

The Children's Page

THE RAGGEDY DOLL.

When the nursery blinds are all fastened and tight, When the curtains are drawn and it's not at all light, When my mother has kissed me and hurried away And I hear them down stairs, very busy and gay— Then the raggedy doll in her calico dress Comes cheeply creep from the nursery press, She remembers I'm little and lonely, I guess.

Oh, she never comes out through the sunny day. The fellows and I don't use dolls when we play, But she waits till the footfall and bat are asleep And she picks up her skirts and comes creepily creep. Does the raggedy doll in her raggedy clothes With holes in her elbows and holes in her toes And her sawdust all dripping wherever she goes.

Then the grizzly black bear who hides back of the door Goes a-slinking away, and the imps on the floor Who scatter and point till I cover my head, Go a-scrampering off. There's quite nothing to dread, For the raggedy doll waves a raggedy arm To keep little me safe from all harm, And she climbs in the crib and lies down, soft and warm.

Oh, what if she's dirty and really a sight! And exceedingly old! She's my comfort at night As she snuggles beside me so staunch and so true, With her battered old head close to my head, Have you A raggedy doll just as loving and dear, So very untidy and homely and queer, But quite sure to be found when you need some one near? —Carolyn S. Bailey.

THE LEGEND OF THE GOLD-FINCH.

Raphael's earliest masterpieces include the name of "La Madonna del Cardellino"—Our Lady of the Goldfinch. The inspiration to compose this great work of art came to him while travelling from Florence to Urbino, when, overtaken by a thunderstorm, he sought refuge in a peasant's cottage in the little village of Ostia del Monte. Here it was that Raphael heard for the first time the beautiful legend of "Il Cardellino della Santa Madonna," so familiar to all the peasantry of the Roman States. The story made a deep impression upon the young artist, with the result of which the whole world is familiar.

In the days when the Child Jesus was leading a hidden life in His humble home at Nazareth, little St. John—afterward known as the Baptist—dwelt at Hebron with his aged parents, the high-priest Zachary and St. Elizabeth. As he daily grew in beauty and in knowledge, all were won by the boy's singular charm and his marvellous wisdom; and they said of him: "He will be a great prophet—greater than any of the House of Jacob!" Maybe the child had some presentiment that he would one day be the herald of a new era; maybe he foresaw, in the divine light which flooded his soul, the sublime time for its fulfilment, however, was not yet come, for he was but nine years old.

Now, although St. John had never seen the Holy Child, he had heard tell of that wondrous night when Jesus was born in the lowly stable at Bethlehem, and how the angels of God had proclaimed the glad news to shepherds watching their flocks hard by; and he had always felt a great love for the little Child who was said to be the Son of God. This love had grown within him till it became so strong that he yearned to go to the city of Nazareth and behold Jesus with his own eyes.

At length the longing became so intense that he started off one morning, little knowing how far he had to travel, and reckless of the hardships he might have to endure. Bravely he trudged along, now toiling up steep, rugged paths, now traversing broad tracts of country bathed in the noonday sunshine; and then resting by the wayside, for the heat was great and his little bare feet became sore and tired; then on again, till at last, passing by Bethlehem and skirting the mountain of Zion, he entered Jerusalem.

The city was crowded with pilgrims from all parts of Palestine, who were come to celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles. John also hurried to the Temple, hoping perhaps to see Jesus there—but he found Him not. Kneeling before the sanctuary, he was lost for a while in prayer, then, seeing no sign of Him he sought, he left the Temple by the Northern Gate, and resumed his journey. He went straight before him, guided only by his unerring instinct, which led him across wide, desolate plains, through narrow and difficult passes, and along devious ways. He traversed various towns—Anathot, Jericho, Galgala,—all of whose names had long been familiar to him. He walked on and on a long time till at last he found himself in an immense valley. It was a beautiful, fertile country, where there were no rugged rocks nor bare steep hills; he was in the land of Canaan. Little St. John stood a long while gazing upon the scene in admiration. There were miles of vineyards, whose grapes were such as he had never seen in Hebron; the very shrubs and trees grew here in greater magnificence than elsewhere; the air was laden with the perfumes of rare and gorgeous flowers. Intoxicated with delight at all the beauties about him, the child for a while forgot himself and his pious pilgrimage, and started running thither and thither, regardless of the track he had been following;

pausing here to smell a flower, there to taste the luscious fruit of the pomegranate, then racing on again in pursuit of a beautiful butterfly.

On and on he ran till his little feet were aching and he grew tired of the chase, for he was only nine years old. Then, as though waking from a dream, suddenly he came to himself, and tears of sorrow started to his eyes as he remembered Him whom he had set out to find. But now he had lost his way, and he knew not whither to turn. Unconsciously he had wandered into a sort of meadow, with vast fields of golden corn on the one hand, and a belt of mighty cedars on the other. He searched about him for the lost track, but he had left it far behind. At length he found a narrow pathway, almost hidden with weeds and briars; and this he followed till he came to a little stream.

"Whither goest thou, little John?" a sweet voice cried to him; and, looking up into a tree whence the sound came, he saw a little bird—a kingfisher—pruning itself upon one of the lower branches. "I am going to Nazareth in Galilee, where dwells the Holy Child. Will thou come with me, pretty bird, and guide me there? For I have gone astray and know not which way to turn." "Nay, I can not go with thee. I have my nest in yonder bank. Who will finish it if I leave here? Vagabonds may wander from their homes, careless of the pain and anxiety they cause their parents; but I have my work to do. Nay, I will not accompany thee."

The words sank into the child's heart and left him sad and thoughtful. He continued up the stream, when once more he was aroused by a voice clear and musical: "Whither goest thou, little John?" And there, fluttering about a white blossom of fragrant perfume, he saw a beautiful humming-bird. "To Nazareth," he replied. "Wilt thou come and show me the way, sweet bird of paradise?" "Nay; my little ones will soon be hatched. Who would watch them if I were to go? I can not go with thee," was the answer.

And he went on his lonely way, the same cry greeted him again and again; yet when he called upon them to help him, the birds each in turn gave him the same reply. All were too busy with their nests or their young to give heed to him.

He was very sad and sore perplexed. Yet the craving to see the Child Jesus was even now as strong within him as when he had started. Some mystical force impelled him onward; he had the intuition that Heaven would bless his efforts, and this gave him strength and courage to continue his journey. He walked on until the sun sank below the purple hills, and the gathering darkness closed about him. He had long ago left behind him the beautiful, fertile valley of Canaan, and was now in a barren, desolate country, strewn with rocks and stones, amongst which briars and thistles ran riot; and these tore his little feet as he trudged wearily on.

Presently, in the stillness of the evening, a soft, melodious voice whispered to him: "What seekest thou, little wanderer?" It was a goldfinch perched upon the large purple flower of a tall thistle close by. But the child made no reply. What was the use, he thought to himself? For all the birds were in league against him. And in the anguish of his heart he cried aloud: "O God, Thy creatures are all against me! Do Thou come to my aid!" Then wearily he sank upon the ground and was soon in a deep sleep. And the little goldfinch, watching near, received his answer; for in his sleep the child murmured the words, "Jesus . . . at Nazareth . . . in Galilee."

At once the bird flew down to the sleeping figure, and whispered softly in the boy's ear: "Little John, be not sad-hearted, for thou hast reached the end of thy journey. Behind the hill lies Nazareth, hidden from view by yonder cluster of tamarisks at the foot of the ravine. Arise with the sun, and thou shalt find thy little Master, the beautiful Child God."

Then the goldfinch flew back to the purple thistle-down. The lower seemed to open itself to receive him, and he nestled into its very heart, and was swayed to sleep by the gentle night breeze.

At early dawn St. John awoke, radiant and happy. Running to the foot of the ravine, he made his way through the cluster of tamarisk trees, and then stood spellbound. A narrow, ragged pathway wound itself through the intervening hills; and there beyond, bathed in the glory of the rising sun, stood the fair city of Nazareth.

The child, in his eagerness, was rushing onward, when a sudden recollection arrested his footsteps. Was not he, the fugitive, unworthy to appear before the Holy Child, the spotless Lamb of God, unless he purified himself by some act of penitence? Moreover, he felt that every additional pain he put upon himself for the love of his little Master would draw him nearer to the Divine Heart of Jesus. He stood still a moment in troubled thought; then an inspiration came to him, and he hurried back to the spot where he had slept that night.

There were many thistles growing there. Plucking the tallest he found, he fashioned it into a sort of girdle, unmindful of the pain from the sharp prickles; and, opening his little tunic, he wound the girdle close about his waist. Then the little penitent continued his journey along the narrow pathway between the hills, and over jagged rocks, until at length he came out into the high-road. And as he hastened on, a great joy was in his heart, and he heeded not the pain caused by his girdle of thistles. At each step, the long, sharp points pierced the deeper into his tender flesh; the blood gushed forth and trickled upon the ground; and, lo! each drop as it fell turned into a tiny crimson flower of the sweetest perfume. But he did not see the miracle; his eyes were scan-

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ning the white houses of Nazareth, till they fell upon one halfway up the hillside—a little cottage wreathed in flowers, which he knew at once was the one he sought. And there upon the threshold he beheld Jesus and His Blessed Mother, and St. Joseph nearby, busy at his humble trade. Running toward the Holy Child with eager outstretched arms, St. John cried out: "Lamb of God, who takest away the sins of the world!" And Jesus answered: "This is John. He shall be great before the Lord."

The little visitor could contain his emotion no longer; and, falling into the arms of Jesus, he wept for very joy. And then he told Him of the solitary journey, and how he had gone astray and the birds had refused to help him, and how he had sought to purify himself from sin by doing penance. Then said Jesus, with a wondrous, sweet smile: "Take off thy girdle, little John; for thy time of suffering is not yet come. Later on thou shalt do penance in order to show unto men the way of redemption."

But when the child loosened his tunic to withdraw the instrument of pain—O wonder!—instead of a prickly thistle branch, it was a garland of roses which he drew forth; and a breeze came, and scattered the petals of the roses, which, as they ascended high into the air, changed into myriads of birds—martins and kingfishers, swallows, nightingales, humming-birds, and many others of all colors; and, soaring aloft, they sang songs of praise to the Holy One. The garland was bare now but for one beautiful blossom, which was the large purple flower of the thistle. This opened itself and disclosed the kindly little goldfinch. In the hour of need, had whispered words of comfort and of hope to the sleeping child. The little bird raised his voice in a glad song of welcome, crying: "Hail to the new prophet! He shall be great in the House of Jacob." And hundreds of sweet voices re-echoed in the air: "He shall be great! He shall be great!" Then St. John, kneeling before the Child God, offered Him the pretty goldfinch. Jesus held it in His divine hands, caressing it tenderly, and kissing the beautiful crimson head;

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