

Natural History for Little Folks.**The Story of the First Snowdrops.**

An old man sat alone in his house. It was full of shadows; it was dark and gloomy. The old man cared nothing for the shadows or the darkness, for he was thinking of all the mighty deeds that he had done. "There is no one else in the world," he muttered, "who has done such deeds as I," and he counted them over aloud. A sound outside of the house interrupted him. "What can it be?" he said to himself. "How dares anything interrupt me? I have told all things to be still. It sounds like the rippling of waters, and I have told the waters to be quiet in their beds. There it is again. It is like the singing of birds, and I have sent the birds far away to the south."

Some one opened the door and came in. It was a youth with sunny curls and rosy face.

"Who said you might come in?" muttered the old man.

"Did not you?" asked the youth, with a merry little laugh. "I am really afraid that I came without asking. You see, every one is glad to see me and"—

"I am not," interrupted the old man.

"I have heard rumors of your great deeds," said the youth, "and I came to see whether the tales are true."

"The deeds are more true than the tales," muttered the old man, "for the tales are never great enough. No one can count the wonderful things I have done."

"And what are they?" asked the young man gravely, but with a merry little twinkle in his eyes that would have made one think of the waves sparkling in the sunlight. "Let us see whether you or I can tell the greatest tale."

"I can breathe upon a river and turn it to ice," said the old man.

"I can breathe upon the ice and turn it to a river," said the youth.

"I can say to water, 'Stand still,' and it will not dare to stir."

"I can say, 'Stand no longer,' and it will go running and chattering down the mountain side."

"I shake my white head," said the old man, "and snow covers the earth."

"I shake my curls," said the young man, "and the air sparkles with sunshine. In a moment the snow is gone."

"I say to the birds, 'Sing no more. Leave me,' and they spread their wings and fly far away."

"I say, 'Little birds, come back,' and in a moment they are back again and singing their sweetest songs to me."

"No one can count the leaves," said the old man, "but whether I shake the trees with my icy touch, or whether I turn my cold breath upon them, they fall to the ground with fear and trembling. Are there any rumors of my deeds as great as that?"

The young man answered gravely, but with a laugh in his voice, "I never saw any leaves falling to the ground, for when I appear, they are all fair and green and trembling with gladness of my coming."

So the two talked all night long. As morning came near, the old man appeared weary, but the youth grew merrier. The sunlight brightened, and the youth turned to the open door. The trees were full of birds, and when they saw him, they sang, "O beautiful spring! glad are we to look again upon your face!"

"My own dear birds!" cried Spring. He turned to say good-by, but the old man was gone, and where he had stood were only snowflakes. But were they snowflakes? He looked again. They were little white snowdrops, the first flowers of spring, the only flowers that can remember the winter.—
The Book of Nature Myths.

Summer Threads.

A little spider had lived all the summer in the meadow, and had busied herself catching many of those naughty midges that are so fond of biting children's hands and faces. In the winter the meadow is flooded by the river, and any little creature that cannot live in the water is drowned.

The spider has, at the end of the summer, just the same longing to travel that some birds have, but she could never get very far on her little legs, for the very first ditch would stop her. She knows a much better way to get along, however. She watches wind and weather like an experienced seaman: "To-day is beautiful sunshine," says she, "and a favourable wind, not too mild and not too blustry; this is a day to start upon a voyage!"

So she climbs quickly to the top of an alder-bush, and perches on the tip of a branch. There she stands upon her head, and stretches out her body, with its spinning apparatus upwards. She spins a long thread, and lets it blow far, far out in the breeze, till the wind lifts it and tugs at it, and the spider can hold no longer, lets go of the branch, and sails away at the end of her thread, like a balloonist in a balloon.