

IVY-LEAVED TOAD-FLAX  
(*Linaria cymbalaria*).

At this season the charming little ivy-leaved toad-flax may be found in the crevices of old walls, where its thread-like roots feed upon the decaying mortar. Penetrating deeply into the fissures of the brickwork they both keep the plant firmly in its place and render it independent of cold, heat and dryness. The cheery little plant holds its own and looks green and flourishing when prolonged drought is making other vegetation appear faded.

The winter and spring rains soak into the mortar of an old wall, and the horizontal roots of the toad-flax, protected as they are between the layers of bricks, have their store of moisture to draw upon and keep the plant in health and vigour.

If a root of this small creeper can be found within easy reach, it will repay a little careful observation through the summer. It possesses

several points of interest besides the delicate beauty of its tiny lavender and yellow flowers. It is closely related to the large snapdragons, but differs from them in having a spurred flower.

From its wonderfully prolific growth, this plant is popularly known as mother of thousands, and its drooping slender stems throwing a sort of veil over crumbling masonry must have given rise to its other familiar name of maiden hair.

The leaves are like miniature ivy, and when young are of a purple colour on the under side. The chief interest in watching this plant is to observe its remarkable mode of sowing its seed.

As soon as the small capsule is formed it begins to turn towards the wall until it finds a crevice, and in that it places itself, just as we should put a small parcel on a shelf, and it remains secreted there until ripened by the warmth of sunlight, when the capsules split open, the seeds are shed out and lie upon the

crumbling mortar ready to germinate as soon as rain shall fall and afford them the needed moisture.

I often show this plant to my young friends as affording a remarkable instance of vegetable instinct and adaptation.

I am tempted to quote from Miss Ann Pratt's *Flowering Plants of Great Britain* an interesting incident connected with this humble flower.

In 1850 a deputation waited upon the Chancellor of the Exchequer respecting the abolition of the window tax.

A spray of *Linaria*, which had grown in the dark and produced only dwarfed and blanched leaves, was shown in contrast with another spray gathered from the same plant which, on its sunlit side was of a rich green and covered with flowers; this mute appeal was well calculated to show the evil and depressing effect of darkened dwellings and the consequent cruelty of the window tax.

## IN THE TWILIGHT SIDE BY SIDE.

By RUTH LAMB.

### PART VII. AN OPEN EVENING.

"Fight the good fight of faith" (1 Timothy vi. 12).

"Let us not be weary in well doing; for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not" (Gal. vi. 9).

HITHERTO, my dear girls, I have done all the talking at our twilight gatherings and you have been only listeners. I came to the conclusion some time ago that we ought to have an "open night," so that such of you as chose to speak might give the rest the benefit of your experience.

I think I hear you ask "How can this be done? Is it likely that any one of us would care to open her heart to all the rest? When we last met, did you not say how hard girls find it to speak even to their mothers about the most important subject of all?"

True. But many of you have written unreservedly to me, and, as I believe it will be equally interesting and beneficial for us all to exchange thoughts about the subjects considered at our twilight sittings, I am going to make portions of your letters the text for our talk this evening. Be assured, however, that in doing this I shall be guilty of no breach of confidence, or give one moment's anxiety to any of you who have honoured by trusting me.

In most cases your heart-to-heart revelations have been accompanied neither by real names nor addresses. If all of you, who have met with me for eighteen months past, were to pass singly before my eyes, I should not recognise one of my correspondents.

As to hand-writings! They tell me nothing. They are all strange to me. Thus our connection is a dual one. We are at the same time dear friends, who love and sympathise with each other, and, in a personal sense, absolute strangers.

I cannot express to you how deeply I have been stirred by your letters. Stirred with truest motherly sympathy by your troubles; regret at what you tell me of your failures and disappointments; joy and thankfulness when you have been able to report even a temporary victory over a besetting sin or an oft-recurring temptation.

Have not I had the same experiences, and gone through the same temptations, and grieved over similar failures? In reading your words, I have seemed to live over again many an incident in my own past life, and to walk beside you on the path you find so rugged and thorny.

If you, in writing to me, have yielded to that natural longing of which we spoke when last together, you may be assured I have found it terribly hard not to be able to answer you individually. This is impossible, but I want each and all of you who have written to me, to believe that I feel for and with you. I am deeply grateful for the many sweet words of appreciation which prove that our twilight meetings have not been in vain, but that, by God's blessing, they have been helpful to so many friends, and of such varying ages and positions in life.

Often the reading of a few simple lines from a young "general servant" or an equally hard worker in some other daily round of toil, has brought a song of thanksgiving from my heart to God, and tears of joy to my eyes. You, who have written the glad tidings of the blessings which have come to you through our gatherings, can hardly imagine how rich I have felt as I read your words.

There was one sweet sentence which has often recurred to my mind. "I am only a young girl and have not many Christian friends, so that every crumb seems to cheer and help me. Before writing this, I knelt down and asked God to help you very, very much, and also to bless all you have written both to others and myself."

What a sweet, unselfish spirit is manifested in such a prayer. What blessings might we look for if only each heart and voice amongst us were uplifted in like manner. Yet the writer, whilst owning her desire to be a true and consistent follower of Christ, grieves over the fact that old sins and failings still have a strong influence over her.

"Utter selfishness is the worst of them all, and I don't think I could have a worse, could I?" she asks.

In looking over other letters, I find the same complaints and regrets about hasty tempers and words, selfishness, want of perseverance, good resolutions and scanty fulfilments, the yielding easily to temptation and gradually going back to the old ways, after a brief struggle to lead the "higher life." In other words the Christ life, though at best, the imitation might bear only a very shadowy resemblance to the perfect pattern given for our imitation.

I shall quote passages from several letters, because I attach a very great value to such glimpses of the inner self as are given by them. I know how they touched responsive chords in my own heart, and I doubt not they will in like manner stir you to whom I speak. They will make us all feel that our meetings

have been the seeds from which have sprung golden harvests.

You know it is always said there is no teacher like experience, and we never fully understand a thing unless it has, in a manner, become part of our own lives. But we may learn most valuable lessons from the experience of others, and the misfortune is, that we are too often unwilling to be taught by anything which does not concern us personally. Still, I feel sure that you, dear girls, listening, as I tell you the actual words of other girls, will acknowledge to yourselves, "I too have felt the same longings, grieved over the same failures, experienced the same difficulties and need for guidance and strength. Yet I have kept silence to all around me, and alas! I have not gone to Him who has said, 'Come unto me,' and promised, 'Ye shall find rest unto your souls.'"

Now listen whilst I read a few passages for the benefit of us all—of myself, as much as any.

"I am only just starting in the 'narrow way,' and feel very much to need help in many things, or rather to have them explained, but I could not possibly speak to anyone. I long to tell a dear, Christian friend of God's goodness to me, but I cannot. Is it wrong of me not to speak? I do love God and I want to be a true follower. Will you explain that verse—'Do all to the glory of God.' It seems by it that we must not do anything unless we glorify God by doing it. I suppose one can hardly do that at a dance or a play—can they? Yet these seem very harmless things if not carried to excess. I am very fond of dancing, but if I could really see that it is unfitting a Christian I would give both up."

"The talk on 'He that is slow to anger' was a great help, as I have a very quick temper. I believe that God has helped me to control it lately, but it is dreadfully hard to keep back the sharp words when provoked."

In regard to that same talk, the correspondent whose first anxious letter suggested it, writing again tells me: "What you said kept me from getting angry for the rest of the day, and has helped me since a great deal. I feel sure you will pray for me every day, and the feeling that you do so, will, I think, often help me to gain a victory over myself. I shall also pray that I may give less love to self and more to others. I shall 'strive on, work on, fight on,' and pray that not only I but all who unite in spirit in the Twilight Talks, may have strength to persevere and in the end to conquer, and that I may be able to tell you that my victories are more in number than my defeats."