

For the Young.

THE FIRE-FLY.

(TRANSLATED FROM THE GERMAN.)

On the evening of a sultry summer's day, Mary, a poor widow, was seated by the window of her little room, and was looking out on the orchard that surrounded her cottage. The grass, which had been mown that morning, was made up into cocks, and the delightful and refreshing perfume was wafted in at the window. The sky was clear and cloudless, and the moon shone into the room, casting the shadow of the windows and the vines which surrounded them on the floor.

Her little Felix, a child of six years old, was standing near her, and his blooming face and golden hair were lighted by the moon.

The poor young widow sat there to rest herself; but great as the labour of this hot day had been to her body, a still greater pain oppressed her mind, and made her forgetful of her weariness. There stood by her a basin of milk and bread, of which she had scarcely tasted a spoonful. Felix was quite disturbed, and did not play or make any noise, because he saw his mother so unhappy. He also, on observing that she wept bitterly, instead of eating his supper, had laid his spoon aside and his little earthenware basin stood nearly full on the table.

Mary had become a widow in the beginning of the spring. Her husband, one of the best young men in the village, had laid by so much money by his industry and frugality that he had bought this little cottage and orchard, but had not quite enough to pay for them. The poor man had planted the green with young fruit-trees, which already bore fine fruit. He had chosen for his wife, Mary, an orphan, a pious and industrious young woman, who had been well brought up. They were living happily together when the typhus fever came, and the husband died. Mary, too, who had nursed him through his illness with the greatest care, took the fever, and was very near joining him in death.

On recovering from her illness she found her circumstances were very bad. Still she hoped not to be obliged to quit her cottage. Her husband had long been in the service of a rich farmer, who had valued and respected him for his industry, fidelity, and good character, and who, when he bought this house and garden, had lent him three hundred florins, on condition of being repaid twenty-five florins yearly. This had been punctually paid every year until the time of his illness, and the debt now only amounted to fifty florins, as Mary knew very well. The farmer also died of the fever. His heir the daughter's husband, found the bond for three hundred florins among his father-in-law's papers. He knew nothing of the circumstances, and demanded the whole sum of the widow.

The poor woman assured him that her husband had paid two hundred and fifty florins, but this availed her nothing. The young farmer did not believe her, and took her before a magistrate. As she could give no proof that any part of the sum had been paid, she was declared liable for the whole debt; the young farmer was impatient for his money, and as poor Mary had nothing but her cottage and garden these must be sold to meet the demand. She had implored the farmer to have pity on her; her little Felix joined his entreaties to hers, but all in vain, and she had now, just an hour before her day's work was ended, learned from a neighbour that the sale was appointed for the following morning.

It was on this account that she was sitting so mournfully at the window, looking sometimes up to heaven, and then again at her little boy; at one moment weeping bitterly, and the next plunged in the deepest melancholy.