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BY

LOUISA M. ALCOTT,

AUTHOR OF "LITTLE WOMEN," "AN OLD-FASHIONED GIRL," "LITTLE MEN,"
"EIGHT COUSINS," "ROSE IN BLOOM," "UNDER THE LILACS," "JACK
AND JILL," "JO'S BOYS," "HOSPITAL SKETCHES," "WORK,
A STORY OF EXPERIENCE," "MOODS, A NOVEL,"
"PROVERB STORIES," "SILVER PITCHERS,"
"SPINNING-WHEEL STORIES,"
"AUNT JO'S SCRAP-BAG."

VOL. II.

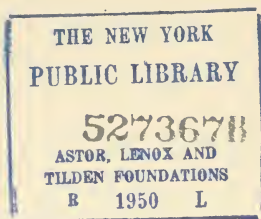
THE FROST KING AND HOW THE
FAIRIES CONQUERED HIM.
LILYBELL AND THISTLEDOWN.
RIPPLE, THE WATER SPRITE.
EVA'S VISIT TO FAIRYLAND
SUNSHINE, AND HER BROTHERS
AND SISTERS.

THE FAIRY SPRING.
QUEEN ASTER.
THE BROWNIE AND THE
PRINCESS.
MERMAIDS.
LITTLE BUD.
THE FLOWER'S STORY.

BOSTON:

LITTLE, BROWN, AND COMPANY,

1901.



Copyright, 1887,
BY LOUISA M. ALCOTT.

University Press:
JOHN WILSON AND SON, CAMBRIDGE.

TO

ELLEN T. EMERSON,

ONE OF THE GOOD FAIRIES WHO STILL REMAIN TO US,
BELOVED BY POETS, LITTLE CHILDREN, AND
MANY GRATEFUL HEARTS,

This Book

IS AFFECTIONATELY INSCRIBED

BY HER OLD FRIEND,

L. M. ALCOTT.

June, 1887.

49X519

P R E F A C E.



MOST of these stories were written at sixteen for my younger sisters and their playmates, the little Emersons and Channings, and appeared some years later under the name of "Flower Fables." With some additions they are now republished for the amusement of those children's children by their old friend,

L. M. ALCOTT.

JUNE, 1887.

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Instead of dying in her cell, the fairy had made it beautiful. — PAGE 13.

I.

THE FROST KING AND HOW THE FAIRIES CONQUERED HIM.

THE Queen sat upon her throne, and all the fairies from the four kingdoms were gathered for a grand council. A very important question was to be decided, and the bravest, wisest elves were met to see what could be done.

The Frost King made war upon the flowers; and it was a great grief to Queen Blossom and her subjects to see their darlings die year after year, instead of enjoying one long summer, as they might have done but for him. She had sent messengers with splendid gifts, and had begged him to stop this dreadful war, which made autumn so sad and left the fields strewn with dead flowers. But he sent back the gifts, sternly refused her prayers, and went on with his cruel work; because he was a tyrant, and loved to destroy innocent things.

“My subjects, we will try once more,” said the Queen, “if any one can propose a plan that will touch his hard heart and make him kind to the dear flowers.”

Then there was a great rustling of wings and murmuring of voices; for all the elves were much excited, and each wanted to propose something. The Queen listened, but none of the plans seemed wise, and she was sadly perplexed, when her favorite maid of honor, the lovely Star, came and knelt before her, saying, while her face shone and her voice trembled with the earnestness of her words, “Dear Queen, let me go alone

to the Frost King and try what love will do. We have sent presents and prayers by messengers who feared and hated him, and he would not receive them; but we have not tried to make him love us, nor shown him how beautiful his land might be, by patiently changing that dreary place, and teaching his people to plant flowers, not to kill them. I am not afraid; let me go and try my plan, for love is very powerful, and I know he has a heart if we can only find it."

"You may go, dear Star," answered the Queen, "and see if you can conquer him. But if any harm happens to you, we will come with our whole army and fight this cruel King till he is conquered."

At these brave words all the elves cheered, and General Sun, the great warrior, waved his sword as if longing to go to battle at once. They gathered about Star,—some to praise and caress her, some to warn her of the dangers of her task, others to tell her the way, and every one to wish her success; for fairies are gentle little creatures, and believe heartily in the power of love.

Star wished to go at once; so they wrapped her in a warm cloak of down from a swan's

breast, gave her a bag of the seeds of all their sweetest flowers, and with kisses and tears went to the gates of Fairyland to say good-by.

Smiling bravely she flew away toward the North, where the frost spirits lived. Soon the wind grew cold, the sunshine faded, and snow began to fall, making Star shiver under her soft cloak. Presently she saw the King's palace. Pillars of ice held up the roof fringed with icicles, which would have sparkled splendidly if there had been any sun. But all was dark and cold, and not a green leaf rustled, or bird sang in the wide plains, white with snow, that stretched as far as the eye could see. Before the doors stood the guard, frozen to their places, who lifted their sharp spears and let Star go in when she said she was a messenger from the Queen.

Walls of ice carved with strange figures were round her, long icicles hung from the roof, and carpets of snow covered the floor. On a throne hung with gray mist sat the King; a crown of crystals was on his white hair, and his mantle was covered with silver frost-work. His eyes were cold, his face stern, and a smile never moved his hard lips. He frowned as he saw the

fairy, and drew his cloak closer, as if afraid the light of her bright face might soften his heart.

Then Star told her errand, and in her gentle voice begged him to be kind. She described the sorrow of both elves and children when his frost killed all the flowers; she painted a bright picture of a world where it was always summer, and asked him to let her show how lovely flowers made any spot, by planting some in his bleak fields.

But he only scowled and ordered her away, saying harshly, "I will do as I please; and if your Queen does not leave me in peace, I will go to war and freeze every fairy to death."

Star tried to say more, but he was so angry that he called his people and bid them shut her up till she would own that he was right and promise to let him kill all the flowers he liked.

"I never will do that," said Star, as the Frost people led her away to a dark little cell, and left her alone.

She was cold and tired and very sad because the King would not listen to her, but her heart was brave, and instead of crying she began to sing. Soon the light of her own eyes, that

shone like stars, made a little glimmer in the dark, and she saw that the floor of her cell was of earth; and presently she heard the tinkle of water as it dripped drop by drop down from the snow above. Then she smiled, so that it seemed as if a ray of light had crept in.

“Here is earth and water, I will make the sunshine, and soon by my fairy power I will have a garden even in Frostland.” As she spoke she pulled out the seeds and fell to work, still singing, still smiling, still sure that in time she would do the hard task she had set herself. First she gathered the drops in her warm hands and moistened the hard earth; then she loosened it and planted her seeds along the walls; and then, sitting in the middle of the narrow room, she waved her wand and chanted the fairy spell that works the pretty miracle of turning seeds to flowers.

“Sleep, little seed,
Deep in your bed,
While winter snow
Lies overhead.
Wake, little sprout,
And drink the rain,
Till sunshine calls
You to rise again.

Strike deep, young root,
In the earth below;
Unfold, pale leaves,
Begin to grow.
Baby bud, dance
In the warm sun;
Bloom, sweet rose,
Life has begun."

As she sung, the light grew stronger, the air warmer, and the drops fell like dew, till up came rows of little green vines and plants, growing like the magic beanstalk all over the walls and all round the room, making the once dark place look like a bower. Moss spread like a carpet underfoot, and a silvery white mushroom sprung up under Star, as if she were the queen of this pretty place.

Soon the Frost spirits heard the music and went to see who dared sing in that gloomy prison. They were much surprised when they peeped, to see that instead of dying in her cell, the fairy had made it beautiful, and sat there singing while her flowers bloomed in spite of all their power.

They hurried to the King and bade him come and see. He went, and when he saw the lovely

place he could not spoil it till he had watched Star at her work, and tried to see what magic did such wonders. For now the dark walls were hung with morning-glories, ringing their many-colored bells, the floor was green with soft moss, the water-drops made music as they fell, and rows of flowers nodded from their beds as if talking together in a sweet language of their own. Star sat on her throne still singing and smiling, till the once dark place was as bright as if a little sun shone there.

“I am strong, but I cannot do that,” said the King. “I love power, and perhaps if I watch I shall learn some of her magic skill to use as I please. I will let her live, but keep her a prisoner, and do as I please about killing other flowers.”

So he left her there, and often stole down to peep, and wonder at her cheerfulness and courage; for she never complained or cried, though she longed for home, and found it very hard to be brave and patient.

Meantime the Queen waited and waited for Star to come, and when a long time passed she sent a messenger to learn where she was. He

brought back the sad tidings that she was a prisoner, and the King would not let her go. Then there was great weeping and wailing in Fairyland, for every one loved gentle Star. They feared she would be frozen to death if they left her in the cruel King's power, and resolved to go to war as he would not set her free.

General Sun ordered out the army, and there was a great blowing of trumpets, beating of drums, and flying of flags as the little soldiers came marching from the four quarters of the kingdom. The earth elves were on foot, in green suits, with acorn cups for helmets and spear grass for lances. The water sprites were in blue armor made of dragon-fly scales, and they drew shells full of tiny bubbles that were shot like cannon-balls, upsetting their small enemies by the dozen. The fire imps wore red, and carried torches to burn, and little guns to shoot bullets of brimstone from, which killed by their dreadful smell. The air spirits were the finest of all; for they were in golden armor, and carried arrows of light, which they shot from tiny rainbows. These came first, and General Sun was

splendid to behold as he led them shining and flashing before the Queen, whose great banner of purple and gold streamed over their heads, while the trumpets blew, the people cheered, and the elfin soldiers marched bravely away to fight the Frost King and bring Star home.

The Queen followed in her chariot drawn by white butterflies, with her maids, and her body guard of the tallest elves in Fairyland. They lived in the pine-trees, and were fine strong fellows, with little cones on their heads, pine needles for swords, and the handsome russet scales for chain armor. Their shields were of sweet-smelling gum, like amber; but no one could approach the Queen when they made a wall about her, for whoever touched these shields stuck fast, and were killed with the sharp swords.

Away streamed the army like a wandering rainbow, and by and by reached the land of frost and snow. The King had been warned that they were coming, and made ready by building a fort of ice, laying in piles of snowballs, and arming his subjects with sharp icicles. All the cold winds that blow wailed like bagpipes, hailstones drummed on the frozen ground,

and banners of mist floated over the towers of the palace. General Fog, in a suit of silver, stood ready to meet the enemy, with an army of snow men behind him, and the Frost King looked down from the walls to direct the fight.

On came the fairy folk, making the icy world sparkle so brilliantly with their light that the King was half-blinded and hid his eyes. The elves shivered as the cold wind touched them, but courage kept them warm, and the Queen, well wrapped in down, stood up in her chariot, boldly demanding Star at the hands of the King.

“I will not give her up,” he answered, scowling like a thunder-cloud, though in his heart he wondered more and more how the brave fairy had lived so long away from such lovely friends as these.

“Then I proclaim war upon your country; and if Star is dead we will show no mercy. Sound the trumpets and set on!” cried the Queen, waving her hand to the General, while every sword flashed out, and an elfin cheer rung like music in the air.

Ordering the rest to halt, General Sun led

the air spirits to battle first, well knowing that nothing could stand long before a charge of that brilliant troop. General Fog did his best, but was driven back against his will; for his snow men melted away as the arrows of light struck them, and he could not stand before the other general, whose shield was a golden sun, without feeling himself dissolve like mist at noon.

They were forced to take refuge in the fort, where the King himself was ordering showers of snow-balls to be shot among the fairy troops. Many were wounded, and carried from the field to the tent where the Queen and her maids tended them, and by their soft magic soon made them fit to fight again.

“Now, a grand attack. Bring up the sappers and miners, Captain Rock. Major Flash, surround the walls and melt them as fast as possible, while the archers shall go on shooting,” commanded General Sun.

Then a company of moles began to dig under the fort; the fire imps banged away at the walls with their cannon, and held their flaming torches close till the blocks of ice began to melt; the air

spirits flew high above and shot their golden arrows down at the Frost people, who fled away to hide in the darkest corners, dazzled and daunted by these brave and brilliant enemies.

It was a hard battle, and the fairies were obliged to rest, after killing General Fog, destroying the fort, and forcing the King to take refuge in the palace. Among the prisoners taken was one who told them where Star was, and all she had done in her little cell. Then they rejoiced, and the Queen said, "Let us follow her example, for these prisoners say the King is changed since she came; that he goes to peep at her lovely bower, and does not spoil it, but talks kindly to her, and seems as if his hard heart might be melting a little. We will not fight any more, but try Star's gentle way, and besiege the King till he surrenders; so we shall win a friend, not kill an enemy."

"We will; we will!" cried all the elves; for they did not love to fight, though brave as little lions to defend their country and their Queen. They all took counsel together, and the Frost people were surprised next day to see the army busily at work making a great garden round the

palace instead of trying to destroy it. Creeping to the holes in the walls they watched what went on, and wondered more and more; for the elves worked hard, and their magic helped them to do in a day what it would have taken years for mortals to do.

First the moles dug up the ground, then the Queen's guard sowed pine seeds, and in an hour a green wall fenced in the garden where the earth fairies planted seeds of all the flowers that grow. The fire imps warmed the air, and drove away every chilly wind, every gray cloud or flake of snow that dared come near this enchanted spot. The water sprites gathered drops from the melting ice palace and watered the budding beds, after the imps had taken the chill off, while the air spirits made sunshine overhead by flying to and fro with tireless wings, till a golden curtain was woven that shut out the cold sky and made summer for the flowers.

The Queen and her maids helped, for they fashioned birds, bees, and butterflies with magic skill, and gave them life to sing, buzz, and flutter in the new world, growing so fast where once all was bare and cold and dark.

Slowly the ice palace melted; for warm airs stole through the pines, and soon the walls were thin as glass, the towers vanished like frost-work in the sun, and block after block flowed away in little rills as if glad to escape from prison. The King and his subjects felt that they were conquered; for the ice seemed to melt from them also, and their hearts began to beat, their cold faces to soften as if they wanted to smile if they knew how, and they loved to watch and wonder at the sweet miracles the elves were working all about them.

The King tried not to give up, for he was very proud, and had ruled so long it was hard to submit; but his power was gone, his palace crumbling about him, his people longing to join the enemy, and there was nothing for him to do but lay down his crown or fly away to the far North and live with the bears and icebergs in that frozen world. He would have done this but for Star. All the while the battle and the siege were going on, she lived in her little cell, knowing nothing about it, but hoping and waiting, sure that help would come. Every time the King visited her he seemed kinder, and liked more and more

to listen to her songs or the stories she told him of life in Fairyland, and the joy of being merciful. So she knew that the seeds she sowed in his heart were beginning to grow like those planted in the cell, and she watched over them as carefully.

One day her loveliest roses bloomed, and she was singing for joy as the pink flowers filled the cell with their sweet breath, when the King came hurrying down to her and falling at her feet begged her to save his life. She wondered what he meant, and he told her of the battle, and how the elves were conquering him by love; for the palace was nearly gone, a great garden lay blossoming all about it, and he had nowhere to go unless she would be his friend and ask her people to forgive and pity him.

Then Star felt that she had done her task, and laying her hands on his white head, she melted the last frost from his old heart by saying in her tender voice, "Do not fear my people; they will welcome you and give you a home if you will promise to hurt no more flowers, but always be as gentle as you are now. Come with me, and let us teach you how beautiful sunshine and love and happy work can make you."

The King promised, and Star led him up to the light again, where his people waited to know what was to become of them.

“Follow me, follow me, and do not be afraid,” called Star, dancing before them, — so glad to be free that she longed to fly away. Everything was changed; for as they came up from the cell the ruins of the palace melted into a quiet lake, and under the archway of the pines they passed into a new and lovely world of sunshine, flowers, and happy elves. A great cry went up when Star was seen leading the King, with his few subjects behind him, and every one flew to welcome the dear fairy and the captives she brought.

“I am your prisoner, and I submit, for I have no kingdom now,” said the King, as he bowed before the Queen.

“These are the only chains you shall wear, and *this* is your new kingdom,” answered the Queen, as her maids hung wreaths of flowers on the King’s arms and put a green crown on his head, while all the fairies gathered round to welcome him to the lovely garden where he was to reign beloved and happy, with no frost to spoil the long summer he had learned to love.

There was a great feast that day, and then the elfin army marched home again, well pleased with the battle they had fought, though all said that it was Star who had conquered the Frost-King.





On a bed of moss lay Lilybell fast asleep. — PAGE 37.

II.

LILYBELL AND THISTLEDOWN, OR THE FAIRY SLEEPING BEAUTY.

ONCE upon a time two little fairies went out into the world to seek their fortune. Thistledown wore a green suit, a purple cloak, a gay feather in his cap, and was as handsome an elf as one could wish to see. But he was not

loved in Fairyland; for, like the flower whose name and colors he wore, many faults like sharp prickles were hidden under his fine clothes. He was idle, selfish, and cruel, and cared for nothing but his own pleasure and comfort, as we shall see.

His little friend Lilybell was very different, for she was so kind and good every one loved her. She spent her time trying to undo the mischief naughty Thistle did, and that was why she followed him now, because she was afraid he would get into trouble and need some one to help him.

Side by side they flew over hill and dale till they came to a pleasant garden.

“I am tired and hungry,” said Thistle; “let us rest here and see what fun is going on.”

“Now, dear Thistle, be kind and gentle, and make friends among these flowers. See how they spread their leaves for our beds, and offer us their honey to eat, and their dew to bathe in. It would be very wrong to treat them badly after such a welcome as this,” answered Lilybell, as she lay down to sleep in the deep cup of one of her own flowers, as if in a little bed hung with white curtains.

Thistle laughed and flew off to find the tulips, for he liked splendid flowers and lived like a king. First he robbed the violets of their honey, and shook the blue-bells roughly to get all their dew for his bath. Then he ruffled many leaves before his bed suited him, and after a short nap was up and away having what he called fun. He chased the butterflies and hurt them with the sharp thorn he carried for a sword; he broke the cobwebs laid to bleach on the grass for fairy cloth; he pushed the little birds out of the nest and killed them; he stole pollen from the busy bees, and laughed to see them patiently begin to fill their little bags again. At last he came to a lovely rose-tree with one open flower and a little bud.

“Why are you so slow about blooming, baby rose? You are too old to be rocked in your green cradle any longer. Come out and play with me,” said Thistle, as he perched on the tree ready for more mischief.

“No, my little bud is not strong enough to meet the sun and air yet,” answered the rose-mother, bending over her baby, while all her red leaves trembled with fear, for the wind had

told her the harm this cruel fairy had been doing in the garden.

“You silly flower, to wait so long. See how quickly I will make the ugly green bud a pretty pink rose,” cried Thistle, as he pulled open the folded bud so rudely that the little leaves fell all broken on the ground.

“It was my first and only one, and I was so fond and proud of it! Now you have killed it, cruel fairy, and I am all alone,” sobbed the mother, while her tears fell like rain on the poor bud fading in the hot sun.

Thistle was ashamed of himself, but he would not say he was sorry, and flew away to hunt a white moth, till clouds began to gather and a shower came on. Then he hurried back to the tulips for shelter, sure they would take him in because he had praised their gay colors, and they were vain flowers. But when he came all wet and cold begging to be covered, they laughed and shook their broad leaves till the drops fell on him faster than the rain and beat him down.

“Go away, naughty fairy! we know you now, and won't let you in, for you bring trouble

wherever you go. You need n't come to us for a new cloak when the shower has spoilt that one," they cried.

"I don't care, the daisies will be glad to take pity on so splendid an elf as I am," said Thistle, as he flew down to the humble flowers in the grass.

But all the rosy leaves were tightly closed and he knocked in vain, for the daisies had heard of his pranks, and would not risk spoiling their seeds by opening to such a naughty fellow.

He tried the buttercups and dandelions, the violets and mignonette, the lilies and the honeysuckles, but all shut their doors against him and told him to go away.

"Now I have no friends and must die of cold. If I had only minded Lilybell I might be safe and warm as she is somewhere," sighed Thistle, as he stood shivering in the rain.

"I have no little bud to shelter now, and you can come in here," said a soft voice above him; and looking up, Thistle saw that he was under the rose-tree where the dead bud hung broken on its stem.

Grieved and ashamed, the fairy gladly crept

in among the warm red leaves, and the rose-mother held him close to her gentle bosom where no rain or chilly wind could reach him. But when she thought he was asleep she sighed so sadly over her lost baby that Thistle found no rest, and dreamed only sad dreams.

Soon the sun shone again and Lilybell came to find her friend; but he was ashamed to meet her and stole away. When the flowers told Lily all the harm Thistle had done she was very sorrowful, and tried to comfort them. She cured the hurt birds and butterflies, helped the bees he had robbed, and watered the poor rose till more buds came to bloom on her stem. Then when all were well and happy again she went to find Thistle, leaving the garden full of grateful friends.

Meantime, Thistle had been playing more pranks, and got into trouble. A kind bee invited him to dinner one day, and the fairy liked the pretty home in the hive; for the floors were of white wax, the walls of golden honey-comb, and the air sweet with the breath of flowers. It was a busy place; some got the food and stored it up in the little cells; some were the house-

maids, and kept all exquisitely neat; some took care of the eggs and fed the young bees like good nurses; and others waited on the Queen.

“Will you stay and work with us? No one is idle here, and it is a happier life than playing all day,” said Buzz, the friendly bee.

“I hate to work,” answered lazy Thistle, and would not do anything at all.

Then they told him he must go; that made him angry, and he went to some of the bees whom he had made discontented by his fine tales of an idle life, and said to them, —

“Let us feast and be jolly; winter is far off and there is no need to work in the summer time. Come and make merry, while those busy fellows are away, and the nurses watching the babies in the cells.”

Then he led the drones to the hive, like a band of robbers; first they fastened the Queen into her royal room, so she could do nothing but buzz angrily; next they drove the poor house-keepers away, and frightened the little bees into fits as they went rioting through the waxen halls, pulling down the honey-comb, and stealing the bee-bread carefully put away in the neat cells

for winter time. They stayed as long as they dared, and flew off before the workers came home to find their pretty hive in ruins.

“That was fine fun,” said Thistle, as he went to hide in a great forest where he thought the angry bees could not find him.

Here he soon made friends with a gay dragon-fly, and they had splendid games skimming over the lake or swinging on the ferns that grew about it. For a while Thistle was good, and might have had a happy time if he had not quarrelled with his friend about a little fish that the cruel elf pricked with his sword till it nearly died. Gauzy-wing thought that very cruel, and said he would tell the Brownies who ruled over everything in the wood.

“I’m not afraid,” answered Thistle; “they can’t hurt me.”

But he *was* afraid, and as soon as the dragon-fly was asleep that night, he got an ugly spider to come and spin webs all round the poor thing till it could stir neither leg nor wing.

Then leaving it to starve, Thistle flew out of the wood, sure that the Brownies would not catch him.

But they did, for they knew all that happened in their kingdom; and when he stopped to rest in a wild morning-glory-bell, they sent word by the wind that he was to be kept a prisoner till they came. So the purple leaves closed round the sleeping fairy, and he woke to find himself held fast. Then he knew how poor Gauzy-wing felt, and wished he had not been so unkind. But it was too late, for soon the Brownies came, and tying his wings with a strong blade of grass said as they led him away, —

“You do so much harm we are going to keep you a prisoner till you repent, for no one can live in this beautiful world unless he is kind and good. Here you will have time to think over your naughtiness, and learn to be a better elf.”

So they shut him up in a great rock where there was no light but one little ray through a crack that let air into his narrow cell, and there poor Thistle sat alone longing to be free, and sobbing over all the pleasant things he had lost. By and by he stopped crying, and said to himself, —

“Perhaps if I am patient and cheerful, even in

this dark place, the Brownies will let me out." So he began to sing, and the more he sang the better he felt, for the ray of sunshine seemed to grow brighter, the days shorter, and his sorrow easier to bear, because he was trying to take his punishment bravely and be good.

Lilybell was looking for him all this time, tracing him by the harm he did, and stopping to comfort those whom he hurt; so she never found him till she had helped the bees put the hive in order, set free poor Gauzy-wing, and nursed the hurt fish till it was well again. Then she went on looking for him, and wondering where he was. She never would have guessed if he had not sung so much, for the birds loved to hear him, and often perched on the rocks to listen and learn the fairy songs. Columbines sprung up there in the sunshine and danced on their slender stems as they peeped in at him with rosy faces, while green moss went creeping up the sides of the rock as if eager to join in the music.

As Lilybell came to this pleasant place, she wondered if there was a fairy party going on, for the birds were singing, the flowers dancing,

and the old rock looked very gay. When they saw her, the birds stopped, and the columbines stood so still that she heard a voice singing sadly, —

“Bright shines the summer sun,
Soft is the summer air,
Gayly the wood-birds sing,
Flowers are blooming fair.
But deep in the dark, cold rock
All alone must I dwell,
Longing for you, dear friend,
Lilybell, Lilybell !”

“Where are you?” cried the other fairy, flying up among the columbines; for she could see no opening in the rock, and wondered where the voice came from. No one replied, for Thistle did not hear her, so she sang her answer to his call, —

“Through sunshine and shower
I have looked for you long,
Guided by bird and flower,
And now by your song,
Thistledown ! Thistledown !
O'er wood, hill, and dell
Hither to comfort you
Comes Lilybell.”

Then through the narrow opening two arms were stretched out to her, and all the columbines danced for joy that Thistle was found.

Lilybell made her home there, and did all she could to cheer the poor prisoner, glad to see that he was sorry for his naughtiness, and really trying to be good. But he pined so to come out that she could not bear it, and said she would go and ask the Brownies what he could do to be free.

Thistle waited and waited, but she did not come back, and he cried and called so pitifully that the Brownies came at last and took him out, saying, —

“Lilybell is safe, but she is in a magic sleep, and will not wake till you bring us a golden wand from the earth elves, a cloak of sunshine from the air spirits, and a crown of diamonds from the water fairies. It is a hard task, for you have no friends to help you along. But if you love Lilybell enough to be patient, brave, and kind, you may succeed, and she will wake to reward you when you bring the fairy gifts.”

As they said this, the Brownies led him to a green tent made of tall ferns, and inside on a bed

of moss lay Lilybell fast asleep, like the Beauty in the dear old story.

“I will do it,” said Thistle, and spreading the wings that had been idle so long, he was off like a humming-bird.

“Flowers know most about the earth elves, so I will ask them,” he thought, and began to ask every clover and buttercup, wood-violet, and wayside dandelion that he met. But no one would answer him; all shrunk away and drew their curtains close, remembering his rough treatment before.

“I will go to the rose; I think she is a friend, for she forgave me, and took me in when the rest left me in the cold,” said Thistle, much discouraged, and half afraid to ask anything of the flower he had hurt so much.

But when he came to the garden the rose-mother welcomed him kindly, and proudly showed the family of little buds that now grew on her stem.

“I will trust and help you for Lilybell’s sake,” she said. “Look up, my darlings, and show the friend how rosy your little faces are growing; you need not be afraid now.”

But the buds leaned closer to their mother, and would only peep at Thistle, for they remembered the little sister whom he had killed, and they feared him.

“ Ah,” he sadly thought, “ if I had only been kind like Lily, they would all love and trust me, and be glad to help me. How beautiful goodness is! I must try to prove to them that I *am* sorry; then they will believe me, and show me how to find the crown.”

So, at night when the flowers were asleep, he watered them; sung lullabies to the restless young birds, and tucked the butterflies up under the leaves where no dew could spoil their lovely wings. He rocked the baby-buds to sleep when they grew impatient before it was time to blossom; he kept grubs from harming the delicate leaves of the flowers, and brought cool winds to refresh them when the sun was hot.

The rose was always good to him, and when the other plants wondered who did so many kind things, she said to them, —

“ It is Thistle, and he is so changed I am sure we may trust him. He hides by day for no one is friendly, but by night he works or sits alone,

and sobs and sighs so sadly I cannot sleep for pity.”

Then they all answered, “We will love and help him for Lilybell’s sake.”

So they called him to come and be friends, and he was very happy to be forgiven. But he did not forget his task, and when he told them what it was, they called Downy-back, the mole, and bid him show Thistle where the earth elves lived. Thanking the kind flowers, Thistle followed the mole deep into the ground, along the road he knew so well, till they saw a light before them.

“There they are; now you can go on alone, and good luck to you,” said Downy-back, as he scampered away, — for he liked the dark best.

Thistle came to a great hall made of jewels that shone like the sun, and here many spirits were dancing like fire-flies to the music of silver bells.

One of these came and asked why he was there, and when he told her, Sparkle said, “You must work for us if you want to earn the golden wand.”

“What must I do?” asked Thistle.

“Many things,” answered Sparkle; “some of us watch over the roots of the flowers and keep them warm and safe; others gather drops and make springs that gush up among the rocks, where people drink the fresh water and are glad; others dig for jewels, make good-luck pennies, and help miners find gold and silver hidden in dark places. Can you be happy here, and do all these things faithfully?”

“Yes, for love of Lily I can do anything,” said Thistle bravely, and fell to work at once with all his heart.

It was hard and dull for the gay fairy, who loved light and air, to live in the earth like a mole; and often he was very sad and tired, and longed to fly away to rest. But he never did, and at last Sparkle said, “You have done enough. Here is the golden wand, and as many jewels as you like.”

But Thistle cared only for the wand, and hurried up to the sunshine as fast as he could climb, eager to show the Brownies how well he had kept his word.

They were very glad to see him back and told him to rest a little. But he could not wait, and

with a look at Lily, still fast asleep, he flew away to find the air spirits.

No one seemed to know where they lived, and Thistle was in despair till he remembered hearing Buzz speak of them when he first met him.

“I dare not go to the hive, for the bees might kill me, I did so much harm. Perhaps if I first show them I am sorry, they will forgive me as the flowers did,” he said.

So he went into a field of clover and worked busily till he had filled two blue-bells full of the sweetest honey. These he left at the door of the hive when no one saw him, and then hid in the apple-tree close by.

The bees were much pleased and surprised; for every day two little blue jars stood at the door, full of honey so fresh and sweet that it was kept for the Queen and the royal babies.

“It is some good elf, who knows how much trouble we have had this summer, and wants to help us fill our cells before the frost comes. If we catch the kind fellow we will thank him well,” said the bees gratefully.

“Ah, ha! we shall be friends again, I think, if

I keep on," laughed Thistle, much cheered as he sat among the leaves.

After this he not only left the pretty honeypots, but flew far and wide for all the flowering herbs bees love to suck, and nearly broke his back lugging berries from the wood, or great bags of pollen for their bread, till he was as dusty as a little miller. He helped the ants with their heavy loads, the field-mice with their small harvesting, and chased flies from the patient cows feeding in the fields. No one saw him, but all loved "Nimble Nobody" as they called the invisible friend who did so many kindly things.

At last they caught him, as he was wrapping a lizard who had chills in a warm mullein-leaf blanket.

"Why, it is naughty Thistle!" cried the bees, ready to sting him to death.

"No, no," chirped an old cricket, who had kept the secret. "It is the good fellow who has done so much to make us all happy and comfortable. Put up your stings and shake hands, before he flies away to hide from you again."

The bees could hardly believe this at first, but finding it true were glad to make up the quarrel

and be friends. When they heard what Thistle wanted, they consented at once, and sent Buzz to show him the way to Cloudland, where the air spirits lived.

It seemed a lovely place, for the sky was gold and purple overhead, silver mist hung like curtains from the rainbow arches, and white clouds were piled up like downy cushions for the spirits to sleep on. But they were very busy flying to and fro like motes in a sunbeam, some polishing the stars that they might shine well at night, some drawing up water from rivers and lakes, to shower it down again in rain or dew; others sent messages by the winds that kept coming and going like telegraph-boys, with news from all parts of the world; and others were weaving light into a shining stuff to hang on dark walls, wrap about budding plants, and clothe all spirits of the airy world.

“These are the ones I want,” said Thistle, and asked for the mantle of sunshine.

“You must earn it first, and help us work,” answered the weavers.

Thistle willingly went with them and shared their lovely tasks; but most of all he liked to

shake sweet dreams from the dreamland tree down upon little people in their beds, to send strong, bright rays suddenly into dark rooms, dancing on the walls and cheering sick or sad eyes. Sometimes he went riding to the earth on a raindrop, like a little water-cart man, and sprinkled the dusty road or gave some thirsty plant a good drink. He helped the winds carry messages, and blow flower-seeds into lonely places to spring and blossom there, a pleasant surprise for all who might find them.

It was a busy and a happy life, and he liked it; for fairies love light, air, and motion, and he was learning to live for good and helpful things. Sooner than he expected the golden cloak was won, and he shot like a falling star to the forest with his prize.

“One more trial and she will wake,” said the Brownies, well pleased.

“This I shall not like, for I am not a water elf, but I’ll do my best,” answered Thistle, and roamed away into the wood, following a brook till he came to the lake where he used to play with Gauzy-wing. As he stood wondering how to find the nixies, he heard a faint cry for

help, and presently found a little frog with a broken leg, lying on the moss.

“I tried to jump too far, when a cruel child was going to tread on me, and fell among the stones; I long for the water, but can drag myself no farther,” sighed the frog, his bright eyes dim with pain.

Thistle did not like to touch the cold thing, but remembering his own unkindness to the dragon-fly, he helped the poor froggie to a fallen oak-leaf, and then tugged it by its stout stem to the waterside where he could bathe the hurt leg and bring cool draughts in an acorn cup.

“Alas! I cannot swim, and I am very tired of this bed,” cried poor Hop after a day or two, during which Thistle fed and nursed him tenderly.

“I’ll pull a lily-pad to the shore, and when you are on it we can sail about wherever we please, without tiring you,” and away went the elf to find the green boat.

After that they floated all day, and anchored at night, and Hop got well so fast that soon he could dive off and paddle a bit with his hands,

or float, using his well leg to steer with. Thistle had talked about the water sprites, but Hop was rather a dull fellow, and lived in the mud, so he could tell him nothing. One day, however, a little fish popped up his head and said, —

“I know, and for kind Lilybell’s sake I’ll show you where they live.”

Then Thistle left grateful Hop to his family, and folding his wings plunged into the lake after the silvery fish, who darted deeper and deeper till they stood in a curious palace made of rosy coral at the bottom of the sea. Gay shells made the floors and ornamented the walls. Lovely sea-weeds grew from the white sand, and heaps of pearls lay everywhere. The water sprites in their blue robes floated here and there, or slept in beds of foam, rocked by the motion of the waves.

They gathered round the stranger, bringing all sorts of treasures for him. But he did not care for these, and told them what he wanted. Then little Pearl, the gentlest of the sprites, said :

“You must help the coral-workers till the branches of their tree reach the air; because we want a new island, and that is the way we

begin them. It is very dull work, but we cannot give you the crown till that is done."

Thistle was ready to begin at once, and hastened away to the coral-tree, where hundreds of little creatures were building cell upon cell, till the white tree rose tall and wide, spreading through the blue water. It *was* very dull, and the poor fairy never could lose his fear of the strange monsters that swam to and fro, staring at him with big eyes, or opening their great mouths as if to swallow him. There was no sun, — only a dim light, and the sky seemed full of storm, when the waves rolled overhead, and wrecks came floating down. The sea-flowers had no sweetness; the only birds were flying-fish and Mother Carey's chickens, as the stormy petrels are called. Thistle pined for light and air, but kept patiently at work, and his only pleasure was now and then to float with Pearl on the waves that rippled to the shore, and get a breath of warm air from the lovely earth he longed to see again.

At last the great tree rose above the sea, and the long task was done; for now the waves would wash weeds over the branches, gulls would bring

earth and sticks to make their nests, and by and by an island would be formed where men might land or wild birds live in peace.

“Now you can go. Here is the crown of water-drops, changed to diamonds, that will always lie cool and bright on your Lily’s head. Good-by, good-by,” said Pearl, as she gave the reward and waved her hand to Thistle, who shook the foam off his wings and flew away in the sunshine, like a happy butterfly just out of its cell.

When he came to the wood the Brownies hastened to meet him, and he saw that they had made the place beautiful with wreaths from tree to tree; birds were singing their sweetest on every bough; the brook was laughing as it hurried by to tell the good news wherever it went; and the flowers, all in their best, were dancing with impatience to welcome him home.

Lilybell lay with the cloak of sunshine folded round her, and the golden wand in her hand, waiting for the crown and the kiss that should wake her from this long sleep. Thistle gave them both; and when her eyes opened and she stretched out her arms to him, he was the

happiest fairy in the world. The Brownies told all he had done, and how at last he had learned to be gentle, true, and brave, after many trials and troubles.

“You shall have the crown, for you have worked so hard you deserve it, and I will have a wreath of flowers,” said Lily, so glad and proud she cared for nothing else.

“Keep your crown, for here are friends coming to bring Thistle his rewards,” said the Brownies, as they pointed to a troop of earth spirits rising from among the mossy roots of an old tree. Sparkle brought a golden wand like the one he had earned for Lily, and while she was giving it, down through the air came the sky spirits, with the mantle of sunshine as their gift. Hardly had they folded it round happy Thistle, when the sound of music, like drops falling in time and tune, was heard, and along the brook in their boats of rosy shells came the water sprites with the crown.

As they put it on his head all took hands and danced about the two elves, shouting in their soft voices, “Thistledown and Lilybell! Long live our King and Queen!”



Suddenly a great wave came rolling in. — PAGE 64.

III.

RIPPLE, THE WATER SPRITE.

DOWN in the deep sea lived Ripple, a happy little water sprite. She lived in a palace of red coral, with gardens of sea-flowers all round it, the waves like a blue sky above it, and white sand full of jewels for its floor. Ripple and her mates had gay times playing

with the sea-urchins, chasing flying-fish, rocking in the shells, and weaving many-colored seaweed into delicate clothes to wear. •

But the pastime Ripple loved best was to rise to the light and air, and float on the waves that rocked her softly in the sunshine, while the gulls stooped to tell her news of the great world they saw in their long flights. She liked to watch little children playing on the shore, and when they ran into the sea she caught them in her arms and held them up and kissed them, though they saw and felt only the cool water and the white foam.

Ripple had one sorrow; for when tempests came and the waves rolled overhead like black clouds, ships were often wrecked, and those whom the angry sea drowned came floating down, pale and cold, to the home of the water sprites, who mourned over them, and laid them in graves of white sea-sand, where jewels shone like flowers.

One day a little child sank down from the storm above to the quiet that was never broken, far below. Its pretty eyes were closed as if asleep, its long hair hung about the pale face

like wet weeds, and the little hands still held the shells they had been gathering when the cruel waves swept it away. The tender-hearted sprites cried salt tears over it, and wrapped it in their softest sheets, finding it so lovely and so sad they could not bury it out of sight. While they sung their lullabies Ripple heard through the roar of wind and water a bitter cry that seemed to call her. Floating up through foam and spray she saw a woman standing on the beach with her arms outstretched, imploring the cruel sea to give her back her little child.

Ripple longed so much to comfort the poor mother that power was given her to show herself, and to make her soft language understood. A slender creature, in a robe as white as foam, with eyes as blue as the sea, and a murmuring voice that made music like falling drops of water, bent over the weeping woman and told her that the child was cared for far below all storms, and promised to keep the little grave beautiful with sea-flowers, and safe from any harm. But the mother could not be comforted, and still cried bitterly, —

“Give him back to me alive and laughing, or

I cannot live. Dear sprite, have you no charm to make the little darling breathe again? Oh, find one, find one, or let me lie beside him in the hungry sea.”

“I will look far and wide and see if I can help you. Watch by the shore, and I will come again with the little child if there is any power in land or sea to make him live,” cried Ripple, so eager to do this happy thing that she sprang into the ocean and vanished like a bubble.

She hurried to the Queen in her palace of pearls and told her all the sad story.

“Dear Ripple, you cannot keep your promise, for there is no power in my kingdom to work this spell. The only thing that could do it would be a flame from the sun to warm the little body into life, and you could never reach the fire spirits’ home far, far away.”

“But I *will*!” cried Ripple, bravely. “If you had seen the poor mother’s tears and heard her cries you would feel as I do, and never let her watch in vain. Tell me where I must go; and I will not be afraid of anything if I can only make the little child live again.”

“Far away beside the sun live the fire spirits; but I cannot tell the road, for it is through the air and no water sprite could live to reach it. Dear Ripple, do not go, for if any harm comes to you I shall lose my sweetest subject,” said the Queen, — and all the others begged her to stay safely at home.

But Ripple would not break her promise, and they had to let her go. So the sprites built a tomb of delicate, bright shells, where the child might lie till she came to make him live again; and with a brave good-by Ripple floated away on her long journey to the sky.

“I will go round the world till I find a road to the sun. Some kind friend will help me, for I have no wings and cannot float through the blue air as through the sea,” she said, as she came to the other side of the ocean and saw a lovely land before her. Grass was green on all the hills, flowers were budding, young leaves danced upon the trees, and birds were singing everywhere.

“Why are you all so gay?” asked Ripple, wondering.

“Spring is coming! Spring is coming! and

all the earth is glad," sang the lark, as the music poured from its little throat.

"Shall I see her?" asked Ripple, eagerly.

"You will meet her soon. The sunshine told us she was near, and we are hurrying to be up and dressed to welcome her back," answered a blue-eyed violet, dancing on her stem for joy.

"I will ask her how to reach the fire spirits. She travels over the earth every year, and perhaps can show me the way," said Ripple, as she went on.

Soon a beautiful child came dancing over the hills, rosy as dawn, with hair like sunshine, a voice like the balmy wind, and her robe full of seeds, little leaves, dewdrops, and budding flowers, which she scattered far and wide, till the earth smiled back at the smiling sky.

"Dear Spring, will you help a poor little sprite, who is looking for the fire spirits' home?" cried Ripple,—and told her tale so eagerly that the child stopped to hear.

"Alas, I cannot tell you," answered Spring, "but my elder sister Summer is coming behind me, and she may know. I long to help, so I

will give you this breeze, that will carry you over land and sea and never tire. I wish I could do more, but the world is calling me, and I must go."

"Many thanks, kind Spring," cried Ripple, as she floated away on the breeze. "Say a kind word to the poor mother waiting on the shore, and tell her I do not forget."

Then the lovely season flew on with her sunshine and song, and Ripple went swiftly over hill and dale till she came to the place where Summer lived. Here the sun shone warmly on early fruit and ripening grain; the wind blew freshly over sweet hay-fields and rustled the thick branches of the trees. Heavy dews and soft showers refreshed the growing things, and long bright days brought beauty to the world.

"Now I must look for Summer," said Ripple, as she sailed along.

"I am here," said a voice, and she saw a beautiful woman floating by, in green robes, with a golden crown on her hair, and her arms full of splendid flowers.

Ripple told her story again, but Summer said with a sigh of pity, —

“ I cannot show you the way, but my brother Autumn may know. I, too, will give you a gift to help you along, good little creature. This sunbeam will be a lamp to light your way, for you may have a gloomy journey yet.”

Then Summer went on, leaving all green and golden behind her, and Ripple flew away to look for Autumn. Soon the fields were yellow with corn and grain; purple grapes hung on the vines; nuts rattled down among the dead leaves, and frost made the trees gay with lovely colors. A handsome hunter, in a russet suit, came striding over the hills, with his hounds about him, while he made music on his silver horn, and all the echoes answered him.

This was Autumn, but he was no wiser than his sisters, and seeing the little sprite's disappointment he kindly said, —

“ Ask Winter; he knows the fire spirits well, for when he comes they fly down to kindle fires on the hearths where people gather to keep warm. Take this red leaf, and when you meet his chilly winds wrap it round you, else you will be frozen to death. A safe journey and a happy end;” and with a shrill blast on his horn

Autumn hurried away, with his hounds leaping after him.

“Shall I ever get there?” sighed poor Ripple, as the never-tiring breeze flew on, till the sky grew dark and cold winds began to blow. Then she folded the warm red leaf about her like a cloak, and looked sadly down at the dead flowers and frozen fields, not knowing that Winter spread a soft blanket of snow over them, so they could lie safely asleep till Spring woke them again.

Presently, riding on the north wind, Winter came rushing by, with a sparkling crown of ice on his white hair, and a cloak of frost-work, from which he scattered snowflakes far and wide.

“What do you want with me, pretty thing? Do not be afraid; I am warm at heart, though rude and cold outside,” said Winter, with a smile that made his pleasant face glow in the frosty air.

When Ripple told what she was looking for, he nodded and pointed to the gloomy sky.

“Far away up there is the palace, and the only road is through cloud and mist and strange

places full of danger. It is too hard a task for you, and the fire spirits are wild, hot-tempered things who may kill you. Come back with me, and do not try."

"I cannot go back, now that I have found the way. Surely the spirits will not hurt me when I tell why I have come; and if they do give me the spark I shall be the happiest sprite in all the big sea. Tell the poor mother I will keep my word; and be kind to her, she is so sad."

"You brave little creature! I think you will succeed. Take this snowflake, that will never melt, and good luck to you," cried Winter, as the north wind carried him away, leaving the air full of snow.

"Now, dear Breeze, fly straight up till we reach our journey's end. Sunbeam shall light the way; Redleaf shall keep me warm, and Snowflake lie here beside me till I need it. Good-by to land and sea; now away, up to the sun!"

When Ripple first began her airy journey, heavy clouds lay piled like hills about her, and a cold mist filled the air. Higher and higher they went, and darker grew the air, while a

stormy wind tossed the little traveller to and fro as if on the angry sea.

“ Shall I ever see the beautiful world again? ” sighed Ripple. “ It is indeed a dreadful road, and but for the seasons' gifts I should have died. Fly fast, dear wind, and bring me to the sunshine again.”

Soon the clouds were left behind, the mist rolled away, and she came up among the stars. With wondering eyes she looked at the bright worlds that once seemed dim and distant when she saw them from the sea. Now they moved around her, some shining with a soft light, some with many-colored rings, some pale and cold, while others burned with a red glare.

Ripple would gladly have stayed to watch them, for she fancied voices called; faces smiled at her, and each star made music as it shone in the wide sky. But higher up, still nearer to the sun, she saw a far-off light that glittered like a crimson flame, and made a fiery glow. “ The spirits must be there,” she said, and hurried on, eager to reach her journey's end.

Up she flew till straight before her lay a broad path that led to a golden arch, behind which she

could see lovely creatures moving to and fro. As she drew nearer, the air grew so hot that the red leaf shrivelled up, and Ripple would have died if she had not quickly unfolded the snowflake and wrapped herself in that cool cloak. Then she could safely pass under the tall arch into a strange place, where the walls were of orange, blue, and purple flames, that made beautiful figures as they flickered to and fro. Here the fire spirits lived, and Ripple saw with wonder their crowns of flame, their flashing eyes, the sparks that propped from their lips as they spoke, and how in each one's bosom burned a little flame that never wavered or went out.

She had time to see no more, for the wild things came dancing round her; and their hot breath would have burned her if she had not pulled the snow-cloak over her head and begged them not to touch her, but to take her to the Queen.

Through halls of many-colored fire they led her to a spirit more brilliant than the rest; for a crown of yellow flames waved on her head, and under the transparent violet of her robe the light in her breast shone like a star.

Then Ripple told how she had been round the world to find them, and, thanks to the seasons, had come at last to ask the magic spark that would make the little child live again.

“We cannot give it,” said the Queen; “for each of us must take something from our bosom-fires to make up this flame, and this we do not like to do; because the brighter these souls of ours burn, the lovelier we are.”

“Dear, warm-hearted spirits, do not send me away without it after this long, hard journey,” cried Ripple, clasping her hands. “I am sure if you do this kind thing your souls will shine the brighter; for every good act makes us beautiful. Give me the spark and I will do anything I can for you.”

As she spoke, the cloak fell back a little, and the Queen saw the chain of jewels Ripple wore.

“If you will give me those lovely blue stones that shine like water I will give a little of my bosom-fire for the child; because you are a brave sprite, and it is hard to be cruel to you.”

Gladly Ripple gave her the necklace; but, alas! as soon as the Queen's hand touched it the jewels melted like snow, and fell in bright

drops to the ground. Then the Queen's eyes flashed, and the spirits gathered angrily about Ripple, while sparks showered from their lips as they spoke angrily to her.

“I have many finer ones at home, and if you will give me the flame I will bring all I can gather in the sea, and each shall have a necklace to remember the kind deed you have done,” she said gently, as they hovered about her, looking ready to burn her up in their wrath.

“We will do it,” said the Queen; “but if the jewels you bring melt like these, we shall keep you a prisoner here. Promise to come back, or we shall send lightning to find and kill you, even at the bottom of the sea.”

Ripple promised, and each spirit gave a spark, till the golden flame was made, and put into a crystal vase, where it shone like a splendid star.

“Remember! remember!” cried the fierce imps as they led her to the arch and left her to travel back through mist and cloud till far below she saw the beautiful blue sea.

Gladly she plunged into the cool waves and sunk to her home, where her friends hastened joyfully to welcome her.

“Now come,” they said, “dear, brave Ripple, and finish the good work you have begun.” They gathered round the tomb, where like a marble image lay the little child. Ripple placed the flame on his breast and watched it sparkle there while the color came slowly back to the pale face, light to the dim eyes, and breath through the cold lips, till the child woke from his long sleep and looked up smiling as he called his mother.

Then the spirits sang for joy, and dressed him in pretty clothes of woven sea-weed, put chains of shells on his neck and a wreath of water-flowers on his head.

“Now you shall see your mother who has waited so long, dear child,” said Ripple, taking him in her arms and feeling that all her weariness was not in vain.

On the shore the poor woman still sat, watching and waiting patiently, as she had done all that weary year. Suddenly a great wave came rolling in, and on it, lifted high by arms as white as foam, sat the child waving his hands as he cried to her, “I am coming, mother, and I have such lovely things to show you from the bottom of the sea!”

Then the wave broke gently on the shore and left the child safe in his happy mother's arms.

“O faithful Ripple, what can I do to thank you? I wish I had some splendid thing, but I have only this little chain of pearls. They are the tears I shed, and the sea changed them so that I might offer them to you,” said the woman, when she could speak for joy.

Ripple took the pretty chain and floated away, ready for her new task, while the child danced gayly on the sand, and the mother smiled like sunshine on the happy sprite who had done so much for her.

Far and wide in all the caves of the sea did Ripple look for jewels, and when she had long necklaces of all the brightest, she flew away again on the tireless breeze to the fire palace in the sky.

The spirits welcomed her warmly as she poured out her treasures at the feet of the Queen. But when the hot hands touched the jewels, they melted and fell like drops of colored dew. Ripple was filled with fear, for she could not live in that fiery place, and begged for some other task to save her life.

“No, no,” cried the spirits fiercely. “You have not kept your promise and you must stay. Fling off this cold cloak and swim in the fire-fountains till you get a soul like ours, and can help us brighten our bosom sparks again.”

Ripple sank down in despair and felt that she must die; but even then was glad to give her life for the little child's. The spirits gathered about her, but as they began to pull the cloak away, underneath they saw the chain of pearls shining with a soft light, that only brightened as they put their hands upon it.

“Oh, give us this!” they cried; “it is finer than the others, and does not melt. Give us this and you may go free.”

Ripple gladly gave it, and, safe under the cloak, told them how the pearls they so proudly divided to wear were tears which, but for them, would still be flowing. This pleased the spirits, for they had warm hearts as well as hot tempers, and they said, smiling, — “Since we may not kiss you, and you cannot live with us, we will show our love for you by giving you a pleasant journey home. Come out and see the bright path we have made.”

They led her to the gate and there she saw a splendid rainbow arching from the sky to the sea, its lovely colors shining in the sun.

Then with thanks and good-by, happy little Ripple flew back along that lovely road, and every wave in the great ocean danced for joy to welcome her home.





Eva watched their pretty play. — PAGE 69.

IV.

EVA'S VISIT TO FAIRYLAND.

A LITTLE girl lay on the grass down by the brook wondering what the brown water said as it went babbling over the stones. As she listened she heard another kind of music that seemed to come nearer and nearer, till

round the corner floated a beautiful boat filled with elves, who danced on the broad green leaves of the lily of the valley, while the white bells of the tall stem that was the mast rung loud and sweet.

A flat rock, covered with moss, stood in the middle of the brook, and here the boat was anchored for the elves to rest a little. Eva watched them at their pretty play, as they flew about or lay fanning themselves and drinking from the red-brimmed cups on the rocks. Wild strawberries grew in the grass close by, and Eva threw some of the ripest to the fairy folk; for honey and dew seemed a poor sort of lunch to the child. Then the elves saw her, and nodded and smiled and called, but their soft voices could not reach her. So, after whispering among themselves, two of them flew to the brookside, and perching on a buttercup said close to Eva's ear, —

“We have come to thank you for your berries, and to ask if we can do anything for you, because this is our holiday and we can become visible to you.”

“Oh, let me go to fairyland! I have longed

so to see and know all about you dear little people; and never would believe it is true that there are no fairies left," cried Eva, so glad to find that she was right.

"We should not dare to take some children, they would do so much harm; but you believe in us, you love all the sweet things in the world, and never hurt innocent creatures, or tread on flowers, or let ugly passions come into your happy little heart. You shall go with us and see how we live."

But as the elves spoke, Eva looked very sad and said, —

"How can I go? I am so big I should sink that pretty ship with one finger, and I have no wings."

The elves laughed and touched her with their soft hands, saying, —

"You cannot hurt us now. Look in the water and see what we have done."

Eva looked and saw a tiny child standing under a tall blue violet. It was herself, but so small she seemed an elf in a white pinafore and little pink sun-bonnet. She clapped her hands and skipped for joy, and laughed at the cunning

picture; but suddenly she grew sober again, as she looked from the shore to the rock.

“But now I am so wee I cannot step over, and you cannot lift me, I am sure.”

“Give us each a hand and do not be afraid,” said the elves, and whisked her across like dandelion down.

The elves were very glad to see her, and touched and peeped and asked questions as if they had never had a mortal child to play with before. Eva was so small she could dance with them now, and eat what they ate, and sing their pretty songs. She found that flower-honey and dewdrops were very nice, and that it was fine fun to tilt on a blade of grass, to slide down a smooth bulrush-stem, or rock in the cup of a flower. She learned new and merry games, found out what the brook said, saw a cowslip blossom, and had a lovely time till the captain of the ship blew a long sweet blast on a honeysuckle horn, and all the elves went aboard and set sail for home.

“Now I shall find the way to Fairyland and can go again whenever I like,” thought Eva, as she floated away.

But the sly little people did not mean that she should know, for only now and then can a child go to that lovely place. So they set the bells to chiming softly, and all sung lullabies till Eva fell fast asleep, and knew nothing of the journey till she woke in Fairyland.

It seemed to be sunset; for the sky was red, the flowers all dreaming behind their green curtains, the birds tucked up in their nests, and there was no sound but the whisper of the wind that softly sang, "Good-night, good-night."

"We all go early to bed unless the moon shines. We are tired, so come and let us make you cosey till to-morrow," said the elves, showing her a dainty bed with white rose-leaves for sheets, a red rose-leaf for coverlet, and two plump little mushrooms for pillows. Cobweb curtains hung over it, a glow-worm was the candle, and a lily-of-the-valley cup made a nice nightcap, while a tiny gown of woven thistle-down lay ready to be put on.

Eva quicky undressed and slipped into the pretty bed, where she lay looking at the red light till sleep kissed her eyelids, and a lovely

dream floated through her mind till morning came.

As soon as the sun peeped over the hills the elves were up and away to the lake, where they all dipped and splashed and floated and frolicked till the air was full of sparkling drops and the water white with foam. Then they wiped on soft cobweb towels, which they spread on the grass to dry, while they combed their pretty hair and put on fresh gowns of flower-leaves. After that came breakfast, all sitting about in parties to eat fruit and cakes of pollen, while their drink was fresh dew.

“Now, Eva, you see that we are not idle, foolish creatures, but have many things to do, many lessons to learn, and a heaven of our own to hope for,” said the elves when they had all sung together; while the wind, who was the housemaid there, cleared the tables by blowing everything away at one breath. “First of all come to our hospital, — for here we bring all the sick and hurt things cruel or careless people have harmed. In your world children often torment and kill poor birds and worms and flies, and pick flowers to throw away, and chase butterflies

till their poor wings are broken. All these we care for, and our magic makes them live again. Come and see."

Eva followed to a cool, quiet place, where on soft beds lay many wounded things. Rose, the fairy nurse, was binding up the leg of a fly as he lay in a cobweb hammock and feebly buzzed his thanks. In another place an ugly worm was being put together after a cruel boy had cut him in two. Eva thought the elves were good to do such work, and went on to a humming-bird which lay in a bed of honeysuckles, with the quick colors very dim on its little breast and bright wings very still.

"I was shot with an air-gun, and my poor head still aches with the dreadful blow," sighed the poor bird, trying to sip a little honey with his long beak.

"I'm nearly well," chirped a cricket, whose stiff tail had been pulled off by a naughty child and nicely put on again by a very skilful elf.

He looked so cheerful and lively as he hopped about on his bed of dried grass, with his black eyes twinkling, and a bandage of bind-weed holding his tail firmly in place till it was well,

that Eva laughed aloud, and at the pleasant sound all the sick things smiled and seemed better.

Rows of pale flowers stood in one place, and elves watered them, or tied up broken leaves, or let in the sunshine to cure their pains, — for these delicate invalids needed much care; and Mignonette was the name of the nurse who watched over them, like a little Sister of Charity, with her gray gown and sweet face.

“You have seen enough. Come to school now, and see where we are taught all that fairies must know,” said Trip, the elf who was guiding her about.

In a pleasant place they found the child elves sitting on pink daisies with their books of leaves in their hands, while the teacher was a Jack-in-the-pulpit, who asked questions, and was very wise. Eva nodded to the little ones, and they smiled at the stranger as they rustled their books and pretended to study busily.

A class in arithmetic was going on, and Eva listened to questions that none but elves would care to know.

“Twinkle, if there were fifteen seeds on a dan-

delion, and the wind blew ten away, how many would be left? ”

“ Five.”

“ Bud, if a rose opens three leaves one day, two the next, and seven the next, how many in all? ”

“ Eleven.”

“ Daisy, if a silk-worm spins one yard of fairy cloth in an hour, how many can he spin in a day? ”

“ Twelve, if he is n't lazy,” answered the little elf, fluttering her wings, as if anxious to be done.

“ Now we will read,” said Jack, and a new class flew to the long leaf, where they stood in a row, with open books, ready to begin.

“ You may read ‘ The Flower's Lesson ’ to-day, and be careful not to sing-song, Poppy,” said the teacher, passing a dainty book to Eva that she might follow the story.

“ Once there was a rose who had two little buds. One was happy and contented, but the other always wanted something.

“ ‘ I wish the elves would bring me a star instead of dew every night. The drop is soon

gone, but a star would shine splendidly, and I should be finer than all the other flowers,' said the naughty bud one night.

"' But you need the dew to live, and the moon needs the stars up there to light the world. Don't fret, sister, but be sure it is best to take what is sent, and be glad,' answered the good bud.

"' I won't have the dew, and if I cannot get a star I will take a firefly to shine on my breast,' said the other, shaking off a fresh drop that had just fallen on her, and folding her leaves round the bright fly.

"' Foolish child!' cried the rose-mother; ' let the fly go, before he harms you. It is better to be sweet and fair than to shine with a beauty not your own. Be wise, dear, before it is too late.'

"But the silly bud only held the firefly closer, till in its struggles it tore her leaves and flew away. When the hot sun came up the poor bud hung all faded on her stem, longing for a cool drop to drink. Her sister was strong and fresh, and danced gayly in the wind, opening her red petals to the sun.

“ ‘ Now I must die. Oh, why was I vain and silly? ’ sobbed the poor bud, fainting in the heat.

“ Then the mother leaned over her, and from her bosom, where she had hidden it, the dew-drop fell on the thirsty bud, and while she drank it eagerly the rose drew her closer, whispering, ‘ Little darling, learn to be contented with what heaven sends, and make yourself lovely by being good. ’ ”

“ I shall remember that story, ” said Eva when the elves shut their books and flew back to the daisy seats.

“ Would you like to hear them sing? ” asked Trip.

“ Very much, ” said Eva, and in the little song they gave her she got another lesson to carry home.

“ I shine, ” says the sun,
“ To give the world light, ”
“ I glimmer, ” adds the moon,
“ To beautify the night. ”
“ I ripple, ” says the brook,
“ I whisper, ” sighs the breeze,
“ I patter, ” laughs the rain,
“ We rustle, ” call the trees

“ We dance,” nod the daisies,
“ I twinkle,” shines the star,
“ We sing,” chant the birds,
“ How happy we all are ! ”
“ I smile,” cries the child,
Gentle, good, and gay ;
The sweetest thing of all,
The sunshine of each day.

“ I shall sing that to myself and try to do my part,” said Eva, as the elves got out their paints and brushes of butterfly-down, and using large white leaves for paper, learned to imitate the colors of every flower.

“ Why do they do this ? ” asked Eva, for she saw no pictures anywhere.

“ We keep the flowers fresh, for in the world below they have trials with the hot sun that fades, the mould that spots, grubs that gnaw, and frost that kills. We melt bits of rainbow in our paint-pots, and when it is needed we brighten the soft color on Anemone's cheeks, deepen the blue of Violet's eyes, or polish up the cowslips till they shine like cups of gold. We redden the autumn leaves, and put the purple bloom on the grapes. We made the budding birches a soft green, color maple keys, and hang brown

tassels on the alder twigs. We repair the dim spots on butterflies' wings, paint the bluebird like the sky, give Robin his red vest, and turn the yellow bird to a flash of sunshine. Oh, we are artists, and hereafter you will see our pictures everywhere."

"How lovely!" said Eva. "I often wondered who kept all these delicate things so beautiful and gay. But where are we going now?" she added, as the elves led her away from the school.

"Come and see where we learn to ride," they answered, smiling as if they enjoyed this part of their education.

In a little dell where the ground was covered with the softest moss Eva found the fairy riding-school and gymnasium. The horses were all kinds of winged and swift-footed things, and the race-ground was a smooth path round the highest moss mound. Groups of elves lay on the ground, swung on the grass-blades, or sat in the wood flowers, that stood all about.

In one place the mothers and fathers were teaching their little ones to fly. The baby elves sat in a row on the branch of a birch-tree, flut-

tering their small wings and nestling close together, timid yet longing to launch boldly out into the air and float as the others did. The parents were very patient, and one by one the babies took little flights, getting braver and braver each time.

One very timid elf would not stir, so the sly papa and mamma put it on a leaf, and each taking a side, they rode the dear about for a few minutes, till she was used to the motion; then they dropped the leaf, and the little elf finding herself falling spread her wings and flew away to a tall bush, to the great delight of all who saw it.

But the riding was very funny, and Eva soon forgot everything else in watching the gay creatures mount their various horses and fly or gallop round the ring while the teacher — a small fellow in a gay cap and green suit — stood on the moss-mound, cracking a long whip and telling them how to ride in the best fairy fashion.

Several lady elves learned to mount butterflies gracefully and float where they liked, sitting firmly when the winged horses alighted on the flowers. The boy elves preferred field-mice,

who went very swiftly round and round, with saddles of woven grass and reins of yellow bindweed, which looked well on the little gray creatures, who twinkled their bright eyes and whisked their long tails as if they liked it.

But the best fun of all was when the leaping began; and Eva quite trembled lest some sad accident should happen; for grasshoppers were led out, and the gallant elves leaped over the highest flower-tops without falling off.

It was very funny to see the queer hoppers skip with their long legs, and when Puck, the riding-master, mounted, and led a dozen of his pupils a race round the track, all the rest of the elves laughed aloud and clapped their hands in great glee; for Puck was a famous fairy, and his pranks were endless.

Eva was shouting with the rest as the green horses came hopping by, when Puck caught her up before him, and away they raced so swiftly that her hair whistled in the wind and her breath was nearly gone. A tremendous leap took them high over the little hill and landed Eva in a tall dandelion, where she lay laughing and panting as if on a little yellow sofa,

while Trip and her mates fanned her and smoothed her pretty hair.

“That was splendid!” she cried. “I wish I was a real fairy, and always lived in this lovely place. Everything will seem so ugly and big and coarse when I go home I shall never be happy again.”

“Oh, yes, you will,” answered Trip, “for after this visit you will be able to hear and see and know what others never do, and that will make you happy and good. You believed in us, and we reward all who love what we love, and enjoy the beautiful world they live in as we do.”

“Thank you,” said Eva. “If I can know what the birds sing and the brook, and talk with the flowers, and see faces in the sky, and hear music in the wind, I won’t mind being a child, even if people call me queer.”

“You shall understand many lovely things and be able to put them into tales and songs that all will read and sing and thank you for,” said Moonbeam, a sweet, thoughtful elf, who stole quietly about, and was always singing like a soft wind.

“Oh, that is what I always wanted to do,” cried Eva, “for I love my song-books best, and never find new ones enough. Show me more, dear elves, so that I can have many fine tales to tell when I am old enough to write.”

“Come, then, and see our sweetest sight. We cannot show it to every one, but your eyes will be able to see through the veil, and you will understand the meaning of our flower-heaven.”

So Moonlight led her away from all the rest, along a little winding path that went higher and higher till they stood on a hilltop.

“Look up and follow me,” said the elf, and touching Eva’s shoulders with her wand, a pair of wings shot out, and away she floated after her guide toward what looked like a white cloud sailing in the blue sky.

When they alighted a soft mist was round them, and through it Eva saw a golden glimmer like sunshine.

“Look, but do not speak,” said Moonlight, beckoning her along.

Soon the mist passed away and nothing but a thin veil of gossamer like a silken cobweb hung

between them and the world beyond. "Can you see through it?" whispered the elf anxiously.

Eva nodded, and then forgot everything to look with all her eyes into a lovely land of flowers; for the walls were of white lilies, the trees were rose-trees, the ground blue violets, and the birds the little yellow canary-plant, whose blossoms are like birds on the wing. Columbines sounded their red horns, and the air was filled with delicate voices, unlike any ever heard before, because it was the sweet breath of flowers set to music.

But what surprised Eva most was the sight of a common dandelion, a tuft of clover, a faded mignonette-plant, with several other humble flowers, set in a little plot by themselves as if newly come, and about them gathered a crowd of beautiful spirits, so bright, so small, so perfect that Eva could hardly see them, and winked as if dazzled by the sunshine of this garden among the clouds.

"Who are they? and why do they care for those poor flowers?" whispered Eva, forgetting that she must not speak.

Before Moonlight could answer, all grew dim

for a moment, as if a cold breath had passed beyond the curtain and chilled the delicate world within.

“Hush! mortal voices must not be heard here,” answered the elf with a warning look.

“These lovely creatures are the spirits of flowers who did some good deed when they bloomed on earth, and their reward is to live here forever where there is no frost, no rain, no stormy wind to hurt them. Those poor plants have just come, for their work is done, and their souls will soon be set free from the shapes that hold them. You will see how beautiful they have made themselves when out of the common flowers come souls like the perfect ones who are welcoming them.

“That dandelion lived in the room of a poor little sick girl who had no other toy, no other playmate. She watched and loved it as she lay on her bed, for she was never well, and the good flower, instead of fading without sunshine in that dreary room, bloomed its best, till it shone like a little sun. The child died with it in her hand, and when she no longer needed it, we saved it from being thrown away and brought it here to live forever.

“The clover grew in a prison-yard, and a bad boy shut up there watched it as the only green thing that made him think of the fields at home where his mother was waiting and hoping he would come back to her. Clover did her best to keep good thoughts in his mind and he loved her, and tried to repent, and when he was told he might go, he meant to take his flower with him but forgot it in his hurry to get home. We did not forget, for the wind that goes everywhere had told us the little story, and we brought brave Clover out of prison to this flower-heaven.

“Mignonette lived in a splendid garden, but no one minded her, for she is only a little brown thing and hid in a corner, happy with her share of sunshine and rain, and her daily task of blossoming green and strong. People admired the other fine flowers and praised their perfume, never knowing that the sweetest breath of all came from the nook where Mignonette modestly hid behind the roses. No one ever praised her, or came to watch her, and the gardener took no care of her. But the bees found her out and came every day to sip her sweet honey, the butterflies loved her better than the proud roses, and

the wind always stopped for a kiss as it flew by. When autumn came and all the other plants were done blossoming, and stood bare and faded, there was modest Mignonette still green and fresh, still with a blossom or two, and still smiling contentedly with a bosom full of ripened seeds, — her summer work well done, her happy heart ready for the winter sleep.

“ But we said, ‘ No frost shall touch our brave flower; she shall not be neglected another year, but come to live loved and honored in the eternal summer that shines here.’ Now look.”

Eva brushed away the tears that had filled her eyes as she listened to these little histories, and looking eagerly, saw how from the dandelion, set free by the spells the spirits sang, there rose, light as down, a little golden soul, in the delicate shape the others wore. One in pale rose came from the clover, and a third in soft green with dusky wings; but a bright face flew out of the mignonette. Then the others took hands and floated round the new-comers in an airy dance, singing so joyfully that Eva clapped her hands crying, “ Happy souls! I will go home and try

to be as good as they were; then I may be as happy when I go away to my heaven."

The sound of her voice made all dark, and she would have been frightened if the elf had not taken her hand and led her back to the edge of the cloud, saying as they flew down to Fairyland—"See, the sun is setting; we must take you home before this midsummer day ends, and with it our power to make ourselves known."

Eva had so much to tell that she was ready to go; but a new surprise waited for her, and she saw a fairy spectacle as she came again before the palace.

Banners of gay tulip-leaves were blowing in the wind from the lances of reeds held by a troop of elves mounted on mice; a car made of a curled green leaf with checkerberry wheels and cushions of pink mushrooms stood ready for her, and Trip as maid of honor helped her in. Lady elves on butterflies flew behind, and the Queen's trumpeters marched before making music on their horns. All the people of Elfland lined the way, throwing flowers, waving their hands, and calling, "Farewell, little Eva! Come again! Do not forget us!" till she was out of sight.

“How sweet and kind you are to me. What can I do to thank you?” said Eva to Trip, who sat beside her as they rolled along, — a gay and lovely sight, if any but fairy eyes could have seen it.

“Remember all you have seen and heard. Love the good and beautiful things you will find everywhere, and be always a happy child at heart,” answered Trip with a kiss.

Before Eva could speak the sun set and in a moment every elf was invisible, all the pretty show was gone, and the child stood alone by the brook. But she never forgot her visit to Fairyland, and as she grew up she seemed to be a sort of elf herself, happy, gay, and good, with the power of making every one love her as she went singing and smiling through the world. She wrote songs that people loved to sing, told tales children delighted to read, and found so much wisdom, beauty, and music everywhere, that it was very plain she understood the sweet language of bird and flower, wind and water, and remembered all the lessons the elves taught her.



Sunshine was a sweet creature, and a great comfort to her mother. — PAGE 92.

V.

SUNSHINE, AND HER BROTHERS AND SISTERS.

ONCE upon a time there was a very wise old spirit called Mother Nature, who lived in a beautiful place, and had a large family of children, whom she found it rather hard to manage. When they obeyed her, all went well; but

when they played pranks or quarrelled, everything was in confusion, and all sorts of trouble came.

Sunshine, the eldest girl, was a sweet creature, always good, and a great comfort to her mother at all seasons. So were South and West Winds nice little girls; but Lightning, Thunder's twin sister, was very naughty, and liked to do mischief. Snow, the fourth daughter, was a cold, quiet spirit, fond of covering up the world with the nice white sheets she kept folded away in the sky. Rain was always crying, East Wind sulking, Thunder and Hail scolding and growling, and North Wind, the biggest of the boys, went roaring and blustering about so fiercely that every one ran before him, though his wholesome breath freshened the world, and blew away much rubbish, which his gentle sisters could not manage as they kept house.

"Now, my dears, I'm very tired and going to take a nap, so be good children; do your tasks nicely, and wake me in March," said Mother Nature, one November day, when her summer work was over, and her time for rest had come.

“Yes, mamma,” said Sunshine, as she tucked her up with a kiss. “I will do my best to keep the girls busy and the boys in order. Have a good sleep, and I’ll call you in time for the spring work.”

Then the old lady tied her night-cap over her ears, and dozed off quite comfortably, while her good daughter, after a last smile at the frosty world, went to her spinning, that there might be plenty of sunshine for the next summer.

“It’s my turn now, and I’ll cry as much as I like, for mother is n’t here to stop me, and Sunny can’t,” said Rain; and down came floods of tears, while his brother, East Wind, began to blow till every one shivered, and coughs and colds and fog and mud made the world a dismal place. Sunny begged them to stop and give her a chance now and then, but they would not; and everybody said what a dreadful month November was that year.

Fortunately it was soon time for North Wind and his favorite sister Snow to come back from Iceland; and the moment the older brother’s loud voice was heard, Rain and East ran and hid, for they were rather afraid of him.

“Ha, what a mess those rascals have made! Never mind, we ’ll soon have it all nice and tidy for Christmas,” said North, as he dried up the mud, blew away the fog, and got the world ready for Snow to cover with her beautiful down quilt. In a day or two it looked like a fairy world, and Sunshine peeped out to do her part, making the ice on the trees glitter like diamonds, the snowy drifts shine like silver, and fill the blue sky full of light.

Then every one rejoiced, bells jingled merrily, children coasted and snow-balled; Christmas trees began to grow, and all faces to glow as they never do at any other time.

“The holydays shall be pleasant if I can only keep those bad boys in a good humor,” said Sunny; and to make sure of them she fed Rain and East Wind on plum-cake with poppy-seeds in it, so they slept like dormice till the New Year was born.

Snow had her frolics, and no one minded, because she was so pretty; and North was so amiable just then that the white storms only made fine sleighing, and the fresh air kept cheeks rosy, eyes sparkling, lips laughing, and

hearts happy as they should be at that blessed season.

Sunshine was so pleased that she came out to see the fun, and smiled so warmly that a January thaw set in.

“Dear me, I forgot that I must not be too generous at this season, or it makes trouble; for, though people enjoy my pleasant days, they leave off their furs and get cold. I’ll go back to my spinning and only smile through the window; then no harm will be done.”

Thunder and Lightning had been in Italy all this time, and they too got into mischief. Their mother had shut the twins up in a volcano to keep them out of the way till summer, when they were useful. Down there they found playmates to suit them, and had fine times rumbling and boiling, and sending out hot lava and showers of ashes to scare the people who lived near by. Growing tired of this, they at last planned to get up an earthquake and escape. So they kicked and shook the world like children tumbling about under the bed-clothes; and the fire roared, and Thunder growled, and Lightning flew about trying to

get the lid of the volcano off. At last she did, and out they all burst with such a dreadful noise that the poor people thought the end of the world had come. Towns fell down, hills moved, the sea came up on the shore, ashes and stones covered up a whole city, and destruction and despair were everywhere.

“There! was n't that a fine frolic? Mother won't dare to shut us up again, I fancy, when she sees what a piece of work we make for her,” said naughty Lightning, dashing about to peep through the smoke at the sad scene below.

“Grand fun! but if Sunshine wakes mother we shall wish we had not done it. Let's run away to Africa and hide till this is all forgotten,” answered Thunder, rather ashamed of such a dreadful prank.

So they flew off, leaving great sorrow behind them; but Sunshine did not wake mamma, though West Wind came home from Italy to tell her all about it. There was trouble here also, for Rain and East Wind had waked up, and were very angry to find they had been dosed with poppy-seeds.

“Now we’ll pay Sunny for that, and turn everything topsy-turvy,” they said ; and calling Hail, they went to work.

Rain emptied all his water-buckets till the rivers rose and flooded the towns; the snow on the hills melted and covered the fields, washed away the railroads, carried off houses, and drowned many poor animals; Hail pelted with his stones, and East Wind blew cold and shrill till there was no comfort anywhere.

Poor Sunny was at her wits’ end with all these troubles; but she would not wake her mother, and tried to manage her unruly brothers alone. West helped her, for while Sunny shone, and shone so sweetly that Rain had to stop crying, West tugged at the weather-cocks till she made East give way, and let her blow for a while. He was out of breath and had to yield; so the “bad spell of weather” was over, and the poor, half-drowned people could get dry and fish their furniture out of the flood, and moor their floating houses at last. Sunny kept on smiling till she dried up the ground. West sent fresh gales to help her, and by March things looked much better.

“Now do be good children, and let us get ready for the spring-cleaning before mother wakes. I don't know what she *will* say to the boys, but I've done my best, and I hope she will be pleased with me,” said Sunshine, when at last she sat down to rest a moment, tired out.

All the brothers and sisters except the naughty twins, gathered about her, and promised to be very good, for they loved her and were sorry for their pranks. Each tried to help her, and March was a very busy month, for all the winds blew in turn; even gentle South from far away came home to do her part. Snow folded up her down quilts and packed them away; Rain dropped a few quiet showers to swell the buds and green the grass, and Sunny began to shake out the golden webs of light she had been spinning all winter. Every one worked so well that April found that part of the world in fine order; and when South Wind blew open the first hyacinths, Mother Nature smelt them, began to rub her eyes and wake up.

“Bless me, how I've slept. Why didn't you

rouse me sooner, dear? Ah, my good child, I see you've tried to do my work and get all ready for me," said the old lady, throwing away her night-cap, and peeping out of window at the spring world budding everywhere.

Then sitting in her mother's lap, Sunny told her trials and tribulations. At some Mamma Nature laughed, at others she frowned; and when it came to the earthquake and the flood, she looked very sober, saying, as she stroked her daughter's bright hair, —

"My darling, I can't explain these things to you, and I don't always understand why they happen; but you know we have only to obey the King's orders and leave the rest to him. He will punish my naughty children if he sees fit, and reward my good ones; so I shall leave them to him, and go cheerfully on with my own work. That is the only way to keep our lovely world in order and be happy. Now, call your brothers and sisters and we will have our spring frolic together."

They all came, and had a merry time; for as every one knows, April has every kind of weather; so each had a turn to show what he or

she could do, and by May-day things were in fine trim, though East would nip the May queen's little nose, and all Sunny's efforts could only coax out a few hardy dandelions for the eager hands to pick.

But the children were happy, for spring had come; Mother Nature was awake again, and now all would be well with the world.





Before her was the spirit, so beautiful and smiling, May could only clasp her hands and look. — PAGE 116.

VI.

THE FAIRY SPRING.

ONE summer morning a party of little wood-people were talking together about something which interested them very much. The fruit-fairy was eating her breakfast as she swung on a long spray of the raspberry-vines that

waved in the wind; a blue-bird was taking his bath in the pool below, looking as if a bit of the sky had fallen into the water as he splashed and shook the drops from his wings; Skip, the squirrel, was resting on the mossy wall, after clearing out his hole of last year's nuts, to be ready for a new supply; Spin, the spider, was busily spreading her webs to bleach, and Brownie, the little bear, was warming his fuzzy back in the sunshine, for his den was rather dark and cold.

"It is such a pity that no one understands what the brook is trying to tell them. If they only knew about the fairy spring as we do, this is just the day to set out and find it," said Iris, the elf, as she took the last sip of raspberry shrub from the pretty red cup, and wiped her lips on a napkin Spin had made for her.

"Ah, if they only did! how glad I should be to show them the way," answered the blue-bird, as he dried his feathers on a mossy stone, while the caddis-worms all popped their heads out of sight in their little stone houses for fear he might eat them up.

"I have called every child I see, and done

my best to lead them up the mountain ; but they won't come, and I cannot make them understand the sweet words the brook keeps singing. How dull human creatures are ! Even Brownie knows this song, though he is a dear, clumsy thing, always going to sleep when he is not eating," said Skip, with a twinkle in his bright eye ; for he and the little bear were good friends, though one was so brisk and the other so big and awkward.

" Of course I do ; I've heard it ever since I was born, and the first long walk I took was up the mountain to find the wonderful spring. I drank of it, and have been the happiest creature alive ever since," answered Brownie, with a comfortable roll on the green grass.

" I am too busy to go, but my cousin Velvet-back often comes down and tells me about the splendid life he leads up there, where no foot ever treads on him, no hand ever breaks his webs, and everything is so still and bright that he always is in a hurry to get home again. When my weaving and bleaching are all done I am going up to see for myself ;" and Spin shook off the tiny drops of dew

which shone like diamonds on her largest web.

“There is one child who comes every day to look at the brook and listen to its babble as it runs under the little bridge over there. I think *she* will soon hear what it says, and then we will lead her along higher and higher till she finds the spring, and is able to tell every one the happy secret,” said Iris, shaking out her many-colored robe before she skimmed away to float over the pool, so like a glittering dragon-fly few guessed that she was a fairy.

“Yes, she is a sweet child,” said the blue-bird, hopping to the wall to look along the lane to see if she was coming. “She never throws pebbles in the water to disturb the minnows, nor breaks the ferns only to let them die, nor troubles us as we work and play as most children do. She leans there and watches us as if she loved us, and sings to herself as if she were half a bird. I like her, and I hope she will be the first to find the spring.”

“So do I,” said Skip, going to sit by his friend and watch for the child, while Brownie

peeped through a chink in the wall that she might not be frightened at sight of him, small as he was.

“She is coming! she is coming!” called Iris, who had flown to the railing of the rustic bridge, and danced for joy as a little figure came slowly down the winding lane.

A pretty child, with hair like sunshine, eyes blue as the sky, cheeks like the wild roses nodding to her on either side of the way, and a voice as sweet as the babbling brook she loved to sing with. May was never happier than when alone in the woods; and every morning, with her cup, and a little roll of bread in her basket, she wandered away to some of her favorite nooks, to feast on berries, play with the flowers, talk to the birds, and make friends with all the harmless wood-creatures who soon knew and welcomed her.

She had often wondered what the brook sang, and tried to catch the words it seemed to be calling to her. But she never quite understood till this day, for when she came to the bridge and saw her friends—blue-bird, squirrel, and dragon-fly—waiting for her, she smiled, and

waved her hand to them, and just at that moment she heard the song of the brook quite plainly, —

“I am calling, I am calling,
As I ripple, run, and sing,
Come up higher, come up higher,
Come and find the fairy spring.
Who will listen, who will listen
To the wonders I can tell,
Of a palace built of sunshine,
Where the sweetest spirits dwell? —
Singing winds, and magic waters,
Golden shadows, silver rain,
Spells that make the sad heart happy,
Sleep that cures the deepest pain.
Cheeks that bloom like summer roses,
Smiling lips and eyes that shine,
Come to those who climb the mountain,
Find and taste the fairy wine.
I am calling, I am calling,
As I ripple, run, and sing;
Who will listen, who will listen,
To the story of the spring?”

“Where is it; oh, where is it?” cried May, when the song ended; for she longed to see this lovely place and enjoy these beautiful things.

“Go up higher, go up higher,
Far beyond the waterfall.
Follow Echo up the mountain,
She will answer to your call.
Bird and butterfly and blossom,
All will help to show the way;
Lose no time, the day is going,
Find the spring, dear little May,”

sung the brook; and the child was enchanted to hear the sweet voice talking to her of this pleasant journey.

“Yes, I will go at once. I am ready, and have no fear, for the woods are full of friends, and I long to see the mountain top; it must be so lovely up there,” she said, looking through the green arches where the brook came dancing down over the rocks, far away to the gray peak, hidden in clouds.

There lay the fairy spring, and she was going to find it. No one would miss her, for she often played all day in the forest and went home with the lambs at night. The brook said, “Make haste!” so away she went over the wall, with Skip leaping before her, as if to show the safest stones to set her little feet on. Iris waved the raspberry-sprays, to attract her with the ripe fruit, and

when the basket was nearly full, Blue-bird flew from tree to tree to lead her on further into the wood. Brownie dodged behind the rocks and fallen logs, waiting for his turn to come, as he had a fine surprise for the little traveller by and by.

It was a lovely road, and May went happily on, with thick moss underneath, shady boughs overhead, flowers to nod and smile at her, and friends to guard, guide, and amuse her. Every ant stopped work to see her pass; every mosquito piped his little song in her ear; birds leaned out of their nests to bid her good-day, and the bright-eyed snakes, fearing to alarm her, hid under the leaves. But lovely butterflies flew round her in clouds; and she looked like a pretty one herself, with her blue gown and sunny hair blowing in the wind.

So she came at last to the waterfall. Here the brook took a long leap over some high rocks, to fall foaming into a basin fringed with ferns; out of which it flowed again, to run faster than ever down to join the river rolling through the valley, to flow at last into the mighty ocean and learn a grander song.

“I never can get up there without wings,” said May, as she looked at the high rocks with a tangle of vines all over them. Then she remembered what the brook told her, and called out, —

“Echo, are you here?”

“Here!” answered an airy voice.

“How can I climb up?”

“Climb up.”

“Yes; but can I get through the vines?”

“Through the vines.”

“It is very high, but I can try it.”

“Try it, try it,” answered the voice so clearly that May could not doubt what to do.

“Well, if I’m brave I shall be helped.”

“Be helped,” answered Echo.

“Now I’m coming, and I hope I shall find you, sweet Echo.”

“Find sweet Echo,” sung the voice; and when May laughed, a softer laugh answered her so gayly that she forgot her fear in eagerness to see this new friend, hiding above the waterfall.

Up she went, and as if fairy hands cleared the way for her, the tangled vines made a green

ladder for her feet, while every time she stopped for breath and called, as she peeped into the shadowy nooks or looked at the dashing water, "Are you here?" the mocking voice always answered from above, —

"Here!"

So she climbed safely up and sat to rest at the top, looking down the valley where the brook danced and sparkled as if glad to see her on her way. The air blew freshly, and the sun shone more warmly here, for the trees were not so thick, and lovely glimpses of far-off hills and plains, like pictures set in green frames, made one eager to go on and see more.

Skip and Blue-bird kept her company, so she did not feel lonely, and followed these sure guides higher and higher, till she came out among the great bare cliffs, where rocks lay piled as if giants had been throwing them about in their rough play.

"Oh, how large the world is! and what a little thing I am!" said May, as she looked out over miles of country so far below that the towns looked like toy villages, and people like ants at work. A strong wind blew, all was very

still, for no bird sang, and no flowers bloomed; only green moss grew on the rocks, and tiny pines no longer than her finger carpeted the narrow bits of ground here and there. An eagle flew high overhead, and great white clouds sailed by, so near that May could feel their damp breath as they passed.

The child felt a little fear, all was so vast and strange and wonderful; and she seemed so weak and small that for a moment she half wished she had not come. She was hungry and tired, but her basket was empty, and no water appeared. She sighed, and looked from the mountain top, hidden in mist, to the sunny valley where mother was, and a tear was about to fall, when Iris came floating to her like a blue and silver butterfly, and alighting on her hand let May see her lovely little face, and hear her small voice as she smiled and sung, —

“ Have no fear,
Friends are here,
To help you on your way.
The mountain's breast
Will give you rest,
And we a feast, dear May.

Here at your feet
Is honey sweet,
And water fresh to sip.
Fruit I bring
On Blue-bird's wing,
And nuts sends merry Skip.
Rough and wild,
To you, dear child,
Seems the lonely mountain way ;
But have no fear,
For friends are near,
To guard and guide, sweet May."

Then at the tap of the fairy's wand up gushed fresh water from the rock ; Blue-bird dropped a long stalk of grass strung with raspberries like red beads ; Skip scattered his best nuts ; and Brownie came lumbering up with a great piece of honey-comb, folded in vine-leaves. He had found a wild-bees' nest, and this was his surprise. He was so small and gentle, and his little eyes twinkled so kindly, that May could not be afraid, and gladly sat down on the crisp moss to eat and drink with her friends about her.

It was a merry lunch, for all told tales, and each amused the little pilgrim in his or her pretty way. The bird let her hold him on her

hand and admire his lovely blue plumes. Skip chattered and pranced till there seemed to be a dozen squirrels there instead of one. Brownie stood on his head, tried to dance, and was so funny in his clumsy attempts to outdo the others that May laughed till many echoes joined in her merriment. Iris told her splendid stories of the fairy spring, and begged her to go on, for no one ever had so good a chance as she to find out the secret and see the spirit who lived on the mountain top.

“I am strong and brave now, and will not turn back. Come with me, dear creatures, and help me over these great rocks, for I have no wings,” said May, trudging on again, much refreshed by her rest.

“I’ll carry you like a feather, my dear; step up and hold fast, and see me climb,” cried Brownie, glad to be of use.

So May sat on his fuzzy back as on a soft cushion, and his strong legs and sharp claws carried him finely over the rough, steep places, while Blue-bird and Skip went beside her, and Iris flew in front to show the way. It was a very hard journey, and poor fat Brownie panted

and puffed, and often stopped to rest. But May was so surprised and charmed with the lovely clouds all about her that she never thought of being tired. She forgot the world below, and soon the mist hid it from her, and she was in a world of sunshine, sky, and white clouds floating about like ships in a sea of blue air. She seemed to be riding on them when one wrapped her in its soft arms; and more than once a tiny cloud came and sat in her lap, like a downy lamb, which melted when she tried to hold it.

“Now we are nearly there, and Velvet comes to meet us. These fine fellows are the only creatures who live up here, and these tiny star-flowers the only green things that grow,” said Iris, at last, when all the clouds were underneath, and the sky overhead was purple and gold, as the sun was going down.

Velvet ran nimbly to give May a silver thread which would lead her straight to the spring; and the path before her was carpeted with the pretty white stars, that seemed to smile at her as if glad to welcome her. She was so eager that she forgot her weariness, and hurried on

till she came at last to the mountain top, and there like a beautiful blue eye looking up to heaven lay the fairy spring.

May ran to look into it, thinking she would see only the rock below and the clouds above; but to her wonder there was a lovely palace reflected in the clear water, and shining as if made of silver, with crystal bells chiming with a sound like water-drops set to music.

“Oh, how beautiful! Is it real? Who lives there? Can I go to it?” cried May, longing to sink down and find herself in that charming palace, and know to whom it belonged.

“You cannot go till you have drunk of the water and slept by the spring; then the spirit will appear, and you will know the secret,” answered Iris, filling a pearly shell that lay on the brim of the spring.

“Must I stay here all alone? I shall be cold and afraid so far from my own little bed and my dear mother,” said May, looking anxiously about her, for the sky was growing dim and night coming on.

“We will stay with you, and no harm can

come to you, for the spirit will be here while you sleep. Drink and dream, and in the morning you will be in a new world."

While Iris spoke Brownie had piled up a bed of star-flowers in a little crevice of the rock; Velvet had spun a silken curtain over it to keep the dew off; Blue-bird perched on the tallest stone to keep watch; and when May had drunk a cup of the fairy water, and lay down, with Skip rolled up for a pillow, and Brownie at her feet for a warm rug, Iris waved her wand and sung a lullaby so sweet that the child was in dreamland at once.

When she woke it was day, but she had no time to see the rosy sky, the mist rolling away, or the sunshine dazzling down upon the world, for there before her rising from the spring, was the spirit, so beautiful and smiling, May could only clasp her hands and look. As softly as a cloud the spirit floated toward her, and with a kiss as cool as a dew-drop, she said in a voice like a fresh wind, —

"Dear child, you are the first to come and find me. Welcome to the mountain and the secret of the spring. It is this: whoever climbs

up and drinks this water will leave all pain and weariness behind, and grow healthy in body, happy in heart, and learn to see and love all the simple wholesome things that help to keep us good and gay. Do you feel tired now, or lonely, or afraid? Has the charm begun to work?"

"Yes," cried May, "I think it has, for I feel so happy, light, and well, I could fly like a bird. It is so lovely here I could stay all my life if I only had mamma to enjoy it with me."

"She will come, and many others. Little children often are wiser than grown people, and lead them up without knowing it. Look and see what you have done by this longing of yours for the mountain top, and the brave journey that brought you here."

Then the spirit touched May's eyes, and looking down she saw the little path by which she had come grow wider and smoother, till it wound round and round the mountain like a broad white ribbon, and up this pleasant path came many people. Some were pale and sad; some lame, some ill; some were children in their mothers' arms; some old and bent,

but were climbing eagerly up toward the fairy spring,—sure of help and health when they arrived.

“Can you cure them all?” asked May, delighted to see what hope and comfort her journey had given others.

“Not all; but every one will be the better for coming, even the oldest, the saddest, and the sickest; for my four servants, Sunshine, Fresh-air, Water, and Rest, can work miracles, as you will see. Souls and bodies need their help, and they never fail to do good if people will only come to them and believe in their power.”

“I am so glad, for mamma is often ill, and loves to come to the hills and rest. Shall I see her soon? Can I go and tell her all I have learned, or must I stay till she comes?” asked May, longing to run and skip, she felt so well with the fairy water bubbling in her veins.

“Go and tell the news, and lead the others up. You will not see me, but I am here; and my servants will do their work faithfully, for all who are patient and brave. Farewell, dear child, no harm will come to you, and your friends are waiting to help you down. But do

not forget when you are in the valley, or you will never find the fairy spring again."

Then the spirit vanished like mist, and May ran away, singing like a bird, and skipping like a little goat, so proud and happy she felt as if she could fly like a thistle-down. The path seemed very easy now, and her feet were never tired. Her good friends joined her by the way, and they had a merry journey back to the valley. There May thanked them and hastened to tell all she had seen and heard and done. Few believed her ; most people said, "The child fell asleep and dreamed it." A few invalids looked up and sighed to be there, but had no courage to climb so far. A poet said he would go at once, and set off; so did a man who had lost his wife and little children, and was very sad. May's mother believed every word, and went hand in hand with the happy child along the path that grew wider and smoother with every pair of feet that passed.

The wood-creatures nodded at May, and rejoiced to see the party go; but there was no need of them now, so they kept out of sight,

and only the child and the poet saw them. Every one enjoyed the journey, for each hour they felt better; and when at last they reached the spring, and May filled her little cup for them to drink the sweet water, every one tasted and believed, for health and happiness came to them with a single draught.

The sad man smiled, and said he felt so near to heaven and his lost children up there that he should stay. The poet began to sing the loveliest songs he ever made, and pale mamma looked like a rose, as she lay on the star-flowers, breathing the pure air, and basking in the sunshine. May was the spirit of the spring for them, and washed away the tears, the wrinkles, and the lines of pain with the blessed water, while the old mountain did its best to welcome them with mild air, cloud pictures, and the peace that lies above the world.

That was the beginning of the great cure; for when this party came down all so beautifully changed, every one began to hurry away to try their fortune also. Soon the wide road wound round and round, and up it journeyed pilgrims from all parts of the world, till the spirit and

her servants had hundreds of visitors each day. People tried to build a great house up there, and make money out of the spring; but every building put up blew away, the water vanished, and no one was cured till the mountain top was free again to all.

Then the spring gushed up more freshly than before; the little star-flowers bloomed again, and all who came felt the beauty of the quiet place, and were healed of all their troubles by the magic of the hills where the spirit of health still lives to welcome and bless whoever go to find her.





Golden-rod heard the soft sigh, and whispered, "What troubles you, sweet neighbor?" — PAGE 133.

VII.

QUEEN ASTER.

FOR many seasons the Golden-rods had reigned over the meadow, and no one thought of choosing a king from any other family, for they were strong and handsome, and loved to rule.

But one autumn something happened which caused great excitement among the flowers. It was proposed to have a queen, and such a thing had never been heard of before. It began among the Asters; for some of them grew outside the wall beside the road, and saw and heard what went on in the great world. These sturdy plants told the news to their relations inside; and so the Asters were unusually wise and energetic flowers, from the little white stars in the grass to the tall sprays tossing their purple plumes above the mossy wall.

“ Things are moving in the great world, and it is time we made a change in our little one,” said one of the roadside Asters, after a long talk with a wandering wind. “ Matters are not going well in the meadow; for the Golden-rods rule, and they care only for money and power, as their name shows. Now, *we* are descended from the stars, and are both wise and good, and our tribe is even larger than the Golden-rod tribe; so it is but fair that we should take our turn at governing. It will soon be time to choose, and I propose our stately cousin, Violet Aster, for queen this year. Whoever agrees with me, say Aye.”

Quite a shout went up from all the Asters; and the late Clovers and Buttercups joined in it, for they were honest, sensible flowers, and liked fair play. To their great delight the Pitcher-plant, or Forefathers' Cup, said "Aye" most decidedly, and that impressed all the other plants; for this fine family came over in the "Mayflower," and was much honored everywhere.

But the proud Cardinals by the brook blushed with shame at the idea of a queen; the Fringed Gentians shut their blue eyes that they might not see the bold Asters; and Clematis fainted away in the grass, she was so shocked. The Golden-rods laughed scornfully, and were much amused at the suggestion to put them off the throne where they had ruled so long.

"Let those discontented Asters try it," they said. "No one will vote for that foolish Violet, and things will go on as they always have done; so, dear friends, don't be troubled, but help us elect our handsome cousin who was born in the palace this year."

In the middle of the meadow stood a beautiful maple, and at its foot lay a large rock

overgrown by a wild grape-vine. All kinds of flowers sprung up here; and this autumn a tall spray of Golden-rod and a lovely violet Aster grew almost side by side, with only a screen of ferns between them. This was called the palace; and seeing their cousin there made the Asters feel that their turn had come, and many of the other flowers agreed with them that a change of rulers ought to be made for the good of the kingdom.

So when the day came to choose, there was great excitement as the wind went about collecting the votes. The Golden-rods, Cardinals, Gentians, Clematis, and Bitter-sweet voted for the Prince, as they called the handsome fellow by the rock. All the Asters, Buttercups, Clovers, and Pitcher-plants voted for Violet; and to the surprise of the meadow the Maple dropped a leaf, and the Rock gave a bit of lichen for her also. They seldom took part in the affairs of the flower people, — the tree living so high above them, busy with its own music, and the rock being so old that it seemed lost in meditation most of the time; but they liked the idea of a queen (for one was a poet, the other

a philosopher), and both believed in gentle Violet.

Their votes won the day, and with loud rejoicing by her friends she was proclaimed queen of the meadow and welcomed to her throne.

“We will never go to Court or notice her in any way,” cried the haughty Cardinals, red with anger.

“Nor we! Dreadful, unfeminine creature! Let us turn our backs and be grateful that the brook flows between us,” added the Gentians, shaking their fringes as if the mere idea soiled them.

Clematis hid her face among the vine leaves, feeling that the palace was no longer a fit home for a delicate, high-born flower like herself. All the Golden-rods raged at this dreadful disappointment, and said many untrue and disrespectful things of Violet. The Prince tossed his yellow head behind the screen, and laughed as if he did not mind, saying carelessly, —

“Let her try; she never can do it, and will soon be glad to give up and let me take my proper place.”

So the meadow was divided: one half turned its back on the new queen; the other half loved,

admired, and believed in her; and all waited to see how the experiment would succeed. The wise Asters helped her with advice; the Pitcher-plant refreshed her with the history of the brave Puritans who loved liberty and justice and suffered to win them; the honest Clovers sweetened life with their sincere friendship, and the cheerful Buttercups brightened her days with kindly words and deeds. But her best help came from the rock and the tree,—for when she needed strength she leaned her delicate head against the rough breast of the rock, and courage seemed to come to her from the wise old stone that had borne the storms of a hundred years; when her heart was heavy with care or wounded by unkindness, she looked up to the beautiful tree, always full of soft music, always pointing heavenward, and was comforted by these glimpses of a world above her.

The first thing she did was to banish the evil snakes from her kingdom; for they lured the innocent birds to death, and filled many a happy nest with grief. Then she stopped the bees from getting tipsy on the wild grapes and going about stupid, lazy, and cross, a disgrace to their

family and a terror to the flowers. She ordered the field-mice to nibble all the stems of the clusters before they were ripe; so they fell and withered, and did no harm. The vine was very angry, and the bees and wasps scolded and stung; but the Queen was not afraid, and all her good subjects thanked her. The Pitcher-plant offered pure water from its green and russet cups to the busy workers, and the wise bees were heartily glad to see the Grape-vine saloon shut up.

The next task was to stop the red and black ants from constantly fighting; for they were always at war, to the great dismay of more peaceful insects. She bade each tribe keep in its own country, and if any dispute came up, to bring it to her, and she would decide it fairly. This was a hard task; for the ants loved to fight, and would go on struggling after their bodies were separated from their heads, so fierce were they. But she made them friends at last, and every one was glad.

Another reform was to purify the news that came to the meadow. The wind was telegraph-messenger; but the birds were reporters, and

some of them very bad ones. The larks brought tidings from the clouds, and were always welcome; the thrushes from the wood, and all loved to hear their pretty romances; the robins had domestic news, and the lively wrens bits of gossip and witty jokes to relate. But the magpies made much mischief with their ill-natured tattle and evil tales, and the crows criticised and condemned every one who did not believe and do just as they did; so the magpies were forbidden to go gossiping about the meadow, and the gloomy black crows were ordered off the fence where they liked to sit cawing dismally for hours at a time.

Every one felt safe and comfortable when this was done, except the Cardinals, who liked to hear their splendid dresses and fine feasts talked about, and the Golden-rods, who were so used to living in public that they missed the excitement, as well as the scandal of the magpies and the political and religious arguments and quarrels of the crows.

A hospital for sick and homeless creatures was opened under the big burdock leaves; and there several belated butterflies were tucked up

in their silken hammocks to sleep till spring, a sad lady-bug who had lost all her children found comfort in her loneliness, and many crippled ants sat talking over their battles, like old soldiers, in the sunshine.

It took a long time to do all this, and it was a hard task, for the rich and powerful flowers gave no help. But the Asters worked bravely, so did the Clovers and Buttercups; and the Pitcher-plant kept open house with the old-fashioned hospitality one so seldom sees now-a-days. Everything seemed to prosper, and the meadow grew more beautiful day by day. Safe from their enemies the snakes, birds came to build in all the trees and bushes, singing their gratitude so sweetly that there was always music in the air. Sunshine and shower seemed to love to freshen the thirsty flowers and keep the grass green, till every plant grew strong and fair, and passers-by stopped to look, saying with a smile, —

“What a pretty little spot this is!”

The wind carried tidings of these things to other colonies, and brought back messages of praise and good-will from other rulers,

glad to know that the experiment worked so well.

This made a deep impression on the Goldenrods and their friends, for they could not deny that Violet had succeeded better than any one dared to hope; and the proud flowers began to see that they would have to give in, own they were wrong, and become loyal subjects of this wise and gentle queen.

“We shall have to go to Court if ambassadors keep coming with such gifts and honors to her Majesty; for they wonder not to see us there, and will tell that we are sulking at home instead of shining as *we* only can,” said the Cardinals, longing to display their red velvet robes at the feasts which Violet was obliged to give in the palace when kings came to visit her.

“Our time will soon be over, and I’m afraid we must humble ourselves or lose all the gayety of the season. It is hard to see the good old ways changed; but if they must be, we can only gracefully submit,” answered the Gentians, smoothing their delicate blue fringes, eager to be again the belles of the ball.

Clematis astonished every one by suddenly

beginning to climb the maple-tree and shake her silvery tassels like a canopy over the Queen's head.

"I cannot live so near her and not begin to grow. Since I must cling to something, I choose the noblest I can find, and look up, not down, forevermore," she said; for like many weak and timid creatures, she was easily guided, and it was well for her that Violet's example had been a brave one.

Prince Golden-rod had found it impossible to turn his back entirely upon her Majesty, for he was a gentleman with a really noble heart under his yellow cloak; so he was among the first to see, admire, and love the modest faithful flower who grew so near him. He could not help hearing her words of comfort or reproof to those who came to her for advice. He saw the daily acts of charity which no one else discovered; he knew how many trials came to her, and how bravely she bore them; how humbly she asked help, and how sweetly she confessed her shortcomings to the wise rock and the stately tree.

"She has done more than ever we did to make the kingdom beautiful and safe and

happy, and I'll be the first to own it, to thank her and offer my allegiance," he said to himself, and waited for a chance.

One night when the September moon was shining over the meadow, and the air was balmy with the last breath of summer, the Prince ventured to serenade the Queen on his wind-harp. He knew she was awake; for he had peeped through the ferns and seen her looking at the stars with her violet eyes full of dew, as if something troubled her. So he sung his sweetest song, and her Majesty leaned nearer to hear it; for she much longed to be friends with the gallant Prince, and only waited for him to speak to own how dear he was to her, because both were born in the palace and grew up together very happily till coronation time came.

As he ended she sighed, wondering how long it would be before he told her what she knew was in his heart.

Golden-rod heard the soft sigh, and being in a tender mood, forgot his pride, pushed away the screen, and whispered, while his face shone and his voice showed how much he felt, —

“What troubles you, sweet neighbor? For-

get and forgive my unkindness, and let me help you if I can, — I dare not say as Prince Consort, though I love you dearly; but as a friend and faithful subject, for I confess that you are fitter to rule than I.”

As he spoke the leaves that hid Violet's golden heart opened wide and let him see how glad she was, as she bent her stately head and answered softly, —

“There is room upon the throne for two: share it with me as King, and let us rule together; for it is lonely without love, and each needs the other.”

What the Prince answered only the moon knows; but when morning came all the meadow was surprised and rejoiced to see the gold and purple flowers standing side by side, while the maple showered its rosy leaves over them, and the old rock waved his crown of vine-leaves as he said, —

“This is as it should be; love and strength going hand in hand, and justice making the earth glad.”



Betty always wore a brown frock, a big brown hat, and, being out in the sun a great deal, her face was as brown as a berry. — PAGE 135.

VIII.

THE BROWNIE AND THE PRINCESS.

SHE was not a real Brownie, but a little girl named Betty, who lived with her father in a cottage near a great forest. They were poor; so Betty always wore a brown frock, a big brown hat, and, being out in the sun a great

deal, her face was as brown as a berry, though very pretty with its rosy cheeks, dark eyes, and curly hair blowing in the wind. She was a lively little creature, and having no neighbors she made friends with the birds and flowers, rabbits and squirrels, and had fine frolics with them, for they knew and loved her dearly. Many people drove through the beautiful wood, which was not far from the King's palace; and when they saw the little girl dancing with the daisies in the meadow, chasing squirrels up the trees, splashing in the brook, or sitting under her big hat like an elf under a mushroom, they would say, "There is the Brownie."

Betty was wild and shy, and always tried to hide if any one called to her; and it was funny to see her vanish in a hollow tree, drop down in the tall grass, or skip away into the ferns like a timid rabbit. She was afraid of the fine lords and ladies, who laughed at her and called her names, but never thought to bring a book or a toy or say a kind word to the lonely little girl.

Her father took care of the deer in the King's park and was away all day, leaving Betty to

sweep the little house, bake the brown bread, and milk Daisy the white cow, who lived in the shed behind the cottage and was Betty's dearest friend. They had no pasture for her to feed in; so, when the work was done, Betty would take her knitting and drive Daisy along the road where she could eat the grass on either side till she had had enough and lay down to rest under some shady tree. While the cow chewed her cud and took naps, the little girl would have fine games among her playmates, the wood creatures, or lie watching the clouds, or swing on the branches of the trees, or sail leaf boats in the brook. She was happy; but she longed for some one to talk to, and tried vainly to learn what the birds sang all day long. There were a great many about the cottage, for no one troubled them, and they were so tame they would eat out of her hand and sit on her head. A stork family lived on the roof, swallows built their clay nests under the eaves, and wrens chirped in their little homes among the red and white roses that climbed up to peep in at Betty's window. Wood-pigeons came to pick up the grain she scattered for them, larks went singing

up from the grass close by, and nightingales sang her to sleep.

“If I only knew what they said, we could have such happy times together. How can I ever learn?” sighed Betty, as she was driving Daisy home one day at sunset.

She was in the wood, and as she spoke she saw a great gray owl fluttering on the ground as if he was hurt. She ran at once to see what ailed the bird, and was not afraid, though his round eyes stared at her, and he snapped his hooked beak as if very angry.

“Poor thing! its leg is broken,” she said, wondering how she could help it.

“No, it is n't; it's my wing. I leaned out of my nest up there to watch a field mouse, and a ray of sunshine dazzled me so I tumbled down. Pick me up, child, and put me back, and I shall be all right.”

Betty was so surprised to hear the owl speak that she did not stir; and thinking she was frightened at his cross tone, the gray bird said more gently, with a blink of its yellow eyes and a wise nod,—

“I should n't speak to every one, nor trust

any other child; but I know you never hurt anything. I've watched you a long time, and I like you; so I'm going to reward you by giving you the last wish you made, whatever it is. I can: I'm a wizard, and I know all sorts of magic charms. Put me in my nest, tell me your wish, and you shall have it."

"Oh, thank you!" cried Betty, joyfully. "I wished to understand what birds say."

"Dear me, that's a wish that may make trouble; but I'll grant it if you won't tell any one how you learned the secret. I can't have people coming to me, and my neighbors won't want their gossip heard by many ears. They won't mind you, and it will amuse you, poor thing!" said the owl, after a pause.

Betty promised, and, holding the fat bird carefully in her arm, she climbed up the old oak and put him safely in his hole, where he settled himself with a great ruffling of feathers and a hoot of pleasure at being home again.

"Now, pull the tallest bit of down off my right ear and put it in your own; then you will hear what the birds say. Good-night; I'm used up and want to rest," said the owl, with a gape.

“Thank you,” said Betty, and ran after Daisy, who was slowly eating her way home.

The bit of down lay snugly in Betty's ear, and in a moment she heard many sweet voices called to one another, — “Good-night!” “Happy dreams!” “A bright to-morrow;” “Lie still, my darlings;” “Hush, my birdie, sleep till day,” — and all sorts of pretty things, as the wood-birds were going to bed with the sun. When she came to the cottage the papa stork was standing on one leg, while the mamma tucked the little ones under her wings, scolding now and then as a red bill or a long leg popped out. The doves were cooing tenderly in the pine that rustled near by, the swallows skimming over the ground to catch and bring their babies a few more gnats for supper, and the wrens were twittering among the roses like the little gossips they were.

“Now I shall know what they all are saying,” cried Betty, trying to hear the different voices; for there were so many going at once it was difficult to understand the sweet new language.

So she milked Daisy, set the table, and made ready for her father, who was often late, then

took her bowl of bread and milk and sat on the door-step listening with all her might. She always strewed crumbs for the wrens, and they flew down to eat without fear. To-night they came, and as they pecked they talked, and Betty understood every word.

“Here’s a fine soft bit, my love,” said the papa, as he hopped briskly about, with his bright eye on the little girl. “Have a good supper while I feed the children. The child never forgets us, and saves me many a long journey by giving us these nice crumbs. I wish we could do something for her.”

“So do I, and quite tire my wits trying to make some plan to give her pleasure. I often wonder why the little Princess up at the palace has so much and our dear Betty so little. A few of the books and toys that lie about up there would make this child so happy. It is a pity no one thinks of it;” and the kind Mamma Wren sighed as she ate a nice bit close to Betty’s bare foot.

“If she was not so shy and would let people speak to her, I think she would soon make friends, she is so pretty and gay,” answered the

papa, coming back for another load for the hungry babies in the nest.

“The Princess has heard of her and wants to see her. I heard the maids talking about it to-day when I went to call on Cousin Tomtit in the palace garden. They said her Highness was to drive through the pine wood early to-morrow morning to breathe the fresh air, and hoped to see the Brownie and the pretty white cow. Now, if Betty only knew it, she might gather a posy of cowslips, and when the little lady comes give them to her. That would please her very much and bring Betty some pretty gift; for her Highness is generous, though sadly spoilt, I'm afraid.”

This fine plan of Mamma Wren's pleased Betty so much that she clapped her hands and startled the birds away.

“I'll do it! I'll do it!” she cried. “I always wanted to see the little Princess father has told me about. She is ill, and cannot run and play as I do, so I should love to please her, and the cowslips are all out. I'll go early and get a hat full, and not run away if she comes.”

Betty was so full of this delightful plan that

she went early to bed, but did not forget to lean out of her window and peep through the roses into the nest where Mamma Wren brooded over her babies while the papa roosted near by with his head under his wing.

“Good-night, dear birds; thank you very much,” whispered Betty; but they did not mind her, and only twittered sleepily as if a dream disturbed them.


“Up, up, little maid;
Day has begun.
Welcome with us
Our father, the sun!”

sang the larks, as they rose from the grass and waked Betty with their sweet voices.

“Tweet, tweet, it is morning;
Please get up, mamma.
Do bring us some breakfast,
Our dearest papa,”

twittered the young wrens, with their mouths wide open.

“Click, clack, here ’s another day;
Stretch our wings and fly away
Over the wood and over the hills,
Seeking food for our babies’ bills;”



and away went the storks with their long legs trailing out behind, while the little ones popped up their heads and stared at the sun.

“Cluck! cluck!
Here 's good luck :
Old yellow-legs
Has laid two eggs,
All fresh and sweet,
For our girl to eat,”

cackled the gray hens, picking about the shed where the cock stood crowing loudly.

“Coo! coo! coo!
Come, bathe in the dew ;
For the rosy dawn shines
Through our beautiful pines.
So kiss, every one,
For a new day 's begun,”

called the doves softly to one another as they billed and cooed and tripped about on their little pink feet.

Betty looked and listened at her window, and was so happy she kissed the roses nodding at her, then ran down to make the porridge, singing like a bird herself. When her father had gone away to work she made haste to milk

Daisy, sweep the floor, and make all tidy for the day before she went to wait for the Princess.

“Now, you eat your breakfast here while I get the cowslips; for this is a pretty place to be in, and I want you to look very nice when the fine people come,” said Betty, as she left the cow to feed in a little shady nook by the road where the grass was green and an old oak made pleasant shade.

The cowslips were all open and as yellow as gold, so Betty made a great nosegay of some and a splendid cowslip-ball of the rest; then she put them in her hat, well sprinkled with water, and sat on a fallen log knitting busily, while Daisy lay down to chew her cud, with a green wreath of oak leaves round her neck for full dress.

They did not have to wait long. Soon the tramp of horses was heard, and along the wood-road came the white ponies tossing their heads, the pretty carriage with coachman and footman in blue and silver coats, and inside the little Princess, with white plumes waving from her hat as she sat by her nurse, wrapt in a soft silken cloak, for the summer air seemed cold to her.

“ Oh, there 's the Brownie and her pretty white cow! Tell her not to run away, I want to see her and hear her sing,” cried the little Princess, eagerly, as they came nearer.

Betty was rather scared, but did not run away; for the nurse was a kind-looking old woman in a high peasant cap, who smiled and nodded at her with a motherly look, and seemed much pleased when she held up the cowslips, saying, —

“ Will the little lady have them? ”

“ Oh yes, I wanted some; I never had a cowslip ball before. How pretty it is! Thank you, Brownie,” cried the Princess, with both hands full of flowers as she laughed with pleasure.

“ I picked them all for you. I have so many, and I heard you cried for some,” said Betty, very glad that she had not run away and spoiled the little lady's drive.

“ How did you know? ” asked the Princess, staring at her.

“ The birds told me,” said Betty.

“ Oh yes! brownies are fairies, and understand bird-talk; I forgot that. I know what parrots say, but not my other birds. Could you tell

me?" asked the Princess, leaning down very earnestly, for any new thing pleased her.

"I think so, if tame ones sing like the wild ones," answered Betty, proud to know more than the fine child did.

"Come to the palace and tell me; come now, I can't wait! My canary sings all day, but I never understand a word, and I must. Tell her to come, Nurse," commanded the Princess, who always had her own way.

"Can you?" asked the old woman. "We will bring you back at night. Her Highness has a fancy to see you, and she will pay you for coming."

"I can't leave Daisy; we have no field to put her in, and if I shut her up in the shed all day she will be hungry and call for me," answered Betty, longing to go, but not liking to leave her dear cow to suffer.

"Put her in that field till you come back; I give you leave. All this land is mine, so no one will blame you. Do it!" said the Princess, waving her hand to the footman, who jumped down and had Daisy in the great clover-field before Betty could say a word.

“She will like that; and now I can go if you don't mind my old gown and hat,—I have no other clothes,” she said, as the cow began to eat, and the footman opened the carriage door for her.

“I like it. Come in.—Now, go home at once,” said the Princess; and there was poor little Betty rolling away in the grand carriage, feeling as if it was all a fairy tale.

The Princess asked a great many questions, and liked her new friend more and more; for she had never spoken to a poor child before, or known how they live. Betty was excited by this fine adventure, and was so gay and charming in her little ways that the old nurse soon forgot to watch lest she should do or say something amiss.

When they drove up to the great marble palace shining in the sun, with green lawns and terraces and blooming gardens all about it, Betty could only hold her breath and look with all her eyes as she was led through splendid halls and up wide stairs into a room full of pretty things, where six gayly dressed maids sewed and chattered together.

The Princess went away to rest, but Betty was told to stay there and be dressed before she went to play with her Highness. The room was full of closets and chests and boxes and baskets, and as the doors opened and the covers flew off, Betty saw piles of pretty frocks, hats, cloaks, and all manner of dainty things for little girls to wear. Never had she dreamed of such splendid clothes, all lace and ribbons, silk and velvet. Hats with flowers and feathers, pretty pink and blue shoes with gold and silver buckles, silk stockings like cobwebs, and muslin and linen petticoats and nightgowns and little caps all embroidered as if by fairy fingers.

She could only stand and look like one in a dream while the maids very kindly took away her poor brown dress and hat, and after much gossip over what looked best, at last put on a rosy muslin frock, a straw hat with roses in it, and some neat shoes and stockings. Then when her hair was smoothed in thick brown curls, they told her to look in the tall mirror and tell what she saw there.

“Oh, what a pretty little girl!” cried Betty, smiling and nodding at the other child, who

smiled and nodded back at her. She did not know herself, never having had any glass but a quiet pool in the wood or the brook in the meadow.

The maids laughed, and then she saw who it was, and laughed with them, and danced and courtesied and was very merry till a bell rang and she was ordered to go to her Highness.

It was a lovely room, all hung with blue silk and lace, with a silver bed, and chairs and couches of blue damask, pictures on the walls, flowers in all the windows, and golden cages full of birds. A white cat slept on its cushion, a tiny dog ran about with a golden collar hung with bells, and books and toys were heaped on the tables. The Princess was scolding her nurse because she wanted her to rest longer after the drive; but when Betty came in looking so pretty and gay, the frown changed to a smile, and she cried, —

“How nice you look! Not like a Brownie now; but I hope you have not forgotten about the birds.”

“No,” said Betty; “let me listen a minute and I’ll tell you what they say.”

So both were silent, and the maid and nurse kept as still as mice while the canary sang his shrill, sweet song, and Betty's face grew sad as she heard it.

“He says he is tired of his cage and longs to be free among the other birds; for a tree is a better home than a golden palace, and a crumb in the wood sweeter than all the sugar in his silver cup. ‘Let me go! let me go! or my heart will break!’ That is what he says, and the bulfinch sings the same song; so do the love birds and the beautiful gay one whom I don't know.”

“What does Polly say? I understand him when he talks, but not when he scolds and chatters to himself as he is doing now,” said the Princess, looking much surprised at what she heard; for she thought her birds must be happy in such fine cages.

Betty listened to the great red and green and blue parrot, who sat on a perch wagging his head and chuckling to himself as if he were enjoying some good joke. Presently Betty blushed and laughed, and looked both troubled and amused at what she heard; for the bird was

gabbling away and nodding his head at her in a very funny manner.

“What does he say?” asked the Princess, impatiently.

“Please don’t ask. You will not like it. I could n’t tell,” said Betty, still laughing and blushing.

“You *must* tell, or I’ll have Polly’s neck wrung. I *will* know every word, and I won’t be angry with *you*, no matter what that saucy bird says,” commanded the Princess.

“He says this,” began Betty, not liking to obey, but afraid poor Polly would be hurt if she did not: “‘Now here’s a new pet for her Highness to torment. Nice, pretty little girl! Pity she came, to be made much of for a day or two and then thrown away or knocked about like an old doll. She thinks it all very fine here, poor thing! But if she knew all I know she would run away and never come back; for a crosser, more spoilt child than her Highness never lived.’”

Betty dared not go on, for the Princess looked angry; and the maid went to slap the parrot, who gave a queer laugh and snapped at her fingers, squalling out, —

“She is! she is! and you all say it behind her back. *I* know your sly ways. You praise and pet her, and pretend that she is the sweetest darling in the world, when you know that this nice, rosy, good little girl out of the wood is worth a dozen silly, tyrannical princesses. Ha! ha! I’m not afraid to speak the truth, am I, Betty?”

Betty was frightened, but could not help laughing when the naughty bird winked at her as he hung upside down, with his hooked beak wide open and his splendid wings flapping.

“Tell me! tell me!” cried the Princess, forgetting her anger in curiosity.

Betty had to tell, and was very glad when Bonnbelle laughed also, and seemed to enjoy the truth told in this funny way.

“Tell him you know what he says, and ask him, since he is so wise, what I shall do to be as good as you are,” said the Princess, who really had a kind little heart and knew that she was petted far too much.

Betty told the parrot she understood his language, and he was so surprised that he got on his perch at once and stared at her, as he said eagerly, —

“Don't let me be punished for telling truth, there 's a dear child. I can't take it back, and since you ask my advice, I think the best thing you can do for her Highness is to let her change places with you and learn to be contented and useful and happy. Tell her so, with my compliments.”

Betty found this a hard message to give; but it pleased Bonnbelle, for she clapped her hands and cried, —

“I'll ask mamma. Would you like to do it, Brownie, and be a princess?”

“No, thank you,” said Betty; “I could n't leave my father and Daisy, and I'm not fit to live in a palace. It's very splendid, but I think I love the little house and the wood and my birds better.”

The nurse and the maid held up their hands, amazed at such a fancy; but Bonnbelle seemed to understand, and said kindly, —

“Yes; I think it is very dull here, and much pleasanter in the fields to do as one likes. May I come and play with you, and learn to be like you, dear Betty?”

She looked a little sad as she spoke, and

Betty pitied her; so she smiled and answered gladly, —

“Yes, that will be lovely. Come and stay with me, and I will show you all my playmates, and you shall milk Daisy, and feed the hens, and see the rabbits and the tame fawn, and run in the daisy field, and pull cowslips, and eat bread and milk out of my best blue bowl.”

“Yes, and have a little brown gown and a big hat like yours, and wooden shoes that clatter, and learn how to knit, and climb trees, and what the birds say!” added Bonnibelle, so charmed at the plan that she jumped off the couch and began to skip about as she had not done for days before.

“Now come and see my toys, and choose any you like; for I’m fond of you, dear, because you tell me new things and are not like the silly little lords and ladies who come to see me, and only quarrel and strut about like peacocks till I’m tired of them.”

Bonnibelle put her arm round Betty, and led her away to a long hall so full of playthings that it looked like a splendid toy-shop. Dolls by the dozen were there, — dolls that talked and

sang and walked and went to sleep, fine dolls, funny dolls, big and little doll queens and babies, dolls of all nations. Never was there such a glorious party of these dear creatures seen before; and Betty had no eyes for anything else, being a real little girl, full of love for dollies, and never yet had she owned one.

“Take as many as you like,” said Bonnibelle. “I’m tired of them.”

It nearly took Betty’s breath away to think that she might have a dozen dolls if she chose. But she wisely decided that one was enough, and picked out a darling baby-doll in its pretty cradle, with blue eyes shut, and flaxen curls under the dainty cap. It would fill her motherly little soul with joy to have this lovely thing to lie in her arms by day, sleep by her side at night, and live with her in the lonely cottage; for baby could say “Mamma” quite naturally, and Betty felt that she would never be tired of hearing the voice call her by that sweet name.

It was hard to tear herself from the cradle to see the other treasures; but she went to and fro with Bonnibelle, admiring all she saw, till Nurse

came to tell them that lunch was ready and her Highness must play no more.

Betty hardly knew how to behave when she found herself sitting at a fine table with a footman behind her chair and all sorts of curious glass and china and silver things before her. But she watched what Bonnibelle did, and so got on pretty well, and ate peaches and cream and cake and dainty white rolls and bonbons with a good appetite. She would not touch the little birds in the silver dish, though they smelt very nice, but said sadly, —

“No, thank you, sir; I could n't eat my friends.”

The footman tried not to laugh; but the Princess pushed away her own plate with a frown, saying, —

“Neither will I. Give me some apricot jelly and a bit of angel cake. Now that I know more about birds and what they think of me, I shall be careful how I treat them. Don't bring any more to my table.”

After lunch the children went to the library, where all the best picture-books ever printed were ranged on the shelves, and cosey little chairs

stood about where one could sit and read delicious fairy tales all day long. Betty skipped for joy when her new friend picked out a pile of the gayest and best for her to take home; and then they went to the music-room, where a band played beautifully and the Princess danced with her master in a stately way that Betty thought very stupid.

“Now you must dance. I’ve heard how finely you do it; for some lords and ladies saw you dancing with the daisies, and said it was the prettiest ballet they ever looked at. You *must!* No, please do, dear Betty,” said Bonnbelle, commanding at first; then, remembering what the parrot said, she spoke more gently.

“I cannot here before these people. I don’t know any steps, and need flowers to dance with me,” said Betty.

“Then come on the terrace; there are plenty of flowers in the garden, and I am tired of this,” answered Bonnbelle, going through one of the long windows to the wide marble walk where Betty had been longing to go.

Several peacocks were sitting on the steps, and they at once spread their splendid tails and

began to strut before the children, making a harsh noise as they tossed the crowns of shining feathers on their heads.

“What do they say?” asked the Princess.

“‘Here comes the vain little creature who thinks her fine clothes handsomer than ours, and likes to show them off to poorer people and put on proud airs. We don’t admire her; for we know how silly she is, for all her fine feathers.’”

“I won’t listen to any more rude words from these bad birds, and I won’t praise their splendid tails as I meant to. Go along, you vain things! no one wants you here,” cried Betty, chasing the peacocks off the terrace, while the Princess laughed to see them drop their gorgeous trains and go scurrying away with loud squawks of fear.

“It was true. I *am* vain and silly; but no one ever dared to tell me so, and I shall try to do better now I see how foolish those birds look and how sweet you are,” she said, when Betty came skipping back to her.

“I’ll make a peacock dance for you. See how well I do it!” and Betty began to prance,

with her full pink skirt held up, and her head tossed, and her toes turned out, so like the birds that old Nurse and the maid, who had followed, began to laugh as well as Bonnibelle.

It was very funny; and when she had imitated the vain strutting and fluttering of the peacocks, Betty suddenly dropped her skirt, and went hurrying away, flapping her arms like wings and squawking dismally.

She wanted to please the Princess and make her forget the rude things she had been forced to tell; so when she came running back she was glad to find her very merry, and anxious for more fun.

“Now I’ll do the tulip dance,” said Betty, and began to bow and courtesy to a bed full of splendid flowers, all gold and scarlet, white and purple; and the tulips seemed to bow and courtesy back again like stately lords and ladies at a ball. Such dainty steps, such graceful sweeps and elegant wavings of the arms one never saw before; for Betty imitated the tall blossoms waving in the wind, and danced a prettier minuet with them than any ever seen at court.

“It is wonderful!” said the maid.

“Bless the dear! she must be a real fairy to do all that,” said the old nurse.

“Dance again! oh, please dance again, it is so pretty!” cried the Princess, clapping her hands as Betty rose from her farewell courtesy and came smiling toward her.

“I’ll give you the wind dance; that is very gay, and this fine floor is so smooth I feel as if my feet had wings.”

With that Betty began to flutter to and fro like a leaf blown by the wind; now she went down the terrace as if swept by a strong gust, now she stood still, swaying a little in the soft breath of air, then off she spun as if caught in a storm, eddying round and round till she looked like a stray rose-leaf whisked over the ground. Sometimes she whirled close to the Princess, then blew up against the stout old nurse, but was gone before she could be caught. Once she went down the marble steps at a bound and came flying over the railing as if in truth she did have wings on her nimble feet. Then the gale seemed to die away, and slowly the leaf floated to the ground at Bonnbelle’s feet, to lie there rosy, breathless, and tired.

Bonnibelle clapped her hands again; but before she could tell half her delight, a beautiful lady came from the window, where she had seen the pretty ballet. Two little pages carried her long train of silvery silk; two ladies walked beside her, one holding a rose-colored parasol over her head, the other with a fan and cushion; jewels shone on her white hands and neck and in her hair, and she was very splendid, for this was the Queen. But her face was sweet and lovely, her voice very soft, and her smile so kind that Betty was not afraid, and made her best courtesy prettily.

When the red damask cushion was laid on one of the carved stone seats, and the pages had dropped the train, and the maids had shut the parasol and handed the golden fan, they stepped back, and only the Queen and nurse and little girls were left together.

“Does the new toy please you, darling?” asked the shining lady, as Bonnibelle ran to climb into her lap and pour out a long story of the pleasant time she had been having with the Brownie. “Indeed I think she is a fairy, to make you so rosy, gay, and satisfied.”

“Who taught you to dance so wonderfully, child?” asked the Queen, when she had kissed her little daughter, glad to see her look so unlike the sad, cross, or listless creature she usually found.

“The wind, Lady Queen,” answered Betty, smiling.

“And where did you get the fine tales you tell?”

“From the birds, Lady Queen.”

“And what do you do to have such rosy cheeks?”

“Eat brown bread and milk, Lady Queen.”

“And how is it that a lonely child like you is so happy and good?”

“My father takes care of me, and my mother in heaven keeps me good, Lady Queen.”

When Betty said that, the Queen put out her hand and drew the little girl closer, as if her tender heart pitied the motherless child and longed to help if she only knew how.

Just then the sound of horses' feet was heard in the great courtyard below, trumpets sounded, and every one knew that the king had come home from hunting. Presently, with a jing-

ling of spurs and trampling of boots, he came along the terrace with some of his lords behind him.

Every one began to bow except the Queen, who sat still with the Princess on her knee, for Bonnibelle did not run to meet her father as Betty always did when he came home. Betty thought she would be afraid of the King, and so she would perhaps, if he had worn his crown and ermine cloak and jewels everywhere; but now he was dressed very like her father, in hunter's green, with a silver horn over his shoulder, and no sign of splendor about him but the feather in his hat and the great ring that glittered when he pulled off his glove to kiss the Queen's hand; so Betty smiled and bobbed her little courtesy, looking boldly up in his face.

He liked that, and knew her, for he had often seen her when he rode through the wood.

"Come hither, Brownie, I have a story you will like to hear," he said, sitting down beside the Queen and beckoning to Betty with a friendly nod.

She went and stood at his knee, eager to

hear, while all the lords and ladies bent forward to listen, for it was plain that something had happened beside the killing of a stag that day.

“I was hunting in the great oak wood two hours ago, and had knelt down to aim at a splendid stag,” began the King, stroking Betty’s brown head, “when a wild boar, very fierce and large, burst out of the ferns behind me just as I fired at the deer. I had only my dagger left to use, but I sprang up to face him, when a root tripped my foot, and there I lay quite helpless, as the furious old fellow rushed at me. I think this little maid here would have been Queen Bonnibelle to-morrow if a brave woodman had not darted from behind a tree and with one blow of his axe killed the beast as he bent his head to gore me. It was your father, Brownie, and I owe my life to him.”

As the King ended, a murmur rose, and all the lords and ladies looked as if they would like to give a cheer; but the Queen turned pale and old Nurse ran to fan her, while Bonnibelle put out her arms to her father, crying, —

“No, I will never be a queen if you die, dear papa!”

The King took her on one knee and set Betty on the other, saying gayly, —

“Now what shall we do for this brave man who saved me?”

“Give him a palace to live in, and millions of money,” said the Princess, who could think of nothing better.

“I offered him a house and money, but he wanted neither, for he loved his little cottage and had no need of gold, he said. Think again, little maids, and find something he *will* like,” said the King, looking at Betty.

“A nice field for Daisy is all he wants, Lord King,” she answered boldly; for the handsome brown face with the kind eyes was very like her father’s, she thought.

“He shall have it. Now wish three wishes for yourself, my child, and I will grant them if I can.”

Betty showed all her little white teeth as she laughed for joy at this splendid offer. Then she said slowly, —

“I have but one wish now, for the Princess

has given me a dear doll and many books; so I am the happiest creature in all the kingdom, and have no wants."

"Contented little lass! Who of us can say the same?" said the King, looking at the people round him, who dropped their eyes and looked foolish, for they were always asking favors of the good King. "Well, now let us know the one thing I can do to please brave woodman John's little daughter."

"Please let the Princess come and play with me," said Betty, eagerly.

The lords looked horrified, and the ladies as if they would faint away at the mere idea of such a dreadful thing. But the Queen nodded, Bon-nibelle cried, "Oh, do!" and the King laughed as he asked in a surprised tone, —

"But why not come and play with her here? What is there at the cottage that we have not at the palace?"

"Many things, Lord King," answered Betty. "She is tired of the palace and everything in it, she says, and longs to run about in the wood, and be well and gay and busy all day long, as I am. She wants to bake and milk and sweep

and knit, and hear the wind blow, and dance with the daisies, and talk with my birds, and dream happy dreams, and love to be alive, as I do."

"Upon my word, here's a bold Brownie! But she is right, I think; and if my Princess can get a pair of cheeks like these down at the cottage, she shall go as often as she likes," said the King, amused at Betty's free words, and struck by the contrast between the two faces before him, one like a pale garden lily and the other like a fresh wild rose.

Then Bonnibelle burst out and told all the story of the day, talking as she had never talked before; and every one listened, amazed to see how lively and sweet her Highness could be, and wondered what had made such a sudden change. But the old nurse went about, saying in a whisper, —

"She is a real Brownie, I know it; for no mortal child would be so bold and bright, and do what she has done, — bewitched both King and Queen, and made her Highness a new child."

So all looked at Betty with great respect; and when at last the talk was over and the King rose

to go, with a kiss for each little girl, every one bowed and made way for the Brownie, as if she too were a Princess.

But Betty was not proud; for she remembered the peacocks as she walked hand in hand with Bonnbelle after the royal papa and mamma over the terrace to the great hall, where the feast was spread and music sounding splendidly.

“You shall sit by me and have my golden cup,” said Bonnbelle, when the silver horns were still, and all waited for the King to hand the Queen to her place.

“No, I must go home. It is sunset; Daisy must be milked, and father’s supper ready when he comes. Let me run away and get my old clothes; these are too fine to wear in the cottage,” answered Betty, longing to stay, but so faithful to her duty that even the King’s command could not keep her.

“Tell her to stay, papa; I want her,” cried Bonnbelle, going to the great gilded chair where her father sat.

“Stay, child,” said the King, with a wave of the hand where the great jewel shone like a star.

But Betty shook her head and answered sweetly, —

“Please do not make me, dear Lord King. Daisy needs me, and father will miss me sadly if I do not run to meet him when he comes home.”

Then the King smiled, and said heartily, —

“Good child! we will not keep you. Woodman John gave me my life, and I will not take away the comfort of his. Run home, little Brownie, and God bless you!”

Betty tripped upstairs, and put on her old frock and hat, took one of the finest books and the dear doll, leaving the rest to be sent next day, and then tried to slip away by some back door; but there were so many halls and steps she got lost, and came at last into the great hall again. All were eating now; and the meat and wine and spicy pies and piles of fruit smelt very nice, and Betty would have only brown bread and milk for supper; but she did not stay, and no one but the pages saw her as she ran down the steps to the courtyard, like Cinderella hurrying from the hall when the clock struck twelve and all her fine clothes vanished.

She had a very happy walk through the cool green wood, however, and a happy hour telling her father all about this wonderful day; but the happiest time of all was when she went to bed in her little room, with the darling baby fast asleep on her arm, and the wrens talking together among the roses of how much good their wise Brownie would do the Princess in the days to come.

Then Betty fell asleep and dreamed such lovely dreams of the moon with a sweet face like the Queen's smiling at her, of her father looking as proud and handsome as the King, with his axe on his shoulder and the great boar dead at his feet; and Bonnibelle, rosy, gay, and strong, working and playing with her like a little sister in the cottage, while all the birds sang gayly:—

“Bonnibelle! Bonnibelle!
Listen, listen, while we tell
A sweet secret all may know,
How a little child may grow
Like a happy wayside flower,
Warmed by sun, fed by shower,
Rocked by wind, loved by elf,
Quite forgetful of itself;

Full of honey for the bee,
Beautiful for all to see,
Nodding to the passers-by,
Smiling at the summer sky,
Sweetening all the balmy air,
Happy, innocent, and fair.
Flowers like these blossom may
In a palace garden gay ;
Lilies tall or roses red,
For a royal hand or head.
But be they low, or be they high,
Under the soft leaves must lie
A true little heart of gold,
Never proud or hard or cold,
But brave and tender, just and free,
Whether it queen or beggar be ;
Else its beauty is in vain,
And never will it bloom again.
This the secret we would tell,
Bonnibelle ! Bonnibelle !”



Nelly spied two pretty little creatures floating to and fro on the rocking waves. — PAGE 175.

IX.

MERMAIDS.

“**I** WISH I were a sea-gull or a fish or a mermaid; then I could swim as much as I like, and not have to stay on this stupid dry land all day,” said Nelly, as she sat frowning and punching holes in the sand one summer

morning, while the waves came murmuring up on the beach, and a fresh wind sang its pleasant song.

The little girl loved to bathe so well that she wanted to be in the water all the time, and had been forbidden to go into the sea for a day or two because she had a cold. So she was in a pet, and ran away from her playmates to sit and sulk in a lonely spot among the rocks. She had been watching the gulls fly and float, with their white wings shining as they dipped down or soared away in the sunshine. As she wished her wish a very large one swept down upon the sand before her, and startled her by saying in a hoarse tone, as she stared at its bright eyes, the red ring round its neck, and the little tuft on its head, —

“I am the King of the gulls, and I can grant any one of your wishes. Which will you be, — a fish, a bird, or a mermaid?”

“People say there are no mermaids,” stammered Nelly.

“There are; only mortals cannot see them unless I give the power. Be quick! I don't like the sand. Choose, and let me be off!” com-

manded the Great Gull, with an impatient flutter of its wide wings.

“Then I’ll be a mermaid, please. I always wanted to see one, and it must be very nice to live always in the water.”

“Done!” said the gull, and was gone like a flash.

Nelly rubbed her eyes, and looked about her rather scared; but nothing had happened to her yet, and she was just going to complain that the bird had cheated her, when the sound of soft voices made her climb the rock behind her to see who was singing down there.

She nearly fell off again when she spied two pretty little creatures floating to and fro on the rocking waves. Both had long brown hair, green eyes as clear as crystal, pale faces, and the sweetest voices Nelly had ever heard. But the strange thing was that each little body ended in a shining tail,—one all golden, the other all silver scales. Their little breasts and arms were white as foam, and they wore bracelets of pearls, strings of rosy shells about their necks, and garlands of gay sea-weed in their hair. They were singing as they rocked, and throwing

bubbles to and fro as if playing ball. They saw Nelly in a moment, and tossing a great rainbow-colored bubble toward her, cried gayly, —

“Come and play, little friend. We know you, and have often tried to make you see us when you float and dive so bravely in our sea.”

“I long to come; but it is so deep there and the waves are so rough that I should be dashed on the rocks,” answered Nelly, charmed to see real mermaids at last, and eager to go to them.

“We came for you. The King-gull told us to call you. Slip off your clothes and spring down to us; then we will change you, and you can have your wish,” said the mermaids, holding up their arms to her.

“My mother said I must not go into the sea,” began Nelly, sadly.

“What is a mother?” asked one little sea-maid, while the other laughed as if the word amused her.

“Why, don't you know? Don't you have fathers and mothers down there?” cried Nelly, so surprised that she forgot her wish for a moment.

“No; we are born of the moon and the sea, and we have no other parents,” said Goldfin, the shining one.

“How dreadful!” exclaimed Nelly. “Who takes care of you, and where do you live? Without fathers and mothers you cannot have any home.”

“We take care of ourselves. All the sea is our home, and we do as we please. Come, come, and see how gay it is!” called Silver-tail, the other mermaid, tossing bubbles like a juggler till the air was full of them as they sailed away on the wind.

Now, if Nelly had not been angry with her good mamma just then, and ready for any disobedience, she would never have been so naughty, or have gone to play with such strange friends. She was very curious to see how they lived, and be able to relate her adventures when she came back, as she was sure she would, all safe and sound. So she dropped her clothes on the rock and splashed into the green pool below, glad to show off her fine swimming. But Goldfin and Silver-tail caught her and bade her drink the spray they held in their hands.

“Sea water is salt and bitter; I don't like it,” said Nelly, holding back.

“Then you cannot be like us. Drink, and in a moment see what will happen!” cried Goldfin.

Nelly swallowed the cold drops and caught her breath, for a dreadful pain shot through her from her head to her feet, while the mermaids chanted some strange words and waved their hands over her. It was gone in an instant, and she felt like a cork floating on the water. She wondered, till glancing down she saw that her little white legs were changed to a fish's tail of many colors, which gently steered her along as the waves rippled against her breast.

“Now I am a mermaid,” she cried, and looked into the pool to see if her eyes were green, her face pale, and her hair like curly brown sea-weed.

No; she had her child's face still, with rosy cheeks, blue eyes, and yellow curls. She was not disappointed, however, for she thought it a prettier face than the moony ones of her new playmates; so she laughed and said gayly, —

“Now you will play with me and love me, won't you?”

“What is love?” asked Silver-tail, staring at her.

“Why, when people love they put their arms round one another and kiss, and feel happy in their hearts,” answered Nelly, trying to explain the beautiful word.

“How do you kiss?” asked Goldfin, curiously.

Nelly put an arm round the neck of each, and softly kissed them on their cold wet lips.

“Don't you like it? Is it sweet?” she asked.

“I feel that you are warmer than I, but I think oysters taste better,” said one; and the other added, —

“Mermaids have no hearts, so that does not make us happier.”

“No hearts?” cried Nelly, in dismay. “Can't you love? Don't you know about souls and being good, and all that?”

“No,” laughed the mermaids, shaking their heads till the drops flew about like pearls. “We have no souls, and don't trouble about

being good. We sing and swim and eat and sleep; is not that enough to make us happy?"

"Dear me, how queer they are!" thought Nelly, half afraid, yet very anxious to go with them and see more of this curious sea-life of which they had spoken. "Don't you care about me at all, and don't you want me to stay with you a little while?" she asked, wondering how she should get on with creatures who could not love her.

"Oh yes, we like you as a new playmate, and are glad you came to see us. You shall have our bracelets to wear, and we will show you all kinds of pretty things down below, if you are not afraid to come," answered the mermaids, dressing her in their garlands and necklaces, and smiling at her so sweetly that she was ready to follow as they swam away with her far out on the great billows that tossed them to and fro but could not drown or harm them now.

Nelly enjoyed it very much, and wondered why the fishermen in their boats did not try to catch them, till she learned that mermaids were invisible and were never caught. This made her

feel very safe, and after a fine game of play she let her friends take her by the hand and sink down to the new world below. She expected to find it very gay and splendid, with sea-coral trees growing everywhere, palaces of pearl, and the ground covered with jewels; but it was dim and quiet. Great weeds fanned to and fro as the water stirred them; shells lay about on the sand, and queer creatures crawled or swam everywhere.

The green sea-water was the sky, and ships cast their shadows like clouds over the twilight world below. Several gray-bearded old mermen sat meditating in nooks among the rocks, and a few mermaids lay asleep in the great oyster-shells that opened to receive them and their beds of sea-weed. A soft murmur was in the air like the sound one hears in shells, and nowhere did Nelly see any toys or food or fun of any sort.

“Is this the way you live?” she asked, trying not to show how disappointed she was.

“Is n’t it lovely?” answered Goldfin. “This is my bed, and you shall have the shell between Silver-tail and me. See! it is lined with mother-

of-pearl, and has a soft cushion of our best seaweeds to lie on."

"Are you hungry?" asked Silver-tail. "Come and have some shrimps for dinner,— I know a fine place for them,— or oysters if you like them better."

Nelly was ready to eat anything, the sea air had given her such a fine appetite; so they swam away to gather the pretty pink shrimps in scallop shells, as little girls gather strawberries in baskets; then they sat down to eat them, and Nelly longed for bread and butter, but dared not say so. She was so surprised at all she saw, that this queer, cold lunch was soon forgotten in the wonderful tales the mermaids told her, as they cracked snails and ate them like nuts, or pulled the green sea-apples tasting like pickled limes from the vines that climbed up the rocks.

"You don't seem to have a very large family, or have the others gone to a party somewhere?" asked Nelly, rather tired of the quiet.

"No; there never are many of us. A new brood will be out soon, and then there will be some little mer-babies to play with. We will

show you the Wonder-tree, if you are done eating, and tell you all about it," answered Silver-tail, floating away with a wave of the hand.

Nelly and Goldfin followed to a lonely place, where a tall plant grew up from the sand till its branches reached the air above and spread out like floating weeds covered with little pods like those we often snap under our feet as they lie dry upon the beach.

"Only a few of these will bloom; for there never are many mermaids in the sea, you know. It takes long for the tree to reach the light, and it cannot blossom unless the full moon shines on it at midnight; then these buds open, and the water-babies swim away to grow up like us," said Silver-tail.

"Without any nurses to take care of them, or mothers to pet them?" asked Nelly, thinking of the pretty baby at home with whom she was so fond of playing.

"They take care of themselves, and when there are too many in one place the old mer-men send away some to another ocean; so we get on quietly, and there is room for all," said Goldfin, contentedly.

“And when you die, what happens?” asked Nelly, much interested in these queer creatures.

“Oh, we grow older and grayer and sit still in a corner till we turn to stone and help make these rocks. I’ve been told by Barnacle, the old one yonder, that people sometimes find marks of our hands or heads or fins in the stone, and are very much puzzled to know what kind of fish or animal made the prints; that is one of our jokes;” and both the mermaids laughed as if they enjoyed bewildering the wits of the people who were so much wiser than they.

“Well, I think it is much nicer to be buried under grass and flowers when our souls have flown away to heaven,” said Nelly, beginning to be glad she was not a “truly” mermaid.

“What is heaven?” asked Silver-tail, stupidly.

“You would not understand if I tried to tell you. I can only say it is a lovely place where we go when we die, and the angels don’t puzzle over us at all, but love us and are glad to see us come,” said Nelly, soberly.

Both little maids stared at her with their green eyes as if they wanted to understand, but

gave it up, and with a whisk of their shining tails darted away, calling to her, —

“Come and play with the crabs; it’s great fun.”

Nelly was rather afraid of crabs, they nipped her toes so when she went among them; but having no feet now, she felt braver, and was soon having a gay time chasing them over the rocks, and laughing to see them go scrambling sidewise into their holes. The green lobsters amused her very much by the queer way they hitched along, with their great claws ready to grasp and hold whatever they wanted. It was funny to see them wipe their bulging eyes with their feelers and roll them about on all sides. The hermit crabs in their shells were curious, and the great snails popping out their horns; the sea-spiders were very ugly, and she shook with fear when the horrible Octopus went by, with his eight long arms waving about like snakes and his hooked beak snapping.

“Show me something pretty,” she begged; “I don’t like these ugly things. Haven’t you any flowers or birds or animals here to play with?”

“ Oh yes, here are our sea anemones, yellow, red, and white, all blooming in their beds; and these lovely plants of every color which you call weeds. Then there are the coral trees, far away, which we will show you some day, and the sponges on the rocks, and many other curious things,” answered Goldfin, leading Nelly up and down to see the only flowers they had. Then Silver-tail said, —

“ She will like the nautilus boats and the flying fish, and a ride on the dolphins and whales. Come and let her see that we have birds and animals as well as she.”

Up they went; and when Nelly saw the lovely red and blue creatures like a fleet of fairy boats floating over the waves, she clapped her hands and cried, —

“ We have nothing so beautiful on the land! How delicate and fair they are! Won't the wind tear them to pieces and the storms wreck them?”

“ Watch and see!” answered the mermaids, well pleased at her delight; and as a gust blew by every silken sail was furled, the lovely colors vanished, and the fairy boats sank out of sight safely to the bottom of the sea.

“Our sailors can’t do that,” said Nelly; “and when our ships go down they never come up again.”

Just then some fish flew over their heads and splashed down again, while the gulls snapped at them in vain.

“Those are our birds, and here are our horses. People call them porpoises, but we call them dolphins, and have many a fine gallop on their backs,” said Goldfin, as a school of great creatures came gambolling by.

Up sprang the mermaids, and went swiftly dashing through the water with high leaps now and then, as their sea-horses reared and plunged, tossing their tails and waving their fins as if they enjoyed the frolic. Nelly did, and wished to ride longer; but a whale appeared, and her playmates went to climb on his back and hear the news from the North Sea. It was like a moving island, and they sat under the fountain as he spouted water and rolled about lazily basking in the sun after his cold voyage.

“Don’t we have good times?” asked Silver-tail, when they slid down the slippery sides of the monster and climbed up again as if coasting.

“Splendid! I like to be a mermaid and have no lessons to study, no work to sew, no nurse to scold me, and no mamma to forbid my swimming as much as I choose,” said naughty Nelly; but as she spoke and looked toward the land now far away, a little pain went through her heart to remind her that she was not a real mermaid, and still had a conscience, though she would not listen to it.

They played all the afternoon, had an oyster supper, and went early to bed to get a good nap before midnight, because the moon was full and they hoped the Wonder-tree would bloom before morning.

Nelly liked the quiet now; and the soft song of the sea lulled her to sleep, to dream of sailing in a nautilus boat till a dreadful cuttle-fish came after her and she woke in a fright, wondering to find herself lying on a bed of wet weeds in a great shell.

“Come away; it is time, and a lovely night,” called the mermaids, and with several new friends they all hurried up to watch the buds open when the moon kissed them.

The sea shone like silver; the stars seemed to

float there as well as in the sky, and the wind blew off the shore bringing the sweet smell of hay-fields and gardens. All the sea people sang as they lay rocking on the quiet waves, and Nelly felt as if this were the strangest, loveliest dream she had ever dreamed.

By and by the moon shone full upon the Wonder-tree, and one by one out popped the water-babies, looking like polliwogs, only they had little faces and arms instead of fins. Lively mites they were, swimming away at once in a shoal like minnows, while the older mermaids welcomed them and gave them pretty names as the tiny things came to peep at them and dart between the hands that tried to grasp them. Till dawn they kept in the moonlight, growing fast as they learned to use their little tails and talk in small, sweet voices; but when day came they all sank down to the bottom of the sea, and went to sleep in the shell cradles made ready for them. That was all the care they needed, and after that they had no nursing, but did what they liked, and let the older ones play with them like dolls.

Nelly had several pets, and tried to make

them love and mind her; but the queer little creatures laughed in her face when she talked to them, darted away when she wanted to kiss them, and stood on their heads and wagged their bits of tails when she told them to be good. So she let them alone, and amused herself as well as she could with other things; but soon she grew very tired of this strange, idle life, and began to long for some of the dear old plays and people and places she used to like so much.

Every one was kind to her; but nobody seemed to love her, to care when she was good, or wish to make her better when she was selfish or angry. She felt hungry for something all the time, and often sad, though she hardly knew why. She dreamed about her mother, and sometimes woke up feeling for baby, who used to creep into her bed and kiss her eyes open in the morning. But now it was only a water-baby, who would squirm away like a little eel and leave her to think about home and wonder if they missed her there.

“I can't go back, so I must forget,” she said, and tried to do it; but it was very hard, and she

half wished she was a real mermaid with no heart at all.

“Show me something new; I’m tired of all these plays and sights and toys,” she said one day, as she and her two playmates sat stringing little silver and rosy shells for necklaces.

“We are never tired,” said Goldfin.

“You have n’t any minds, and don’t think much or care to know things. I do, and I want to learn a little or make some one happy if I can,” said Nelly, soberly, as she looked about the curious world she lived in and saw what a dim, cold, quiet place it was, with the old mermen turning to stone in their nooks, the lazy mermaids rocking in their shells or combing their hair, and the young ones playing like so many stupid little fishes in the sun.

“We can’t go to the South Sea yet, and we have nothing more to show you unless a great storm comes up,” said Silver-tail.

“Perhaps she would like a wreck; there is a new one not far off,” proposed Goldfin. “A big ship went over a small one, and it sank very soon. One of Mother Carey’s chickens told me about it this morning, and I thought we

might go and see it before it is all spoiled. Things that men make never last very long in our sea."

"Yes, let us go; I long to see and touch something my people made. Your world is wonderful, but I begin to think my own is the best, for me at least," said Nelly, as they left their pearls and swam away to the wreck, which lay down among the rocks, fast going to pieces. "Where are the people?" she asked, as they were about to float in at the broken windows and doors. She was very much afraid that she might see some poor drowned creature, and it would trouble *her*, though the mermaids might not care.

"Little Chick said they were all saved. It was a fruit-ship, and there were only a few passengers. One lady and child and some men went away in the boats to the shore, but left everything else behind."

"I'm so glad!" cried Nelly, feeling her heart warm in her breast at the good news about the mother and little child.

The ship had been loaded with oranges, and the sand was covered with boxes of them

broken open, and letting the fruit float to the top of the water. Much was spoiled, but some was still good, and Nelly told the mermaids to taste and see if oranges were not better than salt sea-apples. They did not like them, but played ball with the golden things till Nelly proposed that they should toss some on the shore for the fishermen's children. That suited them; and soon the beach was covered with oranges, and the poor little people were running and screaming with delight to pick up this splendid feast.

“I wish there were some pretty things to give them; but there are only the sailors' bags of clothes all wet, and those are not nice,” said Nelly, enjoying this game very much; for she was homesick and longed to hear human voices and see faces like her own. She wanted to do something for some one, and be loved a little. So she peeped all about the ship, and at last, in one cabin better than the others, she found the toys and clothes of the little child and its mother. She was very glad of that, and, knowing how children love their own things and cry when they are lost, she gathered up all that were not spoiled,

and made Goldfin and Silver-tail help her carry them to the shore, where people had gathered to save whatever came from the wreck.

There was great rejoicing when these small treasures came ashore, and they were carried to the house where the lady and the child were. This pleased Nelly very much, and even the lazy mermaids found the new game pleasant; so they went on floating things to the beach, even the heavy bags with the poor sailors' clothes, wet books, and boxes, which otherwise would have been lost. No one could see Goldfin and Silver-tail, but now and then some child would cry out, when Nelly lingered to look and listen through the foam and spray, —

“Oh, I saw a face over there, — a dear little face, very pretty but sad, and a hand waved at me! Could it be a mermaid?”

Then some older person would say, —

“Nonsense, child! there are no mermaids. It is only the reflection of your own face in the water. Come away, or the tide will catch you.”

If Nelly had not been partly human this could not have happened; and though no one believed

in her, she took comfort in the thought that she was not all a fish, and loved to linger where she could see the children at play long after Goldfin and Silver-tail had grown tired of them and gone back to their own affairs.

The longer she stayed the more sad she grew; for the land seemed pleasanter now than the sea, — the green, dry, warm land, with the flowers and trees, birds and lambs, and dear people to love and care for her. Even school looked like a happy place; and when she thought of her own home, where mother and Baby were, her heart was so full of longing for them that her tears dropped into the sea, and she held out her arms, crying sadly, —

“ Oh, mamma, dear mamma, forgive me, love me, and help me to come back to you ! ”

No one answered, no one came; and poor Nelly sank sobbing down to cry herself to sleep in her pearl-lined bed, with no good-night kiss to comfort her.

Every day she longed more and more to go home, and grew more and more tired of the sea and all in it. The mermaids could not amuse her nor understand her sorrow; so she went to

wise old Barnacle and asked him what she should do to be a child again.

“No one but the King of the gulls can change you, my Periwinkle,” said the merman, kindly. “You must wait and watch for him patiently. He is not seen very often; so it may be years before he comes again. Meantime be happy with us, and don’t fret for that very dry land in which we see no beauty.”

This comforted Nelly a good deal, and she spent half her time floating on the waves, calling the gulls, feeding them, and making them her friends, so that they might be sure to tell her when the King came. Other kind things she did, trying to be good; for *she* knew, though even the wise old merman did not, that naughty people *cannot* be happy. She gathered all the curious shells she could find, and strewed them on the beach for the children playing there. She popped the cross crabs and lobsters into the nets let down for them, and helped the fishermen to many a good load for market. She sat and sang among the rocks where lonely people could hear the faint sweet music and enjoy it. She watched over the little people when they

went bathing, and loved to catch and kiss the rosy babies as they splashed about, and send quiet ripples to refresh the sick ones when their nurses dipped them in the wholesome sea.

She was good to all the wounded fishes who got hurt by the many enemies that haunt the great ocean, and tried to teach the cruel sharks, the ugly octopus, and the lazy snails to be kinder and more industrious. They did not mind her; but it kept her busy, and made her heart tender to try to help all who came near her, and every night when she went to her lonely bed she said hopefully, —

“Perhaps to-morrow the King will come and let me go home. When I do, mamma must find a better Nelly than the naughty, wilful one who ran away.”

She supposed her mother would think her drowned when the clothes were found on the rock, and often mourned over the sorrow she had given those at home. But she cheered herself with imagining the joy her wonderful return would bring, and could hardly wait for that happy time.

The mermaids were soon going far away to

the South Sea for the winter, and begged her to come with them, telling how lovely everything was there, — all about the pearl-divers, the Spice Islands, the coral trees, and the many wonders of that summer world. But Nelly no longer cared for any place but the pretty cottage on the cliff that overlooked the sea, and she was not tempted by any of the fine tales they told.

“No; I'd rather live here all alone where I can see my own people and home, even if I wait years and years before the King comes. I know now what a silly child I was to leave everything that I was made to use and enjoy, and try to be a creature without any soul. I don't care if my heart does ache; I'd rather be as I am than like you, without any love in you or any wish to be good and wise and happy as we are.”

Goldfin and Silver-tail thought her very ungrateful after she said that, and left her alone. But she did not care; for Father Barnacle was to stay and “stone up,” as they called their queer way of dying. So when all had gone she was very kind to the old merman, who never stirred out of his nook, but sat meditating on

the hundred years of his life and wondering what would become of the rock he was slowly to grow a part of.

Nelly did not want him to die yet; so she brought him nice things to eat, sang to him, and asked so many questions that he was forced to keep awake and answer them. Oh, such wonderful stories as he told her! Such interesting histories of sea flowers, fishes, and monsters, such wise lessons in tides and stars, and the mysteries of the great ocean! Nelly would sit on a conch shell and listen for hours, never tired of these new fairy tales.

But she did not forget to watch for the Great Gull, and every day floated near the shore, beckoning every white-winged bird that flew by and asking for tidings of the King. At last he came! Nelly was lying on the waves idly singing to herself, with one hand held up for her pet sandpiper to light upon, when, instead of little Peep, a great silvery bird perched there, and looking up she saw the fiery eye, the red ring about the neck, the crest on the head, and with a joyful splash she cried out, —

“ He ’s come! he ’s come! Oh, dear King,

give me another wish, a better wish, and let me be a little girl again."

"Done!" said the Great Gull, waving his wings over her. "Will you be contented now?"

"I will! I will!" answered Nelly, eagerly.

"Never wilful and disobedient?"

"Never, never!"

"Sure you won't want to be a bird, a fish, or a mermaid again?"

"Yes, yes; for nothing is so lovely as to be a child."

"Good!" and suddenly clutching her in his strong claws the gull flew high up in the air as if he were going to take her to his nest and eat her like a fish.

Poor Nelly was sadly frightened; but before she could catch her breath to ask what was to happen, the King said, in a loud voice, "Remember!" and let her drop.

She expected to be dashed on the rocks below, and thought that was to be her punishment, perhaps; but to her great surprise she floated down like a feather, and found herself lying on the sand in her own shape and the very clothes

she wore when she went away. She lay a moment enjoying the comfort of being warm and dry, and feeling the dear earth under her.

“Why, darling, how long you have been asleep!” said a voice close by; and starting up Nelly saw her mother stooping over her, while Baby was creeping nearer to laugh and crow as he peeped into her face to see if she was awake.

“Oh, mamma, dear mamma, I am so glad to have you again! I was very naughty, but I’ve learned a lesson, and I’m going to be your good child now,” cried Nelly, holding her mother tight with many kisses.

“Bless the dear! she has been dreaming, and wakes up in a lovely mood,” said mamma, laughing.

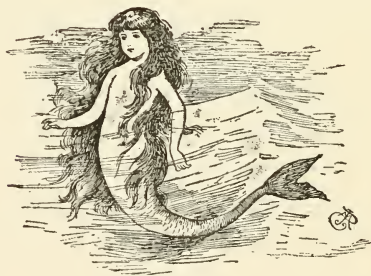
“Did n’t you think I was drowned? How long have I been away?” asked Nelly, looking about her as if bewildered.

“About an hour. I was not troubled, for I knew you would not break your promise, dear.”

“Then it *was* a dream, and I have n’t been a mermaid?” said Nelly.

“I hope not; for I like my little girl just as she is. Tell me the dream while I smooth away these tangles before we go home.”

So, sitting on her mother's knee, while Baby dug holes in the sand, Nelly told her adventures as well as she could; for now it all seemed dim and far away, and nothing remained clear in her mind but the thought that it was indeed a lovely and a happy thing to be a little child with a heart to feel, a mother to love, and a home to live in till we go to find that other one, fairer than any on the earth or in the sea.





Bud admired them very much, and felt very glad and proud when they lighted all over her, till she looked like one great butterfly with wings of every color. — PAGE 215.

X.

LITTLE BUD.

“THE naughty cuckoo has been here while we were gone, and left this great blue egg among our little white ones,” said the linnnet to her mate as they came back from their breakfast one day and found the nest full.

“It is not a cuckoo’s egg, my dear,” answered the father bird, shaking his head, “some fairy must have put it here, and we must take care of it or they may be angry and do harm to our little ones by and by. Sit carefully on it, and see what will follow.”

So Mamma Linnet sat patiently on the five eggs for many days more, and then out came her four small children and began to chirp for food. But the big blue egg still lay there, and no sound of a little bill pecking inside was heard.

“Shall we throw it out of the nest and make room for our babies?” asked the mother, finding her nursery very crowded.

“Not yet,” said the careful papa, standing on one leg to rest, being very tired of bringing worms for his family. “Wait two more days, and then if the egg does not break, we will push it out.”

He was a wise bird, and they were always glad that they waited; for on the seventh day the blue egg suddenly flew open, and there lay the smallest, prettiest little girl ever seen,—three inches long, but rosy, gay, and lively as she popped up her curly head and looked about

her as if much surprised to find herself in a nest swinging on the branch of a tree.

“Who are you?” asked the father linnet, while all the young ones stared at her with their big eyes, and opened their beaks as if to eat her up.

“I’m little Bud,” answered the tiny creature, smiling at them so sweetly it was impossible to help loving her at once.

“Where do you come from?” said the mother.

“I don’t know.”

“Are you a fairy?”

“No; for I have no wand.”

“A new kind of bird?”

“I have no feathers or wings.”

“A human child?”

“I think not; for I have no parents.”

“Bless the dear! what can she be? and what shall we do with her?” cried both the birds, much amazed at this new child of theirs.

Bud did not seem to be troubled at all, but lay rocking in her blue cradle and laughing at the young linnets who peeped curiously over the edge of it.

"She must have something to eat," said the papa, flying off.

"And some clothes," added the mamma, bustling about.

But when a nice, fat worm was brought, Bud covered her face and cried with a shiver, —

"No, no! I cannot eat that ugly thing."

"Get a strawberry," said the mamma; and she tried to wrap the largest, softest feather that lined her nest round the naked little maid.

But Bud kicked her small legs out of it at once, and stood up, saying with a laugh, —

"I'm not a bird; I cannot wear feathers. Give me a pretty green leaf for a gown, and let me look about this big world where I find myself all at once."

So the linnet pulled a leaf and pecked two holes for Bud's arms, and put it on like a pinafore; for she never had dressed a baby and did not know how, her own children being born with down coats which soon changed to gray feathers. Bud looked very pretty in her green dress as she sat on the edge of the nest staring about with her blue eyes and clapping her hands when the papa came flying home with a

sweet wild berry in his bill for her breakfast. She ate it like an apple, and drank a drop of dew that had fallen in the night; then she began to sing so sweetly that all the neighbors came to see what sort of bird Dame Linnet had hatched.

Such a twittering and fluttering as went on while they talked the matter over, asked many questions, and admired the pretty little creature who only knew her name and nothing more!

“Shall you keep her?” asked the robin, as he puffed out his red waistcoat and looked very wise.

“We dare not send her away,” said the linnets.

“She will be a great deal of care,” said the wren.

“You never can teach her to fly, and what will you do when your own children are gone?” asked the wood dove, who was very tender-hearted.

“You will have to make a new frock every day, and that will be so much work,” said the yellow-bird, who was very proud of her own gay gown and black velvet hood.

“I think some bad elf put her here to bring you trouble. I'd push her out of the nest and let her take care of herself,” advised the woodpecker, wondering if the plump child would be as good to eat as the worms he hammered out of the trees.

“No, no!” cried the brown thrush; “she is too pretty to bring harm. Keep her till you see what she can do, and perhaps she may be a good sprite after all.”

“She sings almost as well as I do, and I shall like to add her songs to the many I already know,” said the blackbird, who had lovely concerts in the meadow all by himself.

“Yes, we will wait a little; and if we cannot decide, by and by we will ask your advice, neighbors,” said the linnets, beginning to feel rather proud of the curious stranger, since her coming made such a stir in the wood.

The birds flew away; and Bud settled down as one of the family, making herself so pleasant that all loved her and willingly crowded together to make room for her in the nest. The mother brooded over her at night, and made her fresh gowns every day when the old ones

withered up; the father brought her dew to wash in and to drink, and flew far and wide to find ripe berries for her to eat; while the young birds were never tired of hearing her sing, watching her dance on the edge of the nest, or learning the pretty plays she taught them. Every one was very kind and waited patiently to see what would come. But when at last the little birds flew away, the parents wanted to go with them, and did not like to leave Bud all alone.

“I’m not afraid,” she said, “for now I am strong enough to take care of myself. All the birds know me, and I shall not be lonely. Carry me down to the grass below, and let me run about and find my own food and clothes as your children do. I won’t forget you, but you need not trouble about me any more.”

So Papa Linnet took her on his back, as often before, and flew down to the softest place below, and there they left her with a tender good-by; for they had to watch over their young ones, who were trying their wings and wandering far and wide.

“I shall be taken care of as the flowers are,”

said Bud, when she found herself sitting on a pebble beside the path that went through the pleasant wood, full of happy little creatures busy with their work or play.

“I wish I were a bird, then I could fly about and see the world; or a fairy, then I could do splendid things; or even a flower for some one to love and carry away. I wonder what I was made for, and what I can do,—such a little thing in this great world! I’m sure I don’t know; but I can be happy and kind, and try to help all I see, then I shall make friends and not feel lonely very long.”

As she said this, brave Bud looked about her to see whom she could help first, and spied an ant tugging a large white bundle along. It looked as if he were taking clothes to some fairy washerwoman; but the bundle was an egg, and the ant-nurse was bringing it up from the nest to lie awhile in the warm sun to grow.

He told Bud all about it when she offered to help, and very gladly let her watch this egg while he and the other nurses went down for many more. Soon they lay all about in the quiet corner where the sun shone on them, and

Bud went to and fro, turning them, and keeping guard over them lest some hungry bird should snap them up.

“Now I’m useful,” she said, quite happy in her new work, though she was only a nursery-maid, and had no wages but the thanks of the busy ants. By and by the eggs were carried down, and she was free to go on her travels again. The grass was like a forest to her, the mounds of moss were high hills, a little brook a great river, and a patch of sand a desert to be crossed.

“First, I will dress myself nicely,” said Bud; and coming to a wild rosebush she gathered up several of the fallen leaves, and tried to fasten them together with the thorns. But her little hands could not manage the pretty pink skirt, and the thorns pricked her tender flesh as she folded the leaves over her bosom; so she was about to give up in despair and put on the faded green one again, when a wood-spider, who sat in his hole near by, said kindly, —

“Come here, little lady! I can spin and weave, and I’ll sew your dress for you with pleasure. I saw you helping my neighbors the ants; so I will help you.”

Bud was very glad of this kind offer, and watched the spider at his work as he sewed the pink leaves together with his silver thread as neatly as a seamstress, put a line of embroidery all round the hem, and twisted a silken cord to tie it at the waist."

"Oh, how pretty you are!" cried the spider when the dress was on. "You must have a veil to keep the sun out of your eyes. Here is my last web;" and he threw the shining gauze over her head, making her look like a little bride under the silvery veil.

Bud thanked him very much, and went happily on till she came to a party of columbines dancing in the wind. They thought she was the spirit of a rose come to visit them, and lowered their scarlet horns to offer her the honey in the tower ends.

She was just wondering where she should find some dinner, and here was a delicious feast all ready for her, thanks to the pretty dress which made the columbines think her a flower. She threw up her veil and told them her story, which they thought very interesting and rather sad.

"Stay and live with us, little darling!" they

cried. "You are too delicate to go about all alone. The wind will blow you away, some foot will crush you, or some cruel wasp kill you with its sting. Live here, and we will be your friends, and feed and care for you."

"You are very kind, and your home is very pleasant; but I must go on. I feel sure that I have something to do, that somewhere I shall find my place, and sometime have a pair of wings, and be either a bird or a fairy," answered Bud, as she rested by the rock round which the flowers grew.

"Here comes our good friend Honey-bag, the bee. He is very wise; perhaps he can tell you where you should go and what you are," said the columbines, nodding joyfully as the brown velvet bee came buzzing along, for he was their postman and brought the daily news.

Eagerly they told him all about their little guest, and asked him if he had heard anything of a featherless bird, a strayed elf, or a human changeling hidden in a blue egg.

The bee said he once heard a humming-bird tell about some little creatures who were neither children nor fairies, because they were made out

of the fancies in people's heads. These poor mites never could be real boys and girls; but if they tried very hard, and were very good, wings would grow and they would be elves at last.

"I will, I will!" cried Bud. "I know I am one of those creatures, and I want to be a fairy and find my home by and by. How shall I do it?"

"I think you have begun very well; for I've heard of you from several friends as I came through the wood, and all say good words of you. Go on, and I am sure you will find your wings at last. See! I will do my part, and give you something to eat as you travel along."

As the kind bee spoke he began to mix the yellow pollen and honey he had gathered, and soon handed Bud a nice little loaf of bee-bread to carry with her. She folded it up in white violet leaves, like a sweet-scented napkin, and with a horn of honey from the columbines set out again with many thanks and full of hope and courage.

Presently a cloud of gay butterflies came flocking round her, crying out, —

"Here's a rose! I smell honey! Come and

taste! No, it is an elf! Dance with us, little dear!"

Bud admired them very much, and felt very glad and proud when they lighted all over her, till she looked like one great butterfly with wings of every color.

"I cannot play with you because I am not an elf; but if you will carry me on my way toward Fairy-land I will give you my honey and my bread, for I go very slowly and want to get along as quickly as I can," said Bud, thinking that these pretty insects might help her.

The butterflies were idle things and hated to work, but they wanted the dainty loaf and the flower sweets; so they said they would try to carry Bud and save her tired little feet. They held tightly to her belt, her hair, her frock, and all flew up at once, lifting her a little way above the ground and carrying her along in a cloud of blue and yellow, red and brown wings fluttering as they went. It was hard work, and soon the smaller ones let go; so Bud began to fall, and they were forced to lay her down on the grass while they rested and ate the bee-bread every crumb.

"Take me a little farther, and then you shall have the honey," said wise Bud, who was anxious to get on, and saw that the lazy flies would leave her as soon as her provisions were gone.

"Up again!" cried the great black and golden one; and away they went, all tugging stoutly. But though the tiny maid was as light as a feather, they had little strength in either legs or wings, and soon dropped her bump in the dusty path below.

"Thanks! Here's the horn; now let me rest and get over my fall," said Bud, making up her mind that her own feet were safest, after all.

The butterflies flew away, and the small traveller sat up to see where she was. A dismal groaning caught her ear; and close by she saw a rusty old beetle feebly trying to dig a hole in the sand.

"What is the matter?" asked Bud.

"It is time to die, and I want to bury myself; but I'm so weak I'm afraid I shall not get my grave ready in time, and then I shall be eaten up by some bird, or crushed by some giant's foot," answered the beetle, kicking and shovelling away as hard as he could.

“But if you were dead you would not know it,” said Bud.

“Stupid child! if I’m killed in that way I cannot live again; but if I bury myself and lie asleep till spring, I come up a grub or a young beetle, I don’t know which, but I am sure of some change. So I want a good grave to rest in; for dying is only a sleep before we wake up in another shape.”

“I’m glad of that!” cried Bud. “I’ll help you dig, and I’ll cover you nicely, and hope you will be some pretty insect by and by.”

So she threw off her veil, and worked busily with a little wooden shovel till a deep grave was made. The old beetle tumbled in with a gruff “Thank you, child,” and died quite comfortably, with the warm sand over him. Bud piled little stones above the place, and left him to his long sleep, happy to be able to help, and full of wonder as to whether she too would have to die before her change came.

The sun was going down now; for the butterfly party and the beetle’s funeral had taken a long time, and twilight was coming on.

"I must find a place to sleep," said Bud, rather anxiously; for this was her first night alone, and she began to miss Mother Linnet's warm wings brooding over her.

But she kept up her courage and trudged on till she was so tired she was forced to stop and rest on a bank where a glow-worm had just lighted its little lamp.

"Can I stay here under this big leaf?" she asked, glad to see the friendly light and bathe her tired feet in the dewy grass.

"You cannot go much farther, for the marsh is close by, and I see you have no wings, so you never could get on," answered the worm, turning his green lamp full upon the weary little wanderer.

Bud told her story, and was just going to ask if there was anything to eat, for she was sadly hungry, when some very sweet voices called down to her from a tall bush over her head, —

"Come to us, dear! We are the marsh-honeysuckles, cousins of the columbines you met to-day. Here is supper, with a bed, and a warm welcome for the good little creature Honey-bag the bee told us about."

Bud put up her arms to a great cluster of white flowers bending down to her, and in a moment lay in a delicious place, full of sweetest fragrance, while the honeysuckles fed and petted and rocked her to sleep before she could half thank them for their kindness.

There was time for a good nap and a lovely dream before a harsh voice waked her up, and she heard a bat talking as it hung near by, with its leathery wings over its eyes to shut out the light of the glow-worm still strolling about on the bank.

“Yes, the poor little boy wandered into the bog and was nearly drowned,” said the bat. “It was that naughty Willy Wisp playing tricks again, and leading people out of the right path to splash into the mud. I’ve scolded him many a time, but he *will* do it; for he loves to make the woodmen and the children think he is the light in their cottage windows till they fall into the marsh, and then he hides and leaves them to get out as they can.”

“What a wicked fellow!” cried Bud, rubbing her eyes and sitting up to listen.

“Of course he would n’t mind you, for he

knows you hate light, and he likes to tease you by flashing his lantern in your eyes," said the glow-worm.

"Yes, I do hate light of all kinds, and wish it were always night," scolded the bat.

"I don't! I love sunshine and stars and fire-flies and glow-worms and all the bright things; so perhaps if *I* went and talked to Willy Wisp he would stop playing these naughty pranks," said Bud, much interested, and feeling that this would be a very good work to do for the dear children.

"You could n't keep him out of mischief unless you told stories all night. He loves tales dearly, but won't stay still and listen unless they are always new and *very* charming," said the bat, peeping out with one eye to see who the stranger might be.

"I know hundreds! for I was born of a fancy, and my head is full of lovely ones, and I sing such merry songs all the birds used to listen to me for hours. If I could only reach this Willy Wisp I think I could amuse him till the people got safely home," said Bud.

"Come and try; I'll carry you," said the bat,

shutting his wings and looking like a black mouse as he crept nearer for Bud to mount.

“No, no; stay with us, and don’t go to that dismal marsh full of ugly things and bad air,” cried the honeysuckles, trying to hold her fast with soft, sticky hands.

But Bud was eager to do all the good she might, and bravely mounted her new horse, singing as she flew away,—

“On the bat’s back I do fly
After summer, merrily.”

“She won’t do it,” said the glow-worm, putting out his lamp as he went to bed.

“Alas, no! Poor little thing! she will die over there, and never be a fairy,” sighed the flowers, looking like sad white ghosts in the dim light.

A cloud of fireflies danced over the marsh, where frogs croaked, mosquitoes hummed, and tall yellow lilies rang their freckled bells. The air was damp and hot; a white mist rose from the water that glimmered between the forests of reeds and the islands of bog moss, and sleek muskrats and bright-eyed snakes glided about,

while wild ducks slept with their heads under their wings in quiet corners.

A strange, shadowy place, and Bud's heart died within her as she thought of staying here alone. But she did want to see if she could make the bad Willy behave better and not lead poor people into danger; so she held fast while the bat skimmed to and fro looking for the naughty fellow. Soon he came dancing toward them, — a dark little body with a big head like a round lantern, all shining with the light inside.

“What have you brought me, old Leather-wing? — a pretty bride to cheer up the marsh, or an elf to dance at my ball to-night?” he said, looking at Bud with delight as she sat on the dusky bat, with her pink dress and silvery veil glimmering in the brightness, that now shone over her like moonlight.

“No; it is a famous story-teller, come to amuse you when you are tired of whisking about and doing mischief. Be very polite or I will take her away again,” answered the bat, setting Bud down on a small green island among the bulrushes and tall marsh moss.

“Let us hear one. Stop croaking, Speckle-back, and do you ladies quit dancing while I listen. Go along, Leather-wing; she shall stay till to-morrow and see what she can do,” said Willy Wisp, seating himself near Bud, while the frogs grew still and the fireflies settled on the leaves like little lamps, making the island as light as day.

“It is late now; so when you hear the clock strike twelve you can stop and go to sleep, for the people will all be safe at home and Willy can do no harm. I’ll come again soon. Good-night.”

And away skimmed the bat, glad to find the darkest part of the marsh and hunt gnats for supper.

Bud immediately began to tell the story of “The Merry Cockchafer,” and it proved so very interesting that soon a circle of frogs surrounded the island, laughing with their great mouths and winking their bright eyes as they listened. The wild ducks woke up and came to hear also; a water-snake glided nearer, with his neighbor the muskrat; while the fireflies grew so thick on the reeds and moss that everything sparkled,

and Willy Wisp nodded his bright head joyfully as he sat like a king with his court about him.

Just in the most exciting place, when the Cockchafer and the Stag-beetle were going to fight a duel about the lovely white Moth, the clock struck twelve, and Bud, who was very tired, stopped short, saying, —

“I will finish to-morrow at twilight. The last part is the best, for the Lady-bug and the wicked Grasshopper do terrible things in it.”

They all begged eagerly for the end, but Bud was hoarse and must go to sleep; so every one went away to talk about this new and charming creature who had come to make the long nights pleasant. Willy Wisp went zigzagging to and fro, trying to imagine what would come next, and Bud laid her head on a bulrush pillow to dream of stars till morning.

She was rather troubled, when daylight came, to find herself a prisoner; for deep water was all round her island, and there was no way of escaping. She asked a pretty white duck to take her to a larger place, for here there was nothing to eat but the soft green buds of the

sweet flag and the little sour balls of the wild-cranberry vines.

"I'm not a steamer, and I don't carry passengers," answered the duck, paddling away; for he wanted Bud to stay and tell more tales.

So there she had to live for many days, watching the long-legged herons as they stalked about fishing in the pools, seeing how the rats built their curious houses, the frogs leaped and dived, the snakes glided to and fro, and the ducklings ate flies all day long. She talked with the yellow lilies, learned the song of the whispering reeds, and climbed up the tall stems of the bulrushes to look out over the marsh and long to be on the firm ground again. The bat forgot to come and see her, and Willy grew so fond of her stories that he would sit for hours while she told them; so no one came to harm, and Bud felt that she was really doing a good thing all alone there in the dreary bog. Every one loved her and wanted her to stay; but by and by the summer was over, the fireflies died, and Willy Wisp grew pale and lazy and fell asleep easier each night, as if he too were ready to

fade away till hot weather should make him lively and bright again.

“Now I might go if I could find any friend to help me,” said Bud, when the wild ducks said good-by and the herons stalked away.

“I will help you,” said a water-snake, popping his head up with a kinder look than one would fancy such fiery eyes could wear.

“You!” said Bud, much surprised; for she had never liked the snake very well, though she had always been kind to him.

“I am your friend if you will have me. No one cares for me, I am so ugly and have had a bad name ever since the world began; but I hope when I shed my skin I may be handsomer or change to something better, so I try to be a good snake and do what I can to make my neighbors happy.”

“Poor thing! I hope you will be a pretty green adder, and live among the flowers like one I once knew. It must be hard to be contented here, and you are very kind to want to help me,” said Bud, laying her little warm hand on the ugly head of the snake, who had crept up to bask in the sun.

That pleased Forked-tongue very much; for no one ever petted him, and his eyes shone like jewels as he coiled his slender body nearer Bud's feet, and lifted up his head to answer her.

"You want to go away and you shall. We shall all miss you sadly, but it will soon be cold and you need stay no longer; so I will ask my friend Sleek to gnaw these strong rushes till they fall and make bridges across the pools. You can go safely over them and find some warm, pretty place to live in till the summer comes again."

"That is a fine plan! Thank you, dear friend; let us do it at once while Willy is asleep and no one sees us," cried Bud.

So Sleek the muskrat came and made a road for her from one tuft of grass to another till she was safely on the land. Then she bade these ugly but kind friends good-by, and gladly ran about the pleasant field where autumn flowers were going to seed and dead leaves falling fast. She feasted on wild grapes, dried berries, and apples fallen from the trees since the harvest was carried in. Everything was getting ready for winter, and Bud was glad to make herself

a warm suit of mullein clothes, with a little hood of thistle-down. She was fitting beechnut shells on her tiny feet for shoes when a withered plant near by called out to her, —

“Are you going far, that you put on new clothes and stout boots, little stranger?”

“I must travel till I find my own country, no matter how far away it is. Can I do any errand for you?” asked Bud, kindly.

“Yes; will you carry these seeds of mine to the great meadow over there? All my friends are there, and I long to be at home again. Some one picked me last spring and dropped me here. But I did not die; I took root and bloomed here, and must always stay unless some one will take my seeds back. Then I shall come up in my own place next spring and be a happy flower again.”

“I will do it,” said Bud; “but I thought the wind took your seeds about for you.”

“Some are too heavy. Pine seeds, maple keys, thistle and dandelion down, and many others blow about; but some of us grow from our roots, and some, like me, come from seeds kept in little bags. I'm called Shepherd's-

purse, and I'm a humble weed; but I love my own people and long to see them again."

"You shall!" cried Bud; and gathering the three-cornered bags she took them carefully away to the meadow where other plants like this one were glad to hear of their lost friend and to watch over the gift she sent them.

Remembering how pleasant and comfortable it was to find various flowers blooming along the roadside like hospitable inns for tiny travellers like herself, good Bud spent several days in planting roots and seeds beside the path that led through the meadow.

"Now children, birds, butterflies, and fairies will be glad to find these pretty things blooming here, though they will never know who planted them," she said, when the last task was done.

The frost had come, and nuts were rattling down, leaves turning brown, and cold winds beginning to blow; so poor Bud looked about as she went through a wood to find some safe, warm place to sleep in, for a time at least, because she felt sure that when the snow came she would die, so small and delicate and friendless was the dear little thing. When she came to a

great oak she sat down on an acorn cup, and tried to break the hard shell of an acorn that she might nibble a bit for her dinner. She could not do it, and sat thinking sadly what would become of her, when a sweet acorn without its shell dropped into her lap, and, looking up, she saw a gray squirrel peeping at her from a branch above her head. She smiled, and thanked him, and he came down with a whisk to sit opposite and look at her with his fine tail over his head like an umbrella.

“I know you, little maid, and I’m glad you came here, for I can show you a charming house for the winter. I heard you tell a field-mouse how lonely you were, and I saw tears dropping just now as you sat here thinking you had not a friend in the world,” said Dart, as he nodded at her and kindly cracked a chestnut to follow the acorn if she needed more.

“Every one is very kind to me, but every one seems to go to sleep when autumn comes; so I felt alone and sad, and expected to die in the snow. But if I can find a cosey place to live in till spring I shall be very glad, and will do anything I can to pay for it,” answered Bud,

much comforted by her good dinner and a kind word.

“If you will help me get in my nuts and acorns and moss and leaves for winter food and bedding, I will let you use the Kobolds’ house till they come. They are jolly little fellows, and they will allow you to stay, and teach you to spin; for they spin all winter, and make lovely cloth for the elves out of silkweed and thistle-down. Here is their house. I hide it and take care of it while they are gone, and get it ready for them in the autumn, as they come with the first snow.”

While Dart spoke he had been clearing away a pile of dead leaves at the foot of the old oak, and soon Bud saw an arched doorway leading into the hollow trunk, where the roots made different chambers, and all was dry and warm and cosey as a little house. She went in and looked about, well pleased at what she saw, and very glad of such a comfortable home. She hoped the Kobolds would let her stay, and set to work at once to help Dart get ready for them; for the sky looked dark with snow, and a cold wind rustled through the wood.

In one room they stored nuts and acorns, rose and holly berries, a dried apple or two, and many pine cones to burn; for Dart showed her a little fireplace, and told her the Kobolds kept themselves very warm and jolly at their work. In another room they spread moss and dry grass for beds, and there the seven little men would sleep like dormice. The empty cocoon of a caterpillar still hung in one corner, and Bud said that should be her hammock with a curtain made of woven yellow bindweed hung before the nook. They swept the floor with fir-needle brooms, and spread a carpet of red oak leaves, which gave a very gay air to the place. Then Dart left Bud to fill a row of acorn cups with water from a spring near by, while he ran off to nibble splinters from the pitch pines to make torches for the Kobolds, who worked in the evening and needed light.

Bud was as happy as a little girl with a new baby-house, and looked like a tiny doll herself as she bustled to and fro, filling her tubs, dusting her pretty rooms, and getting ready for the seven strangers, like Snowdrop and the dwarfs in the dear old fairy tale. All was ready in two days,

and Dart had time to lay up his own stores before the snow came. Bud watched over the heaps of nuts he piled lest his sly neighbors should steal them while he ran up and down tucking them away in holes about the oak-tree. This helped him much, and he was very fond of her; and together they got up a nice surprise for the Kobolds by putting in new beds for them made of chestnut burrs, which rocked on their outside prickles like cradles, and were lined with down as soft as silk.

“That will tickle them,” said Dart; “and when they know that you thought of it, they will like you as much as I do. Now rest a bit, and be ready to welcome them, for I’m sure they will come to-day. I’ll run to the tree-top and look out for them, so you can light the fire when I give the word.”

Dart whisked away, and Bud stood in the doorway, with a warm mat of hemlock sprigs under her feet, and a garland of evergreen overhead; for she had trimmed up the arch, and stuck bits of gay holly all about to welcome the little men. Soon snow-flakes began to flutter down, and Bud rejoiced that she had a nice,

warm home to stay in, instead of freezing to death like a lost bird. Suddenly Dart called from the tree-top, "They are coming!" and hurried down to rub two sticks together till a spark flew out and set the pine cone on the hearth ablaze. "Run to the door and courtesy when you see them," he said, fanning the fire with his bushy tail, in a great state of excitement.

Bud peeped out and was just going to say, "I see nothing but snow," when she saw that what looked like a party of flakes blowing up to the door was really the seven Kobolds loaded with great piles of white silkweed for their spinning. She dropped her best courtesy, smiled her sweetest smile, and called out, "Welcome home, my masters!" like a little maidservant, as she led the way to the large room, now bright and warm with the fire roaring up the chimney made by a hole in the old roots.

"Ha, ha! Neighbor Dart, you have done well this time, and we are satisfied with you. Now just store away our packs while we go for our wheels, and then we will have supper. But first, tell us who this pretty person is, if you

please?" said the oldest of the Kobolds, while the others stood nodding and looking at Bud as if she pleased them well.

"Your new housekeeper, gentlemen," answered Dart, and in a few words told them all about his friend,—how she had helped get ready for them, what fine tales and songs she knew, and how much good she had done and still hoped to do while waiting for her wings to grow.

"Good, very good! She shall stay with us, and we will take care of her till spring. Then we will see what happens;" and they all smiled and nodded harder than ever, as if they knew something charming but would not tell it yet.

Then they clapped on their funny pointed hats, and trotted away before Bud could thank them half enough. While they were gone Dart showed her how to put a row of chestnuts on the hearth to roast, and how to set the table, which was a dry mushroom propped up on four legs in the middle of the room, with little toadstools to sit on. Acorn cups full of berries and water, and grains of wheat and barley were arranged on it, with a place for the chestnuts

when they were done, and some preserved apple on an oak-leaf platter. Several torches were lighted and stuck in holes at the four corners of the table, and then all was ready, and Bud put on a little white apron made of her torn veil, and waited like a neat cook to dish up supper when her masters arrived.

Presently they came, each lugging a tiny spinning-wheel on his back; for they hid them in a cave among the rocks all summer, and got them out when the time for their winter work was come again. Dart helped them settle down a bit, and then left them to eat and rest; while Bud waited on them so nicely they wondered how they ever got on without a maid before. She was not at all afraid of them now; for they were jolly little fellows, with fat bodies, thin legs, rosy faces, and sharp eyes. All were dressed in white down suits, and wore droll pointed hats made of some seed pod, and boots of magic stuff which carried them great distances as if blown by the wind.

They liked their supper very much, and ate and drank and chatted pleasantly till all were done; then they sat round the fire and smoked

sweet fern in Indian pipes till Bud had cleared away.

“Now come and sing to us,” they said; and the youngest Kobold politely set a stool in the warmest corner for her.

So Bud sang all her gayest songs to their great delight, and told her adventures; and all were very cosey till it was time to sleep. The little men were charmed with their new beds, and pulling poppy-pod nightcaps over their heads tumbled in with drowsy good-nights, leaving Bud to cover up the fire, shut the front door, and put out the lights. Soon she was in her own soft hammock; and nothing broke the silence but the sigh of the wind, the tap of falling snow-flakes on dry leaves outside, and seven little snores inside, as the tired Kobolds dreamed cosily in their new beds.

Bud was up early next day, and had everything ready when the little men came out to breakfast. After it they set their wheels whirling, and all day long they spun busily till many skeins of shining silk were ready to be woven into elfin cloth. Bud soon learned, and they made her a wheel; so she could work with them.

They seldom spoke, and never ate nor stopped till night; then the wheels stood still, and the spinners went out for a run while Bud got supper.

In the evening they went coasting if it was moonlight, or owl-hunting, and had gay times in the wood, whisking Bud with them, or sliding down hillocks of snow on their sleds of bark, while Dart looked on, well wrapped up in his gray fur coat.

But stormy nights they sat at home, and told stories and played games, and were very merry, and Bud learned many wise and interesting things; for the Kobolds knew all kinds of fairies, nixies, goblins, and spirits, and had been in many lands.

It was very pleasant; but when the last month of winter came Bud began to be so sleepy she could not keep her eyes open, and sat nodding as she spun, gaping instead of singing, and was often found dreaming in her bed when she should have been up and at work. She was much troubled about it, but could not help it; and the Kobolds only laughed, slyly felt of her shoulders, and told her to sleep away, for their

work was nearly done and they did not need her.

One morning Bud did not wake up at all, and when the little men peeped at her there she lay rolled up in her hammock very like a chrysalis in its shell.

“All right,” laughed the imps, nodding at one another; “let her sleep while the wings grow, and in May she will wake up to a prettier surprise than the one she gave us.”

So they finished their work, packed up the silk, and as soon as the snow was gone they hid their wheels, had a farewell feast with Dart, and departed, begging him to watch over Bud, and have their house ready for them next year.

Day after day the grass grew greener, the buds larger, the air warmer, and the world more beautiful as spring flew over it; but Bud still lay asleep in her little bed, and the faithful squirrel went every morning to see that she was safe. May came at last, and the pink flowers under the leaves pushed out their rosy faces; birds sang among the green bushes, and the sun shone brightly as the little wood creatures

ventured out one by one for another happy summer.

Then Bud woke from her long sleep, stretched her small arms and legs like a baby after its nap, looked about her to see where she was, and sprang up, fearing it was too late to get the Kobolds' breakfast. But the house was empty, the fire was out, the wheels gone, and nothing to be seen but a lovely white silk dress lying on the table with her name woven in tiny buds all over it. While she was looking at it with delight, Dart came in, and skipped for joy to see her awake again and prettier than ever; for while she slept she had grown very beautiful. Her winter gown was withered up, and fell off as she got out of bed, leaving her all ready for the new silver-white gown, which she gladly put on.

"Pull away my old hood that lies there on my shoulders, and let me tie my pretty dress with this fine belt," said Bud, feeling something on her back.

Dart's black eyes sparkled as he answered with a gay whisk, —

"Shake yourself and see what happens. But

don't go till I have time to admire the splendid princess ready for Fairy-land."

Bud shook; and, lo! a pair of blue and silver wings unfolded from her little shoulders, and there she stood, a shining creature, gay as a butterfly, delicate as an elf, lovely as a happy child; while Dart waved his tail like a banner as he cried joyfully, —

"The Kobolds said it would be so because you tried so hard to be and do good! Now you can go home and lead a happy life in Fairy-land."

Bud could only clap her hands and laugh for joy, and try to see the beautiful wings she had worked and waited for so long.

"Thank you very much for all your kindness to me, dear Dart; I will come again and see you and the little men if I can. Now I must go and try to fly before I set out for home," she said, and hastened to the door, where wood violets were watching for her with eager blue eyes, while the robins, wrens, and linnets sang to welcome her.

There was no need to learn how to fly; the lovely wings lifted her lightly up, and away she

went like a new-born butterfly glittering in the sunshine. It was so delightful that she could hardly bear to come down to the earth again; so she perched on a high branch of the old oak and took a peep at Dart's home before she said good-by to him.

"How shall I find my way to Fairy-land?" she asked, eager to be off, for the longing was stronger than ever in her heart.

"I have come to show you the road," answered a shrill small voice, as a splendid humming-bird lit on the branch beside her, its breast sparkling like a jewel, and its long bill full of honey, while its quivering wings made the softest music.

"I am ready! Good-by, dear friends! good-by, great world! I love you, but I must go to my own people," cried Bud, and with a flash of the blue and silver wings she was gone.

But for many a winter's night her story was told by the Kobolds as they spun around their fire; and for many a long day did bird and bee, beetle, ant, and flower, love and remember little Bud.



So they chose a sunny spot on a lonely moor, where the earth was rich, and a brook kept it moist, and there they planted the seeds and tended them carefully. — PAGE 257.

XI.

THE FLOWER'S STORY.

MARION had been ill, and was still so weak that she had to lie on her bed many hours each day trying to sleep and rest. One winter afternoon when the snow fell quietly outside and the room was very still, with Nurse

dozing in her chair, the kitten purring on the rug, and nothing new or pretty to look at but a bunch of pansies in a glass beside the bed, Marion said to herself with a sigh, —

“If I only had some one to tell me a story I should be able to get through this long day without fretting. But Mamma is away, Nurse is tired, and I know all my books by heart; so what can I do, since I'm too tired to play with my dolls?”

No one answered this important question; and Marion sighed again as she turned to look at the other side of the room, hoping to discover some help or amusement in that direction. The queer ladies on the great Japanese fan over the glass stared at her with their small eyes, but seemed too busy drinking tea out of red and yellow teapots to take any interest in the pale little girl on the bed. The pins sat primly in the blue satin cushion as usual; but neither the pearl fly, the golden rose-headed one, nor the funny mourning brooch Nurse was so fond of, — with hair in it, and a picture of a fat baby at the back, — could amuse Marion now. The dolls lay piled up in the cradle, with their poor arms and

legs sticking out in all directions, sadly neglected by their little mamma; while the dear books upon the shelves had been read so often lately that they had nothing new and pleasant to offer now.

“Oh dear! I wish the birds on the wall-paper or the children in the pictures hanging round my room could sing and talk to me. I've been so good and patient I really think some one *ought* to take pity on a poor little sick girl and do something to please her,” said Marion, with a third sigh, heavier than the others.

It made such a breeze that it blew one of the flowers out of the glass. Marion took it up and looked at it, ready for any playmate, even a ladies'-delight.

It was a very pretty one, and showed such a smiling face among its dark and bright petals that the child felt as if she had found a friend, and kissed it softly, being rather tender-hearted just then as well as lonely.

To her great surprise the flower nodded at her, and then a faint, sweet voice said, as she still held it close to her face, —

“Now I can speak, and am very glad to come

and amuse you; for we have been pitying you very much, because we also are lonely and homesick so far from our own people."

"Why, you dear little thing, how lovely it is to hear you talk and see you smile at me! Please tell me all about yourself. I'm fond of flowers, and was so pleased when one of my schoolmates sent me this pretty nosegay of pansies," said Marion, charmed with this surprise.

"I have no story; for I was born in a greenhouse, and have lived in a little flower-pot all my life, with many sisters, who are carried away when they bloom, and never come back again. We only sat for a few hours in a shop before we were pinned in paper, and brought here by a dreadful boy, who left us at your door. We were much pleased to find ourselves in this pretty vase of fresh water in a quiet, warm room, with a gentle mistress to look at us. Now, if you want a story about our people, I will tell you an old one that all our family know and like very much."

"Do!" cried Marion; and then, with kitty asleep on her arm, she lay and listened with the deepest interest to this little history of —

THE PRINCES AND THE PANSIES:

A FAIRY TALE.

ONCE upon a time there was a King who had two little sons, named Purple and Plush because they always wore mourning for their mother, who died when they were born. The King would not wear purple, which is the proper color for royal sorrow. He was a very selfish man, and cared only for his own comfort; so he lived in his splendid rooms, and amused himself among his books, quite lazy and contented in his green velvet dressing-gown and red cap, sleeping a great deal, reading, and drinking wine. so that he might forget the loss of his beautiful queen.

He did not care about his little sons, and left them to the nurses and then the tutors, as they grew up from babies to pretty boys, so sweet and wise and good that people said the spirit of their dead mother must watch over them; and perhaps it did. They were always together, always busy, always kind and gentle,

but rather sad, because their father did not love them; and all the affection of the many friends they made could not make up for the loss of father and mother love.

His subjects wanted the King to marry again, so that the court might be gay with feasts and balls and splendid games as it used to be; but he was too selfish and lazy to disturb himself, till a certain beautiful lady came to see him. She was a widow, with two little daughters, named Primrose and Daffodil because they always wore yellow gowns. Their mother was the Princess Jonquil, and dressed in cloth of gold. She was very proud, and wished to be queen; so she put on a purple velvet cloak, and made the little girls wear purple hats to look as if they mourned like the rest of the kingdom, and went to court to marry the King. They were all so pretty and charming that every one admired and welcomed them; and while the Princess played chess and read poetry to amuse his Majesty, the children played together and tried to be friends.

But Primrose and Daffodil were vain and selfish and wilful; and the little Princes soon

found that they expected to have their own way about everything, and flew into sad passions if any one dared to reprove them. So the little boys were more unhappy than ever when they were told that their father was to marry the Princess, and these disagreeable girls were to be their half-sisters.

There was a splendid wedding, and the bells rang, and the trumpets sounded, and every one feasted and danced; for the fountains were filled with wine, and tables were spread in the market-place, so that all the poor people could have a good time as well as the rich. The new Queen was very anxious to please her subjects, and made things so gay that at first every one praised her; and the King gladly let her rule, as it left him quiet with his books and bottles. Now the little girls were prouder than ever, and shone like the sun in their fine new gowns. But the Princes would not change their purple velvet suits, though they put on gold belts and set jonquils in their caps in honor of the Queen. They tried to enjoy the gayety, but soon found that they were neglected by every one; for people saw who was to have the power, and hastened

to pet and flatter the young Princesses in order to please their mother. She showed how she meant to rule the first time she took the throne ; for the King was not there, and she sat alone in her cloth-of-gold robes very splendid to see. She put her daughters one at each side on the green satin chairs set for the Princes, and ordered the poor boys to share her footstool between them.

Some people were very angry at this, and told the King. But he only said : " Don't trouble me. Her Majesty will do as she thinks best ; and my sons will obey her as if they were her own." So nothing could be done ; and the gentle boys sat at the Queen's feet, while the vain little girls rustled and smiled and tossed their heads on the high seats where they did not belong.

This was the beginning of sad times for the Princes ; for the new mother wanted them out of the way that she might reign when the King died. She dared not send them away so soon ; but she ordered them to live quietly with their tutors and servants in a lonely part of the palace, and never allowed them to come to the

feasts, the hunting-parties, or any of the splendid shows with which she amused the people. Since their father did not object, the boys obeyed, and amused themselves by working among the flowers with old Adam, the gardener, who taught them many curious, useful, and beautiful things about trees and plants. They also learned to play and sing, and often sat in the summer evenings making music with their little lutes sweeter than that of the nightingales in the rose-bushes, or the court concerts, where the bad Queen and the proud Princesses sat in all their splendor. The boys studied and grew wise with the teachers, who loved them; but as time went by they began to long for more freedom and pleasure, when the horns blew and all the great people rode away to hunt the deer or fly their falcons. They begged the Queen to let them see their father; but when she saw what handsome, tall lads they were growing she was more anxious than ever to get rid of them, and in the night she sent her soldiers to take them to the tower, where they were shut up in a high room, with only bread and water to live on, — no books, no friends, no freedom; for no one knew where

they were, because the Queen told the father that they had run away, and when he had sent some people to look for them he troubled himself no more about the matter.

So they lived for a year all alone in the tower; but they were not very unhappy, for the sun smiled in at them, birds built nests in the ivy that covered the gray walls, and the wind sang them to sleep as it roared or whispered round their high room. They loved and cheered each other, and kept up their courage till one day no bread and water was put in at the little wicket of the door. For three days no food came, and then they knew that the wicked Queen meant to starve them to death. People thought them lost; and all but the few who were faithful forgot the Princes and obeyed the Queen, who now ruled over them like a tyrant, while her daughters grew more proud and selfish every day, and the old King slept most of the time, careless of everything but his ease.

“Now, brother, we must escape, for it is plain that no one will help us; so we will help ourselves,” said Purple bravely, resolving not to starve to death to please a cruel stepmother.

“We will,” cried Plush; “but how can we get out of this high tower with no ladder?”

“We will make one. I’ve often planned it all, but thought it our duty to obey. Now it is right to take care of ourselves, and try to reach our father if we can. Let us braid ropes of the straw of our beds, the blankets and sheets, and as many of our clothes as we can spare. All these will not make a ladder long enough to reach the ground; but it will carry us down to where the ivy branches are strong, and from there we can climb safely to the bottom. We will go by night and find good old Adam. He will feed and help us and tell us what to do.”

“A splendid plan! Let us set to work while our strength holds out or it will be too late,” answered Plush, who was very white and weak with hunger.

Busily flew the fingers, and soon long coils of cord were made; while the poor lads chewed leaves and drank the rain to keep themselves alive. At last they had enough to reach a long way down; and when night came Purple made his brother go first, — for he was an hour younger, and rather lighter, and he wanted to

be sure he was safe before he escaped himself. Down climbed Plush, while the other lad leaned out, with his hands on the frail ladder, holding his breath till the dark figure was out of sight in the gloom, and a soft whistle told him that all was safe with the dear boy. Then he followed, and Plush caught him in his arms as he came climbing down; while all the little birds sat silent in their nests among the ivy, and not a stout branch broke under the clinging hands and feet, — for birds and plants loved them, and were faithful friends, as we shall see.

In the darkness the Princes found their way to Adam's house in the great garden, and were welcomed joyfully; for the old man thought them dead. When he heard their story he told them that they could never reach their father, and that they were in danger of their lives if they tried to do so; for the Queen was very cruel and powerful, and would not let them live if she could help it.

“Go away till you are grown, my dear little masters; then come back as men and take the kingdom that belongs to you.”

“But how can we live? What can we do,

since we have no money or friends to help us?" asked the boys, as they rested after a good supper.

"Here are your lutes," said old Adam; "I took care of them for you; and you can go singing through the world, and so earn money for your bread. I will give you some magic seeds which my father left me, saying that they would not grow unless royal hands planted them, when they would bring fortune to the happy owner for whom they bloomed. I taught you how to garden; so when you are safely out of the kingdom sow the seed in some wild spot, and see if the story is true. I have nothing else to give you but bread and wine and all good wishes, my dear wronged Princes. God be with you, and bring you safely home again to reign over us long and happily."

The brothers thanked him heartily, and at dawn stole out of the city with their lutes at their backs, wallets of food at their sides, and each wrapped in a russet mantle made out of Adam's old cloak. Freedom and fresh air soon gave them back their strength and courage, and when they were at a safe distance from home

they began to sing and play in the villages as they travelled along. With their faded suits, bonny faces, and gentle manners, they were a charming pair of young troubadours, and every one was glad to listen to the sweet music they made. Rich people threw silver into the caps they held up when the songs were done, and poor people gladly gave them food and beds since they had no money to give. In this way they got on very pleasantly through the winter, for in that country there was no snow; and the lads grew strong and brave trudging over hill and dale, with no enemies but wind and rain to fear, and leaving many friends behind them. They liked the free life, though it was hard; but they never forgot that they were princes, even when their purple suits were in rags and the russet cloaks worn out. Nothing mean or selfish, cruel or unjust, ever disturbed the peace of their honest hearts and clean consciences; and many generous acts, gentle words, and brave thoughts made the beggar lads kings of themselves at least, and very rich in the blessings of those whom they so kindly helped and comforted.

When spring came they were far from home, and felt that it was time to try the fairy flowers. So they chose a sunny spot on a lonely moor, where the earth was rich, and a brook kept it moist, and no one cared what they did, and there they planted the seeds and tended them carefully. While waiting for the blossoms they built a hut of green branches, and lived on wild berries, the rabbits they snared, the fish they caught, and the black bread they bought of an old woman who came to look for herbs. They had saved a little money, and when that was gone one of them would wander off for a few days singing some more into the bag, while the other watched over the bed of tender plants fast growing green and strong.

They wondered what the magic flowers would be, and often feared that they would never bloom, it was so long before any buds appeared.

“If no flowers come we shall know that we are not the right gardeners, though we *are* royal,” said Purple, as he watered the bed one day.

“Then we will go on singing till we get round the world, brother. By that time we shall be men and can fight for our kingdom,” answered

Plush, weeding busily in among the low plants that spread far and wide with large tightly folded buds on all of them.

“Our old neighbor, the herb-woman, is very curious about this plot of ours, and wants to know what we are going to raise here. I told her we did not know, but when the flowers came she might see them, because she is very wise and this may be some new herb which will cure the sick. That would be a pleasant thing to do, even if we never made a fortune.”

“Indeed it would! I’d rather make people happy than be a king, and so would you, brother.”

As the boys spoke a very sweet perfume filled the air, and all the leaves rustled softly as if the south wind stirred them. Then everything was still again, and the larks twittered high above their heads as if they were telling some good news to the beautiful blue world far above the clouds.

Next morning, when the Princes went to their garden, lo! it was all in bloom, and lay there like a gold and purple carpet fit for a king. The flowers were pansies, but such as were never

seen before; for these were very large and all alike, looking like little faces, half sad, half cheerful, as the yellow and the dark leaves framed them in. They were very sweet, and as they nodded in the wind seemed to be whispering something to one another so interesting that the lads longed to know the pretty story they were telling.

“What can we do with them, and how can they bring us good luck?” said the elder brother, looking seriously down at the lovely things.

“Enjoy them first, then sell them in little posies, and so make money; for they are the finest ever seen, and people will be glad to buy them,” answered the younger, as he began to gather the great beauties at his feet.

“So we can, and keep the seed, and go on planting and selling till we are rich. It is slow work, but we learned to be patient in the tower, and will wait to see what fortune heart's-ease is to bring us,” said Prince Purple, going down on his knees before a group of lovely flowers, who bent as if glad to be gathered by such gentle hands.

“Heyday! what have we here? Surely you are fairy gardeners, my sons, to bring such splendid blossoms out of this wild moor,” said a cracked voice behind them, as the old herb-woman came hobbling up with her apron full of mushrooms and her basket of sweet-smelling roots and leaves.

“Only pansies, mother, for the market,” answered Plush, looking up with a smile.

“See how sweet they are! You shall have the first because you are so kind to us,” added Purple, offering her a bunch of them as gallantly as if he were kneeling to a queen instead of an old woman as brown and wrinkled as a withered leaf.

“Good lads! I’ll be still kinder and read the story these fine flowers are trying to tell,” she said, as her eyes shone and her skinny hands turned the pansies to and fro. “I can read all plants, and so I learn many strange things. See if you understand this sad tale, for this is what is written on these flowers, and it must be true, for they cannot lie.”

The Princes drew nearer and watched curiously as a trembling finger pointed out the dif-

ferent parts while the old woman spoke, glancing into their tell-tale faces now and then.

“There are five leaves. This great golden one sits alone on her green seat at the top. These two smaller yellow ones, with a touch of purple in them, sit on either side; but these two purple ones have only one seat between them, though they are the handsomest of all. Now look here in the middle, and see this little image like a man in a green gown and a red cap hiding away in the warmest, safest place with a bag of seeds which will ripen by-and-by if he will let the sun in. Come now, do you see any meaning to that, my sons?” asked the old soul, with a sharp look at the boys, who blushed and smiled and sighed, but could not speak, for here was their own sad story truly told in the magic flower.

The herb-woman nodded wisely, but only said in a kind tone, as she put the posy in her bosom, —

“Heart's-ease won't grow for every one, but all the world wants it and will pay well for it; so sell your pansies, lads, and earn a fortune worth having. I'll be in the market-place when

you come, and say a good word for you, though you don't need it with such bonny faces and gentle ways of your own."

Then she went away, and the wondering Princes made haste to pick all the flowers that were in bloom, tying the bunches up with sweet-scented grass, and laying them in baskets of green rushes which they had made. A pretty sight it was; for the little pansy faces seemed to smile up at whoever looked, the sweet breath called out, "Come and buy us!" and the dew sparkled on the leaves like diamonds on the gold and purple robes of some queen.

When the Princes came to the town they stood in the market-place and cried their wares like the other people with fruit and vegetables; but their faces were so noble, their voices so clear, their flowers so large and beautiful, that in spite of their poor clothes and humble work every one who saw and heard them felt that there was something strange and interesting about the fine boys who called so sweetly, —

"Heart's-ease! here's fresh heart's-ease!
Who'll buy? Who'll buy?"

All who passed were charmed with the great

pansies, for the like had never been seen in that country; so the baskets were soon empty, and more than one bit of gold shone among the copper and silver coins in their pockets, because the rich as well as the poor hastened to buy heart's-ease. Much pleased with their day's work, the lads went gayly home to water the bed and rejoice over the buds that were thicker than ever. After that they sold flowers all summer long; for the magic pansies kept on blooming till the frost came, and every one who bought them discovered that they really did bring comfort and happy thoughts, and this made high and low eager to get them. Doctors sent for them for the sick; sad people ordered many to cheer them up; even bad people loved them because the bright faces, half grave, half gay, never reproached them, but smiled so pleasantly, that they woke better feelings in the evil minds. Far and wide flew the fame of this new herb, as they called it; and kings and queens begged for the seed, since they especially needed heart's-ease. Several plants even reached the lazy King as he sat in his luxurious room drinking his wine, studying, and sleeping; and the sight of the

flowers woke him up, for his beautiful dead wife's name was Pansy, and he began to wonder where his sons could be and to ask about them.

The Queen also needed the wonderful herb, for she was troubled by the disorder of her kingdom. Her subjects did not love her, and grew tired of being taxed to pay for her splendor. They began to rebel, especially the poor, of whom she took no care, but left them to starve and suffer while she enjoyed herself. Even the rich and noble people became discontented and wanted to be still richer and nobler, and quarrelled among themselves, and hinted that she had killed or banished the Princes, who ought to be ruling, and would now do it better than she did.

Primrose and Daffodil had sent for the magic flowers because they wanted everything new and pretty that they heard of, no matter what it cost. When the lovely things arrived in beautiful china urns, the young Princesses were charmed with them and forbade any one else to have them.

“ These are our colors, and these flowers shall

be our royal badge, and no one must wear them under pain of death," they said; and they put their servants as well as themselves into new suits of purple velvet and gold, very splendid to see, with pansies everywhere, — on carriages and clothes, banners and furniture, — very proud of the graceful coat-of-arms.

But they, like their mother, soon found that the name meant something more than a pretty flower; for *pensée* is the French for "a thought," and into their careless minds came thoughts of all the harm they had done, as if the breath of the new-fashioned violet reproached them, while the sweet little faces recalled the sad ones of the banished boys whose places they had unjustly taken.

So all were ill at ease, and the spell of the flower began to work at home as well as abroad, helping to make things ready for the wanderers when they should return.

Meantime the Princes were travelling round the world, learning much and growing wise and good as well as tall and brave, and handsomer than ever. In the winter time they sang and played, and no Christmas feast was merry with-

out the lute-players, no peasant's wedding quite perfect till they came, and often in palaces they made music for lords and ladies to dance by, and were generously paid. But what they liked better was to sing in prisons, hospitals, or poor places, where they not only gave pleasure but money, and then stole away without stopping to be thanked, so happy to be able to help the sad and sick and suffering.

In summer they rested in some pleasant spot, and planted the magic seed which would grow in any soil and was admired everywhere. So they went on their way busily and happily, leaving music and flowers behind them, and making the world brighter and better by sweet sounds and happy thoughts, till they were called "The Blessed Boys," and were waited for and welcomed and loved east and west and north and south.

Summers and winters passed, and they were tall youths when they came again to their father's kingdom in their journey round the world. But though old and wise enough now to rule, and sure to be gladly received by the discontented people, they found that they no longer felt bitter

and angry with those who had wronged them. Time had taught them to forgive and forget; their peaceful, happy life made war distasteful, and they loved freedom so well that they had no heart to force others to obey.

“We reign over a larger and lovelier kingdom than this, our subjects love us dearly, and we are not tied to a throne, but are as free as the wind; let us be content with this, and ask for nothing more,” said Prince Purple to his brother, as they looked down on the familiar city while resting on a hill outside the gates.

“I don’t care to be shut up in a palace and obliged to live by rule any more. But if what we heard is true, there is plenty of work to do for the poor here, and we have saved so much we can at least begin to help those who suffer most. No one need know us, and we can be at work while waiting for our father to remember and recall us,” answered Plush, who was as princely yet as delicate as the soft silken stuff he loved to wear.

So they disguised themselves as young Brothers of Mercy in black hoods and gowns, and went into the city looking about them for a home. Old

Adam was still alive, but very poor now; for the Queen had sent him away when the Princes escaped, and the King had forgotten him. The boys found him out and told him who they were, and lived with him, making the old man very happy, proud, and comfortable. All day they went about among the poor, helping them in many ways; for the money they had earned never seemed to give out, no matter how generous they were. Heart's-ease sprang up where they walked, as if the magic seeds fell out of their pockets unseen; and soon they could be traced all over the city by happy faces, and the pots of pansies in humble windows where no flowers would ever grow before. No one knew them by any name but that of "The Brothers;" and many sick, sad souls blessed them for the good they did so quietly.

Before long, tidings of these wonderful young men reached the palace, where the old King now lay ill, and the Queen lived in fear of her life, for the people hated her and might break out at any moment. She sent for the Brothers; and they came at once, hoping to do some good. Nobody recognized the pretty Princes in the tall young

monks, half hidden in their hoods and gowns; but comfort and courage seemed to come with them, for the sick King grew stronger when they prayed or sang beside him, and the sad Queen took heart, and confessed her sins to them, begging them to tell her what to do, since selfish splendor brought neither happiness, love, nor honor.

“Repent, and undo the wrong you have done,” answered one Brother, boldly.

“But the Princes are lost or dead, and my people hate me,” sighed the poor Queen.

“God has taken better care of the motherless boys than you did, and they will come back when it is time. Do you pity and help your people. Make them love and trust you; then you will be safe and happy, and your kingdom glorious,” said the other Brother in his gentle voice.

“I will, I will!” cried the Queen, while repentant tears fell on her cloth-of-gold mantle, which was not dimmed by the salt drops, but seemed to shine the brighter for them.

Then she took counsel with the Brothers; and while Plush nursed and cheered the old father, Purple helped his stepmother to win

the confidence of her people by giving bread and money generously, building better houses for them, making wiser laws, and ruling with mercy and justice, till peace came back and the danger of rebellion was over,—for kindness conquers all things.

The Princesses at first objected to these changes, and were angry with the new-comers for preaching self-denial, humility, and simplicity; but the monks made them so beautiful by their persuasive words and lovely lives that soon these royal girls, as well as all their ladies, began to see how selfish and frivolous their days had been and to long for better things.

It took time to teach them to freely put away their fine clothes, forget their luxurious habits, and heartily enjoy good books, wise society, real charity, and all the sweet, simple duties, pleasures, and lessons which make life happy and death peaceful when it comes to kings as well as beggars.

Slowly the beautiful work went on. The old father seemed to wake up and wonder why he had been wasting time in dreams. It was too late now for him to rule; he had not strength

enough, and he vainly longed for his brave boys. The Queen sat alone on the throne, forgiven and loved, and might have been happy if the thought of the lost Princes had not haunted her till she was so full of remorse and sorrow she resolved to go into a convent and do penance for her sins. But who should reign in her place? The King was too old and feeble, the Princesses too young, and the rightful heirs were lost or dead.

“Now is the time!” said Purple. “We are needed, and must enter into our kingdom before some usurper comes to take it.”

“I am ready, brother; and we both are fitter to rule as princes for having learned to work, wait, and be happy as beggars,” answered Plush.

There was to be a grand council of all the wise men, great lords, and good people to decide about a new king; for the Queen wanted to abdicate, being tired of her splendor. When all were gathered together, and the beautiful ladies looked down from the gallery at the knights in armor, the gray-headed ministers, and the sturdy citizens, every one was glad to

see the beloved Brothers come in and stand humbly at the lower end of the council board. They were welcome everywhere; for though so young, they seemed to understand the hearts of people better than the old men who studied books all their long lives. After much debate the Queen said, as she left the great golden chair empty, —

“Let us leave it to our good friends who have helped us so much, and taught us to see what is needed on a throne. Dear Brothers, come up hither, and tell us who shall sit here, for I am not worthy.”

Without a word the two young monks went to the high place, and, standing on either side of the Queen, dropped off their disguises. There, brave in purple velvet suits, with the golden heads and handsome faces of the royal boys, older and graver, but still the same, — there were the lost Princes, come to their own at last!

People were so startled that for a moment no one spoke or stirred; all stood up and stared silently while Purple said, with a smile and gesture that won their hearts, —

“We are ready to take our rightful places, if you need us, glad to forget the past, forgive our wrongs, and try to make the future happier for all. We have been prisoners, beggars, gardeners, minstrels, and monks in our long wanderings. Now we are princes again, more fit to rule because of the hard lessons we have learned; while time and poverty and pain have taught us the value of patience, justice, courage, and mercy.”

As he ended a great shout greeted them, and the Queen fell at their feet praying for pardon; while Primrose and Daffodil hid their faces, remembering the cruel things they had said and done. There could be no doubt that the Princes were welcome home and well beloved, for soon all over the city flew the glad news. Bells rang, bonfires blazed, people danced and sang, and feasts were spread in palaces and cottages in honor of the Blessed Boys.

The old King was startled wide awake, and so delighted that he got straight out of his bed, cured of all his ills but age, as if by magic. The Queen smiled again, and felt that she was for-

given; penitent Primrose and Daffodil grew as sweet and gay as the flowers they were named for, and the Princes fell in love with them in the good old fairy-tale fashion. Everything was all right now, and the kingdom soon looked like a great garden of pansies; for the chosen flower blossomed everywhere, and rich and poor loved it.

Before long two splendid weddings were seen at court, and a new throne was made, — a double one, for on it sat the twin kings with their young wives beside them. The old King abdicated at once; and the Queen was so tired of reigning that she gladly devoted herself to her husband, both enjoying the happiness of their children, who ruled long and well over Pansyland, — for they gave that name to their country out of gratitude to the flower that brought them friends and fortune, wisdom and heart's-ease.

“That is a pleasant story, and I shall remember it,” said Marion, as the teller leaned down to refresh itself with a sip of water after the long tale.

“Remember also what it means, my dear,” said the flower in its sweet voice. “Learn to rule yourself; make your own little kingdom a peaceful, happy one, and find nothing too humble to teach you a lesson, — not even a Ladies'-Delight.”



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