

BUDS AND BLOSSOMS;
OR,
STORIES OF REAL CHILDREN.

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INTRODUCTION.

I have some little children who are fond of listening to me while I tell them stories; but I always find, that when they are very much pleased with one, they ask these questions: "Is it all *true*, mama? Is it about a real little boy and girl?" and when I am obliged to answer, "No, I do not think it is," their countenances fall, and they seem as if half their pleasure and half their interest were gone. Now I cannot help fancying that other little boys and girls may have the same love for true stories that mine have; so I think I will write some and try. Would you then like to hear about some real children who are now alive, and at the moment you read of them, most likely either playing or learning their lessons, either good or naughty, just as they are going to be described to you? You would.—Well then, Emily, Edwin, and Charles, are my children, and I will make you know them as well as if they were your own playfellows; and who can tell but you may some time or other chance to see them, and to play with them in reality? How droll it would be to meet them, and to find out that they were the very children you had been reading about, and how surprised they would be to see that you knew all that had ever happened to them. Why, they would think that you must be little fairies, and would be half afraid to trust themselves with you for fear that you should play off some elfish trick upon them.

THE WISH.

“Mama,” said Emily to me the other day, “I like to hear you tell Charles about God, and to see him listen as if he wanted to understand all you say, so very, very much. Do tell me how you first began to teach me, and whether I seemed to love to be taught as much as Charlie does. I suppose you began when I was a very little girl, and now I am nearly six years old; so of course I cannot remember such a long time ago.”

“I think, dear Emily, the first time I told you any thing about God was when you were a little more than two years old. I had been drawing different things to amuse you. After the house, and the tree, and the cow, which you so often hear little Charlie beg for, you asked me to draw the sun, and the moon, and the stars; then, lifting up your little face, you said, ‘But, mama, who could reach up and draw those pretty great pictures of the sun and moon that Emmie sees in the sky?’”

Emily.—“O then, mama, no doubt you told me that they were not really pictures, but great lights which God, who is better and wiser than we are, and can do every thing and reach every where, placed in the sky for our sakes; and then you could easily go on to tell me, about his creating us, and taking care of us by night and by day; and how we ought to thank and to love him.

“And did I love him, mama?”

“Yes, my Emily; and I believe you thought that every thing he made should do the same; for one day, when I was working in the drawing-room, and you were with me, I observed that you stood at the window quite quiet for a long time, watching something, but *what* I did not know. At last you turned round, and said, ‘Mama, how dearly the little birds must love God!—they fly up in the sky so often to see him. Emmie wishes she was a little bird too.’”

THE FIRST RIPE STRAWBERRY.

“Now, Emily and Edwin, bring your little stools close by me, and Charlie shall climb into my lap, and we will have a good gossip over this bright fire.”

Emily.—“O that will be so nice, mama! I do love a gossip; and what shall we talk about?”

Edwin.—“Let us talk about next summer; I am so fond of next summer, because then there will be fruit and flowers and young birds.”

“Well, suppose we begin by talking about *last* summer, because we know most about it. So first Emily shall talk about the fruit, and then Edwin about the flowers; and I will talk about the young birds, which are the three things you are so fond of. So what have you to say about the fruit, Emily?”

“O do you remember how we used to go every day for such a long time to peep at the strawberry-beds, because Edwin did not recollect even what a ripe strawberry was like, and I wanted to show him the first; but the tiresome flowers staid on so long, that I scolded them, though they looked so white and pretty; and then they seemed to laugh in my face with their little saucy yellow eyes; and when at last they did drop off, there were only little hard green heads, that looked as if they never could be ripe, never could be soft and red and juicy. Well, but then it rained for two whole days, and the next morning, though the sun was very hot indeed, the grass was so wet that

we could not run across the lawn to the fruit-garden. But the day after, mama said, 'Now, Emily and Edwin, you may go and peep at the strawberry-beds.' So we ran away hand in hand, and then—ah, ah, Mr. Eddie! I see you remember what we found, for your eyes sparkle, and you open your little mouth just as you did when I popped the first ripe strawberry into it."

Edwin.—"Yes, Emmie, and how long I hunted for one for you, and lifted up every leaf, but there was not one more ripe, and I had eaten mine quite, quite up; but you said, 'Never mind, for I am old enough to remember how they taste.'"

Emily.—"And it would indeed have been silly to have minded, for the next day there was one for each of us, and the day after a great many; and the day after that, mama let us fill our little basket to surprise old nurse with a treat at our tea-time.—O when will it be summer again?"

Edwin.—"It will be Charles's turn to be feasted now instead of me; for, poor little boy, he only knows about oranges and figs and sweetmeats, and perhaps remembers a very little about grapes and peaches and morella cherries."

"But I think, Edwin, by poor Charlie's face, he does not seem to consider the things you have just mentioned quite so worthless as you suppose, or that he would be so very much to be pitied if he never saw any other fruit at all."

Emily.—"O! but then, mama, that is because he does now know what a ripe strawberry is. It is not that a strawberry tastes only of strawberry, but that it tastes of summer all over.—O sweet summer! when will you come again?"

THE FLOWERS.

“Now then, Edwin, it is your turn to talk; so what have you to tell us about the flowers?”

Edwin.—“O not a great deal about the garden flowers, mama, because I can never recollect their names;—only just the Dahlias, because I used to be so fond of standing before them to watch that sweet little humming-bird-bee, which used to spin round and round, and dart its long tongue that looked just like a bill, first into one flower and then into another; and Emily and I thought it really was a bill, and that the humming-bird-bee really was a bird; and we used to hunt among the shrubs for its tiny nest, and wonder whether its eggs were bigger than the beads of Emmie’s necklace; till one day you caught the little cheat under your handkerchief, and we found out that instead of being a beautiful lilac bird, it was nothing but a plain dull-coloured moth, and that it was only its spinning round and round that made its colour and its shape so pretty.—Yes, yes, Mr. Humming-bird-bee, you may twirl about as much as you please when you come back in the summer, (for we did let you go, though you were such a sad cheat,) but you will never take us in again, I promise you.

“And I remember, mama, about the trumpet-honeysuckle, because of my toy trumpet, and because of something that happened about it too. We had been watching a poor bee a long time, which was working very busily getting its little wings and legs all laden with honey, and every now and then it came to

the mouth of the trumpet-honeysuckle, and we saw its little powdery nose, and then it went back again, as if it thought it might still get a little more; at last it came quite out, and seemed very busy packing the wax and honey tight under its wings, that it might not be blown away as it flew;—and then, O what a sad, sad thing happened to the poor bee! A great horrid hornet came rushing over our heads, pounced upon it, carried it away in its frightful arms, settled upon a laurel leaf just by, and began to devour it with a crackling noise, till Emmie threw her basket at it, and then it soared in the air, and carried the poor bee off far over our heads to some tall tree, where I dare say it eat it up, honey and all, in a minute.”

Emily.—“Now, mama, it is your turn, and I am sure you must have a great deal to remind us of, for you were quite as much interested about the young birds as we were.”

“It is too late to begin now, dear Emily, and to-morrow evening I shall be from home; but on the one following, I will certainly keep my promise. But now my loves, good night.”

THE PIANO-FORTE.

Emily.—“Mama, I like the evening after you have dined out, for you have always something to tell. You have either seen some little boys or girls, or heard some amusing story; so pray now think of some nice thing to entertain us with.”

“Well, I believe I can satisfy you to-night, for I have something to tell, and something to read also.

“When the ladies went into the drawing-room after dinner, we found, besides the little Russells, a sweet-looking girl who was staying with them. She had been seated at the pianoforte playing for the little Russells’ amusement; but she got up hastily on our entering the room, and placed herself modestly behind her young friends. ‘That was a beautiful air that we heard as we crossed the hall, and appeared to be most beautifully played,’ said one of the party.

“‘Yes,’ replied Mrs. Russell, ‘Ellen Ross does play beautifully, and I shall not allow her a very long respite before I ask her to let us hear her.’

“In a short time, then, Ellen was again seated at the pianoforte, and her playing was really quite astonishing for so young a girl. I expressed my admiration to Mrs. Russell, who said, ‘The story attached to that dear girl’s playing is more singular than her playing itself. Last summer I was staying with the Sydneys in Hampshire, who are the Ross’s nearest neighbours and great friends. Mrs. Sydney, who doats on Ellen, told me a story of her

which pleased me so much, that I wrote it down immediately for the amusement of my own little girls, who, after hearing it, never let me rest till I had invited Ellen Ross to stay with us. If you like, I will lend it to you to read to your Emily.' And here it is; so as we are all together, I will read it to you at once."

THE BIRTH-DAY.

“Ellen,” said Colonel Ross to his daughter one day, “I have been mortified this morning, but I own not surprised. I have had a note from your music-master, declining to give you any more lessons. I believe the honest man knows I can ill afford the expense, and he is candid enough to tell me that my ‘daughter’s extreme volatility, and total neglect of practising, render it perfectly useless for him to continue to attend her’—Ellen,” continued Colonel Ross, glancing sadly at a beautiful pianoforte which stood in the otherwise simply-furnished drawing-room, “I had hoped that that instrument, which indeed I did not purchase without a sacrifice, would have become the source of many an hour of solace, and that my little girl would have loved to have played away some of her papa’s weary evenings when his shattered health and spirits unfit him for employment. But don’t cry, my love,—and, Ellen, do not ask me to let you learn again. I have long seen your dislike to practising, and as my little girl does every thing else so well, perhaps I ought to have released her from the one irksome thing sooner; but I have had reason to be fond of music,” and Colonel Ross’s eye rested on the portrait of Ellen’s mother, painted as a St. Cecilia. “Good night, my child,” added he, “let us never mention this subject again,—let me see your last drawing when you come down to-morrow morning, love. I will try and centre my amusement in a pursuit which is a favourite one with you also.”

Ellen received her papa’s kiss in silence, and restrained her tears till, as she had nearly crossed the hall, a sound reached

her, which sent them rapidly down her cheeks. She heard her papa lock the pianoforte, and as he did it, sigh deeply.

Till within the last year Ellen Ross's had been a wandering life: she had accompanied her parents from climate to climate in search of that health for her dear mother, which it, however, pleased Providence to withhold from her. She died in Italy, and her husband and child had returned to England, and were now fixed in a retired village on the edge of the New Forest. Ellen's wanderings, though they had in many respects cultivated her taste and contributed to her accomplishments, for she had acquired the French and Italian languages without trouble, and warbled their national airs as if she had been born amongst their own purple vineyards, had prevented her from gaining those steady habits of perseverance which are never more wanted than during the first drudgery which the learning music must inflict. Poor Ellen's love of sweet sounds, and recollection of having heard them abroad in their utmost perfection, gave her no assistance now. The tedious scales, and the childish tunes which she blundered through, offended her ear exactly in proportion as it was alive to the delights of real music; and she would quit the instrument in disgust, and wander in the garden to do what she *could do*—to warble the airs which found their own way so naturally from her heart to her lips. But now, now she had a motive which no selfish repugnance could weaken. Her papa had been mortified—disappointed. Her indolence had robbed him of an expected pleasure—a pleasure which he had said he “made a sacrifice to obtain.” Ere she closed her eyes that night, Ellen's plan was formed, and the instant she opened them in the morning, she

exclaimed, "Ah! it is nearly day-light already, and Caroline Sydney always gets up early—*she* is never idle."

Another hour found the two friends closeted in Caroline's school-room, and Mrs. Sydney was soon called in to aid the consultation. It was settled that Ellen was to have the use of Caroline's pianoforte for the purpose of practising, and as she had always been in the habit of passing two or three hours every day with her young friend, her absence from home for this object could excite no inquiry. Mrs. Sydney and Caroline readily promised to assist her with all the instruction she could require; and with such a motive, such teachers, and a natural talent for music, who can wonder that her progress was indeed rapid?

"How delighted her papa will be!" exclaimed Caroline Sydney to her mama one day, while Ellen was playing one of Colonel Ross's most favourite airs. "He will indeed, Caroline," replied Mrs. Sydney, "and that remark of yours calls out Ellen's powers like magic."—"I know it does, mama," said Caroline, "and I can always guess when Ellen is thinking of her papa's surprise,—she plays her tunes then with as much spirit as if she had composed them herself. I can hardly wait for Colonel Ross's birth-day; and yet," she added, addressing Ellen, "you must not betray the secret sooner, for you know I always spend that day with you, and it would break my heart not to be present."

"O Caroline!" said Ellen, springing from the music-stool, and throwing her arms round her friend's neck, "how can you think I could be so ungrateful as to cheat you of your share of a pleasure which I should never, never have enjoyed without your own and your dear mama's kindness?"

The birth-day at length arrived. "Ellen, my love," said Colonel Ross, entering the room in which she was sitting, putting the last touch to a drawing which was to be one of the offerings of the evening, and which she slipped into her portfolio as her papa came in, "I fear your own and Caroline Sydney's pleasure will be rather spoiled this evening by the arrival of a stranger; but General Malcolm is a very old friend of mine, who has taken Earl Court. He has just found out that I am in his neighbourhood, and has written to propose spending to-day with me. We were old soldiers together, and I have not seen him for many years, and I cannot do so ungracious a thing as to refuse to receive him."

It may be guessed that Ellen's first feeling was that of consternation. The fondly cherished scheme of a whole year seemed to be at once disconcerted. A stranger was to be with them on that evening on which the discovery was to have taken place; and as Caroline was so engaged that she could not be present till after dinner, the birth-day must, she thought, pass away without a chance of the surprise which was to have made it for her the happiest she had ever hailed.

However, no selfish feeling could find a resting-place for many moments in Ellen's mind. She remembered how often she had wished that her papa had some friend within his reach of his own habits and profession, whose society might beguile the gloom with which ill health and sad recollections would sometimes overshadow his fine mind and naturally even temper, and she said cheerfully, "Then, dear papa, I must offer you my drawing *now*, though I think I could have improved it before the evening; but I should be shy at showing it before a

stranger." The drawing was full of taste, and the kiss full of affection with which it was received, and Colonel Ross left the room to write an acceptance of General Malcolm's offered visit.

The afternoon came, and with it General Malcolm. Ellen presided at the dinner-table in compliment to the day, and then retired to the drawing-room to await her young friend's arrival.

"Poor Caroline!" thought she, "how disappointed she will be! I cannot expect she will be comforted as completely as I am, when I tell her how very, very much dear papa seems to enjoy having his old friend with him. But, ah! I hear her coming."

In spite of the comfort of which Ellen had been boasting, a tear accompanied the kiss with which she greeted her friend. Poor Caroline was indeed in dismay, and many a reproachful epithet did she lavish on the unconscious general for his ill-timed arrival. "How I shall hate the very sight of him, provoking creature! Could he not have fixed on any day but this? I shall not be able to speak to him civilly, or to look at him with common patience—But, Ellen, could you not play still?"—"O Caroline! how can I before a stranger?—You know I shall be quite sure to cry; and" added she, her sweet eyes filling with tears, "I should not wonder if my dear papa cried too."

The little girls were now interrupted by the entrance of the two gentlemen. During tea, the conversation turned on the general's new house. "Have you completed the furnishing it?" asked Colonel Ross. "There is only one thing I believe materially wanting; though, as an old bachelor, I have no constant means of enjoying the luxury of music, I cannot bear to deprive myself of the chance of hearing it occasionally from

my lady-guests.—You do not, I fear,” continued General Malcolm, “chance to know of a fine-toned pianoforte to be disposed of in the neighbourhood?”—“I have been for the last year looking out for a purchaser for the one you see before you,” replied Colonel Ross, with a sigh; “Ellen does not play, and it is useless to me.”—“What, devotedly fond as I know you are of music, have you not made a point of your daughter’s learning?” exclaimed General Malcolm. “She did begin, but she does not like it, and music is not an accomplishment to be *forced*. It requires too great a sacrifice of time, unless there is a certainty of success.”—“I should not have thought that your daughter disliked music,” said General Malcolm, almost unconsciously glancing at the picture of her mother, whose talent had so often charmed him; and then resting his eyes on Ellen’s countenance, beaming with the same seraphic sweetness, “I should have thought the very soul of music dwelt there:—But could I not hear a few notes?—a chord or the simplest scale would enable me to judge of the tone of the instrument.”—“Caroline Sydney has unfortunately sprained her wrist,” said Colonel Ross, “or we should have no difficulty.” Caroline cast a beseeching look on the blushing, hesitating Ellen. “Papa,” said she, timidly, “I think I could remember a few notes.”—“Well, you may at least try,” said her papa; and as he took the key from the drawer in which it had so long lain useless, Ellen once more heard it turn in the lock of the pianoforte, and heard also once again the sigh which accompanied the action, but with feelings how different from her former ones! She sat down, and after a light and brilliant prelude, played one of her mother’s most favourite airs, adding variations full of taste and beauty of her own arranging.

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