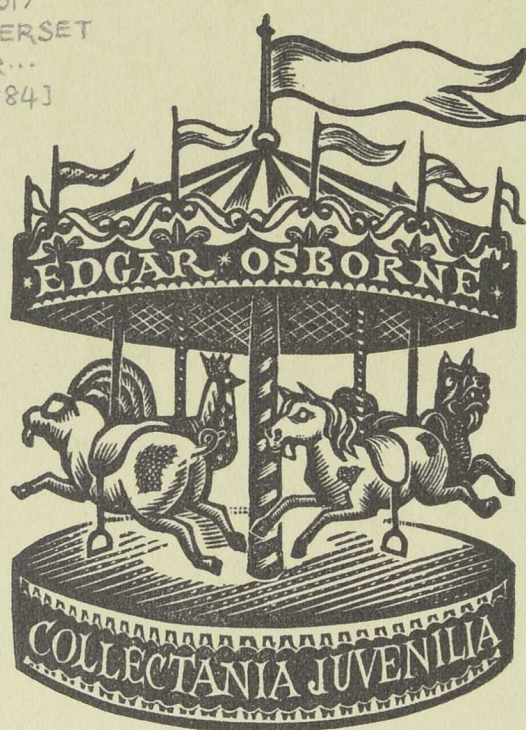


"Our Village life"

vs

Lady H. Somerset

P(fol)
SOMERSET
OUR...
[1884]



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OUR VILLAGE LIFE

WORDS AND ILLUSTRATIONS
BY LADY H. SOMERSET

P R E F A C E.

IN offering this little book to the public, I think it right to say that I do not wish to claim their attention because I consider it possesses any merit, but rather their indulgence, as my object is mainly to help a work of charity by its publication. The life of English village children stands always in our minds in painful contrast with the pent-up, dreary life of the child born and bred in our crowded cities.

With special pity do we think of those little ones who go forth from our workhouses, and workhouse schools, with so little that is bright to help them on the weary journey of life with all its up-hill struggles.

For the sake of such as these, I seek your indulgence for my little work.

Its sale will help to support a home recently opened here for workhouse girls.

At an early age they are taken from our City Unions, and trained here for laundry and household work. When fitted, they are sent into the world with a bright prospect before them of earning a good and honest livelihood.

Further, they find here a home and home teaching, at a time in their lives when such influences are of most importance.

A home to which they can at any time return, and to which we trust they will look back, as surrounded with all the sacred meaning that that word must ever have in our minds.

REIGATE PRIORY,

June, 1884.



DEDICATED TO LAURA
A LOVING
REMEMBRANCE OF HER
SUNDAY CLASS

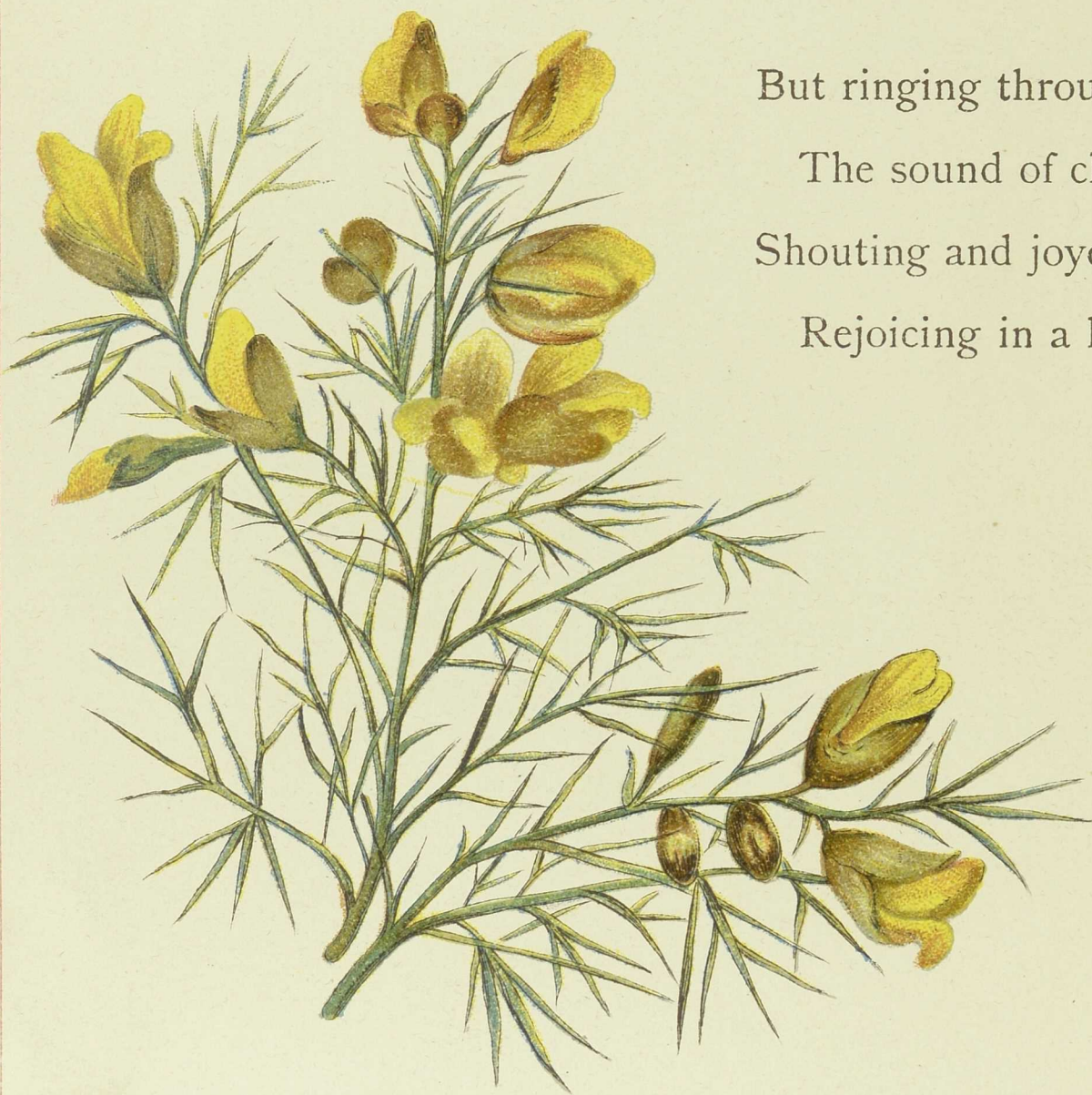


AN ACT OF LOVE.

WITHIN a cottage on the bleak hill-side,
 Tossing all day on fevered bed of pain,
 There lay a feeble sickly child,
 A little cripple, who from birth was lame.

All day he lay and watched the sun's
 bright rays,
 Until the long dark evening shadows
 came,
 And then the night ended the weary
 days,
 For night and morning were to him
 the same.





But ringing through the silence oft there came
The sound of children's voices at their play,
Shouting and joyous in their merry game,
Rejoicing in a happy holiday.

They used to stop and pick the bilberries black
That grew upon the purple mountain-side,
Following the yellow gorse's golden track,
And carrying home their spoil with childish pride

But one, more thoughtful than the rest, had seen
Through the half-opened casement, as she went,
The sick child's wistful face, as he did lean
To catch a sight of those on pleasure bent.



And stealing from the others at their play,
She softly entered the poor cabin door,
Holding the purple treasures plucked that day,
Laid out before him in her pinafore.

A weary day to suffering souls made bright
By one sweet thought of charity and love,
Is worth more in our loving Saviour's sight
Than angels' praises sung in heaven above.



ON THE STAIRS.

COLD winds are blowing,
Fast it is snowing,
Firelight is gleaming
On young faces beaming ;
For the children all declare
Father treads the old oak stair.

Small feet pattering,
Small tongues chattering,
Such a glad meeting,
Such loving greeting ;
Quite a crowd of faces fair
Lighting up the old oak stair.

Soft arms so clinging,
Sweet ways so winning,
Father, though weary,
Soon becomes cheery,
Bearing with such strength and care
Baby up the old oak stair.

Glad laughter ringing,
Snatches of singing,
Darkness is banished,
Shadows all vanished,
When like sunbeams captured there,
Children climb the old oak stair.





SWALLOWS.

Now that the summer days are nearly
done,

The swallows all will leave our home,
Following the golden footsteps of the sun,
Across the sea in unknown lands to
roam.

Ah, swallow, when you seek the palm-
tree's shade

In some cool valley in a tropic strand,
Will you remember the small nest you
made,

And long for home in a far distant land?



Or will you never think of us again,
Circling in summer air your happy flight
In worlds so fair, that it must seem that pain
Must be for ever banished from your sight.

And yet, when winter hours have fled away,
And spring-time cheers the heart with her bright reign,
When all the world is decked for holiday,
I think you'll turn to us with joy again.



VIOLETS.

GENTLY by the sun's warm
kisses

Wakened from' their winter
sleep,

When the sweet child-voices
greet them,

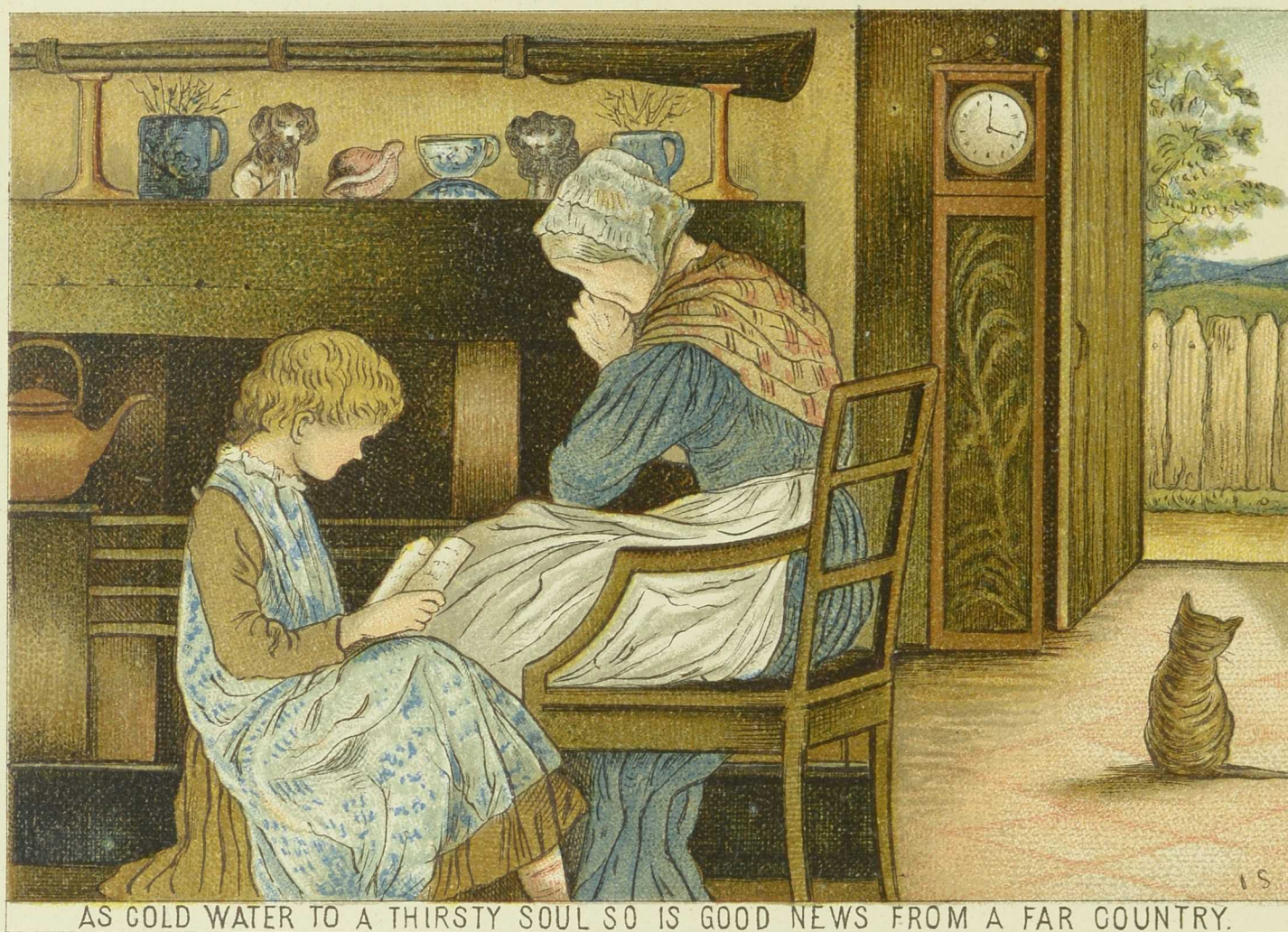
Slyly forth the violets peep.



And the bright eyes bending o'er them,
Seem to take a deeper hue,
As they gaze with gleeful laughter
Down upon the blossoms blue.

Tightly crushed by baby fingers,
Or by elders plucked with care,
Still it is the violet's life-work
To shed sweetness everywhere.





AS COLD WATER TO A THIRSTY SOUL SO IS GOOD NEWS FROM A FAR COUNTRY.

GOOD NEWS.

A MOTHER is watching and waiting
For the news that must surely come,
And the old Dutch clock is striking
The hours that seem so long.

She heard a battle was fought and won
To the glory of England's name:
Was he safe and well, her dear one,
Or lifeless among the slain?

They had all been taken from her,
Taken one by one;
He alone remains to cheer her
Till her life's sad course is run.

A childish voice at the door
Brings the colour to her cheek ;
What is the news she brings her
That makes her afraid to speak ?

But holding high a letter,
The child springs to her side :
“ It is his writing ; he is safe ! ”
With sympathy she cried.

And sitting on a low stool
At the old mother's feet,
She read the welcome words that fell
Like angel's music sweet.

He told of the great victory,
How well the soldiers fought ;
How hardly they had won it,
And how dearly it was bought.

He told her how he'd done his best
To save a comrade's life—
That any would have done the same
That joined in that great strife.

But that after all was over,
The general called his name,
And said his conduct would deserve
Victoria's Cross of fame.

The neighbour's child had paused,
A solemn silence fell ;
The joy was still so new that each
Seemed loth to break the spell.



And then in thankful prayer she turned
To Him, who long ago
Raised up the widow's son, and healed
The mother's bitter woe ;—

To Him who now had heard her cry
From His high throne above,
And pitied her, and spared her boy,
With the same tender love.



THE ROOKS.

THE tall trees are rocking
The young rooks on high,
The wild wind is singing
Their sweet lullaby,
They nestle down softly
There close to the sky,
The angels must see them
As earth-ward they fly.

When long evenings come,
And the parents return
To bring them the food
That their patience doth earn,
How anxious they are
The world's wonders to learn,
With their yellow beaks
Gaping, awaiting the worm.



And then when their parliament
Meets in the trees,
Their angry discussions
Are borne on the breeze ;
The wide world is listening,
The young rooks believe.
Ah ! they're not the first
That such notions deceive.





COWSLIPS.

“Behold the lilies of the field ; they toil not, neither do they spin : and yet I say unto you, That Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these.”

MAKE me a crown of golden cowslips bright,
Brighter than purest gold studded with gems,
More beautiful and richer to my sight
Than untold wealth of royal diadems.



The mightiest queen that wears a golden crown,
With jewelled sceptre, emblem of her power,
In shining silken and rich woven gown,
Is not so regal as this golden flower.

We spin and toil and labour all in vain,
We cannot rival one fair flower that grows ;
Kings' glory cannot their sweet wealth attain,
For we clothe them, but God alone made those.



THE WELL.

We sat by the well in the evening,
And we talked of the days to come,
How fair the prospect seemed then,
In the rays of the summer sun.

We gazed in its deep blue waters,
At our faces reflected there,
With not a trace of sorrow,
Of grief, or toil, or care.



Ah! if in the far, far future,

We gaze in that well once more,

Will its truth-telling waters show us

Bright faces as of yore?

Will the world with its sin and its sorrow,

And its mean and sordid care,

Have left the same bright image

We once saw reflected there?

Our features will change and alter,

And age will creep on fast,

But the well may ever show us

That innocence can last,—

Can last through the heat and din

Of the world's most garish light,

And can in the cool of the evening,

Bloom unfaded, untouched, and bright.



THE BEE.

Down in a meadow, full of summer flowers,
A little idle boy had lain all day ;
The golden bee, toiling through mid-day hours,
Hummed him unceasingly her drowsy lay.

“ Why can’t you rest awhile,” at last said he ;
“ The sun is hot, and you have worked so long ;
These flowers would make you such a downy bed,
Surely to pause and sleep would not be wrong ?”

“ I could not rest while I have work to do,
For idleness would be no rest to me.”
And busily from flower to flower she flew,
While listlessly he watched the little bee.



"Have you no work to do, no home to make,
No help to bring to others ; through the day
No duties in this world to undertake,
While these bright golden hours pass away ?

"What work can I do? I am but a child,"
Answered the boy, while listlessly he plucked
Some blossoms of the meadow flowers wild,
That held the honey that the bee had sucked.

"I passed your home," the little bee replied,
"While yet the noon-day sun was high above,
And saw your mother, while the baby cried,
Leaving her work to soothe it with her love.

"She had been toiling since the early morn,
Carrying her washing baskets to and fro ;
She looked so weary, and she seemed so worn,
I think your work is there, if you would go.

"You could the little ones in safety keep ;
You could fetch water from the village well ;
You could watch o'er the baby in his sleep,
And from your mother's brow the care dispel.



“I toil and labour at my daily
task,
And work in strict obedience
to my queen ;
I do my duty, and would never
ask
Why I obey her power—it is
supreme.”

“We have a King above who
rules us all,
Both you and I obey His
gentle sway ;
He made us,” said the boy,
“both great and small.
Dear bee, I thank you for
your words this day.”

Thus should we strive, as through life's paths we tread,
To hear its many voices, oft they tell
Where the soft light of duty's star is shed,
To guide from the dark vale out to the brighter dell.



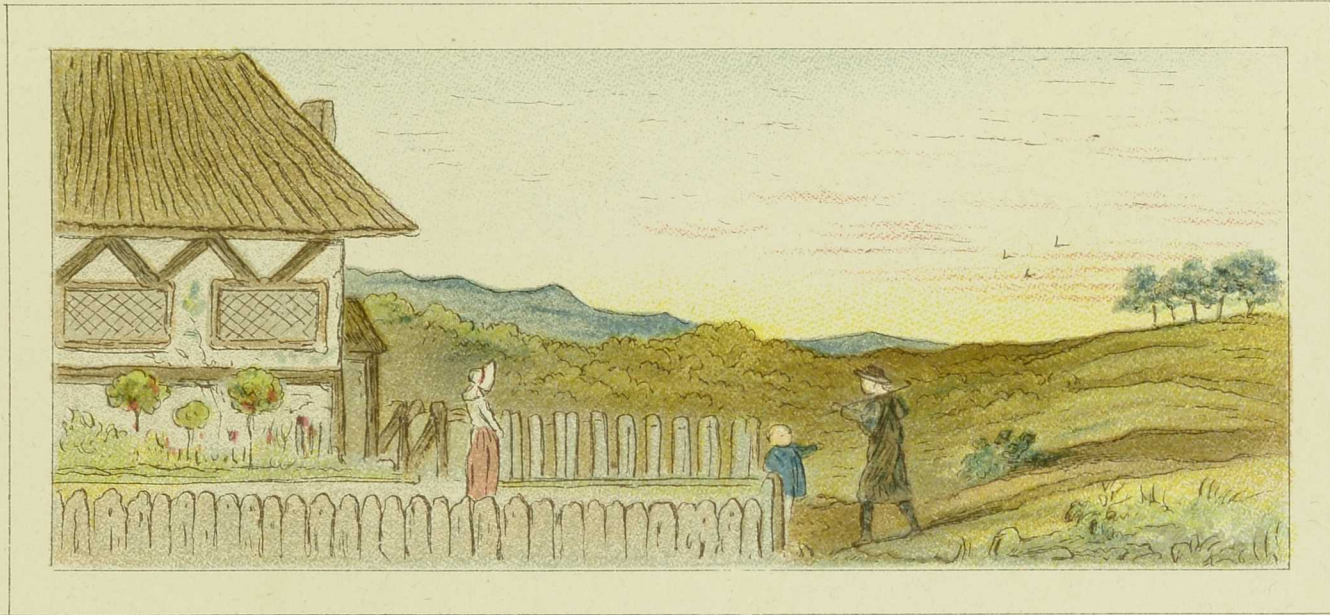
THE TRAVELLER.

Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these My brethren
ye have done it unto Me."

A WEARY man came down the village street,
Bent down, and old, and sad, and worn,
With lagging footsteps, and with tired feet,
For he had toiled all day from early morn.

Seeking for work, and finding, alas! none;
Too proud to beg unearned his daily bread;
The journey of his sad life nearly run,
And not a resting-place to lay his head.

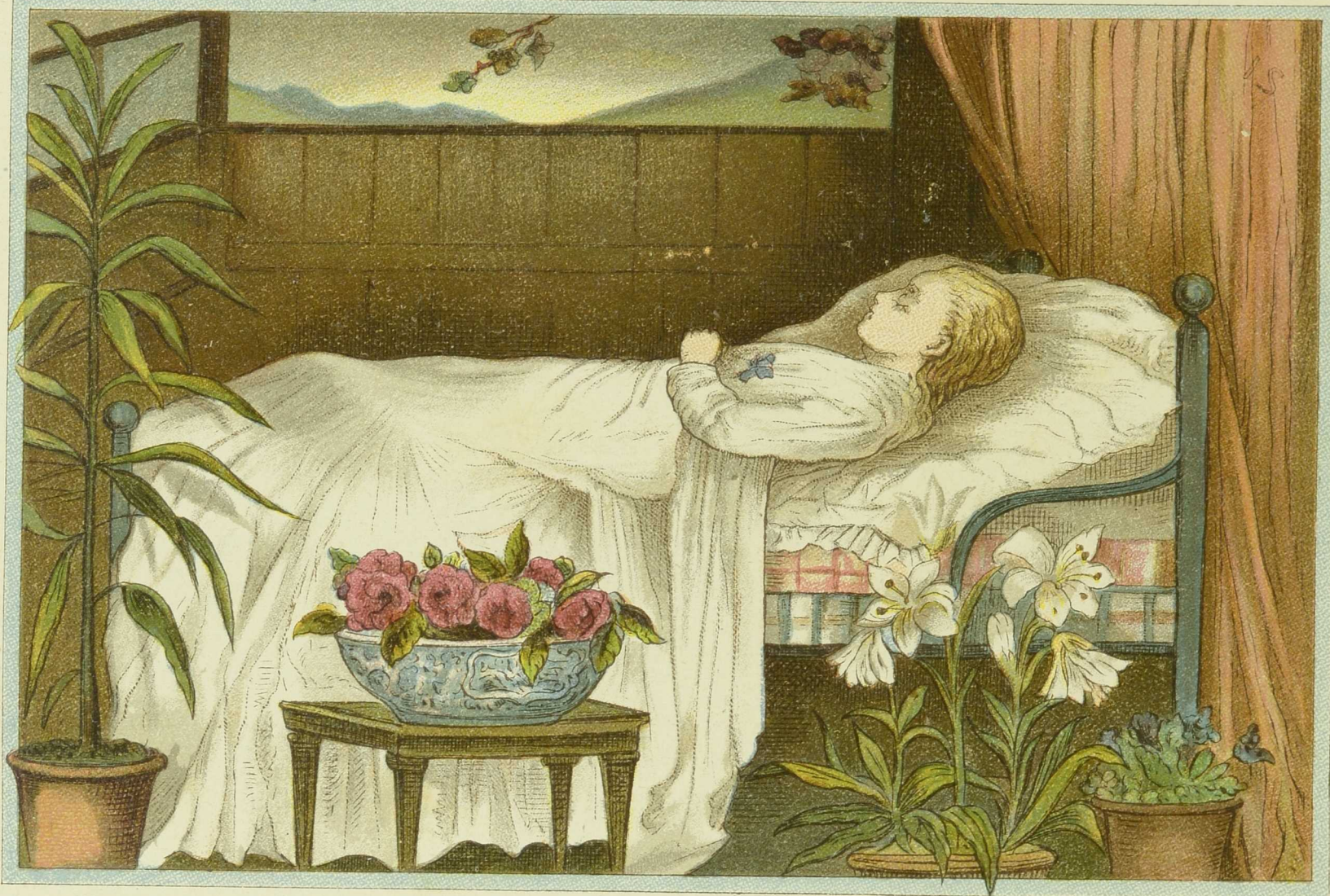




He stopped and leaned against a garden gate
Where on the steps there sat a little child;
She turned and wondered, seeing it was late,
Her large eyes filled with sweet compassion mild.

‘Are you not tired? Wait awhile and rest.
Are you not hungry? Stay, my supper’s here.”
He murmured words of thanks, and softly blessed
The child whom God had sent to bring him cheer.

And so she fetched her bowl of milk and bread,
And his poor heart was comforted from pain,
And all his hopes which had so long seemed dead,
By this child’s act of love were raised again.



THE DEAD CHILD.

"Not lost, but gone before."

YESTERDAY she was playing,
Laughing the livelong day,
With playful fingers plucking
The flowers that round her lay.



She laid her head on her pillow
When she'd lisped her evening prayer;
She woke to eternal morning,
For we know that no night is there.

Ah, darling! a golden sunbeam
Is kissing your marble brow;
Is it glory that shone through the golden gate
Which opened for you just now?

You, child, now know what the wise men
Are seeking to know in vain;
And groping their way so darkly
Through this land of weary pain.

You are with the blessed ones who follow
The train of the Holy Lamb;
And your eyes have seen the glory
That enters not heart of man.

So, perhaps, 'mid those songs of triumph,
A childish prayer you say,
That we, too, may soon be with you
In that land of eternal day!





WATER LILIES.

“ BEAUTIFUL lilies swaying
Gently to and fro,
Kissed by the sun-lit ripples
Singing as they go.

“ You must be tired of rocking
On this quiet stream ;
Of life beyond this corner
You can only dream

“Do you not long to follow
Where those ripples gay,
Sparkle and splash unfettered
Through the livelong day?



“They say beyond the river
Rolls the mighty sea.
Beautiful captive lilies
I will set you free.

Thus spake a little country lad,
Gazing at the flowers;
Watching the buds unfolding
Through the summer hours.

Then, as he gazed, sweet voices

Murmured soft and low:

“Why from a home so peaceful,

Should we care to go?

“Out on the wide blue river

Many blossoms lie,

In all their queen-like beauty

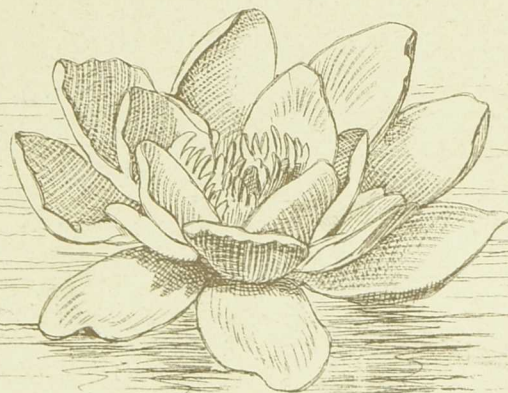
’Neath the open sky.

“But we are content to float

In this streamlet clear,

Freedom no joy could bring, for

God has placed us here.”





GUARDIAN ANGELS.

WHEN our evening prayers we say,
Ere at night our heads we lay
On our pillows soft and white,
Let us ask that angels bright
May be with us through the night.

If we wake at night in fear,
Though we know that mother's near,
We need then have no alarm,
For we know a stronger Arm
Will be guarding us from harm.



"Train up a child in the way he should go,
and when he is old he will not depart from it."

PROV. xxii. v. 6.





FINIS

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vs
Lads H. Somerset