

LITTLE THINGS.

OFTEN, little things we hear,
Often, little things we see,
Waken thoughts that long have slept
Deep down in our memory.

Strangely slight the circumstance
That has force to turn the mind
Backward on the path of years,
To the loved scenes far behind!

'Tis the perfume of a flower,
Or a quaint old-fashioned tune;
Or a song-bird 'mid the leaves
Singing in the sunny June.

'Tis the evening-star, mayhap,
In the gloaming silver-bright,
Or a gold and purple cloud
Waning in the western light.

'Tis the rustling of a dress,
Or a certain tone of voice,
That can make the pulses throb,
That can bid the heart rejoice.

Ah, my heart! But not of joy
Must alone thy history tell.
Sorrow, shame, and bitter tears
Little things recall as well.

LA RABBIATA.

(FROM THE GERMAN OF PAUL HEYSE.)

THE sun had not yet risen. Over Vesuvius lay a thick grey sheet of mist, which stretched away towards Naples, and obscured the little towns along the coast. The sea was calm. The harbour was built in a narrow bay under the high and rocky Sorrentine coast, and here the fishermen and their wives were already moving about, and pulling to shore the boats and nets which had been lying out all night. Others prepared the barks, trimmed the sails, and got out the oars and masts from the caves, which were built deep into the rock, and in which the tackle was kept at night. Not an idler was to be seen—even those who were too old to go out in the boats, helped to pull in the nets; and here and there on one of the flat roofs stood an old woman, turning her spindle, or busy looking after her grandchildren.

"Do you see, Rachel, there is our padre curato?" said an old woman to a little creature ten years old standing near her, and busy with her spindle. "He is just getting into the boat; Antonino is to row him over to Capri. Maria Santissima! how sleepy the reverend gentleman looks!" And so saying, she waved her hand to a pleasant-looking little priest who had just settled himself in the boat, after having first carefully spread his black cloak over the wooden bench. Others on the shore paused in their work to watch the padre go off, as he nodded and bowed from side to side.

"Why must he go to Capri, grandmother?" said the child; "have they got no padre there, that they must borrow ours?"

"Don't be so silly, child," said the old woman; "they have got padres enough, and the most beautiful churches, and even a hermit, which we have not got. But there is a grand signora there; and she lived here in Sorrento for a long time, and was very ill; so the padre was often obliged to go to her with the Sacrament, because they thought she would not live till the morning. Well, the Holy Virgin has helped her, and she has grown strong and well again, and can bathe in the sea every day. When she went back to Capri, she gave a whole heap of beautiful ducats to the church and to the poor, and would not go till the padre had promised to visit her, so that she might confess to him. It is astonishing what a deal she thinks of him; and we may bless ourselves that we have got such a padre, with talents worthy of an archbishop, and who is so run after by grand people. The Madonna protect him," and with these words, she nodded to the little bark which was just going to push off down below.

"Shall we have fine weather, my son?" asked

the little priest, glancing doubtfully away towards Naples.

"The sun has not yet shone out," answered the lad; "he'll soon drive away that bit of fog."

"Then pull away so that we get there before the heat."

Antonino was just taking the long oar to push out into the open sea, when he suddenly stopped, and looked up towards the steep path which led down from the little town of Sorrento to the harbour beneath. A slight girlish figure was visible up there, hurrying down over the stones, and waving a handkerchief. She carried a little bundle under her arm, and her appearance was poor enough. Nevertheless, she had a lofty way of carrying her head, and the plaits of hair which were coiled over her forehead seemed to crown her like a diadem.

"What are we waiting for?" asked the padre.

"Somebody is coming who wants to go to Capri too. By your leave, padre, we shan't go the slower, for it's only a young girl of scarcely eighteen years."

At this moment the girl appeared behind the wall which hid the winding-path.

"Laurella," said the padre; "what has she got to do at Capri?"

Antonino shrugged his shoulders; the girl hurried forwards, her eyes cast down.

"Good morning, la Rabbia!" cried some of the young men who were standing round. They would have said more if the presence of the padre had not held them in respect, for the cool way in which the girl received their salutation seemed to make them more insolent.

"Good morning, Laurella," said the padre; "how goes it? art thou going to Capri?"

"With your leave, padre. Ask Antonino; he is the master of the boat. Every one is master of his own property; and God ruler over us all. There is a half carline," said Laurella, without looking at the young boatman, "if I can go for that."

"You can use it better than I," muttered the lad, pushing away some baskets of oranges so as to make room for her. (He was going to sell them at Capri, where the land is too dry to produce oranges enough for the wants of the many visitors.)

"I will not go for nothing," answered the girl, bending her black eyebrows.

"Come now child," said the padre, "he is a good lad, and does not wish to enrich himself from thy poverty. There now, get in"—and he gave her his hand—"and sit down by me. Why, he has spread out his jacket for thee to sit on; he did not do as much for me; but young people are always so; for the smallest bit of womanhood, people care more than for ten holy fathers. Now, no excuses, Tonino; it is as our God has made it." Meanwhile, Laurella had got in and sat down, after having first carefully pushed away the jacket. Tonino let it lie, but muttered something between his teeth; then he pulled hard against the current, and the little boat flew out into the gulf. "What hast thou in thy bundle?" asked the padre, as they sped away over the sea, which was just lit up by the first rays of the sun.

"Silk, cotton, and bread, padre; the silk is for a woman at Capri who makes ribands; and the cotton for some one else."

"Hast thou spun it thyself?"

"Yes, padre."

"If I remember rightly, thou canst also make ribands?"

"Yes sir, but my mother is worse again, so that I cannot leave home, and we cannot pay for a loom for ourselves."

"Worse is she? Dear me! when I was with you at Easter she was sitting up."

"Spring is always the worst time for her; since the great storms and the earthquakes, she has had so much pain, that she has been obliged to lie down."

"Do not leave off praying, my child, and asking the Holy Virgin to make intercession for thee. When thou comest down to the shore, they called thee 'la Rabbia.' Why so? It is not a nice name for a Christian, who ought to be meek and humble."

The dark face of the girl glowed all over, and her eyes sparkled.

"They mock me, because I don't dance and sing and chatter like the others; they ought to let me alone, I don't meddle with them."

"Thou mightest, however, be pleasant to every one; others whose life is easier may dance and sing, but even one who is sad can have a pleasant word for all."

She cast down her eyes, and pulled her eyebrows over them. They went on a little while in silence. The sun had now risen in full splendour over the mountains; the peak of Vesuvius reared itself over the sheet of cloud which still clung to its base, and the white houses on the plain of Sorrento peeped out from the green orange-trees.

"Has nothing more been heard of that artist, Laurella, that Neapolitan who wished to have thee for a wife?" asked the padre.

She shook her head.

"He came to take thy portrait, why didst thou not let him?"

"What did he want with it? There are others more beautiful than I—and then—who knows what he would have done with it; he might have bewitched me with it, mother said, and hurt my soul, or even killed me."

"Think not such sinful things," said the padre, seriously; "art thou not always in God's hand, without whose will not a hair of thy head can perish? and dost thou suppose that a man with a portrait in his possession is stronger than the great God? besides thou couldst see that he only meant kindly towards thee; would he have wished to marry thee otherwise?"

She was silent.

"And why didst thou refuse him? They said he was a good man, and would have supported thee and thy mother better than thou canst do with thy little bit of spinning and silk-winding."

"We are poor people," said she, passionately, "and my mother has been ill a long while; we should only have been a burden to him. I could never pass for a signora, and when his friends came to see him, he would have been ashamed of me."

"How thou talkest! I tell thee, child, that he was a good gentleman; besides, he was going to settle at Sorrento; there will not soon again be such another, who seemed to be sent straight from heaven to help you."

"I don't want a husband; never!" said she, quite determinately, and as if to herself.

"Hast thou taken an oath, or wilt thou turn nun?"

She shook her head.

"They are right who call thee obstinate, though such a name is not nice; dost thou not consider that thou art not alone in the world, and by this stubbornness thou makest the life and sufferings of thy poor mother only more bitter: what sufficient reason was there to refuse every honest hand which would support thee and thy mother; answer me, Laurella?"

"There is a reason," said she, gently and hesitatingly, "but I cannot tell it."

"Not tell it—not even to me—not to thy father confessor? At another time thou wouldst have no difficulty in telling me; is it not so?"

She nodded.

"Then relieve thy heart, child; if thou art in the right, I will be the first to allow it! but thou art young, and knowest nothing of the world, and some day thou mightest repent that for a childish fancy thou shouldst have thrown away thy happiness."

She cast a rapid, mid glance at the lad who sat at the end of the boat, rowing busily, with his woollen cap pulled down right over his brow. He was looking sidelong at the water, and seemed to be lost in his own thoughts. The padre observed her glance, and bent his ear nearer to her. "You did not know my father?" whispered she, and her eyes became fierce.

"Thy father? Why, I think he died when thou wast scarcely ten; what has thy father, who may be in Paradise, to do with thy obstinacy?"

"You did not know him, padre; you do not know that he is entirely to blame for my mother's illness."

"How so?"