

FOR THE NEWS.]

THE FADING FLOWERS.

O flowers, that through summer, all too short,
Wert clad in beauty, bettering day by day,
Ye flowers that successfully did court
The zephyrs, blowing beauty bright and gay:

Ye mute reminders, eloquent yet dumb,
That speak of a fair land where buds e'er bloom,
That tell us of a lasting life to come—
A lasting life beyond the darksome tomb.

Ye jewels frail, but richer than the gems
That lie within the rocky breast of earth,
Ye short-lived beauties shown on changeable stems
That next day show us buds of newer birth:

Brief was thy mission; yet a world of good
Was born of that brief mission to mankind,
For hath some wearied one not walked the wood,
Nor left thy sweet encouragement behind?

Hath not some faltering heart, of hope bereft,
Felt newly strengthened to abide the weight
Of sorrowed care and pain that almost left
It wide in twain when hope was coming late?

Hath not some sinful soul felt all suffused
With deep repentance, when he saw again
The flowers of happy childhood that he used
To foster, ere he learned the wiles of men?

And ye have caused some bitter tears to fall
A down the shrunken cheek of hallowed age—
Not tears of grief like those shed o'er the pall,
But tears from eyes that fain would read youth's page.

And still the saddened thought that ye brought up
Were such as serve to clear the heart of pain;
They were sweet thoughts that changed the bitter
Cup
To a refreshing draught of joy again.

O dearest flowers, pass into nothingness,
Lie limp and dead beneath withered leaves and snow;
Believe I mourn, nor love thy beauty less,
Because thy shades are wan, thy petals low.

Brantford, Ont.

C. M. R.

NINA.

The rain drizzled down drearily. All day it had fallen unceasingly, and converted into greasy mud the dust lying on the city pavements. At an upper window in one of the dingy back streets in the east of London stood a girl looking steadily out at the dinginess and the smoke and the rain. She was not unhappy, for her life had known nothing brighter, and it had most certainly known worse. Her neighbors were, as a rule, more to be pitied than she. If, when singing to her guitar in one of the West End streets, the lot of some gayly-dressed girl leaning back luxuriously in a passing carriage, whose years she could guess did not number more than her own—if her lot seemed most strangely different, and a sudden questioning would spring up in her soul, "Why is there all this difference of lives in the world?" the return to her own home never failed to make her forget all her surmises in gratitude that her life was a happier one than those around her. In the room to the right there was misery enough. A drunken husband and father caused the miserable dependents on his bounty to pass their days and nights in hunger, wretchedness, and abject fear before him. To the left a sallow-faced seamstress, whose back ached from the beginning of the year till the end, stitched for the miserable portion that, if it kept her in breath, granted her nothing beyond.

Nina's lot was a fair one in comparison with these. She had health unvarying and good. She had strength that made her long excursions of occasionally twenty miles a pleasure rather than wearisome, and she had the means of gathering sufficient coppers to allow her, when a fit of laziness overtook her, to take a day's rest. But, above all, she had a great joy awaiting her when, on a clear, dry evening such as she had hoped this would prove, she sallied forth, guitar in hand, her sister at her side, and to crowds of admiring listeners allowed the rich tones of a voice that floated out on the air without effort to delight her audience. For Nina was a sweet singer, and she delighted in her singing.

"If it would but clear!" she was saying to her younger sister. "I hate the sloppy streets, and nobody caring to stop to listen to me, but just giving from charity. I won't go out if it doesn't stop."

"We shall have no bread then, if you don't, except just a slice; and perhaps to-morrow may be wetter."

"Well, I suppose we could go supperless to bed for once, and not think ourselves so very ill off. It isn't many in this land who know what a good supper is."

But the younger sister was more dependent on her share of such luxuries, and grumbled accordingly.

"Oh, Nina, dear, we'll go! It will clear, I know. Look—I don't see a drop now but the droppings from the slates! And, even if it was to rain, I would rather go wet to bed than hungry. And perhaps luck will come round the corner. A handsome gentleman will pass, and he will say: 'What a voice! One does not hear that every day in the streets.'"

And Kitty mimicked exactly the accent of a gentleman who had made the above speech in their hearing a few weeks before, and had, much to her delight and amazement, dropped half-a-crown into Kitty's open hand. The incident had been a fruitful source of enjoyment ever since to the sisters.

"And then," went on Kitty, for the thirteenth time, "he will put his hand into his trousers pocket and bring out half-a-crown, or perhaps"—with a still greater stretch of imagination and sparkling eyes—"mistake a half-sovereign for a sixpence, and hand it over to us."

"We would show him that he had made a mistake then," put in Nina, promptly, "and he would change it back to a sixpence."

"In that case I would rather he didn't make the mistake at all," said Kitty ruefully, "unless with a sudden brightening—"he felt so surprised at our honesty that he would tell us to keep it, and perhaps find us out and do for us, and make us rich ladies like what you read about in the story-books."

"I shouldn't want that. I want to be paid for my singing, not to be given money because I am poor, or for being honest either. We can be as honest as the richest among them."

"Well, you needn't fly out! I was just doing a bit of fancying. It is awfully nice, when the room is cold and the weather is dreary, just to forget it with something pretty. Look—it's going to be fine! I see the moon shining on the far-away slates. See—they're glittering quite white, and the rain is over. Let us get out before the shops are shut, and see the lights, and the people taking home their good things."

The elder sister did not prove difficult to persuade. She went immediately and put on the bright red-and-blue scarf which she wore to make her look picturesque, like the Italian girls who were rivals in trade; while Kitty fastened rows of paste beads round her neck, and threw over her shoulders a blue embroidered scarf that had been her sister's gift to her; and, thus arrayed in the east-aside garments of a second-rate theatre, the two sisters, their musical instruments in their hands, sallied forth, Nina already humming snatches of her favorite airs.

The girls did not intend to go far, although the bright moonlight now streaming on roof and pavement was inviting enough. They went about a mile from their home, and took their stand near some shops, the lights of which were an attraction to the younger sister; and Nina's voice soon tempted a crowd of passers-by to slacken their pace and linger till the song was finished. Their wonder was how an Italian—for such, in her gay dress, the dark-eyed girl looked—could pronounce so well the favourite songs of their country. Kitty had gone round the crowd once and had collected a considerable number of coppers.—Then she went back to her sister's side just as she began to sing "The Flowers of the Forest," a song her father, who was a Scotchman, had learned her. The crowd stood listening attentively.

Suddenly Kitty got excited. She withdrew a step behind her sister, and, heedless of the interruption to the song, whispered hurriedly.

"Sing out your best, Nina! He's there—the gentleman that gave us the half-crown!"

And Nina obeyed, and sang out her best in very gratitude. As the crowd listened, they forgot that they were gathered on a wintry night, giving ear to a street singer—they forgot everything but the exquisite pathos of the melody and words. When the song was ended there was a pause; then the listeners woke to the consciousness of their surroundings and drew breath.

"Did I exaggerate?" whispered a masculine voice in the ear of his next neighbor.

"No," was the involuntary answer.

"Will you speak to her?"

Kitty's bright face, right before the speakers, prevented an answer. The men plunged their hands into their pockets. In a minute Kitty's day-dream had been fulfilled, and not only silver, but gold glittered in her hand. But Nina's lesson was fresh in her memory. She dared not allow the mistake to pass, if mistake it was.

"Please, sir, this is not a sixpence; it is gold."

"I know, my child. Keep it. Give it to your sister."

"But is it not a mistake?" her eyes gleaming.

"No, it is not a mistake. Your sister—she is your sister, I suppose!—could command hundreds of such pieces if she were trained a little. Ah, you don't understand, of course. Keep the half-sovereign. You understand that."

But Kitty understood more. She stepped back quickly to Nina's side, without seeking more money.

"Nina, sing for your life! He is a prince, I am sure; and perhaps he'll fall in love with you right off to-night. Sing!"

With such stories filling her imagination as that of Cinderella and the glass slipper, it was small wonder that, when at the end of Nina's next song, the unknown benefactor stepped forward to speak to the singer. Kitty made up her mind that the lucky moment was come, that her sister's fortune was made. The first question was slightly disappointing.

"What is your name, my girl?"

"Nina Black, sir," answered Nina shyly.

"Where do you live?"

Her address was frankly given.

"Stay! I will scribble it down. I have nothing of a memory."

This done he looked with kind scrutiny into her face.

"Nobody ever taught you to sing, I suppose?"

"No, sir—except my father."

"What is your father?"

"He is dead, sir. He was a schoolmaster before he became ill."

"Ah, that explains much! Then you are alone?"

"Yes, sir. Kitty and I live alone."

"Well, I have your address. Take care of your voice. Don't strain it much. You overdid a bar just now and spoiled it. Good-night. Did your sister give you the half-sovereign? It is yours, of course—you earned it. I have paid as much for less of a treat before now. Good-night."

So saying, he left. Nina was going to sing again, but Kitty forbade it.

"Bother! Come home and count the money. Who is going to wait for their ha'pennies?"—with contempt. "We'll get a good supper, anyway; but he might have said more."

"I wonder why he took the address?" said Nina, as she followed her sister slowly out of the crowd.

"Perhaps he means to come and ask you to marry him. He is an oldish man, though. What a pity it isn't true that such people change to fine young handsome princes! He might have been enchanted, you know, and you have been the one that was to break the charm."

Nina laughed good-naturedly. She wanted a sight of the gold now. Kitty allowed her to handle it, but nothing more. She was banker and marketwoman.

"He said I had earned it," murmured Nina musingly, as she gazed on the little yellow coin.

"And he said more to me. He said you could earn hundreds of them if you liked. He thought I didn't understand; but I did."

"Earn hundreds! How?"—eagerly.

"With training; that was what he said."

"Well, I wish I had training, then," sighed Nina.

"Here are the shops!" broke in Kitty. "We can buy anything now, Nina. What shall it be?"

"Something good, with enough for that sick dressmaker too, Kitty, and some sweeties for the lame boy; and, oh, Kitty, a spotted handkerchief for old Mr. Jallow! He was always so proud of his handkerchief—for it was like better days to him—and he lost it yesterday. I heard him say so."

"My goodness, poor Jallow!"—and Kitty proceeded joyfully to do all that had been suggested by her elder sister.

This was a white day with them both. All their lives it remained a white day. Life, whatever changes it brought, had not much better to offer them than that.

Eight days later they received, with much shamefacedness, their first visitor. It was Nina's admirer.

"I have come to ask you to sing again to me," he said.

Nina, glad to hide her confusion, hastened for her guitar.

"Where did you get that thing?"

"It was my father's, sir."

"Did he play it?"

"Oh, yes, sir; far better than I can."

"Well, sing, that's a good girl."

In a moment the girl's fingers were wandering over the strings, and ere long her rich, soft voice was filling the room. The visitor buried his face in his hands and listened. When she had finished, he looked up.

"Thank you. Your voice is music itself. Now consider; would you go far away to a foreign land if you thought that, by going and by studying hard, you would be a great singer? Would you go contentedly, if you found the opportunity, and be determined to work very hard?"

"Would Kitty go, too?"

Kitty started. She had quite forgotten herself; but now she felt that it was well her sister had a better memory.

"Well, I don't know. I think not."

"No, sir; I would not go."

"But think! To become a great singer; to earn thousands and thousands of pounds, perhaps; to be admired and run after! Think!"

"No, sir; I would not go if Kitty did not go too."

"Well, that would be a bad expense. But say, for argument's sake, if Kitty went too, would you go then?"

"Yes, sir."

"You would go without hesitation?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well, I don't know; I am a professor of music, but not rich. I don't know that I could afford to send you both abroad; but we shall see."

And once more the professor went his way.

The *Columbia* was about to sail from Hull harbor. On its deck, looking earnestly toward the land, was Nina, and at her side, much more interested in the new life on which they were entering, was Kitty. Her fellow-passengers were engaging her attention, and, while Nina was resting mournful eyes on the only land she knew, and which she felt loath to leave, her sister was busy with a thousand speculations as to who this one might be, and whither that one could be going.

The professor had brought them on board; he had made all necessary arrangements. Nina was going to study for three years; and, when she returned to England, it would be to step at once on to the stage, and by her wondrous singing bring in a rich harvest to pay for this sowing time. The sister's little room has been given up. It was in a miserable locality, and great were Kitty's rejoicings at bidding it farewell.

To Nina the parting from old associations was pain. She had glorified the poor little dwelling till it had grown very dear. How lovingly her memory dwelt on scenes where her old father occupied the corner-seat at the fireside, and with gentle words attempted to give his children the education money had bought for him, trained

her to use her voice, and, when she looked for criticism, praised her with glistening eyes! Who would have such patience with her in the far-off land? Who would have pride in her success? Then the last years had been free and joyous. What dressings in the dusk, and complacency over the gay-colored ribbons which vanity had prompted them to buy; what easy money-making, wandering through brightly-lit streets, and what merry suppers at the close of the day? Nina doubted if they would ever be so happy again. At the end of the arrangements she was sobbing painfully, and half inclined to forego all her prospects. She knew what she had, and the future was only dimly outlined.

But Kitty was a wholesome restraint on any such vagaries. She had the future mapped out with marvelous clearness. She sketched glowing pictures to her quieter sister of what awaited her, and through her, both.

"There—we shall never have so poor a home again, I daresay!"

"Shall we ever have so rich a one?" thought Nina.

Away from the land they were sailing, and Kitty was in a ferment of delight.

"Nina, just look at these ladies! Did you ever see anything like their hats! And there is something so nice in the face of one of them—something so romantic."

But Nina leaned far over the edge of the vessel, and never turned her eyes from the receding shore.

"Mr. Harris will be back home now," was Kitty's next venture. "He'll be pretty well tired."

Nina's eyes sought her sister.

"Yes; wasn't it kind of him to take so much trouble? I never knew any one so good. He reminded me of father."

"He has taken a deal of trouble"—saucily; "but he'll expect to be well paid for it. You will have to clear off his account first."

"Oh, I do hope!"—Nina clasped her hands quickly—"that he will lose nothing by me! I shall work day and night rather than that."

"I dare say. But there's no great fear. He will be proud some day to say he knows you. I heard that tall, dark gentleman say something like that the other day."

"Well"—Nina's eyes flashed—"if he will be as proud to know me as I shall be to say he helped me, he will be proud enough."

Kitty tossed her head. She meant to forget the past. What was the use of publishing their poverty? But it was too early to begin that lesson to her elder sister. She was scarcely ready for it.

It was by Kitty's manoeuvres that, before the short passage to Germany was ended, all the passengers knew of the wonderful possession of the dark-eyed girl in their midst, and on deck, in the soft moonlight, parties had gathered together in silence to hear her sing, while sailors at the far end of the boat paused in their work to listen.

"See!" spoke Kitty, in high triumph. "It wasn't only your professor, for everybody that hears your prophecies you will be the wonder of England."

Nina's eyes darkened and enlarged as she listened.

"Then I shall repay him and made him proud of me yet," she thought. "He shall not repent his kind deed."

"We shall be as rich as princesses!" cried Kitty. "Won't it be splendid! We shall ride in a carriage-and-pair, and have dressed-up men behind us, waiting on us."

"You shall have everything you want, Kitty, if I can get it for you."

"Hurrah—we shall be as rich as princesses!" cried Kitty again.

In a little narrow back street with smells that suggested doubtful drainage, the sisters made their acquaintance with German life. The fat professor to whose care Nina had been consigned, lived in a four-roomed flat up some high stairs, and in one of these rooms she passed the long hours educating herself in all ways, but spending the greater part of her time at the piano. To Kitty the surroundings to their new existence were a great shock. It had been the favorite amusement on winter evenings to watch the lighting up of such big houses as she chanced to pass, and to admire ardently the crimson draperies, the gilded picture frames, the pretty carpets. She had confidently looked forward to some little luxury in this wonderful land that they had traveled so far to see; and the wooden floors, the cane-bottomed chairs were not such a great remove from the clean little kitchen they had been reared in. When she and her sister were alone, she handled with some contempt the minute ewer, which was more like a good-sized jug.

"Such a shabby, ugly little thing! Nothing like half as good as the ones we used to see in the china-shop at the corner! And he a professor, too! Good gracious, the lady in the poultry shop—you know her, Nina—she would turn up her nose at the like of this! The Germans must be a poor set of people."

"I think it is all so nice, Kitty—so clean." Kitty sniffed the air with her little retroused nose.

"As if we needed to come this length to see anything clean!"

Then work began for Nina. From early morning till late at night she toiled; and hard, discouraging work she found it. It was a very different kind of tuition from that of her doting, easily-pleased father. Often did the tears find her eyes at memory of the triumphant flash of