

BOYS AND GIRLS

Beside the Well.

(Margaret E. Sangster.)

To the well's broad rim, in the evening dim,
Came the dusky mothers with babes at breast;
And the woman fair who was waiting there
Told them the story of love and rest.

She had learned those words, like the songs
Of birds,
In a sweet far land where Christ was King;
Where the world was bright in the beautiful light
Our Saviour came from His heaven to bring.

But they had no clue to the things she knew,—
These sad-faced mothers whom care and pain
Had marked their own, in that tropic zone,
Where the gods of the heathen sternly reign.

And she vainly tried, till at last supplied
By a tender thought sent from above;
Over and over she said and prayed,
And she gently said it, 'GOD IS LOVE!'

'As you love the son, your precious one,
Whom you hold in your arms in joy and pride;
So God loves you! with a love that knew
The way to seek o'er the world so wide.'

And the gracious tale, that can never fail
To win the heart when it enters in,
Brought tears to the eyes, made day-dawn rise,
To the women lost in that night of sin.

O, sisters mine, will you not resign
Some fitting pleasure, that One above
May see you send, by the hand of a friend,
This word to the desolate, God is Love?
—Selected.

Harp of a Thousand Strings.

(Anne Throop, in the 'Christian Register'.)

Once there was a man who lived in a very beautiful country, but yet said that he found life not worth living. One day a personage came to him, a stranger of an insistently beautiful presence. The man, as if he had a right, led him to a part of his own estate, quiet and lonely, where he had not been, he recalled, since he was a young man. The stranger spoke of the beauty of the view and asked the man if he, too, did not think it fine.

'Yes,' the man answered respectfully, though, truth to tell, somewhat indifferently. 'It is said to be a very fine country about here. I used to come here often when I was a youngster. It all appears familiar,' he went on, 'yet oddly enough not half so beautiful as I remember thinking it formerly.'

'That may be because you are looking now without much interest or attention,' answered the stranger, 'because your mind is on other things.'

'Well,' said the man, looking off, 'I recollect that I used to imagine I saw off there above the horizon line the shining white peaks of a mountain range, but I must have been mistaken, for I am sure the mountains are too far off to be made out from anywhere about here, and I do not see them now.'

His companion said nothing to this, but his silence somehow made the man feel that it was through his own fault he no longer saw the mountains, so he suggested by way of apology, that it was very hazy.

'A depth of space,' responded the stranger, 'is often taken for a haze; but if you were in a dark room, and obliged to try to see, you would look and look, until you could after a while see objects more and more distinctly.'

'Oh,' said the man, feeling he must see something, 'I do, after all, see some white clouds there.'

'Look longer,' said the stranger; and in a moment he added, 'don't you find your clouds keep rather a constant shape?'

'Why,' exclaimed the man at length, ap-

pearing pleased, 'I do see now, the clouds are the snow caps of my old mountains!' and he sat smiling for a moment over memories of his boyhood that had been crowded out of his mind a long time.

'How still it is here!' he said presently.

'Yes, except for the wind,' the stranger answered; 'listen to it.'

'The wind is so perpetual,' said the man, 'that I did not notice it.'

'So it is,' said the stranger, 'so it is, perpetual!' but something that seemed like a bit of a smile in his eyes, and his silence after he had spoken, made the man feel again remiss, as he had felt before about not seeing the mountains. It came over him how the sun, the stars, the procession of the days, are also perpetual. Sensitiveness seemed re-awakening in him. He felt humiliated. What was he, to think carelessly of any of the forces about him? They, indeed, could do well enough without him, but without them he could not live. He looked wonderingly at his companion. Was this unknown presence freer than he, and thus nearer kin to ethereal things, more deeply conscious of the spacious and infinite glories, who was arousing in him his old-time awe and wonder for the natural things too long disregarded, for this very reason that they are perpetual?

As though he had spoken all this to the stranger, the stranger answered, at the same time smiling reassuringly. 'No,' he said, 'they could not do without you, any more than you without them. You would not exist if you, too, were not necessary to the perfect whole. Moreover,' he continued, 'your mind is greater than the sum of things it conceives,' saying which he turned upon the man a look of great benevolence and majesty, till the man felt himself uplifted, as though he, too, for the moment could see from the heights from which the stranger looked.

'But listen, now,' said the stranger again, 'how the wind blows through the big pine trees! When you were a child, you used to love to listen to it at night until you went to sleep.' The man saw in his memory a long dark window with white curtains drawn, and outside big branches swaying, and he felt softly that strange, exhilarating mystery of the wind at night. So many other memories thronged about the window and the little bed beside it, where he had lain, that the tears came in his eyes.

'And between each of these needles on the branches the wind blows with separate, tiny sounds,' went on the stranger, looking upward into the trees. 'You can almost distinguish them. Listen! do you hear?'

The man was silent a moment; then he shook his head, smiling a bit deprecatingly at the stranger.

'I hear the general blowing of the branches,' he said, 'but as for separate, finer sounds, I don't distinguish them at once.'

'It isn't wonderful,' commented the stranger, 'after becoming so accustomed to the deadening, harsh sounds you have lived in the midst of, that even them you hardly notice. It is very still here, though, and after you have listened some time, you will surely begin again to hear some of the undertones, and the soft, higher overtones. They are innumerable,' he added, while again the wonderful deep calm that had uplifted the man before shone in the stranger's face; 'one may always listen and hear new ones, for there is no end to them.'

Then it seemed to the man that when the stranger had spoken, an unusually clear silence fell, except for the wind, so that, whether from remembering them as he used to hear them, or actually hearing them again, he could not be sure which, he began to distinguish some of the soft and harmonic murmurs.

'It is a long time since I have thought of it,' said he, 'but those are what I called fairies' voices when I was a child.'

'What a pity,' said the stranger, 'to have to learn again what one had already in childhood!'

'Indeed, that is true,' replied the man, humbly.

Near where they sat some low shrubs grew, and the man mechanically reached out his hand and plucked a flower from one, a small, sweet field rose. He looked into it

absently, thinking of what the stranger had been saying to him, and began to twirl it in his fingers.

'You still love flowers?' said the stranger, interrogatively.

The man stopped twirling the rose.

'Why,' he answered, 'I sometimes remember that I am fond of them.'

'But, see,' said the other, 'you have broken it,' and the man saw that some of the petals were bruised with whisking against his fingers.

'I should never have known you were fond of them,' commented the stranger, 'by the way you handle them.'

'There are a great many of them,' said the man, somewhat weakly.

'To be sure,' the angel rejoined, 'there are a great many of them. You are fond of them collectively, you mean, and one does not count.'

'I am extremely dull to attempt excuses,' said the man, accepting the rebuke, and flushing a bit under the stranger's penetrating eyes, but thinking to redeem himself he pressed the flower to his nostrils and spoke of its fragrance.

'But why do you need to crush it?' asked his companion. Then he added in a lenient tone, 'I suppose, however, down below in the lower grounds of your estate and the country about, the air is heavy, and the flowers stronger and coarser, so you thought you could hardly get the odor of this fragile thing without crushing it.'

'I suppose that is the reason,' said the man, who, though he thought he should have felt grateful for this excuse thus supplied, felt ashamed instead, for he saw the stranger's eyes grown suddenly sad. Still the man could not help thinking the stranger almost too hard to please.

'It is my business to be so,' the stranger replied, as he had once before, to the man's thoughts, turning his clear eyes upon him; yet, oddly enough, his reply seemed hardly to be in spoken words, so that a strange feeling came upon the man, of which he had been partly conscious during the whole interview, of being doubtful as to whether or not it was this presence at his side speaking or his own thoughts answering themselves.

'Indeed, I know the fragrance of these little hill flowers is very delicate, but it is also more exquisitely pungent than your more showy plants. It is very penetrating. There was a time when the perfume in the air from the flowers was enough for you. It seems to me that is the better way.'

'So it is,' said the man with penitence, 'far the better way,' and he flung the flower aside upon the grass.

'Poor flower,' said the stranger, and he picked it up and held it shelteringly between his palms. What a trying manner of silent reproof the stranger had, and about so slight a thing!

The deep glance turned upon the man again. 'You can do many remarkable things,—things you do not count slight at all, and that, in reality, are not slight when they are well done, but can you make the beauty of a flower?' Again the man did not know whether his own thoughts or the stranger questioned him. The stranger looked down at the drooping rose in his hands as though in the little bruised flower-heart was the mystery and the hurt of a world; then, in a moment, he laid it in his bosom.

The man's head was bowed. He had never thought so humbly. There is, then, nothing in the world slight,—no fault that can be slurred over and condoned. It awed him that tiny things should be fraught with so great significance, as great as even those things might be he had been accustomed to think important.

With a kindly touch the stranger laid his hand on the man's shoulder.

'Here in the grass are some wild berries. You used to be fond of them. Why don't you gather some?' he said.

The man looked down among the leaves.

'They are so small they seem hardly worth the trouble,' said he, picking one, and putting it in his mouth. 'Besides, I can hardly taste them.' He looked up at the stranger. 'I am at fault again,' he confessed, 'I have