

## THE LITTLE FOLK.

"Whenever you hear the robin sing,  
Or the cricket chirping from leaf and stem,  
They are chanting, my child, a psalm of praise  
To the God who watches over them."

## THE OLD WILD WELL.

The day was warm and sultry, the landscape showed through a haze of heat, but down in the old well of the ruined courtyard it was cool enough. It had been a long, long time since the well had been disturbed, so long that the creatures who inhabited it believed to an insect it belonged to them, and that no one had any right there but themselves. The rope that used to hold the bucket was away, but the bucket itself was there, rotting quietly under a mass of ivy that, trailing across the courtyard, had taken root round the broken stumps, which were all that remained of the old windlass that had once let down the bucket to the water. A leaf from a beech tree in the garden had been blown by a sudden gust of wind into the courtyard, and had fallen into the well. It made quite a ripple on the surface of the clear, dark water, and the ripple disturbed a little green insect that was drowsing peacefully on a patch of starny moss of the same colour as itself that covered a projecting stone close to the water.

"I call this an intrusion," said the little green insect, gazing angrily at a lady-bird that was standing in a dazed manner on the floating leaf.

The lady-bird had little red spots all over its body, and its mind seemed to be troubled, for it did not reply.

"An intrusion," repeated the little insect, as if it enjoyed the word. "Why do you come here?"

"I'm sure I didn't want to come," began the lady-bird.

"Very polite," said the little green insect. "Then why did you do it?"

"I don't mean to be rude," began the lady-bird again.

"But you are," interrupted the little green insect, with asperity.

A bronze beetle ran out of a chink beside the patch of moss, and looked round questioningly.

"This creature arrived suddenly in her carriage," explained the little green insect. "She won't say why she came; her manners are very bad."

The bronze beetle looked inquiringly at the lady-bird.

"I live in the world," she began, hastily, as if afraid she would be interrupted.

"This is the world," said the little green insect.

"It isn't," replied the lady-bird, with some excitement. "It's nothing like the world. It is full of light and sunshine, with blue skies, waving trees, and lovely flowers, and grass. Oh, the grass so green and fresh! Then the cousins; I'm sure I've a million cousins."

"Stuff!" said the little green insect, but the bronze beetle, clearing his throat, for he felt the damp in the morning, asked why she had left such a beautiful place and so many relations.

"I couldn't help it," and the lady-bird glanced apologetically at the little green insect, who, settling itself comfortably on the soft green moss, began staring at a puffy grey moth that was moaning to itself at the other side of the well.

"I was enjoying the sunshine," continued the lady-bird, "on a leaf in the beech tree, when a gust of wind broke off the leaf, and carried it into the courtyard. I was so frightened that I did not know what had happened till I found myself floating in the well."

"And you regret coming here?" asked the bronze beetle, wistfully.

"If you knew how lovely the world is," replied the lady-bird, "you would not ask such a question."

A chrysalis, that was lying in a crack in the stone just above the bronze beetle, listening sleepily to what had been going on, now moved itself in its case.

"Dear me," it thought, "what could anyone want better than to lie down here and dream; to sleep is delicious."

"It's mean of you to come here with stories of your world," cried the little green insect, bitterly, "trying to make us discontent with ours; mean."

"But it's true," murmured the lady-bird.

"I don't believe it," said the little green insect.

"Aho, there's sorrow in the world," moaned the grey moth. "Look at me."

"What's wrong with you, stupid?" asked the little green insect, severely.

"My heart is broken," and the grey moth gave a woolly sigh. "Last night I saw a most beautiful thing; it was clear, bright, shining. I felt full of love, and flew towards it. I saw it smiling to me. I felt its warm breath on my wings, when a puff of wind came, and the bright, the shining, disappeared."

The chrysalis pricked up its ears; it pricked them up so suddenly that the top of its case came off with a crack and fell into the water. It roused itself and looked round. How beautiful the well seemed to it with its green and brown lichens and mosses, its feathers, grasses, and ferns peeping out from every crevice, and the cool, dark water sleeping at the bottom.

"I never want to see anything lovelier than this," said the chrysalis so suddenly that a little black clock that had been watching it intently was so startled that it fell on its back, and it was some time before it could regain its feet.

"That's because you know no better," murmured the lady-bird, apprehensively. "You've never seen the sun shining on a meadow full of bright flowers. It's dark down here. I can hardly see."

"It's what we call twilight," snapped the little green insect; "the best kind of light, with no moles in it."

"What should I do in a meadow?" whispered the chrysalis. "I've no legs or wings, nothing but a head, and I don't know what kind of head it is either."

"It's not much to look at," remarked the little green insect.

"Could you not try to wriggle out of your case?" ventured the lady-bird. "In the world I've seen strange things come out of cases, leaves come out of them, and flowers, and chickens—oh, and all sorts of things."

"There might be a leg or two inside," suggested the bronze beetle, hoarsely.

"But I'm quite happy as I am," returned the chrysalis. "I wouldn't know what to do with legs. I don't need them to sleep with."

"Oh, but you won't sleep any more," said the bronze beetle, "now that you've awakened; and if you were once out of your husk, why you'd be wanting to go into the world with the lady-bird. I'm quite contented down here. I've all my comforts round me, but, then, I've no wings."

"I must have got a chill with the top of my case coming off," observed the chrysalis, "for I'm sick and shivery."

"Ah, yes, the shining, the lovely, disappeared," burbled the moth from its dark corner.

An owl flew out from the old tower, and alighted on one of the wooden stumps beside the well, blinked in the light for a moment, and then flew back to its nest among the ivy. It had dreamed that a mouse was playing in the courtyard, and had come out to see if it were a fat one. As it flew, a bit of the stump, loosened by its feet, fell into the well. The bronze beetle disappeared, and the black clock ran backwards and forwards distractedly, but the little green insect gazed stonily at the lady-bird as she made her way over the floating wood to the side of the well, and began her journey up to the world.

She had got half-way up when something flew past her with a shiver of delight. Up, up it went into the balmy air, soaring towards the blue sky, a lovely creature, with wings of crimson purple and gold. It fluttered over a cluster of sweet peas, rested for a moment on a pale lily, then nestled with a quiver of joy to the heart of a rose.

"I thought I was alive when I was in the well," it whispered to the rose, "but only now I live. This, this is life."

And below in the crack, near the bottom of the well, lay a shining husk, all that was left of what had once been the chrysalis.

"Oh, yes," remarked the little green insect, "they both went away without as much as saying 'good-bye.' Truly they have shocking manners," and she settled herself comfortably among the moss and went to sleep.

—Christian Leader.