

## "THE SHADOW OF A GREAT ROCK IN A WEARY LAND."

**I** THOUGHT that I was wandering in a weedy plain under a burning sun, my eyes dazzled by the glare of light, my feet tired with long walking. I had but just entered upon the plain, for hitherto my way had led through many different scenes, brighter and pleasanter far than this. First of all along a sunny path, with gay flowers springing up on either side, which often tempted me to wander hither and thither out of the way to pluck them; very fair were they to look upon in their varied hues, and there was no drawback to the delight with which I gathered them, until I found that they gradually withered and lost their beauty in the hot grasp of my eager hands, and presently, among the fair green leaves of the one, far surpassing any other flowers in beauty and rich perfume, I found thorns lurking, which grieved and puzzled me, and made me pause warily before yielding to the desire to pluck any more. There were pleasant paths opening out on all sides to be traversed, cheerful glades in forest nooks, soft turf on which to repose, and refreshing streams of water clear like crystal, and keeping up a low under-current of song as they flowed along; while overhead the forest-trees spread out their giant arms, and threw soft shadows on the turf at their feet, forming a tempting shelter from the sun, now mounting higher and higher towards its mid-day fulness of splendour; everything around was fair, and every sense lulled in sweet repose that cloyed not; the birds warbled songs of gladness, and so pleasant did earth seem to me, that as I watched one soaring upward far away in the blue sky, I wondered dreamily why it should choose to leave this fair land for any untried sphere, and what pleasure could be found in winging ever onward through the monotonous expanse of blue, when the earth beneath seemed overflowing with all kinds of enjoyment. Thus musing I wandered on, entering each moment new scenes of delight, now resting awhile to take a refreshing draught from the pearly stream,

now reaching forward eagerly to gather fruit and flowers, lured farther and farther away from the spot I had left in the morning, and so occupied in the pursuit of pleasure, that I failed to think of the good counsel that had been given to me before I set out on my journey. At last, far on in the distance, I espied some tempting-looking clusters of fruit overhanging a large sheet of water, and altogether heedless and careless of the consequences, I left the road, and pressed forward through bramble and briar until, after long toiling, I held them within reach, but at the moment the prize was secured, it fell to dust in my hand; most fair was it to look upon, but its beauty was gone directly my light touch fell upon it; and as with a sense of disappointment I now tried to regain the path, from which I had turned aside in my eager pursuit of this valueless fruit, I encountered many difficulties. The paths which I had trodden with light, easy step when buoyed up with hope and expectation, now seemed steep and rugged, and the lost track I could not again find; it seemed that I had reached the outskirts of the wood, and the way now led on and on through close thickets and underwood, and across an open space with rank coarse grass upon it, and with the vegetation becoming more and more scant, until I at length emerged on a vast tract of sandy waste, with no landmark to guide my steps; I could see the pleasant wood lying far behind me in the distance, but a haze had gathered over it, and there was no path to lead back there, even could I have retraced my weary steps; and though nearly fainting beneath the scorching heat of the sun, I felt compelled to keep moving forward,—to what end I scarcely knew. I fancied that I could discern a boundary to this desert waste, but whether far or near it was impossible to judge, for the distance was as difficult to determine on this sea of shifting sand as it is on the ocean. It was a gloomy river which thus attracted my gaze as it flowed ever darkly along; beyond it everything appeared