

like some quaint kind of head-gear. Even if they get out of the husk they are for the first day or two crumpled into odd shapes, just as they were packed and curled up in the seed-coat; but before long they spread out their two cotyledons and seem to rejoice in the light and air.

These seedlings are of a dark green colour with a crimson stem, a combination we may also find in the bud of the tree itself, which in some specimens has outer bud-scales of the richest crimson, whilst the delicately folded young leaves within are of a vivid tint of green.

This year, 1898, I find a remarkable number of these seedlings with three and even four cotyledon leaves, showing that the seeds must have contained three or four embryos. A month or two later we shall find these young trees showing two leaves of the mature form, which is quite different from the strap-shaped cotyledon.

It may interest my readers to be reminded that the sycamore of which I have been speaking is not the sycamore of Scripture, that being a species of fig, an entirely different tree in every respect.

It has an oval undivided leaf like the bay-tree and having wide-spreading branches affording abundant shade; it is often to be met with by the roadside in Palestine, where it is planted for the benefit of wayfarers, who welcome the cool shelter it affords from the hot sun and also the sustaining fruit it bears.

Beech seed-leaves consist of two broad deep green cotyledons of palest green beneath; they are very distinctive, and once identified we can never mistake them.

The lime-tree has seedlings with deeply incised leaves, very unlike the perfect form.

If we have no companion who can name

these baby-trees for us, the only way to learn about them is to look under the various trees in April and May, when we shall probably light upon the growing seeds of each kind. When pressed and dried, they form an interesting collection either by themselves or to add to any dried specimens of the English forest-trees we may happen to be forming.



SHEPHERD'S PURSE.

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One of the commonest weeds to be found throughout spring and summer is the shepherd's purse (*Capsella bursa pastoris*). It often bears as many as fifty pods on its stem, and by counting the number of seeds in each pod and adding the whole number together, we shall find the total to amount to about one thousand five hundred seeds. No wonder gardeners find it a troublesome weed when one plant can produce so many seeds and sow itself all over the garden. We may note its very varied leaves, those on the stem are oblong and arrow-shaped at the base, the root leaves being pinnatifid, that is cleft into divisions half way down.

In China and North America the plant is used as a vegetable, and it used to be credited with medicinal virtues.

My chief interest in this hardy little weed arises from its remarkable power of adaptation; if it happens to be growing in rich soil, it will attain to a height of one or two feet, but if starved in some wall crevice or growing between the stones on a hard gravel path even there it does its best; its stem is covered with immature purses and is crowned by a tiny head of flowers; it is thus a true emblem of patience and fruitfulness under adverse circumstances.

SISTERS THREE.

By MRS. HENRY MANSERGH, Author of "A Rose-coloured Thread," etc.

CHAPTER XXIII.

"AND so you are engaged too, Norah!"

Half-an-hour had passed since Rex had left Cloudsdale, and Lettice and Norah were seated in the bed-room which they shared together, Norah still trembling and tearful, Lettice full of serious, wide-eyed interest.

"And so you are engaged too!"

"No, not engaged. There is nothing definite, but I know that he cares for me, and I have promised to wait—"

"It's the same thing, but—five years! It is a terribly long time! So much may happen before then. You may change your mind!"

"No! I can't explain, but I simply could not think of anyone else while Rex was alive. It would be all the same if it were fifteen years. You need not pity me, Lettice. I shall keep house for father after you and Hilary are married, and I shall be quite happy. I don't think anything could make me unhappy again, now that I know Rex cares for me, and that when he comes back—"

Norah stopped short, and Lettice drew her breath with a painful respiration.

"Oh, Nonie, I envy you! I wish I felt like that. I could never, never marry Arthur if I had to go out to India, and leave you all behind. Even now—Norah! if I speak out to you, will

you keep it to yourself? Will you promise faithfully not to repeat a word to father or Hilary, or anyone else? Will you? Answer, Norah, yes or no!"

"I—I—yes, I promise, Lettice, if you wish it, but wouldn't it be better—"

"No! No! I can speak to no one else, and not even to you unless you promise not to repeat a single word. Sometimes I am so miserable! I never intended to marry Arthur—never for a moment; but he was very nice to me—and (I know you will be shocked, Norah, you are so honest and brave) I wanted him to go on being attentive, and sometimes I did pretend I liked him a little bit, when he seemed discouraged, or as if he were beginning to care less than he used. Then that day on the river he asked me to marry him, and I said No! I was horrified at the idea, and I tried to refuse him, I really did, but he looked so miserable—I couldn't bear to see him. I was quite happy for a little time after that, and when he was away I longed for him to come back, but since then father and Miss Carr have been so cross; there have been such worries with the house, and workmen, and dressmakers, that I have felt sometimes as if I would give the world to run away and hide, and never see any of them again!"

Norah sat motionless, gazing at her sister in horrified silence. Her heart

beat in quick, painful throbs—even Rex himself was forgotten in the shock of hearing her worst fears confirmed in Lettice's own words. Unhappy! within three weeks of her marriage, with presents arriving by every post, the wedding breakfast ordered, the guests bidden to the church! It was some time before she could command her voice sufficiently to speak.

"But—Lettice! If you were happy at first, perhaps you are only miserable now because you are tired and overdone. I think even if I were going to marry Rex, I should feel sad the last few weeks when I thought of leaving father and the old home, and all the rest of you. It seems only natural. It would be rather heartless if one felt differently."

"Do you think so, Norah, do you?" queried Lettice eagerly. "Oh, I am so glad to hear you say that. I have said so to myself over and over again, but I thought I ought to be happy. I have been so wretched. That night when you thought I had toothache—"

"I know. I was afraid it was that. But, Lettice, if you are not satisfied it is not too late even now. You could tell Mr. Newcome."

But Lettice gave a shriek of dismay. "Oh, never, never! I daren't think of it, Norah. The house is ready, all the furniture—my dresses—the wedding