

## Childrens' Department.

### THE FLOWER-SHOW.

In London, for several years, flower-shows have been established, at which the poor are invited to exhibit. Great interest attaches to these annual gatherings, and tastes are fostered by them in courts and alleys where no sunny light of nature enters, which do much to improve the homes of their inhabitants. It is to one such humble show that my true and simple story relates.

Down a dark alley, where the rows of houses stood close together, and the broken windows were filled up with rags, walked a girl who looked a little tidier and cleaner than the children playing around with their heaps of oyster shells. She was returning from an errand, and threaded her way along the dirty alley till she came to the house, No. 21. She ran quickly up-stairs and opened a door. A child younger than herself was nursing a puny little baby, and trying at the same time to toast a few slices of bread in front of a small fire, evidently hindered by the wailing of the infant in her lap.

"Here is sixpence I have got for my needle-work," said the girl who had just come in. "Now mother will let me go again to the ragged school to-night."

"I don't think she will, Annie; baby cries so much in the evening, and mother always says you are to nurse her."

"Well, if she won't let me go, I won't do any more work," replied Annie, sulkily.

"Is that what the kind young lady that you are so fond of, told you?"

"I wish she would teach me always, and then I would try to be better."

"Well, Annie, I am sure you have been kinder to me ever since she taught you, and she would like to know that."

Annie took up the poor little baby, who had begun to fret again, and soothed it on her lap. On one side of the room there was a small bedstead, and there were a few cups and plates upon the shelf; the floor was uncarpeted, and the window without a blind. Over the whole place there was a general look of squalor and misery which is easily accounted for: Annie's father was a costermonger whose earnings were very uncertain, and who, when they were large, generally spent them at the public house; the mother worked hard at the washing-tub, and came home late, tired and cross, and sometimes she, too, spent more than she ought on beer; so that the home of these poor children was a very unhappy one, though unfortunately, not worse than thousands of others in our dreadful London back-streets.

A ragged school had been established for some time in a neighbouring street, and Annie had been sent to it by her mother that she might get some book-learning. At first Annie did not care to go, and became tired of sitting so long quiet; she had not been trained to be obedient, and in consequence often gave her teacher much trouble, disturbing the other girls and being saucy when reproved. One evening a gentle, kind young lady came to assist her friend, in whose class Annie was. The sweet look in her eyes riveted Annie's attention, and she felt an unusual pleasure in trying

to do her task; then the kind word of encouragement inspired her with the desire to do more. When school was over, Annie came by the side of the lady, and looking up into her face, said, "Do come again, I like you to teach me; do come again." The lady looked surprised at being spoken to, and then said kindly, "I shall be here next Friday."

On Friday, Annie managed to come in very good time: she looked tidier and cleaner than usual, and was evidently determined to do her best. The same young lady came to take charge of the class, and with a pleased look recognized her little friend. From that time there was a marked improvement in Annie's behaviour. The lessons she was taught were taken to heart, and it was evident that she was striving through many difficulties to do better. Of course bad habits and bad temper would sometimes gain the mastery, but it soon seemed that by God's grace a hard struggle against sin was going on in her heart.

On the evening of the day on which she brought home the money for her work, the baby was quiet; and Annie's mother allowed her to go to the ragged school. When she came home, a bright look was on her face. "Oh mother," she said, "there is to be a flower-show in two months' time, and teacher says we are all to get little plants in pots, and then we can send them to the show, and the best will get prizes; only they must be our very own flowers that we have taken care of ourselves."

"But I cannot be spending money on flowers or flower-pots," said her mother, somewhat roughly.

"Oh, but mother dear, you will let me spend twopence out of the next sixpence I earn, won't you? And I know an old man in Crane's Court who will let me have such a pretty little geranium."

"Well well, I'll see—perhaps I will," replied her mother more gently.

Poor Annie tried hard to get some work that she could do. At last she succeeded, and very pleased was she when the sixpence was put in her hands. She went round to Crane's Court where an old gardener lived, whose window-sill boasted a few plants, and purchased of him a nice young geranium, which the old man told her would be full of bloom if she watered it regularly, gave it plenty of light and air, and kept it free from insects. She took it home and the care of her plant was a constant pleasure. Every morning she ran to the pump, in the yard and brought up a broken cupful of water—it was her only watering can; and day by day the flower thrived under her careful attention, put forth its leaves, and at length, in excellent time for the show, large heads of beautiful blossoms appeared.

The show was to be held in the nearest square, and the children had already seen preparations being made for tents to receive their cherished plants. The day before the exhibition Annie went to take a peep between the railings at what was going on inside, and then ran home full of glee to tell her sister Susan about the large tent that had been put up. As she came near the house she looked up to see if her plant, which she was to take in the afternoon round to the garden, was safe on the window-sill. It was gone. Who could have touched it? She had never known it moved before.

Her heart beating fast, she ran up stairs very quickly, opened the door, and there on the floor lay her pretty flower, and stalk broken in half. Poor Annie burst into tears. Her father sat on a stool near the window and said, crossly:

"See what comes of keeping your silly flowers in the way. The window can't be opened without knocking them down."

"Oh, but, father," sobbed Annie, "I was going to take it to the flower-show to-day, and perhaps I should have got a prize; for I have taken such care of it,—I loved it so."

"Well, you need not take on so. Here's sixpence to buy another with."

"But then, father, it won't buy me my own and teacher said we must only send those plants we have grown ourselves."

"Who'll know anything about it, you silly girl? Buy your flower, and get your prize."

Annie felt there was something wrong; still she took the sixpence, and went away with a sad heart. She bought a handsome little plant, with fine blossoms. It looked quite as pretty as her own; but Annie felt all the time in her heart she was doing wrong, and could take no pleasure in it. In the afternoon she carried the pot to the tent: it was placed on a stand with a number of others, and looked very gay amongst them. But Annie's heart was like lead, and the words, "Thou, God, seest me," which she had learnt at school, kept running in her head.

The next morning was bright and fine. Annie and Susan made themselves look as tidy as they could, and went to the square. The flowers looked so lovely, the music sounded so merrily, that Annie's misgivings seemed to disappear. On a table at one end of the tent were the prizes

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