

CHRISTMAS VIOLETS.

Lathright I found the violets
 You sent me once across the sea;
 From gardens that the winter frosts
 In summer lands they came to me.

Still fragrant of the English earth,
 Still humid from the frozen dew,
 To me they spoke of Christmas morn,
 They spoke of England, spoke of you.

The flowers are scentless, black, and sore,
 The perfume long has passed away;
 The sea winds tides are year by year
 Is set between us chill and gray.

But you have reached a winless age,
 The haven of a happy clime;
 You do not dread the winter's age,
 Although we missed the summer-time.

And like the flower's breath over sea,
 Across the gulf of time and pain,
 To-night returns the memory
 Of how that lived not all in vain.

THE PIN GHOST.

No! I am certain I did not dream it, because, you see, I wasn't asleep. I was very tired, I know, for I had been sewing busily all day helping my good friend Miss Fairbrain, the dress-maker, to put the finishing touches to my new walking suit, and I had just thrown myself down on the lounge for five minutes' rest, but I was wide awake all the time.

My husband laughs and shakes his head when I say this; but perhaps you, dear reader, will be more reasonable when you have heard the whole story.

It was just after dinner. As I have said, I was very tired, and I left my husband engrossed in the evening paper, while I stole away to my little sewing-room, intending to see the just finished dress was carefully folded and laid away until such time as it should be needed.

But then my weariness overcame me, and I just closed my eyes as I lay on the lounge, to shield them from the gas, when a slight rustling noise attracted my attention, and I opened them instantly to see the very strangest sight: a tiny, slender figure, perhaps two feet in height, clad in a robe of silvery white—an old woman, to judge by her queer wrinkled face; a young sylph, to look at her light agile movements—who was hovering over the countless scraps and shreds which still littered the floor, and apparently picking up something with great eagerness.

For a moment I was too much startled to speak; then, gaining courage as I looked at the little creature, I sprang up, exclaiming at the same time,

"Why, who are you? and where did you come from? and pray what are you doing here?"

The little old woman straightened herself up as she abruptly addressed her, and made a queer little ancient courtesy. Then with great gravity, in a shrill, fine voice which almost seemed to prick one's ears with its peculiar sharpness, she answered,

"I am the Pin Ghost, and my mission has ever been to gather up in all parts of the world the pins that are dropped by so many hasty or careless hands. Especially do I follow in the wake of dressmakers, because then and there have I always found my richest harvest, and that is why I am here to-night."

"Dear me!" I interrupted; "this vocation of yours explains a mystery which has long puzzled the curious. This is the answer to that oft-repeated question of 'Where do the pins go?'"

"Yes," said the sprite, with a queer little smile on her withered face—"yes, and you may congratulate yourself on having fathomed a secret which has baffled wiser heads than yours."

"But tell me," I began eagerly—"tell me what you do with all the pins you gather, and to what use you can put them, come, sit down and let us talk comfortably."

"Sit down, indeed!" said the old woman, with a look of disdain. "Why, I'm neither bent nor crooked, that you should ask me to sit down. No; I always stand, as you might perceive."

Seeing that she was really offended, though I did not know why, I hastened to apologize, and at last the smile returned to her face, and she began her story thus:

"As I have told you, my mission is to pick up the pins that every one scatters, and this work keeps me very busy. By day and by night, in town

or country, in the houses of the rich or the poor, I gather my pins, and having gathered, I proceed to use them. Whenever I see a rich man with more money than brains, building an elegant house and furnishing it in the most costly manner, I begin on him. I put pins in his luxurious sofas, pins in his softest easy-chairs, pins in his bed of down; I even put pins in his favorite dishes, until they cease to gratify his palate—yes, and pins in the elegant dress of his wife and daughters too, until the whole family become uneasy and discontented.

"Then, finding no pleasure in their possessions, they sell or rent their fine house on which they had so prided themselves, and try change and travel. In nine cases out of ten they go abroad and make the tour of Europe, but they do not escape me. No, indeed! I follow them in their journeyings, keeping them continually on the move, putting a few pins in every new purchase or new place, just to keep them from too much tranquillity. Finally our rich man turns his face homeward again, under a vain impression that among the old familiar scenes the old rest and comfort may yet be found. Delusion! I put pins in his old pleasures, his old pursuits, until he can glean nothing restful from them, and is fain to become a dissatisfied grumbler for the rest of his life.

"Then sometimes I find a clergyman who is too happy, too comfortably settled; he loves his people, they love him, and he finds real delight in his duty. Well, I can soon change all that. I stick pins in his sermons, and they prick and vex some sensitive hearer. I stick pins in elder or deacon, warden or vestryman, as the case may be, until their very hand-shakings only sting the more. I put a few pins in the sewing society, the missionary meetings, the social gatherings, until nearly every one gets a prick or a scratch, and is indignant accordingly. By-and-by the poor harassed minister and his perplexed people are mutually glad to sever their uncomfortable relations.

"Then, again, I amuse myself with lovers' quarrels; and let me tell you in confidence that they are the most foolishly sensitive people in the world. A well-placed pin is quite sufficient to make any man absurdly jealous or any girl unreasonably exacting, and I have often known a broken engagement to follow a few good hard pricks.

"Sometimes I stick a pin into an orator just as he is trying to address an audience; and then how the poor man will stammer and hesitate and fidget, and make all his hearers as nervous as himself.

"But my most effective work is done when I can put a few sharp pins into a married man, and then send him home yet smarting from the effect.

"Of course he thinks that his business perplexities have irritated him, and lays his ill humor to some rise or fall in stocks or merchandise; but I know better. Naturally he vents some part of his vexation upon his wife, and this saves me a great deal of work, since no thrust of mine, however sharp, could equal the pain her husband's ill temper can give her.

"In fact, that is the easiest way to reach a married woman; for all the pins I can put in the domestic machinery, all the sharp-pointed frictions of social life, are as nothing compared with the smart a husband's looks and words can inflict.

"Very often, too, I make one at a dinner or evening party, and slyly put a few spare pins in here and there. Have you never been thoroughly uncomfortable at a social gathering where you expected to find only enjoyment? Ah! that was owing to some of my pins."

"Alas!" I exclaimed, as the old woman paused for a moment, "what a list of vexations and annoyances is this! How much real misery you are responsible for, and how complacently you speak of it all! Tell me, do you never do any good—never further any right purpose?"

The sprite looked at me, as I asked this question, with a new expression—a look from which the malice had faded, and was replaced by a gentle gravity.

"I think I may say," she replied, "that my vocation gives me many opportunities of doing good, which I embrace very gladly. Whenever I catch people saying unkind things, repeating foolish gossip, showing selfish disregard for the happiness of others, I never fail to prick them severely. Want of honor or honesty, extravagance, wasted opportunities—all these and countless other causes

provoke me to sharpest pricks and thrusts, given with unceasing vigilance."

"But how is it that all these pricks and stings you give don't make the world any better? Unkindness, selfishness and falsehood abound in every direction, to say nothing of graver errors; and so of what use are your pins, after all?"

"Ah! that is only too true," said my companion, sadly. "I have wondered at that same fact very often, and it is dreadfully discouraging. I can tell you, though I know it is not my fault. But then I sometimes think," she added, brightening visibly as she spoke, "that people get used to my reminders after a while, and so disregard them. For instance, there are the plumbers. Now I have tried faithfully to prick and sting some of those men into being honest; but though I have used up nearly all my reserve pins in the effort, I can't say I have ever met with the slightest success. Indeed, it has often seemed to me that the more I disturbed and tormented them, the more they engrossed themselves in careless work and extortion. Why, I have sometimes been quite in want of pins because of the myriads I have wasted on those people."

"What do you do when you find your supply running low?" I enquired.

"Oh, I practice a little more economy for a time, and then, too, I make use of substitutes."

"I don't see what you can find that would answer the purpose."

"Well, the best of all I employ are the *bored*, and they are really very effective. Why, bless you, with one first-class bore I can make a dozen people uncomfortable, not to say wretched, and, in consequence, I take the bore of all sorts under my special protection. Nothing less powerful than my care could have saved them from the vengeance of their victims long ago."

"Well, notwithstanding all you have said about your efforts for improving people, I must still think that yours is a cruel and a useless occupation, for you cause much needless unhappiness to many innocent people, while, by your own showing, you are unable to do any real good," I said, warmly; for I was, I could hardly tell why, somewhat cross.

The old woman smiled more maliciously than ever as I spoke, and then, making a sudden motion toward me with finger and thumb, as if about to prick me with a pin, she exclaimed, sharply,

"There, take that, and see what it is to be rude to the Pin Ghost!" and the next instant she had vanished from my sight and from the room as completely as if she had never existed. At the same moment my husband called me out, and, with my mind still occupied with my strange visitant, I returned to the parlor and told him the whole story, which he heard with incredulous laughter, declaring that I must have dreamed it all.

But there is one fact which assures me that I really saw the old woman; for ever since she made that paring thrust at me with finger and thumb—ever since that moment, I say—I have been suffering from a vague uneasiness, which has culminated at last in a restless desire to put this narrative in print. Perhaps this was the consummation the malicious old woman intended, and my punishment may consist of sharp criticism, or total unbelief, or—sharpest pin of all—I may be coolly classed among the bored, and thus find myself at once the weapon and the victim of the Pin Ghost.

"A BOUQUET FOR MAMMA ON CHRISTMAS MORNING."

WHAT can brighten the winter hours,
 This Christmas spring, the *Flax's* flowers?
 What is the gift that can gladden more
 Than that at her mother's chamber door?

Elsie ever this gladness bore,
 On which the three-lined hale was born,
 Eagerly bears her little gift
 Her mother's heart to Heaven to lift.

For, oh, to her mother's gaze his sweet,
 Her precious darling's eyes to meet,
 Glad blue eyes, beaming, show
 All other meanings, with yearning love.

Oh Angels of old, that caroled first,
 When the Holy Babe this morn was nursed,
 Shall ever your hymns this season sing,
 To sing us to love and to tender peace!

And of all the Heaven to Earth ye bring,
 Of all the love that to ye ye sing,
 What more dear than Christmas morn
 Than the love that in Elsie's eyes ye see!