

TO M. S.

WITH THANKS FOR A PAPER-KNIFE.

Immemorial law of the Muses
 Decrees that birds may pay
 For all they get by playing
 And singing the debt away.

And so, as I look on your present,
 My thanks break forth in verse—
 I pray you, take them kindly,
 Be they better or worse!

To the eye of the shallow proser,
 This seems but a paper-knife;
 But look with me, and behold it
 A symbol of human life.

How skillfully was it fashioned
 From rainbow'd mother-of-pearl!
 Its handle how cunningly carved
 In delicate twist and curl!

The hand of a ready workman
 Hath shapen its blade so well
 That we might believe it grew so
 In its primitive sheath of shell.

Its loveliness, burnished surface
 Flashes with changeable sheen,
 Like the amaranth down of an *alga*
 Through a sea-pool's opaline.

And, where the handle is wedded
 To the curve of the keener part,
 It is clasped by a circlet golden,
 From the great mid-mountain's heart.

Thus, 'e'en as a thing of matter,
 What stories it hath to tell
 Of the deep earth's unlocked treasure,
 The old sea's briny well!

Yet, hark! for its inner spirit
 Discourseth in lower tone
 Lessons of grave meaning,
 That the thoughtful may hear alone.

The union of soul and body
 Is a cunningly-shapen knife,
 Daily cutting the pages
 Of the mystical Book of Life.

With well-spun nerve and sinew,
 The body is twisted and curled,
 Compactly and roundly fitted
 To bear the wear of the world.

The Spirit is bright with lustres
 Of infinite changeableness,
 And in lightning rainbows forever
 Her origin doth confess.

And, where body meets with spirit,
 The band of their union seems
 To shine with a golden strangeness
 That comes from the mine of dreams.

It is in such suggestions
 That our frame, like the knife, is meant
 To have a significance deeper
 Than a mere dumb instrument.

And your gift shall never grow older,
 For there dwelleth an undimmed youth
 In every thing daily hallowed
 By teaching an inner truth.

So take my thanks for the token,
 And when we cut earth's last page,
 May we open a book that shall never
 Be spotted by tears or age!

FITZ-HUGH LUDLOW.

FORGET-ME-NOT.

AN IDYL OF ENGLISH RURAL LIFE.

I.

"Prue, child, where art thou?"

Old Dame Reid was roaring about one brilliant spring morning, with her spectacles on her nose, seeking this grandchild of hers, this Prue, who was never at hand when wanted, and who, according to the grandmother, was forever wasting the precious hours. The old lady had been all over the garden, calling in every direction; now as the last resource she bent her steps toward the orchard, which at this time was clothed in a glorious mantle of spring blossoms, and called again, "Prue!"

"Here, gran!" answered a voice—a slight girlish arm pushed aside the branches laden with snowy blossoms, and out stepped Prue. She made a pretty enough picture as she stood there, in her quaint, plain, gray dress, with the bunch of daffodils which she had fastened in her neck, the fresh green young grass at her feet, the apple-blossoms in the background, and above her the bright sunlight, touching with gold her chestnut hair, and shining into the depths of her dusky blue eyes; but the grandmother's eyes were at that moment incapable of realizing an artistic effect.

As soon as she perceived the culprit she began sharply:

"I have searched for thee everywhere; thou art always away when I want thee. Come into the house."

"I didn't know you wanted me, gran," Prue said with a faint sigh. She much preferred staying out there in the sunshine among the birds and flowers, to running errands for her grandmother, taking lessons in housekeeping, or learning to cook by a broiling fire. So out of the brightness and blossoms she came, and walked soberly enough by her grandmother's side toward the house.

"I cannot think, child, how thou likest to stand about so idly, when all the world around thee is so busy. Even the senseless birds and insects set thee an example which it would be well for thee to follow. Thou art no longer a child, Prue, thou art seventeen, and thou should'st remember that thy life cannot be all playtime. Twenty minutes have I wasted in searching for thee. Nay, but it should not be. Thou must be more steady."

This seventeen-year-old little maiden certain-

ly was rather childish for her age; wonderfully so, considering that since she was six years old she had lived alone with her grandmother, and that pattern of a domestic servant, Elizabeth, who was nearly as old and as fidgety as her mistress.

"If I had not found thee, thou would'st have lost a great treat," continued the old woman in her sharp voice. "It really would have served thee right if I had refused for thee, since thou art so lazy."

Prue's face brightened up notwithstanding the lecture, for from long habit she had become almost lecture-proof.

"What is it?" she said.

"There, thou art always after thine own pleasure," began Mrs. Reid. "Perhaps when I tell thee that friend Allen has invited thee to tea there with me this evening thou wilt feel that thou hast not deserved it. Now I leave it to thy conscience."

"My conscience tells me to go, grandmother," answered Prue without any hesitation.

"I am afraid thy conscience does not trouble thee much, child; it seems always to do thy bidding. When I was a girl I should have had no enjoyment in pleasure, if my duties had not been rightly performed."

"Then it was very easy for you to be good, gran," Prue said despondently. "I always feel happier when I am doing nothing than when I'm busy."

"Hush! child, the right way alone can bring happiness. Pull up that weed there, and take those flowers from thy neck. The beautiful gifts of Providence were not sent to minister to thy vanity."

Nineteen years ago, from that very same quaint half-timbered little house, Prue's father, Reginald Riley, the seigneur's younger son of a wealthy baronet, had eloped with pretty Patience Reid. The stern old mother, who had fondly loved this, her only child, refused to see or forgive her. Mrs. Reginald Riley suffered a world of trouble with her dissipated, extravagant husband, and died of consumption a few months after him, consigning on her deathbed her little orphan child, Prudence, to the still unrelenting grandmother. Mrs. Reid's tears and repentance came too late; her daughter had passed away beyond reach of the tardy forgiveness which during her lifetime had been denied her.

The old Quakeress grandmother had certainly rather stern notions regarding the education of the young, and sometimes she was somewhat unnecessarily hard on her grandchild, but, despite the monotony of her life, and the lectures which were her daily portion, Prue was a happy girl, living in a little world of her own, which she peopled with her own fresh fancies and imaginations.

Prue had no prickings of conscience to prevent her perfect enjoyment of Mrs. Allen's tea-party, though to any one else less fresh and simple, it would have seemed but a tame affair; she was rather shy at first, but afterward she got more at ease and chatted away gaily. Mr. and Mrs. Morton (the vicar and his wife) were present, for in that little parish there was no room for small doctrinal jealousies; and friend Allen and friend Reid were as welcome at the vicarage as the parish clerk himself.

Prue had been brought up according to her dying mother's wish in Church of England doctrines, and she was a great favorite with the good vicar and his wife, and a constant visitor at their house. This very evening they invited her to come to tea the next day, and although the grandmother thought that so much dissipation in one week was enough to turn a far more steadily-balanced brain than little Prue's, yet the dint of a great deal of persuasion, a reluctant consent was at last wrung from her, and Prue was suffered to accept their invitation.

Who can tell what a day or a post may bring? While little Prue was fast asleep dreaming of her simple pleasures, and smiling over them in her slumbers, a letter addressed to her grandmother was speeding on its way—a letter which was to bring about a great change in that little cottage.

Prue awoke the next morning as early as usual, and was soon out in the garden, where the heavy dew lay on the grass and sweet spring flowers, and the glad songs of the birds filled the air. She saw the postman come in through the little gate, and she wished him good-morning as he handed in a letter to old Elizabeth.

Grannie, with a very grave face, was reading this letter when she went in to her breakfast, but she made no remark on it to Prue, and it was finally folded up and hidden in the depths of her pocket.

This was rather a hard day for Prue; her grandmother was unusually tart and severe with her, and kept her running about hither and thither, generally in search of the spectacles which were always losing themselves.

"Ah well, child," she at last said, as a little impatient sigh escaped Prue's lips, when her grandmother gave her her needle to thread for about the hundredth time. "I know thou dost not care much for thy old gran; but thou would'st not care if thou had'st to leave her. I don't scold thee for the pleasure of scolding thee, and some day thou wilt find out that thy cross old gran is not thy worst friend after all."

In her great astonishment Prue let fall the duster she was hemming.

"Grannie," she cried, "don't say so; it's I who am so naughty and troublesome to you."

"I don't blame thee, child, don't think that. Nay, I know that it is but natural for thee to find me a dull old woman, but thou must try to forgive me for what I can't help."

"Grannie, grannie," cried the girl, starting up, "what do you mean? I can't bear to hear you talk like that."

"Well, it is as I say, thou wilt be quite glad to leave thine old gran, and see the gay, wicked world. The young ones are always ready to leave the old ones. I don't complain."

Was that something shining in grannie's eyes a tear? Prue got up and walked across to her, and knelt down, taking her wrinkled hand in both her own soft ones. The girl was quite frightened, she had never seen grannie so before.

"Grannie," she said sorrowfully and very humbly, "I am very sorry for giving you so much trouble. I didn't know I was so very bad."

"Nay, child, it isn't thy wickedness that grieves me, though we are all bad enough for that matter; but—here the old woman stopped, she could say no more, and Prue threw her arms round her neck and kissed her; and grannie's tears fell fast on her curly head. Never before in all her life had she seen any tears in her grandmother's stern blue eyes. No, not even when as a little child, clad in her deep mourning, she had first come to the old house and looked at Dame Reid with her dead mother's eyes. She had always thought Grannie couldn't cry, but there was proof positive that she could. What was grieving her? Prue wondered.

However, before very long, the old woman dried her eyes with almost an air of defiance, as if she were ashamed at having shown such outward signs of grief, and then she told Prue all about it.

That mysterious letter was from Lady Riley, Prue's old grandmother, who had suddenly become alive to the fact that she had never set eyes on this child of her dead son Reginald; and, as soon as the idea struck her, she immediately wrote off to old Mrs. Reid asking her if she would spare Prue to her for a visit, that she might make her acquaintance. Her son, Sir William, and his family, were at present in town, and she was quite alone at Walstead; and the letter ended by begging that Prue might come.

As her grandmother read out this letter in her grave voice, Prue's heart gave a great bound. Go to Walstead Abbey, see all her cousins, and her uncle, and other grandmother! She could not believe it; it was too much; and when the letter was ended all she could say was:

"Oh, grannie!"

"Ay, thou shalt go, child," said the old woman, with a slight trembling in her voice, for she could not help noticing the joy and delight in Prue's eyes. "I will not stand in thy way and keep thee from thy father's relations. It is ordered by Providence that thou should'st go; but, oh," with a gloomy shake of the head, "I would fain have kept thee with me, safe from the world, for it is a wicked place."

It was quite enough that the old grandmother was beset with every imaginable anxious foreboding. What had the girl's young heart to do with fears and trembling regarding worldliness and vanity? Her dreams of the future were all golden; no shadow suggested itself. Even the parting from her old grandmother and her childhood's early home brought no cloud over her happiness and hopes. How faded, dull and dingy seemed the old life in comparison with this new one that was just opening before her dazzled eyes.

It was great news to carry to her friends at the vicarage the next evening, and it was not very cordially received. They were all sorry to part with her, and would not believe her protestations that she would come back unchanged. Both the boys were at home. Will, the elder, a very grave, staid, old young man, was a tutor; Harry, the younger, somewhat harum-scarum, but free-handed, handsome and generous, was a sailor, a universal favorite with every one, including Prue, and excluding her grandmother. He was just home from China, and was full of curiosities and lively talk.

As Mrs. Morton had promised the grandmother that Prue should not return alone, Harry offered himself as escort, and away they walked together under the bright stars. They were old friends, these two. They had played together and quarrelled together from earliest childhood, and Harry by no means approved of the plan that was to transport Prue, as it were, into a higher sphere. He grumbled a little to her about it on the way home, and asked her how long she meant to be away.

"Only about six weeks, I think," Prue answered.

"Well, I shall see you again before I start. I have two months at home," said Harry. "Don't forget me, Prue."

"Of course I shan't; I shan't forget any one," said Prue, with a little toss of her head.

"I shan't be away so long as all that."

"I never forget you," continued Harry, dolefully. "I always think of you, and I've got a little picture off a box which I look at because it is so like you."

Prue did not receive this remark with the respect it merited, but gave a little saucy laugh.

"I've got a photo taken of myself," continued Harry. "Here it is. It isn't very good, is it? but perhaps you might like it, just for a little remembrance."

"It is too dark to see it," said Prue, "but thank you very much for it. Good-night. Thank you for bringing me home."

"Promise you won't forget me, Prue."

"Yes, I promise; Good-night;" and Prue

darted in through the little gate, for she feared it was getting late, and Harry went his way homeward, and thought of little Prue, and gave a mournful sigh, which, however, soon changed into a merry whistle.

Once in her room, Prue laid that photograph among her most cherished treasures in the little work-box that locked up. Such poor little treasures, too! A pink shell Harry had brought her from the sea-side long, long ago; a wonderful carved penholder he had brought her from his first voyage—little relics of her childhood, inestimably precious because of the dear memories connected with them; and yet she was relinquishing the old life and home without a regret. Was she very hard-hearted? she wondered.

11.

It was indeed a wonder that Prue ever arrived safely at Walstead Abbey, unaccustomed as she was to travelling; but she did eventually reach there, and at last stood, tired and trembling, in a handsome library, awaiting Lady Riley. This paternal grandmother of Prue's was a great contrast to the aged Quakeress, with her stern face, brown dress and snowy cap. Lady Riley, tall and slender, dressed in the richest of silks and enveloped in the finest of shawls, had a pale, delicate face, with thin features and somewhat supercilious eyes. She kissed the little stranger, and then gazed at her inquiringly.

"You are like your poor papa," she said; "but he was so tall. I suppose you have stopped growing!"

"Yes," murmured Prue, overwhelmed with shyness. She had expected such a different welcome, and a yearning came over her for the other gran, and the little shabby parlor at home.

"Rather pretty, and might be made effective," was Lady Riley's comment to her maid and confidante, Diggs, on the subject of her little granddaughter, "but terribly awkward."

"Her clothes are very strange, my lady," remarked Diggs.

"Oh, terrible; but that you must see to. You have nothing very important to do for me now, so I look to you to make her decent before any one sees her."

So Prue's simple Quaker-like frocks were cut, and trimmed, and altered, till she scarce knew them, or herself in them. By the time she had got into her new gowns she had become more accustomed to the great house and the new life at Walstead Abbey; the dulness did not oppress her, for she was used to a monotonous existence, and old Lady Riley in a few days began, as she expressed it, to grow quite fond of her.

When she had been there about three weeks, Sir William wrote to say that he, Eustace, and the two girls were thinking of returning home almost at once. This was bad news for Prue, who rather dreaded the event of these great relations, and would have much preferred to continue alone with her grandmother, with whom she now felt quite at home.

Lady Riley had told her a great deal about the girls—how Eleanor was very beautiful, and Clara very clever. What would they think of her? she wondered, who was neither one thing nor the other.

She was sitting with her grandmother in the library, the evening they arrived, too nervous to read or work, and anxiously listening for the first sound of their approach. At last it came—the rolling of wheels, barking of dogs, opening and shutting of doors, hurrying footsteps, and a murmur of voices.

Then the library-door opened, and someone entered. Prue dared not raise her head from her work, but after a moment or two she obeyed her grandmother's summons, and rose and went over to her side.

"Prudence, this is your cousin Eustace."

Then Prue glanced up, and met the fixed inquiring gaze of a pair of handsome, sleepy, blue eyes.

She timidly held out her hand, and Captain Riley said:

"Awfully glad to have the pleasure of meeting you."

What could she say to that, but murmur, with downcast eyes and blushing cheeks:

"Thank you."

But the introduction to the young ladies, Eleanor and Clara, was still more trying. They looked at her critically, and Prue felt the great difference there was between her cousins and herself—they so calm, self-possessed and perfectly at ease; she so shy, trembling and uncomfortable. Sir William was pompous and and stately, he took but little notice of his new niece, and she, poor child, was thankful to keep in the background.

She sat next Eustace at dinner. He asked her a great many questions in his languid, drawing manner, relative to her former life, and her shy ways and simple answers awakened something like interest in his blasé spirit. But Prue's time of trial was after dinner in the drawing-room alone with the two young ladies, for the grandmother was dozing by the open window at one end of the long drawing-room, and was quite unconscious of what went on at the opposite end.

Eleanor threw herself back in the soft depths of a great easy chair. Clara sat on a couch beside Prue, and put her through a regular catechism as to her studies and pursuits.

Eleanor was very lovely, a pale, statuesque sort of beauty, very indolent and very inanimate; her laziness prevented her from being ill-tempered, and her perfect self-satisfaction inclined