were mistaken, for a few days after a north wind came quite unexpectedly upon them. It bent the Aspen tree almost to breaking, still the loving little leaves clung trembling to their parent, feeling that their very safety rested on their keeping close to it. Then, finding its strength was in vain, away the north wind rushed to the sturdy old Oak, swaying its branches wildly about, and even making them crack in its fierce rage. [97]

But the Oak reared its proud head defiantly, and its leaves hung tightly on—all save one. Alas! with a mocking laugh at his friends' and his brothers' fears, he threw himself into the arms of the cruel north wind, who bore him swiftly away, and ere the night came the foolish leaf lay faded and dead.

As he was whirled away, a sad, sad moan sighed through the branches of the old Oak. 'Twas a cry of anguish for its wilful child. [98]

The bright summer was gone.

One by one the leaves were falling. With a gentle rustle they fell from their parent trees, and lay in their faded beauty upon the earth.

The little Aspen leaf lingered, but one day a soft, sweet zephyr came and gently released her, and she fluttered slowly down to the calm bosom of the little brook, who had, alas! seen many flowers bloom and die.

Tenderly the stream bore it away to a grassy nook on its banks, and there it placed the tiny leaf, alone in its quiet rest.

PARABLE EIGHTH.

THE AMBITIOUS WILD-FLOWER—AMBITION.

'Who'll buy my roses?
they're lovely and fair,
They're Nature's own
bloom, and are fed on
fresh air.'

SO sang a little girl, as she walked along a shady lane, carrying a basket of those [99]
glorious flowers which she was taking to a friend as a birthday gift; and so on she went, singing her song of Roses, sweet Roses, little thinking that others were listening to her melody (besides the birds), or that her simple words would raise angry feelings in the very flowers themselves.

'Oh yes!' exclaimed a small Wild-flower—its name I will not tell; 'oh yes!' she repeated, waiting until the singer was out of hearing; 'always Roses, or Violets, or Lilies—no one ever composes songs about—*us*—we are only common flowers.' [100]

'Don't say so,' interposed Pimpernel, 'because that is not true. There is a poem on a Daisy that will ever be remembered, and I have heard some children sing a pretty one about Buttercups and Daisies, besides.'

'Oh, of course you uphold these song-makers, because your name has appeared in print,' she interrupted, with a toss of her bonnie petals; 'but no one has ever noticed me.'

'Nonsense!' said Ragged Robin, who, having been of a wandering disposition, had seen and heard a great deal in his time; 'why, there is one poet who says,—

"Full many a flower is
born to blush unseen,
And waste its fragrance
on the desert air."

Therefore, if you are not mentioned by name, you certainly must be included among these unknowns who are born to blush unseen.'

'I don't want to be included among these "unknowns" then,' exclaimed the Flower angrily. 'I am sure I am'—she hesitated a moment—'quite as lovely as a Rose, or any other garden beauty;' but she could not help hanging her head for very shame whilst uttering this piece of self-conceit. [101]

'Oh! oh! oh!' were the exclamations to be heard on all sides.

'So I am,' she persisted, going on now in sheer desperation, having proceeded too far to retract. 'My petals are delicately fair, with just a faint rosy blush, my pistils and stamens of a tender yellow, and my form, if fragile, is very graceful—so there!'

You may imagine the laughter that ensued as she ended with that emphatic 'so there!' laughter which could not be suppressed, although she plainly showed her anger at their behaviour; they could not help it, so flower-bells shook and leaves fluttered with mirth, even Quaker grass quivered with merriment.

'I would advise you to be more contented,' said a Honeysuckle, as she looked down upon the ambitious little Flower from her own elevated position; 'let me tell you it is not always those who are highest up in the world are the happiest; they feel the cold winds quite as keenly, perhaps more so.'

'Ah, but I want to live in a conservatory or a greenhouse. I feel I am fitted for that position,' grumbled the other; 'in such a place I should be more seen, and consequently more admired and appreciated.' [102]

'What vanity!' sneered wild Vetch, who was somewhat ambitious also, seeing he tried to climb up as high as he could.

An angry retort was on the lips of the one addressed, but Honeysuckle interposed, by saying kindly,—

'Well, well, we shall see,—perhaps your position may be altered one day, and then you will be able to show us how you bear prosperity. Many flowers I have known transplanted to conservatories, thinking they would prove to be exotics, but I have heard that they generally withered in the heated atmosphere to which they were removed, and did not come to perfection

when taken from their native soil.'

'I am sure I should enjoy the change,' was the answer vouchsafed to this friendly warning. 'I know I am not in my proper sphere; such beauty as mine was never surely intended by Nature for a hedgerow.'

'We shall see!' cried several Blossoms, who felt indignant at her contemptuous way of speaking. 'Your parents were no doubt'— [103]

'Exotics, I am convinced,' she said.

'Then how came you here among such humble company?' asked merry Ragged Robin, who was fond of teasing.

She deigned no reply, but looked him scornfully up and down, to his intense amusement.

'Let her alone!' cried a sturdy Bramble; 'she will buy her experience with sighs and tears, I fear.'

So, acting upon Bramble's advice, they did leave her alone to muse over her ambitious hopes and desires, whilst they, contented and happy with their lowly fate, opened their buds to the bright sunshine, which beams alike upon the high or humble.

And very pretty looked that hedgerow on this same morning. The flowers were so lovely and fresh, for their gentle Mother Nature had washed their bonnie faces fresh with dew, and so they held their petals up to catch the sun's brightest rays, which came in golden gleams through the thickly-leaved hedges above them. What life could possibly be happier? There were the birds flying about, cheering them with merry twitterings, as they sped from tree to tree, or perched in the boughs overhead, warbling ever their songs of gladness. Then the bees would come, and ask [104] them, in drowsy, murmuring voices, for just a sip of nectar from their cups, a boon which was never refused, and in return the busy little workers would leave them some pollen to colour their petals, and render them (if it were possible) more lovely than before. The butterflies, too, would alight on their leaves, and display their brilliant hues for their admiration, or the gay dragon-flies would fly about them in that wandering fashion peculiar to those gorgeous insects, darting hither and thither like flashes of rainbow light. At night the moonlight would kiss their weary eyes to sleep, whilst the soft night-breezes soothed them to rest with murmuring lullabies.

It is true there were storms sometimes, and the cold rain would fall upon them; but still they were sheltered from all fierce tempests, and would rise up refreshed after the dark clouds had passed away, for they knew

'Behind the clouds the
sun's still shining.
. . . .
. .
Into each life some rain
must fall,
Some days must be
dark and dreary;'

and as to the summer showers, why, they tossed their heads, and laughed merrily at them, shaking the light rain-drops from their petals in playful fun. [105]

But on this morning, when the tiny Wild-flower was making her life miserable by useless repinings at her humble lot, and sighing for—she knew not what!—well, on this same morning there was not a cloud to dim the sky, so brightly blue was it, and the soft west wind crept among the leaves and flowers, whispering to them the glad tidings of 'Summer is come!'

I do not know how long it was after the little girl had passed, that a gentleman came sauntering slowly up the lane; and as he went, he would stop every now and then to examine the hedgerow flowers and shrubs. All at once he espied our friend, almost hidden though she was by the leaves and long grass around.

'What a lovely little flower!' he exclaimed, as he stooped down to examine more closely his newly-found treasure; 'how delicate in colour, how sweet in perfume! Surely this was never intended to remain hidden in a hedge?'

Oh, if you could but have seen how she tried to raise her pretty head, which Nature had bowed in simple loveliness, and endeavoured to look big, little thinking that her greatest charm lay in this [106] sweet simplicity.

'I must certainly transplant it to my greenhouse,' he went on saying. 'With care and skill, who knows into what it may not develop!—an entirely new plant, I doubt not. I will at once take it home.'

And away he went to procure the necessary tools for removing her from her lowly home to one more suited to her wishes.

'Did I not tell you so!' was her delighted exclamation.

'Well, I never!' ejaculated Pimpernel, whose pretty eyes were now opened wide in astonishment.

'Better to be born lucky than rich,' muttered Ragged Robin.

'Shall I not be grand in a conservatory?' cried the ambitious Flower.

'I would rather

"Adorn the rustic
stibble-field,
Unseen,
alane,"'

murmured meek Daisy.

'Ah, you have no ambition!' sneered the other; 'besides, "the rustic stibble-field" is your proper sphere—it is not mine!' [107]

'Pride, pride!' rebuked Honeysuckle, gazing sorrowfully down upon the arrogant little speaker. 'Take care that you sigh not yet for your old home and humble friends.'

'Indeed I shall not!' she retorted insolently.

'Wait, wait!' continued sturdy Bramble; ''tis the time of flowers now—wait till the fruit-time comes.'

'I do not know what you mean,' she retorted angrily; 'nor do I'—

'That there is a time for all things,' explained Shepherd's Clock, interrupting her.

'I trust your high hopes will be realized,' said Speedwell kindly.

How much longer this wrangling would have continued it is impossible to say, for at that moment the gentleman returned with a trowel, spade, and basket, and proceeded to remove her from her native soil. In justice to her, it must be confessed that, when the moment came to part for ever from all her old friends, and the surroundings to which, in spite of her incessant murmurs, she felt attached, she clung desperately with her slender, fibrous roots to the familiar spot where from a seedling she had lived and grownyes, clung desperately! But with the utmost care every [108] tender fibre was released, and she was placed in the basket and carried away. Was she glad now? No, far from it—wishing again and again that she had been left alone.

However, it was too late. She had always complained of not being in her proper position, and now the glorious change was come; she was being taken to where her hopes had aspired,—a conservatory or a greenhouse, it mattered not which.

After a while, with the usual indifference of such natures, her regrets subsided, giving place to thoughts respecting the place in which she was destined to live.

'Of course I shall be welcomed by all the nobler flowers with delight and astonishment,' she mused; 'delight because of my agreeable manners, and astonishment at my beauty! How I wish my old hedgerow friends could but be present to witness my reception!'

But this reception, upon which she built such bright fancies, was delayed for some few days, for, on arriving at her destination, she was carried into a dingy shed, not into the splendid glass palace her visions had conjured up. [109]

'Is this the place to which I am destined?' she muttered complainingly. 'Oh dear! no one will see me here. I wish I had remained in the lane, for there was a chance of my being admired by some passer-by. What is the use of my ambitious hopes, if this is to be the end of them?'

Fortunately there was no flower or even a plant near to be wearied with her repinings, so on she grumbled, until at last her misery reached its climax, when she was taken and pressed tightly into a horrible flower-pot, then carefully watered, and afterwards put into a dark corner to take root. Had she been capable of shedding tears, no water would have been required, such as was given to revive her; for the sorrow she felt was almost too great to be borne. Here was a life to lead after all her high aspirations, and her slender roots, too, were so cramped and squeezed it was something dreadful! Oh for the once despised hedgerow, with the soft, cool earth, in which she could stretch her delicate fibres!

But wait, impatient little flower! other days are coming.

One morning—at least so it proved to be, though at the time she did not know it, as in her dark [110] dwelling she saw neither sunrise nor sunset—well, this morning of which we speak, to her intense delight, the gentleman came and carried her out into the open air, and surveyed her critically.

'Yes,' she heard him say, and how her heart bounded with pride, 'it is indeed a lovely flower, and may well take its place among those in the conservatory, for it is really exquisite.'

Here was a triumph! this was the hour to which she had so long looked forward.

'At last, at last!' she murmured. 'Oh, if my old acquaintances could but see me now, what would they say? I wish some of them were here.'

Not satisfied even yet! You see there is always an alloy in our greatest earthly pleasures or triumphs—always a something wanting. Yet so completely bewildered was she by this excess of gratified pride, that she knew not whither she was borne, until, when the delirium, for such it was, had passed, she found herself in a place which her wildest imaginings never could have supposed possible—a wondrous glass palace, filled with the most gorgeous flowers of all tints and forms, some deliciously perfumed, making the air fragrant; whilst in the centre of this palace a [111] fountain rose and fell with soothing murmurs, scattering its silvery spray upon exquisite blossoms that floated in the marble basin. It was almost too lovely, and our little wayside friend sighed with a sense of overpowering astonishment at the wondrous beauties around, beauties that dazzled her unaccustomed eyes. Her place, however, was upon one of the lower shelves, and above her head waved the feathery leaves of tropical plants, which throve wonderfully well in the heated atmosphere of this (to her) paradise.

Then she was left alone with her new associates—alone! how much that word conveys!

After some time the other flowers became aware of a stranger having come among them, and a flutter (as much as such well-bred creatures deigned to evince) stirred their leaves and petals.

'What is she like?' asked a Maidenhair Fern, who from her position could get not even a glimpse of the new arrival.

'Is she elegant and refined?' inquired a Camellia languidly.

'Is she fair or dark?' questioned Tea-Rose, with a faint breath. [112]

'It matters not to me what she is,' murmured Ice-Plant coldly.

'Where does she come from?' whispered Myrtle to her neighbour Cape Jasmine.

'From a hedgerow,' was the reply, but uttered so that all around her heard the answer.

'Only a Wild-flower!' was the general exclamation. 'What presumption to come amongst us!'

Then a chilling silence fell upon them all, except when they spoke to each other; but, after that unlucky explanation of her origin, it was as though they ignored her very existence—she was with them, still not of them.

And, strange to say, our little friend, who was so ready with words among her compeers, was completely silenced by these disdainful beauties, and, instead of replying, and holding, or rather maintaining, her position there, she shrank, as it were, abashed and ashamed of her lowly origin.

Was this the triumphant reception she had expected? Where was the homage her beauty was supposed to exact, and where the admiration of her manners and elegance generally? Ah me! she was only a little wayside blossom after all, pretty, it is true, and suited to the quiet hedgerow, but [113] without the merits or the talents to raise her to a higher place. Better far the humble friends, the lowly mossy bank where she had grown in peace and rest (save for her own unquiet ambition), than the grandeur and contempt which now were hers.

So day after day passed on, and the florist who had brought her from the shady lane, hoping he had discovered a lovely and rare flower, saw with regret that his treasure was fading; the heated atmosphere of this splendid conservatory was too great for her to bear, and she was pining away for the fresh air and freedom of her old home; but, above all, she longed for the kindly if rough sympathy of her humble friends; the cold society of these exotics was gradually yet slowly killing her! In vain was the owner's care lavished upon her—it would not do; the delicate petals shrank up witheringly, the slender green leaves became shrivelled and dying, so in kindness he took her from the gorgeous palace, which she quitted gladly, without one sigh of regret, and carried her back to the shady lane, the once despised hedgerow, and carefully placed her in the very spot from which she had been taken. [114]

It was the home for her!

Sadly she turned her dim eyes to the old friends around, who gazed upon the sorrow-stricken Flower pityingly and without reproach.

'I have returned to die,' she murmured. 'Ambition which has pure and holy aspirations is laudable in all; but I mistook pride for that which is more noble, and I am punished. Do not blame me,' she pleaded piteously, 'but give me your pity, and when I am gone, think with tenderness upon the poor little Wild-flower who knew, when too late, that her place was best and happiest when among the humble blossoms by the peaceful hedgerow!'

PARABLE NINTH.

THE HONEYSUCKLE AND THE BUTTERFLY—HUMILITY AND PRIDE.

ONE early spring day, a little shoot of Honeysuckle was putting forth its tendrils [115]
low down on the ground at the foot of a quickset hedge. As yet it was but a weakly sprig, not knowing its own strength, nor even dreaming that it would ever rise far above the earth. Yet still it was very contented, drawing happiness from its lowly surroundings, happy in living, and feeling the warm sunshine kissing its fragile leaves.

Close by, there was a strange, dark, oblong mass, and the little Honeysuckle tried to imagine what it could possibly be, for it never moved, nor evinced emotion of any kind; and yet it was alive, because people would take it up, examine it, then [116]
put it down again, saying,—

'It is only a common Chrysalis!' But what *that* was the Honeysuckle knew not.

At last, one day, when the sun was shining very brightly indeed, and the air was warm, and filled with the sweet breath of spring, to her great surprise she saw this peculiar object move, then by degrees the dark brown casing was cast aside, and she saw that it had wings!

'Why, what are you?' she questioned, in utter amazement at this marvellous transformation.

'Me!' he replied. 'Oh, I am a Butterfly, and you will see that very soon I shall become most lovely, such gloriously tinted feathers will deck my wings, all the world will be lost in admiration, I shall be so beautiful!'

'And will you let me see you then?' the meek little flower asked humbly.

'Oh yes! certainly you shall gaze upon me,' he answered, with a mighty air of condescension.

'But will you not always remain here?' she questioned, pleased at the idea of having so charming a neighbour.

'Dear me, no! I should think not, indeed. Why, I shall fly far away from this humble [117]
neighbourhood!' was his exclamation.

'What! and leave me?'

'Certainly! what else could you expect?' he replied. 'My ambition could not endure such a humdrum existence as yours; with these gay-coloured wings of mine I shall soar to higher realms, and be courted and caressed where'er I go!'

'Oh that I had wings like yours, or that you clung to earth!' sighed the tender-hearted Honeysuckle, who, from having been so long in close companionship with the dark, unsociable Chrysalis had actually grown to like him.

'Nonsense! what a ridiculous wish!' exclaimed the gaudy insect, who did not share his little friend's feeling of regard. 'Why, I should die if I were rooted to one place! I require a large sphere in which to move about; while as to you—I doubt if ever you will rise higher in the world than you are now.'

Not a kind remark to make, certainly, and it sadly grieved the humble flower to hear the Butterfly thus speak.

'And yet,' she sorrowfully mused, 'perhaps he is right; I know I am but a little green plant, very [118]
small, and very lowly, whilst he is so noble and beautiful with his gorgeous wings. Still, it is heart-rending to think I shall never rise above the sordid earth, always remain a mere groundling! But never mind,' she added more cheerfully; 'even groundlings can do good sometimes, so I'll take courage, and hope for the best.'

Not many days after this, the Butterfly called out joyfully to his little admirer,—

'Good-bye! good-bye! See! I have acquired my full beauty, so now I am off to entrance the world with my perfect loveliness! I *think* I am an Emperor, though I am not quite sure; but there! people will soon appreciate me, and, of course, will acknowledge my claims to admiration.'

'And are you really going?' she asked sadly.

'Yes, of course! I am perfect now, and could not possibly stay *here* any longer;' looking round contemptuously upon his humble surroundings. 'But I'll come and see you again, perhaps; *you* are sure to be found in the same place!'

And away he flew with a mocking laugh; his gay wings fluttered merrily in the sunshine as he poised above the gorgeous garden flowers a while, then he sped away into distance, and was lost [119] to sight, whilst the little Honeysuckle felt very lonely as she watched him disappear.

'Oh dear me!' she sighed; 'I feel rather sad now he has gone. It certainly must be very nice to rise a little in the world, not to be'—

'Take hold of my hand, my dear,' said a kind Bramble, who happened to hear the flower lament her lowly fate. 'I may perhaps be able to give you a lift up.'

'Oh, thank you very much,' was the response; 'but I fear your kindness would be thrown away, for I do not think I shall ever be more than I am at present.'

'One can never know, until he has tried, what may be done,' was the encouraging rejoinder. 'Look at me, for example! I am only what is called a Bramble, very much despised by some folks, no doubt; but then, who despises the fruit I bear? Why, every one likes the hardy blackberry, and I believe "by your fruit ye are known."'

'But I shall never yield fruit,' the Honeysuckle exclaimed; 'and as to flowers'—

'You are as yet only a green sprig of something —what I know not,' interrupted the Bramble [120] sharply. 'But courage, child; take fast hold of me. I am rough but trusty; so take my hand.'

'I fear to climb!' cried the other timidly.

'Nonsense, child! nothing is done without an effort. Only, when once you have secured a chance, hold it fast,' was the caution given.

So she ventured to put forth a tender green tendril and clasp her kind friend's helping hand, which, if rough and thorny, was certainly honest and true.

It is very seldom in this world that the humble and shrinking find friends ready and willing to raise them from the ground; for there is such a rush and scramble to reach the temples of 'Fame' and of 'Mammon,' that each one elbows the other in the crowd. Some of the weaker ones get sadly pushed to the wall, others are trampled under foot, and it is only the very boldest and most daring of the throng who ever reach the desired goal.

But amongst the flowers it is not so; for how many of the weak ones cling for support to others, and, through their tender care, gain strength and beauty. And this was the case with the Honeysuckle; she felt so secure resting on that strong, protecting arm, that by degrees she began [121] to gain courage, and to feel her own power. The Bramble, too, perceiving she was something more than a mere 'little green sprig of something,' kindly encouraged her to persevere in her upward course. So she clambered up higher and higher; the delicate green tendrils became firmer and stronger, and at length, after much painful toiling and many a disappointment, she reached the highest summit of her hopes—the top of a quickset hedge!

'Oh, how can I thank you all!' she joyfully cried, when from her lofty position she gazed around on beautiful scenes undreamt of ere this, and then looked back upon the toilsome path she had travelled, and beheld the many kind friends who had helped her on her way, each one of whom was now rejoicing in her success; 'and you, dear Bramble, my first generous guide'—

'We are all very pleased to see that at last you have succeeded in your efforts, my dear,' interrupted that sturdy friend; 'and, what is more, we do not fear you will prove ungrateful, you are sure to remember us.' [122]

'Indeed, indeed I ever shall!' cried the happy little flower. 'Can I ever forget those who loved me when I was poor and lowly? that would be cruel and unkind.'

And so it proved; for, as the summer grew warmer, and her lovely blossoms opened to the bright sunshine, she in her gratitude showered them over those dear ones who had helped her in the days of her poverty; and the fragrant blossoms thus spread over the hedge and the bramble enhanced their beauty, and rendered them still more lovely in the eyes of the passers-by.

'Dear me!' exclaimed the Butterfly, as one very hot day he alighted to rest upon one of the Honeysuckle's leaves. 'Dear me!' he repeated, surveying her critically; 'why, really I did not know you again. How did you contrive to get so high up in the world?'

'Kind hearts, loving hands, helped me,' was the simple answer given.

'Oh, indeed!' he curtly said. 'Well, I owe gratitude to no one. I suppose you will not get any higher?' he questioned, after a pause.

'No,' she replied, with her usual humility; 'and even if I could, I would not wish it; for, living as I [123] do amongst all who are dear to me, I have no higher ambition.'

'You were always a faint-hearted thing,' exclaimed the insect, quite forgetting even to be commonly polite, so elated was he with pride. 'Just compare the difference in our lives! I fly here,

I fly there, now on this flower, now on that. Ah, mine is a glorious life! nothing but pleasure and excitement all the livelong day. Confess, now, would you not like to be me?'

'No,' she answered, with the utmost sincerity; 'I am so happy here, I would not change my lot even for a career so brilliant as yours.'

'What a taste!' he exclaimed, with scornful pity; 'no wonder you remain a hedge-flower! Why, poets write about us, and there is actually a song called "I'd be a Butterfly." Only think of that!' he exultantly cried.

'What! and have a pin stuck through one's head, and to be suffocated with camphor, merely for the sake of being placed in a glass-case for people to stare at!' ejaculated Spleenwort, with a dash of malice in his tone.

'Don't talk of such things, you common flower!' the insect angrily exclaimed. 'I'll not stay here any longer to listen to such vulgarity. I prefer more refined society!' [124]

And away he flew, evidently very much disturbed in his mind by what Spleenwort had remarked as occurring to butterflies in general, although he would not acknowledge that it was so, even to himself, but tried to banish the thought by indulging more freely in what he considered pleasure. You see—poor, giddy flutterer—he did not like to hear the plain truth spoken; flattery would have pleased him better, yet truth, though sometimes bitter, is a wholesome tonic when taken properly.

The summer days sped fast, for Father Time's scythe is never idle, and he was gradually, though slowly, mowing down the flowers which had garlanded the sunny hours. The leaves once so green were changing now, assuming their glowing autumn tints, whilst some would fall fluttering to the ground with a gentle sigh of weariness, as the cold winds were rustling by. Then the stern northern gale came sweeping along, proclaiming to the forest trees that winter was on her way; and a shudder would pass through their sturdy branches when they heard the tidings, for they feared her chill, icy breath. [125]

The bees took refuge in their well-stored hives, the ants had barred their outer doors, and retired to their most secluded apartments; even the garden spider was sheltered in his home—only the once gay butterfly was homeless and friendless.

'Shelter me, shelter me, dear Honeysuckle,' moaned the shivering insect, coming back to the old home in the day of his sorrow. 'I am so cold, so weary!'

'Poor thing!' the tender flower exclaimed, with the utmost pity, forgetting now all former slights. 'Creep under my leaves, perhaps they may shield you. But your beautiful wings, how came they so torn and colourless?'

'The pitiless storm last night fell upon me and crushed me to the earth in its fury,' he answered, with difficulty, for he was so feeble. '"Tis true the gleams of sunshine to-day have revived me a little; but alas! I am dying! my brief day is over, and there is no one to give me a refuge save you!'

'Where are your gay friends?' she asked,'those with whom you sported throughout the livelong summer hours?' [126]

'Gone far from me,' he answered bitterly; 'they were but friends of the fleeting sunshine, and I in the day of my power thought but of myself, and now—I am left alone to die!'

The Honeysuckle was deeply moved; she remembered no more his haughty pride, she only saw that *now* he was ill and in sorrow; so she placed her clinging tendrils gently around him, trying thus to keep the poor Butterfly under the shelter of her protecting leaves.

Night came stealing on, folding her sable curtains over the earth; and it was a wild night, for not a star shone in the skies, all was dark and dreary, for the Storm King was abroad in all his mighty strength. The fierce gales came with terrific power, tossing the lordly ships as they nobly braved its fury, but causing, oh, so many loving hearts to fervently pray 'for those at sea.' No wonder, then, that when the cold grey dawn awoke the early flowers, they saw the poor crushed Butterfly lying dead! close beside the little Honeysuckle, whose trustful, meek heart he had once so cruelly derided.

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