

river below. Upon the gravelly knolls it fell, and trickled quickly down, down, deep into the ground among the gravels and coarse soil-grains, and most of it was soon out of sight and out of reach. It fell, too, upon the clay field, where the soil-grains were all so small and close together that the rain could not find a way between them, and so the rain stood, like little ponds and rivers, in the pits and ruts over the field. Lastly it fell upon good soil, and slowly it soaked away down to the roots of the clover and the corn and the flowers, and down past the roots to a safe storehouse below. Next morning what a change! Even the crops on the hillside and on the gravelly knolls looked fresh and bright. They had kept enough of the rain for one good drink at any rate. On the clay field, the clover stood in danger of having too much of a good thing, for little patches of water were still to be seen here and there. The good soil seemed almost dry again. The corn leaves had straightened out, and every plant in the field was holding its head up straight and strong.

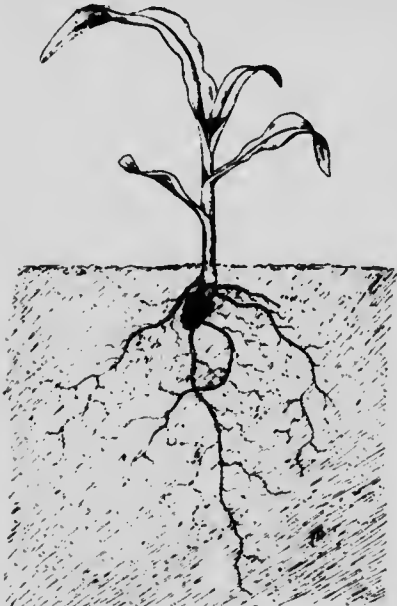


Fig. 6 The Soil and the Seedling.

"The earth all about the roots becomes a scene of life and activity."

A few days later, and again great changes. The hillside and the gravel patch were in as bad plight as ever, — dry and parched. The wet clay soil, in the hot sun, had dried and baked and cracked, squeezing and breaking the tender roots. The heavy rain and the hot sun had done bad things for this soil, and for its little nursing plants. But on the good soil, the crops had flourished ever since the rain. As soon as the plant roots and the sun had drunk up the moisture at the surface of the ground, the roots sent to the storehouse below the message for more water. The ready soil-grains below the roots began to hand the water from one to another up through two, three, and four feet, to keep the roots supplied with plenty to drink. And so, while the ground above was dry and dusty, the rain that had fallen into the good soil many days before, was still kept on tap, and handed out from below when called for.

THE SOIL AND THE SEEDLING. In every seed there is a possible plant, which will produce many other seeds, food for man or beast. But before the plant can come to life, the seed must be placed in earth. What sort of earth bed does the seed like best? Soft, and moist, and warm. Soft, that is, free of lumps, and fine, and mellow, so that the earth may lie snug and close to the seed; moist, so that the seed may swell and burst, and set the young plant free; warm, so that the little plant may be nursed into life.

Imagine now, the little seedling just peeping above ground, and