

## THE FLOOD IN THE BURN.

## A Little Folks' True Tale.

At the foot of a little hill, in an old land, there runs a little stream, a burn, as it is called, no wider at its widest shallows than the scholar-lads in summer days might leap across. And where the burn comes from, a little boy who thought he could know by only wondering, could never find out. It ran along near The Cottage where he slept at night, and once he walked a long way through the farm lands whence it came; but he grew tired long before the little stream seemed any smaller or nearer a beginning. They told him that it began somewhere far away, in the union of other streamlets, and how these trickled out of the fields wherever the rain had fallen—the rain that fell from the clouds that had risen from the great ocean; and they said that the burn ran on till it reached a river, and this river flowed into another, which poured its waters into a great lake, and the lake in turn formed another river which at last emptied itself into the ocean again. And then one day the boy followed the burn, as it ran, till he saw the river which received it, and the river was broad and quiet there, and the burn seemed lost, and the waters strange, so he turned back to play where he knew it best.

There was a clear well-spring of water near there, which was called Vincent's Well, deep and cool, and the boy used to lay himself down and drink of it, and in the waters of the well he could see two blue eyes, and behind or below a great depth of blue sky. And women came for water to the well, but when they carried away all they needed the well was still full, and the blue deepness of the well-sky that he had seen still remained. A little feeder ran from the well to the burn, and in its fresh, cool water there grew cress. And all along the burn-banks grew flowers, and grasses dipped in the water. Strange flies and shiny beetles, flitting butterflies, gleaming dragonflies, and busy spiders thronged about it. Where little bays and quiet shallows held still water the "whirligigs" spun around, and the "boatmen" unceasingly glided and sat, glided and sat, on the surface.

Once in a while a string of ducks would come trooping down to the burn and plunge in with a lordly drake at their head; and they poked in all the holes and rummaged along the banks, and where it was deep enough stood on their heads and flourished their yellowfeet in the air, and then the little boy was sorry for the worms; but he loved to look at the lustrous blue-squared wings, the green-glinting head and velvety neck of the leader; the stainless white, the soft grey, the smooth brown, and all the different downy coats of the others from which the crystal water-drops rolled so easily as they dipped and splashed.

He spent hours sailing little boats, tiny craft, paper-rigged, after the models of all the vessels he had ever seen in picture books,—yachts and schooners, ships and junks, frigates and dhows, and others that he only knew by sight, for he could not say their names; but he followed their voyages in the straight, smooth channels, and past the swirling eddy where a boulder blocked the stream, and into the chattering shallows near the bridge that bore the Old Road over the burn, and out beyond on the other side where it narrowed and deepened, and where the grasses trailed in the water, and great stones made the passage difficult for such helpless craft, and a willow wand was of immense assistance to navigation.

Sometimes he watched the birds that flitted up and down the stream, and hunted gnats, or sought for grubs; a saucy robin, a pretty chaffinch, a yellow yorlin often hopped about; but best of all he liked the dainty wily-wagtail as it ran about among the stones or jumped from bank to bank; for he knew where its nest was hidden under the hanging grasses, and he would not dare to look in it, lest it should be deserted and his be the blame of disturbance. And most of all he envied the swallows, who on duller days came shrieking along the little burn-course through the clouds of midges; or the screaming swift that spread his great black wings and swept along past him like a flash of darkness before the boy could ever be sure he was coming; for he knew that the swift and the swallows spent most of their time in the blue sky and he longed to fly as they did among the clouds and thought no other gift but