

LITTLE ELFIE,

ETC.

BY

R. S. W.

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E. 17

from the Author to his young
friends at Pendower

Christmas 1880

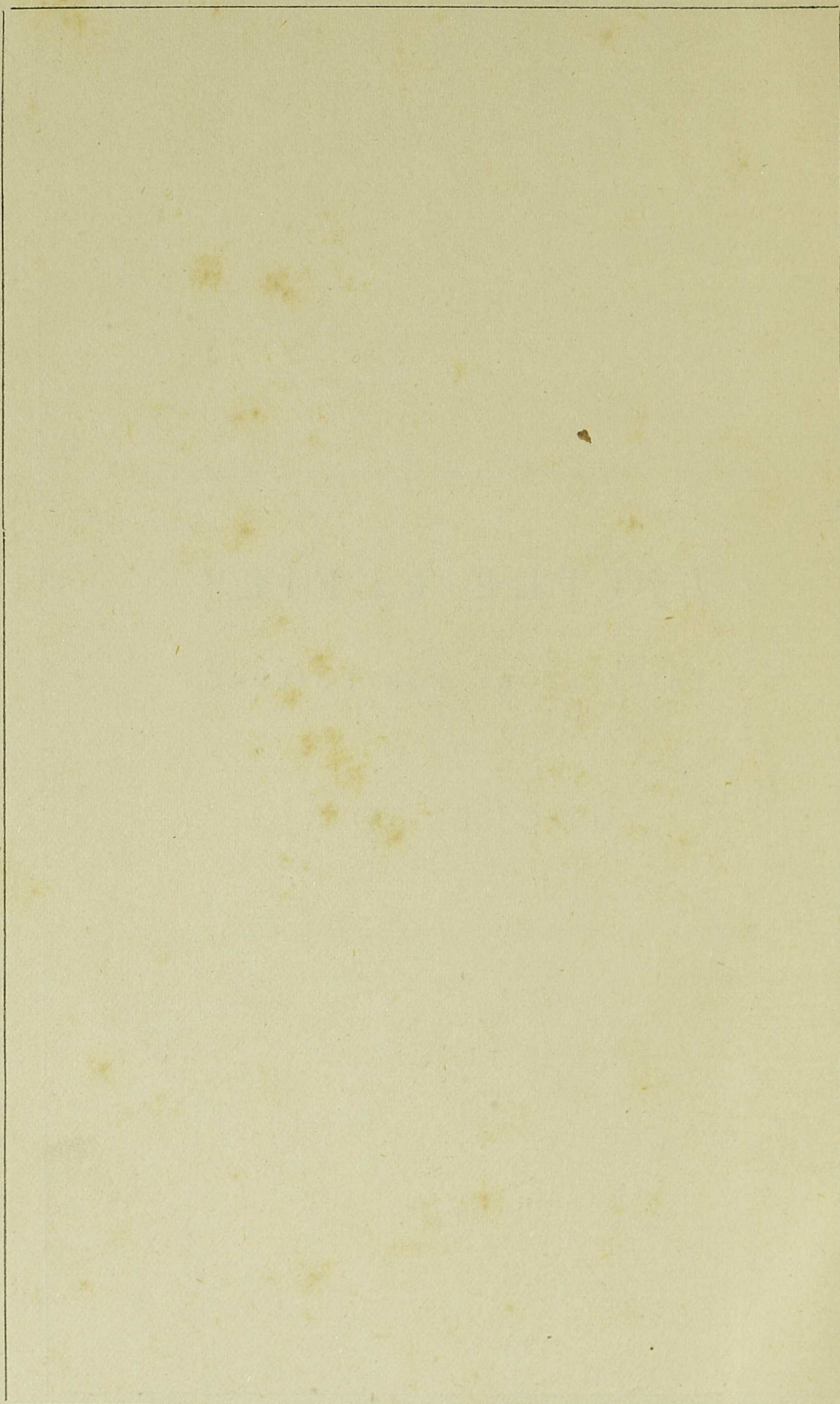
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Charles Scribner*

LITTLE ELFIE:

A FAIRY STORY FOR CHILDREN

BY

UNCLE BOB.



DEDICATION.

Dear little children, Uncle Bob invites you
To listen to this simple tale in rhyme ;
Much will it please him if he but delights you
With fairy legend of the olden time.

Full many a time have little children asked him
To talk to them about the fairy lore ;
And many a time, too, when they thus have tasked him,
He's told the self-same stories o'er and o'er.

For well he loves to see their smiling faces,
To have them cluster round about his knee,
To feel the gentleness of their embraces,
To hear their merry laugh of childish glee.

And so he's gathered up and put together
The thoughts which once did oft his mind enthrall,
That, in the stormy, windy, wintry weather,
His little book might come and speak to all.

Where'er you be, that Time's hard hand may never
The innocence of childhood from you rob,
But that all happiness be yours for ever,
Are the warm wishes of your

UNCLE BOB.

EVENING I.

INTRODUCTORY.

CHAPTER I.

The tale I am going to tell to-night
Is such as oft was told,
In days that have long since passed away,
To men of stalwart mould,
When they gathered at night around the fire,
Safe from the winter cold.

Many a time, in those bygone days,
Has the tale of the evening been,
How on summer's night the tiny fays
Had once and again been seen
Bathing themselves in the moon's clear rays,
Or dancing upon the green.

How many a time as the ploughman bold
Went whistling home from the plough,
He had passed by a round green fairy ring,
Where sat in sorrow a tiny thing
With wet and weary brow,—
And the ploughman went home a saddened man,
A saddened man home went he,
For, ere the dying leaves lay low,
His house must be visited by woe
And pain and misery.

But if on the pleasant meadow grass,
Where the daisies and cowslips grow,
Merrilly round the elves did pass,
Tripping it to and fro,
The ploughman would take off his cap with joy,
And bow full oft and low ;
And home he would go a merry man,
A merry man home went he,
With lightsome heart and laughing face ;
For he knew that the year which came on apace,
A happy New Year would be.

They told how many a prank the elves
In the silent night would play,
How they'd steal through the dairy window bars,
And drink all the cream away ;
How they'd search all over the pantry shelves,
And, without asking leave, would help themselves
To whatever nice there lay ;
But never a trace of them could be found,
For, without e'en a foot-mark on the ground,
They were off ere the light of day.

They told how the weary wanderer
Over some lonely moor,
Would see a light, and think that there
He could find a friendly door ;
And heavily o'er the heather would jog,
But suddenly find himself fast in a bog,
And vanished the crafty light ;
For the Will-o'th'-Wisp was what he saw,
And Puck had used it his steps to draw
Away from the path in the night.

They told how the goblins would enter in
Through the key-hole of the house,
And, without making even the tiny din
Of a little frightened mouse,
Would strictly search through every room
Until they might chance at last to come
Where a little baby lay,
Steeped in a slumber, calm and light,
As pure, and beautiful, and white,
As the hawthorn bloom in May ;
And the spiteful goblins would slyly creep,
And, laying the nurse in a heavy sleep,
They would steal the babe away.

But they'd leave in its place an ugly thing,
Wrinkled, and sour, and old,—
With a face like a crabbèd old man's face,
And a baby's body, without its grace,
And a voice both shrill and bold ;
Whining, and angry, and full of spite,
In mischief alone would it find delight.

And when long years had flown away,
This ugly thing, which ne'er
Had grown any larger, some lucky night
Would suddenly disappear ;
No one could tell which way it had gone,
And none for its loss would care.

And sometimes the little lovely babe
Which the goblins away had ta'en,
They would bring once more from its hiding-place,
And leave it at home again ;

But its after-life would always be
A life of toil and pain.
For it had not learned the ways of men,
It had lived in the fairies' way,
And the summer's heat and winter's rain
Both were all strange to it, and fain
Would it leave the light of day.

Such were the tales that were often told
In the days that have long gone by,
And the listeners' blood would run creepy and cold
At the doleful legendry.
And, as they went eerily upstairs,
They would glance o'er their shoulders, and mutter prayers
That the goblins might keep away :
And, e'en when they lay awake in bed,
They trembled all over with fear and dread,
And daren't ope their eyes, or lift their head,
Until cheered by the light of day.

We laugh when we read these stories old,
And, when we go to bed,
If we should shiver 'tis but with cold,
And not with fairy dread.
But the tale I am going to tell to-night
Is not a tale of terror or fright,
Of goblins great or small ;
But of little Fairies who lived in a wood,
Whose only pleasure was doing good,
And who loved, and were loved by all

THE RAVEN'S WOOD.

CHAPTER II.

In merrie England, long years ago,—
No matter where or when,—
Covering full many a mile of land,
Of hill, and vale, and glen,
There grew a vast and bosky wood,
Which had since the Norman conquest stood,—
Folk said it was planted then
By the Barons, whose high and mighty will
It was the deer to hunt and kill ;
And, though cut down from many a hill,
Some of its trees are standing still.

Around the skirts of the Raven's Wood,—
For to it that name we'll lend,—
Snug farms, well sheltered from cold winds, lay,
Their stack-yards filled with corn and hay ;
For, in the merry month of May,
You might see the mowers bend,
As with each other they keenly vied
Who swiftest could lay the swathes aside,
And soonest his labour end.

You might share the laughter and join the rout
Of the girls who tossed the hay about ;
Or when the golden grain,
The bearded barley, or bending corn,
Or dothering oats, had all been shorn,
You might mount on the loaded wain,
And passing along through green lanes slow,
To the busy stack-yard you might go.

Villages too, lay here and there,
 Snugly embowered in trees,
The blue smoke curled through the evening air
 From the tiny cottages.

You might have seen upon Sunday morn
The farm folk coming through waves of corn,
And passing along through the silent wood
To where the simple old church stood,
 With grave-yard lying round :—

How many a solemn sermon could
 In its crumbling stones be found,—
Telling the old that their time is nigh,
Warning the young that they too must die,
While the spire points upwards to the sky,
And preaches of Immortality.

But once you had left the paths behind,
 You might have walked, I ween,
Full many a mile in the Raven's Wood
 Nor human creature seen.
You might hear the song of many a bird,
 The humming of fly and bee,
And many a thing both strange and fair
 With wonder you might see.

You might scan the sturdy forest oak,
 The monarch of the trees,
Stretching abroad his mighty arms,
 Defiant of the breeze,
Which through the straight stemmed fir-trees moaned
 Like the sound of troubled seas.

And from the tops of those fir-trees tall,
 You might hear the brooding dove,
With her soft, and sweet, and gentle call,

So full of peace and love,
Lulling her little ones to sleep,
Whilst watch and ward her mate doth keep
From the only branch above.

The silver birch hung her tresses down ;
The aspen loved to play,
Trembling at its own loveliness
Like a bride on her wedding day ;
And the hawthorn, frosted with blossom fair,
Both gladdened the sight, and scented the air ;
You couldn't have told one green leaf was there,
It blossomed so full and gay.

Some parts of the wood were so dense with trees
That the light of the summer sun
Could scarce pierce through to the naked ground,
Where neither fern nor flower was found,
But a deep brown bed of leaves lay round,
And, as you trod, their rustling sound
Was a strange and dismal one.

As you walked along you might often see
The timid brown squirrel full of glee,
Run quickly across your path,
And leap up into the tall beech tree,
Up its silvery stem smoothed so carefully,
To the hole where his winter store of food,
Gathered with pains from all parts of the wood,
Through summer and autumn he hath :
Then wag his bushy tail saucily,
As if to say, " Ah ! you can't catch me."

And if the evening was coming on,
Wherever you chanced to go,
Flitting as fast as a frightened thrush,
The little wild rabbits would dash thro' the bush
To the holes they had dug below.
But if you sat still, without making a rout,
You would see them come softly and slyly out,
And when they had looked for you all about,
You would watch them begin to play ;
You would hear them stamp with their tiny feet,
Then crouch on the ground and begin to eat,
Or sit up so oddly, and make themselves neat ;
But if you chanced to move,
You would see a lot of spots of white
Pop into the holes like flashes of light,
And ended, at all events for that night,
Were all their sports above.

Right in the heart of the Raven's Wood
Danced joyously down to the sea
A little streamlet, which, whilst it ran,
Sang ever merrily,
But still so softly, you never could
Tell it was dancing down through the wood,
Until on its very brink you stood.

Its birth-place was many a mile away,
'Midst mountains vast and high,
Which reared their bare and lofty crests
As if to touch the sky ;
But the little streamlet leapt out of their side,
And tumbled along in a tiny tide,
Prattling aud laughing, as though it tried
To mock at their majesty.

Down it came, though the way was stern,
Down the rocky path of the mountain burn,
The only thing that dared to spurn
The quiet of that land.
Scarce there a living thing you'd see,
Save the falcon floating steadily
O'er all, as in command ;
Or, hoping to snare the finny fry,
Which glided, at seasons, swiftly by,
The heavy-winged heron stand.

Down came the tiny mountain burn,
Past wheeling hawk and silent hern,
Until it reached the graceful fern
Which at the entrance stood ;
And then more quietly it ran,
As a youth who begins to feel a man,
(But merrily, as when its course began,)
Through all the Raven's Wood.

Oh ! how it sang as it swept along,
As if it would rival the happy song
Of the little wood-birds, who chanted among
The trees which their branches o'er it hung.
Here, 'neath a shelving bank, 'twas lost,
There some great rock its pathway crossed,
But its tiny waves it over tossed,
Then swept into deep dark pools,
Where, as if they beneath some sorrow stoop,
The weeping willows their branches droop,
Whilst the burn their green leaves cools.

As you walked along the bank you might see
Dart suddenly from the side
The speckled trout, who speedily

Under some stone would hide ;
Whilst now and then up the midst would glide,
In stately, slow, and solemn pride,
Some mighty monarch of the tide.

But in the dusk of the summer's night
The pools would seem alive,
Right into the air would leap the trout
As though to fly they'd strive ;
They'd dive about 'neath the rocks' broad shelves,
And many a prank they'd play,
As if to rival the merry elves
Who thinking of nothing but pleasing themselves,
Danced merrily away.

Such were the charms of the Raven's Wood,—
To-morrow night we'll tell
The tale of the merry little fays
Who in that wood did dwell.
But so long we've wandered its charms to see,
We've gazed so long at each mighty tree ;
So long we've stood to watch the trout
Leaping and frisking so oddly about ;
That I see more than one little weary head,
That wants to be laid in its cosy bed—
And so Good Night must now be said.

EVENING II.

THE FAIRIES.

CHAPTER III.

Last night we talked of the Raven's Wood
And the many things you might see
If you walked on a Summer's holy-day
Under the green-wood tree.
To-night we will talk of the tiny folk
Who loved each sturdy elm and oak,
And who, when Summer warmly broke,
Lived in the wood merrily.

The fairies who dwelt in the Raven's Wood
Were a harmless race of elves,
Very lovely and fair to see,
Unlike any human creatures that be,
Unlike ought but themselves.
You never could tell what size they were—
For sometimes they seemed quite small,
And floated about in the tepid air,
Without any weight at all ;
But quietly, in a minute or two,
Larger and stronger far they grew
Until as a bulrush tall.

Sometimes they seemed clad in coats of green,
Fresh as the leaves in May ;
At other times in the purest white,
And shone with a sharp and steady light,
As if they had each been woven at night,
Out of some star's clear ray.
They had wings as fine as the gossamer
You sometimes watch when borne
Floating about in the sunny air,
In the cool of the summer's morn—
They could hover like bees around a flower,
And flit away from bower to bower
But their slender wings had not the power
To carry them far from Home ;
And they loved so well the Raven's Wood
That they never wished to roam.

In number they seemèd very large ;
How many I could not tell,—
For some of them lived by the brooklet's marge,
And some in the Ivy dell.
They only stayed in the Raven's Wood
Whilst the swallows skimmed o'er the crystal flood,
Or sported in middle air ;
With the swallows they came in sunny May,
With the swallows they went, 'ere the cold, away,
To a land where the year is one Summer's day,
Where the sky is ever fair.

But, while in the Raven's Wood they stayed,
A happy life they led,
Out at nights, when the moon-beams played
Soft and bright down the forest glade—
Would meet each fairy man and maid,

And merrily they sped
Round and round in a fairy ring.
With many a hop, and skip, and spring,
The while their little feet,
Pattering gently over the ground,
Sent forth a low, melodious sound,
Unearthly yet how sweet !

So lightly would the fairies tread
That each little flower would lift its head,
Unharm'd the following day ;
Yet, if you had chanced that road to pass,
Plainly you'd mark a ring on the grass,
Where the night before the merry fays
Had danced the hours away.

When the moon sank low beneath silvery cloud,
And the warning cock crow'd shrill and loud,
The fairies would flit to bed :
Some in the bluebells' depths serene,
Some in the lily-cups' golden sheen,
Would hide their weary head,
But most would fly to the bright flower tall
Which in memory now we the folks-glove call.

Sometimes when the day was mild and still,
No breath disturbed the air,
Scarce quivered the tall grass on the hill,
Which in quiet standeth ne'er ;
Nor a ripple upon the face of the pool,
The fairies would leap into it to cool
Themselves from the noon-day's heat ;
They would dive beneath the crystal wave,
Explore each rock and curious cave,
Or sit whilst the gentle waters lave
Their tiny naked feet.

And thus their pleasant time sped on,
When sunshine fled the bright moon shone,—
One glad day followed a glad day gone,
As wave follows wave so fleet.

Yet not alone in sports like these
Did they pass their time away,—
For fairies have fairy work to do,
As well as fairy play.
'Twas their duty and pleasure to watch o'er all
The creatures of the wood,
To soothe the mourning, to guard the small,
To raise the weakly who weary fall,
To do the sufferiug good.

They led the bee to the sweetest flowers,
They taught the birds to sing,
They loved to pass the sunny hours
With every tiny thing
Which needed their succour or their care ;
To carry it wholesome, strengthening fare,
And keep its poor heart from despair,
Or the flower from withering.

At the time of which we are talking now
The Summer was passing by,—
The bloom on the trees had changed to fruit,
And, though the azure sky
Seldom was sullied by a cloud,
Yet the wind at night was often loud,
'Twould be piercing by and bye.

So the Fairy Queen had message sent
To all the elves of the wood,
To those who stayed in the forest glade,
And those who preferred the flood,

That, when at eve, the moon should throw
Softly her rays o'er all below,
Silvering river, tree, and hill,—
It was her high and mighty will
 A solemn court to hold ;—
They knew the spot which she loved the best,
And at that spot, it was her request
 That she might them all behold.

The starry night came on apace,
 The moon-light softly fell,
And the fairies thickly thronged the place
 They knew their Queen loved well,
For many a time in days of yore
They had held therein their court before.

'Twas just where, by the side of the brook,
 Flourished an Oak tree tall ;
The stream leapt over a ridge of rock,
 And, laughing loud, did fall
Into a deep. dark pool,—and still
The little brook runs, and the people will,
 Even at this day, call
The spot where it leaps and tumbles down
Into the pool with the deep dark frown,
 The Fairies' Waterfall.

On one side the pool the rocks rose high
 And old, and brown, and bare,
Save lichens grey, or cushioned moss,
 Or the graceful maiden hair ;
But the opposite bank sloped far away
Into the depths of the wood, and lay
A mass of fragrant flowers and gay,

Whose beauty was nearly o'er ;—
For the wind at night brought a little frost
Which silvered the trees, at the heavy cost
Of seeing the flowers no more.

A tiny belt of silver sand,
Up which the ripples played,
Divided the water from the land,
Whilst an ambrosial shade
Over the whole of that happy bank
The giant oak tree made.

And often here the fays would dance
Beneath the silent moon,—
Whilst from the branching boughs o'er-head
Rang forth the glorious tune
Which the unseen songster of night sustains
Through May and sultry June.

And there not to listen to birds' sweet song,
But with troubled air and mien,
To-night did the little fairies throng
To gather round their Queen—
Their wonted loyal court to hold
And anxiously hear her words unfold.

The beauty that shone in her Queenly face
I dare not try to tell,
But her every movement was full of grace,
Her Queendom became her well :
For though the crowd of listening fays,
Dressed in their robes of starry rays,

Were beautiful and bright,
Yet, when their noble Queen was there,
To her they seemed less bright and fair,
Than unto day seems night.

Nearest of all to her there stood
Little Elfie, her only Son :—
Well was he known in the Raven's Wood,
And loved by every one.
Their sweetest songs to the birds he taught,
Fresh fragrance the sweetest flow'rets caught
From his soft kiss, but I can not tell
Of all the beauties they loved so well.
Again we shall have of him to speak,
Enough if now I say,
That, though by his Mother his charms were weak,
Through all the crowd you would vainly seek
To find so fair a fay.

The Queen sat, throned o'er all the crowd,
On a cushion of moss brave,
They ceased at once their whisperings loud,
When she her hand did wave,
And thus, for the summons there that night,
Her royal reasons gave :

"The time, my subjects, again has come
When southward the swallows fly,
And seek for the winter a warmer home
Beneath a milder sky ;
And we too must, for a little while,
Bid the Ravens' Wood—Good bye.

"A happy time we have passed since we
First saw its waves of fern,—

May as happy a time be mine and yours
Until we again return :—
Since last we came with the joyous spring
We have done to nought an evil thing,
No cause have we now to mourn.

“The goblins indeed or the pixies may
Indulge in deeds of spite ;
Contented are we if each tiny fay
Dance 'neath the light of the moon's clear ray,
The space of a summer's night,
For in doing good we joy alway,
In giving pleasure delight.

“We love the silence of Raven's Wood,
The birds that through it fly,
The goldfinch bright, and the sweet-voiced thrush,
And the tom-tit merry and sly ;
But the Autumn time has come when we
Must bid them once more Good bye

“We leave not the wood because to us
It has lost its potent charm,—
We only fly from the cold and frost,
And seek the bright and warm,
And we leave not behind one living thing
That would wish to do us harm.”

Children,—if through the storms of life
You would pass safe and calm ;
Remember the Fairies of Raven's Wood ;
Like them let your pleasure be doing good,
Then like them know that nothing would
Desire to do you harm

When the Queen had ceased, the fairy crowd
Down to the grass their fore-heads bowed,
And then arose a murm'ring loud,
Like a hive of honey bees,
The swallows would fly the very next day,
And with them the fairies went away,
Far over the lands and seas.

The Court was ended so off they flew,
Each to his own dear flower,
To slumber once more in its warmest bell,
Safe from both wind and shower,
The last sleep for a long, long time :
In the morn they depart for a warmer clime,
And the next short chapter of this rhyme
Shall tell of their journey o'er.

THE FLITTING.

CHAPTER IV.

Who does not love on a sunny day
In the sweet flowery month of May,
When birds are singing and all is gay,
 To watch the swallows fly?
To see them glint in the sun's bright beam,
Catching the flies which in myriads teem,
Or sweep, like a glance, o'er the glittering stream,
 Or float through the sultry sky?

Who does not love their nest to see,
 Not high in some elm tree tall
Out of the reach of human ken,
They have no dread of the sight of men,
 For they're loved by one and all;
So they fetch some clay and some little sticks,
Which the swallows use for mortar and bricks,
And up in your windows their nest they fix,
 Or in some hole in your wall.

But when the sun in the autumn sky
Shines round and red, away they fly;
And no more we see them flitting by
 'Till the summer again comes round.
Together they come, together they go,
And many a time have we wondered so
To think how each year their way they know,
 How their path through the air they found.

Now the swallows loved the fairies well,
For often, when faint and weak,
They would visit them with healthful food,
And soothing words would speak.
Their tiny wings could not bear them on
Far o'er the deep blue sea,
To the land where the bright sun ever shone
The land where they wished to be ;—
So very small the fairies grew,
And mounting the swallows away they flew.

They started off from the Raven's Wood
Just at the break of day,
And when the noon sun looked down on the trees,
No swallow or fairy there he sees,
For they're many a mile away.
The Ravens' Wood they soon had lost,
Fields, farms, and villages had crossed,
They had flown o'er hill, and vale, and down,
Beneath them had lain full many a town,
The English cliffs, so great and white,
Had dwindled away till lost to sight,
They had traversed the hollow sounding sea,
Whose waters lay curling gracefully,
And they had come to another shore,
And were passing over the fields once more.

They flew o'er the merry land of france
Full many a weary mile,
They passed o'er battle fields of fame,
O'er many an antique pile,
And rested at eve their weary wing
In the walls e'en then old and mouldering,
The chateau once of some mighty King—

Off into the morning light they flew,
And their way through the trackless air renew,
And soon to Spain they came,
Who once was mistress of the World,
Whose haughty standard was unfurled
O'er many a land of fame ;
Who, not content with her Old World might
Sought out a New World to win in fight,
But greedy of gold, and not caring for right,
Stained deeply her mighty name.

Whose ships once floated on every sea,
Whose men where brave and bold,
Whose cities were fair as in dreams we see,
With spires, and towers, and hold,
Wrought by the Moor with tasteful hand,
Until, beyond conception grand,
They glittered a mass of gold :—
Whose hills rose proudly to the skies,
Her fertile vales gave rich supplies
Of corn, and wine, and oil,—
Her orange groves in beauty grew,
Her people basked in the sun, and few
Had care to labour, for well they knew
They could gather with little toil.

But Spain is no more the foremost land,
No more her voice heard in command,
Her flag o'er all unfurled ;
Her gallant ships on all the seas
No more spread sail to court the breeze,
And triumph o'er the world :
Her power, her glory, long gone to decay,
For ill-gotten treasures will never stay.

They came at length to Afric's land,
In whose caves and deserts hoar
Lie savage beasts of prey and blood,
Or lurk like robbers in the wood,
Whence oft is heard the roar
Of the Lion on his midnight prow,
Or the Jackal's low and dismal howl.

But the fairies feared the Lion's roar,
Though its sound was so terrible, no more
Than you do the buzz of a fly,
For he could not hurt them if he would,
Nor would he hurt them if he could,
He let them pass peacefully by.

They found out a lovely, lonely spot
Where man had never been,
And evil beasts disturbèd not
The quiet of the scene,—
No elms or oaks cast their welcome shade,
Nor daisies nor violets grew,
But broad-leaved palms above them played,
And the olive a fragrant shelter made,
And many a flower its charms displayed
Which well the fairies knew.

But the very first night, when gathering round
Their Queen their court they paid,
Little Elfie was missing, nor could be found
Though far and near over miles of ground
The strictest search they made.
Then rose a strange and dismal sound,
Like the dead leaves rustling on the ground,
For Elfie was loved by all!
The Queen in sorrow bowed low her head,

For she feared that her poor little Elfie was dead ;
And oft did the fairies call,
But no answer came, for, you soon will know,
Little Elfie was far from that scene of woe.

And the fairies sang a mournful song
For they loved little Elfie well,
And many a fairy's heart would long
To see him, in scallop shell,
Come sailing over the azure wave
Among them once more to dwell.

FAIRIES' SONG.

Green leaves wrinkle
Summer's gone by,
Stars clearly twinkle
In frosty sky,
Soon the sweet flowers
Will fade and die.

The ground all frozen,
The leaves all dead,
Not one fair flower
For fairy's bed,
Where'll little Elfie
Hide his head ?

He'll wander on
Through wind and rain,
Each day he will feel
More woe and pain ;
We never shall see
Little Elfie again.

Not long does a fairy's sorrow last,
A cloud on the Sun, it soon is past,
And though they ne'er forget,

And many a time they think with fear
Of poor little Elfie and wish him here,
They waste not their time and many a tear,
In useless vain regret ;
For even in Afric's land they knew
They would find some labour of love to do.

Oh ! beautiful then was Afric's land,
When the sun shone brightly down,
And lighted up every lovely bay,
And glittered on sharp peaked hills which lay
Like the minarets of a town.
Beautiful was the deep blue sea
Unaltered by ceaseless tide,
And the deep blue sky which in beauty bright
With that glorious ocean vied.

But though the wondrous works of God
Were beautiful and fair ;
And, though all seemèd pure and bright,
A heavy curse was there ;
For all along the hateful shore
Englishmen, captured by the Moor,
Tugged constantly at the galley's oar,
And when the birds they find,
Flying land-ward wearily,
Their thoughts flew back, across the sea,
To the happy Homes of their infancy,
Which the swallows had left behind.

And at night they slumbered restlessly,
Or, sleeping, dreaming lay
Of the tiny swallows so swift and free,
So great yet helpless they,—
Of the Homes they ne'er would see again,
The joys that long were o'er,

The well-loved faces, they thought with pain,
Might welcome them no more ;
And memory scarce could those scenes recall
For misery near had effaced them all.

But the good little fairies crept in at night
And soothed their restless sleep,
With many a dream of hope so bright,
And many a thought of pleasure light,—
Would they their truth might keep !—
They whispered them never to despair
For succour might reach them even there,
And the whispers lightened their load of care,
And the joy-dreams made them weep ;
And the fairies carried them far from the strife
In many such dreams of joy,
Till each Husband clasped his heart-loved Wife,
Each Son his Mother more dear than life,
Each Father his darling boy.

My little friends wherever you go,
You will find some pain and grief,
You will meet some poor heart steeped in woe,
And may it be yours the joy to know
Of bringing that heart relief.

But now it is time you were off to bed :
We must leave the Fairy Queen hanging her head
In deep and painful sorrow :
And what little Elfie's been and done,
Whether he's lost, or where he's gone,
You shall hear from me to-morrow.

EVENING III.

LOST IN THE WOODS.

CHAPTER V.

Last night we were standing on Afric's shore,
We might hear the hungry lion roar,
Whilst the fairy Queen in sorrow sore
 Bowed lowed her mourning head :
To-night we come back to the wood once more,
And to hear of her Son's adventures, for
 Little Elfie was not dead.

He had heard the words of his Mother the Queen
 And they had made him sad,
Not only to leave the forest green,
 And the lovely flowers, for well I ween
He knew that, ere long, their glittering sheen
 Would be gone,—ah ! no, he had
More reason than that for the grief which now
Bedimmed his bright eyes and beclouded his brow.

My gentle child hast ever in dreams
 Seen forms of heavenly mould,
Faces whose wondrous beauty seems
 Too glorious to behold :

Till, waking, 'twas but a dream, and thou
Wert shivering with cold ;
And the face that now, in thy happy dream,
In rapturous beauty shone,
Like a bubble of air on a swollen stream,
As speedily was gone ;
Yet ever since, in thy memory,
It hath as brightly shone.
Thou wilt find, my gentle child, in life,
Its pleasures are like that dream,
Like it thou wilt find them swiftly flee,
Thou wilt learn that their ne'er lost memory
Is sweeter than they have been ;—
But fair as the face which thou dreamed of then,
Bright as that form soon gone,
So fair, so bright, so beautiful,
In truth little Elfie shone.

One day when the sky was clear and still,
And pleasant the prattling brook,
Little Elfie was bathing his brow to cool,
Whilst the smooth surface of the pool
Gave back his every look,—
Inverted stood the oak-tree tall,
The little flowerets one and all,
The sky rolled far below ;
The wag-tail perched on a stone in the burn,
Nodding its head and its tail in turn,
Seemed to welcome its shadow too.

As little Elfie gladly gazed
Down into the depths, he saw amazed
Glitter along the stream,
A little bird of form most fair,
Of plumage exquisite and rare.

Like a bird of some fabled eastern isle,
Or a ray just clothed in the coloured smile
Of the sun's gentlest gleam.

No more little Elfie bathed that day,
Nor at night did he join the dance,
But in his own blue-bell cup he lay ;
The quiet hours flew swift away,
He seemed, as it were, in trance.
And often murmured soft and low,
"Oh ! where did that bird of beauty go,
I cannot rest till that bird I know."

And ever after that fatal day
He haunted the chattering stream,
Bathing and watching hard alway
For anything which should seem
As that vision fair, which so brightly shone
But for one moment and was gone.

No more the blightest of the blithe
Was little Elfie then,
No more did he sport with the merry tribe
Who wondered, but ne'er could ken,
What dire mishap, or venture strange,
So swiftly could little Elfie change !

And when the message to him was brought
That his Mother, the Queen, would hold a Court,
He carelessly took his place ;—
And yet, save her, as we have known,
No other fay so brightly shone,
None had so sweet a face.

But when he knew that the time had come
That they must leave the wood

He pondered a little in grief and pain
For he thought he should die if never again
He saw the bird he had sought in vain :
 Not long in doubt he stood,
But down to the burn with speed he ran,
For he had formed a hurried plan
 To find the treasure lost ;
He would float down the stream till its home he saw,
Where he'd rest till the winter's snow should thaw,
 And the fairies again had crossed.

A lily flower, which had been torn
 Away by some sudden flood,
Adown the stream was swiftly born
 Beyond the Raven's Wood—
Into its cup little Elfie flew,
For somewhere below he thought he knew
He should find what his heart so fondly sought ;
Ah ! little Elfie too dearly taught
Shalt thou be that joys are seldom caught
Their pursuit with danger is often fraught

Faster and faster the streamlet flowed :
Soon passed they forth from the Raven's Wood,
 While, gilding the morning air,
The sun was struggling through banks of cloud,
And bars of crimson and gold, a crowd
 Of colours rich and rare,
Gladdened e'en little Elfie's heart,
Which 'gan to be sad from the wood to part.

Faster and faster down they went,
 And other streamlets came
Upon the self-same errand bent,
 And their roads were all the same,

So they joined in company and flowed
A river deep, and calm, and broad.
Nought ruffled the surface of the stream
Save the rise of some hungry trout,
The dip of the willows on the bank,
Or the water rat that dived and sank,
Then rose and swam blithely about.

And deeper and broader the river grew,
The willows and trees on its banks were few,
And a far off noise little Elfie knew
Was the roaring of the sea ;
Swifter down the stream did float
His curious little fairy boat,
Twisting and twirling, like a moat
In the sunbeam, merrily.

And now to his wondering gaze appears,
On the river's either side,
Rising rank over rank in tiers,
House upon house, and with many fears
A great town he descries :
For the fairies love not in towns to stay,
Where smoke obscures the light of day,
And all hope of gaining his wish away
From his drooping spirit died.

But he leapt, from the boat as it floated along,
Up on to the crowded quay,
And wended his weary way among
The noisy, clamorous, bustling throng
Which you still there may see ;
And into the very heart of the town
He dived, nought knowing or caring, down,
But 'ere he came out again,

The terrible sounds that there he heard,
The brutal blow, or more brutal word,
 Had filled his heart with pain :
For sin is so foul and vile a thing
'Twill stain e'en the pure white of a fairy's wing.

He longed for the Raven's Wood again,
And willingly left the ways of men,
 But hardly his way he knew,
And the days grew short and the nights more chill,
And many a flower the frost did kill,
 Till scarcely one there grew
Where poor little Elfie could hide from rain,
When the cold wet night filled his heart with pain.

When many a week was passed and gone,
Whilst ever he'd wearily wander on,
 He came to the skirts of a wood,
And entered it, but he heard with dread
The waves of wind roaring overhead,
 And often amazed he stood
To see the withered leaves deep lain,
Or fall from the trees like a shower of rain,
Whilst the heavy leaden clouds hung low,
And weighed down his soul like impending woe.

Ah ! you would have sighed had you seen him now !
No smile's glad sunshine lit up his brow ;
 In that worn and weary face,
The bright little Elfie two months gone by,
'Twas hardly with care and difficulty
 That a steadfast gaze could trace ;
His gossamer wings hung drabbled down,
His starry robe from the dust of the town
Was soiled, and travel stained, and brown.

No home had poor little Elfie now,
No place to lay his head,
The flowers which covered once the ground
Were now all witherèd.
He wandered on with pain and fright,
For he knew if a bitter winter's night
Should catch him with all its freezing might,
He also would be dead.

He came at length to an angry brook
Which foamed and roared along ;
Ah ! what a different voice and look
From (when he had his friends forsaken)
That on whose breast he'd been gently taken,
Which sang a low, sweet song ;
He knew not that this was the same old burn,
So boisterous its waters, its looks so stern,
And desolate gloomed the oak tree bare
Which stood erect in the winter air.

Little Elfie knew not 'twas his own dear tree
So changed it seemèd now,
Its green leaves all long fled away,
And the little birds that warbled gay,
Sat huddled up, like balls of clay,
Upon the naked bough,
Or had fled, when the leaves had turned crumpled and
brown,
To find their living more near the town.

The flowers no more grew round its root,
The graceful fern was dead,
Little Elfie sought out a hole at its foot
To lay his weary head.
His little heart was heavy and sad,

He thought of the fairies, blithe and glad,
Who danced the time away,
Whilst out in the wind, and frost, and rain,
And racked by many a cruel pain,
Night after night he lay.
But, though sad at heart, little Elfie was bold,
And so to ward off the rain and cold,
He gathered up fallen leaves to keep
Him safe, then into the hole did creep,
And very soon he was fast asleep.

Poor little Elfie ! far away
Thy Mother hangs her head
In grief and pain, and many a fay
Mourns truly for thee, night and day :
Sleep, sleep in peace ; may thy hard, wild bed
Be free from rain and frost,
May thy dreams be happy,—all sorrow fled,—
And may the fairies not find thee dead,
When Home they again have crossed.

INTERREGNUM.

CHAPTER VI.

And now we have emptied the Raven's Wood
Of all who used to dwell
Down by the tiny silver flood
Or in the ivy dell.
The fairies are gone to Afric's shore ;
The beautiful swallows are seen no more ;
The leaves are stripped from every tree ;
No merry brown squirrel you now can see ;
True now and again, with a comical roll,
A white thing pops suddenly into a hole,
And you know that a rabbit had just come out
To see if there lay any food about.
True that the trout are in the brook,
Yet no longer they leap, but seek some nook
Where they can lie, secure from harm,
Till winter has passed, and the nights are warm.

No merry birds send their joyous song
Of glee from every bough ;
Not a single member of all the throng
Could you see in the bare wood now.
Not one of the things which gladly grew
But had yielded to winter's rule,
The brooklet was like a ship which knew
But one man left of all its crew,

For only the sober dipper flew,
Or swam in the silent pool.

And in the farm houses all around
The fires were heaped up high,
And at night the merry tale went round,
And ballad or joyful glee :
Whilst out of doors covering deep the ground
The snow fell silently.
And the little children went shivering to bed,
And pulled the clothes up over their head
To keep all the cold away,
Just as I fancy some children will
Be doing the very same thing still,
E'en at the present day.

And during the night King Frost would steal
Under the door, and play
Full many a prank, perhaps he'd make
The water all ice, and you'd have to break
The jug to let it away.
For in the night he holds his reign,
And beautiful shapes on the window pane
He works whilst you're asleep :
Of frosted silver they seem to be,
But let the sun rise and soon you'll see
That they were not made to keep.

And when they looked out of the window, lo !
He had brought to help him his friend, King Snow,
And the little birds from the Ravens' Wood
Hopped sadly over the ground,
And the little children, kind and good,
Scattered crumbs all around,
And those little crumbs would play their part,
And cheer up each little birdie's heart.

How pleasant it is that we can all

Give pleasure so easily !

Not one of the things which lowly crawl,

Birds, beasts, or insects, one and all,

Ugly or beautiful, great or small,

But, if it could tell us, would reveal

That in its own way it can feel

Pain and pleasure as well as we,

And there's nothing that God has seen right to make,

But we should love for its Maker's sake.

And now came the merry Christmas time,

And the Church bells pealed a joyous chime

O'er fields of virgin snow ;

And to the Church decked out with green,

Along the pathways might be seen

The country people go.

For we are told that this blessed morn

A Saviour unto us was born ;

And the people to Church are flocking thus

To praise Him who lived and died for us.

What a dear old time is the Christmas time !

We hail it ever with joy ;

Of all the year 'tis the very prime,

The old man loves it, and hearing the chime,

Feels as though again a boy.

How sweetly the waits on Christmas Eve

Sound in the silent night,

Telling how Jesus Christ did leave

For us His heaven so bright ;

And calling us by our lives to prove

How much we love Him for His love.

But Christmas night when the fire burns clear,

And the tables groan with the best of cheer,

And those we love are gathered near
Around the Christmas tree ;
When under the merry misletoe bough
The children are passing to fro,
And laughingly proving its use they know,
That's the time for you and me.

And though it all comes to an end at last,
And the candles burn out, and the fun is past,
And the children are sent to bed ;
Though the misletoe bough be taken down,
And into the kitchen fire be thrown,
And the green holly leaves be dead ;
Yet the time has been, and in after-life
When you look back to the merry strife
And friendly struggles then ;
And many a face that brightly shone,
This many a year, is past and gone,
And some of you are from children grown
Into strong, able, men ;
You'll love to ponder on by-gone times,
And will gladden again with the Christmas chimes.

With the New Year there came a month
Of frost, and ice, and snow,
And merrily ringing over the ponds
The happy skaters go ;
Whilst the frightened ducks look wondering on,
The picture of perfect woe.

Then February brought a thaw,
The nights were cold, and dark, and raw,
The snow was turned into mud,
And every little ditch ran down
A deep and angry flood.

Ah ! that was a month of wind and rain
Which fiercely fell and blew,
Driving with all its might and main,
As if to shatter the window pane,
And reach the little children ; in vain
It tries, while they stand and view
With downcast hearts the leaden skies,
And watch with eager, anxious eyes,
For sunbeams to shine through.

But soon rough March came blustering in
In his rude and ready way,
And he drove off both snow and damp alike
With his breezes fresh and gay.
And carefully searching over the ground
The first faint marks of the Spring were found,
For the beautiful snow-drops you soon might trace,
Which took the snow's purity and place.

So children when the time shall come,—
Long be it, but come it will,—
When those before you are lying dumb,
And *you* must their places fill ;
Like the flowers which come when the snow's away,
May you be as brave and pure as they.

Enough for to-night ; to-morrow we'll tell
What further adventures the fays befel
When they journeyed once more Home ;
Of the long looked for, happy Spring,
A little time we'll try to sing,
For with it the fairies come.
So now, once more, I bid you Good Night,
May your dreams be happy, your slumbers light.

EVENING IV.

ALL'S WELL THAT ENDS WELL.

CHAPTER VII.

Through bleak December's frost and snow,
Through March's rough wind and rude,
Little Elfie has lain 'neath the old Oak tree
In the heart of the Ravens' Wood ;
The fairies have dwelt 'neath a cloudless sky,
And swiftly their happy time's gone by :
Now, if you listen, you soon shall know
What next took place, where next they go.

The winter had long flown far away,
The air was warm and mild,
No longer the sky was dull and grey,
For the sun so brightly smiled.
Passing along by the wood you heard
Right loud and merrily ring
The Cuckoo's voice, that blithesome bird,
The harbinger of the Spring.

The fields were rich with heavy grass,
And, bursting from every way
That up and down among them pass,
Came laughter loud and gay
From the merry children who decked their hair
With the spotted cowslips, graceful and fair,

Forget-me-not blue, or the woodbine twined
Round the briar which aye leaves a thorn behind,—
The lily so pure and so sweet withal,
The modest violets shy and small,
Or the hard-gained, red-rimmed, fragrant May
Which whitened each hedge like a snowy day.

From each green bower right loudly rings
The sweetest song of each bird that sings ;
The merry brown squirrel, full of glee,
Leaped, full of his fun, from tree to tree ;
Beneath the yew tree's ample shade
Many a gambol the rabbits played ;
The heads of the deer you might discern
Keep popping up from amid the fern ;
The beautiful butterflies born for an hour,
Courtied and won each most fragrant flower ;
The slender dragon-flies over the stream
Kept hovering aye in the sun's bright gleam ;
The trout played merrily down in the deep,
Or basked on the broad weeds, sound asleep ;
The cattle which strayed into shallow pool
Drank deeply and long their thirst to cool,
Then stood idly whisking their tails about,
Nor seemed e'er to think of coming out,
And everything was happy and gay,
For Nature held high holyday.

And see now wheeling through the air
And sporting about in the sky,
In a way which no other birdies dare,
Our friends the swallows fly ;
And the Raven's Wood is still more gay,
For the Fairy Queen that very day
Had arrived with her court of many a fay.

Ah ! where was poor little Elfie now ?
The time had been when his tiny brow
 Had throbbed with pure delight
To have seen his well-loved wood once more ;
The banks with primroses jewelled o'er,
The lichens grey, the moss so green,
The violet's scent, and the lily's sheen,
 Had thrall'd him with their might !
But now the tall and graceful serge
 In rustling moaning wave,
And the beautiful blue-bells sang a dirge
 Over poor Elfie's grave.

The first Court which the Queen would hold
 Was to be at the fall of night,
When the flowers had closed each gentle fold
 In slumbers sound though light ;
The place of meeting was the same
 Where they had met of yore,
But never so beautiful as now
 Had seemed that place before !
For nowhere else in all the wood
 Was the grass such an emerald green,
And nowhere else were the flowers so fair
 As on that bank were seen :
The primroses shone like clustered stars,
The anemone pale with its ruby bars,
While the soft moss made a cushion fair,
And fit e'en the Queen of the fays to bear.

Long did that court its sittings keep,
Till the flowers awakened from their sleep
 At the call of the morning dew,—
For the fairies' sorrow, by their return,

Broke forth, and afresh they 'gan to mourn
For Elfie brave and true :
And often they sang so loud and clear,
“ Elfie, dear Elfie, we wish you were here.”

Not far from the place where that mournful song
From the little fairies broke,
Across the brook its branches hung
Our friend the giant Oak ;
And the sound came travelling along its root,
Until it reached the hole at its foot,
And little Elfie awoke.

He thought he had dreamed a long, long dream,
In which, to his troubled mind, it did seem
He many a sorrow passed,
Through pain and misery, and woe,
His weary course did onward go,
But he reached the end at last ;
Still he was not sure that he wakened yet,
Or if 'twere not a dream which the wonders set
That on every side his glad gaze met.

But whilst he sat and gazed around
On tree, and sky, and stream, and ground,
He heard a sweet, mysterious sound
Rising forth full and clear ;
He knew he had heard that sound before,
Yet still in his mind he wondered sore
If it were not a thing his fancy bore,
And he almost heard with fear.

Trembling out of the hole did he creep,—
Now he was sure that he was not asleep,—
And anxiously listened with might and main

To hear that familiar sound again,
Nor had he to wait to hear it long,
For from the clustered flowers among,
Rang forth once more that same sweet song :
The words which fell on his listening year
Were, "Oh ! how we wish little Elfie was here,
"Summer without him is dark and drear,
"Dear little Elfie we wish you were here : "
No longer he listened, he dashed through the wood,
And right in their midst little Elfie stood.

What happened on this I cannot tell,
But all of you children can picture well
How his Mother would clasp her long lost boy,
How the fairies wept from their very joy,
How many a long and gladdened look
At his dear lost face they anxiously took,
Then sped away and through all the wood
Made known the tidings so glad and good.

And then how every beast and bird
Which lived in hill or glen,
Soon as the joyful tidings they heard
Came pouring down, to confirm the word
With their own eyes better ken.
How the lark soared up in the blue serene
Until not even a speck was seen,
But his sweet shrill song still fell on the ear,
"Elfie is found, our own Elfie is here ;"
"Dear little Elfie's come back " sang the thrush
To her little ones safe in the hawthorn bush ;
"Elfie's come Home," from the tall elm trees
Hummed whole legions of busy bees ;

The robin went hopping about on the ground
Twittering "Elfie, dear Elfie is found ;"
Not a single thing in all the wood
But rejoiced when it heard the tidings good.

* * * * *

No more did little Elfie leave
His Mother alone to sigh and grieve :
 Since he had gone away,
A painful lesson he'd hardly learned,
And to the fairies he returned
 A sadder but wiser fay.
No more he sought for his fancy's bird,
No more his bosom quickly stirred
 With keen desire to roam ;
He had found by proof, what he oft had heard,
That of all earth's joys to be preferred
 Are the peaceful joys of Home.

He still was loved by all the wood,
Still his chiefest pleasure was doing good,
He laboured as hard as e'er he could,
 And both by deed and word,
To strengthen the weak, the sick to cure,
To gladden the down-cast heart and the poor
 By sorrow deeply stirred :
And thus as we found him, brave and true,
We will bid him a long and last adieu !

IN CONCLUSION.

CHAPTER VIII.

My tale is told : no more I hear
The Fairies' simple song,
No more I wander happily
The trees and flowers among.
Without is lying the foot-stained snow
And through it the shivering children go ;
And I am recalled to the present times
By the merry bells ringing the Christmas chimes.

The Raven's Wood has passed away,
And every happy little fay
That turned the moonlight into day
Has faded from our sight ;
The little brook is lost in the sea
Of shoreless, deep obscurity,
And o'er the farms and the villages
With the church-spires peeping through the trees
Has set an endless night.

No more now when we go for a walk
In Summer or in Spring,
Do we turn all cold and cease to talk
At the sight of a fairy ring ;
And we smile at those who have gone before
And who would have done such a thing.

We have learned herein to be wiser men
Than those before us were,
We look not for fairies in the wood,
Or for witches in the air,
For superstition we've laid aside,
And a simpler faith we bear.

We know that there's One whose mighty Arm
Has made all things that be ;
The little worm that crawls on the ground
The fish that swims the sea ;
Each beast and bird lives by His word
As well as you and me.

And though no fairies' hands supply
The needful food and aid
To the tiny things that else would die,
Yet He, who all hath made,
Watches o'er all with unwearying eye,
And through His world His angels fly,
Ready to succour all who need,
The sad ones to soothe, and the hungry feed.

And we may learn from a tale like this
Of the Fairies of Raven's Wood,
How pleasant and happy a thing it is
To do unto others good ;
We may learn to live in love with all,
To help the weary ones and the small,
To do all the good which the weakest may,
And to work our days work in our day.

For the time will come when you and I
Must leave this beautiful world of ours,
Must lose the sun, and stars, and sky,
The trees and the fragrant flowers ;
And we must deep in the cold earth lie,
Through sun, and snow, and showers.

But a world more bright than your fairest dream
When sleep hath closed your eyes,
Hath God prepared for those who below
Have loved Him, and loved all His creatures too,
A world beyond the skies ;
Where parting and sorrow are ever o'er,
Where rain and tempest can come no more,
Where His glorious Light doth for ever shine,
May that world, dear Children, be yours and mine.

December 25th, 1859.

December 25th, 1880.

GRACE DARLING.

Where King Ida's stately castle
Watches o'er the Northern sea,
Lies a little island-cluster
Where the surf breaks ceaselessly ;
Dreaded by the storm-tost sailor,
Beautiful to you and me.

On those islands, where the light-house
Long hath stormy seas defied,
On those islands holy Cuthbert
Lived long years and meekly died ;
From those islands to our Fathers
Came to preach the Crucified.

See, across the gloom of evening,
Shining like a planet bright,
Gladdening the watchful seamen,
Comes a clear and warning light,
Hear it tell a thrilling story
Of a gentle maiden's might.

'Twas a wild September evening
And the north-wind fiercely blew,
When the Forfarshire came drifting
With a weary hopeless crew,
And upon the Longstone striking,
With that warning light in view.

In the lighthouse dwelt a maiden,
Stranger she to doubt or fear,
Little marvel that for ever
All men hold Grace Darling dear !
When the bitter cry for life rose
Help they dreamed not of was near.

“ Father,” cried the dauntless maiden,
“ Hear you not the drowning call ?
Heed not though the seas be raging,
Launch our boat whate’er befall ! ”
Seated in that boat a maiden
And an old man, that was all.

To the rock through wind and tempest,
Through the raging ocean’s roar,
On that dread September morning
Pulled that man and maiden o’er,—
Stormy sea and danger round them,
Dying fellow-men before.

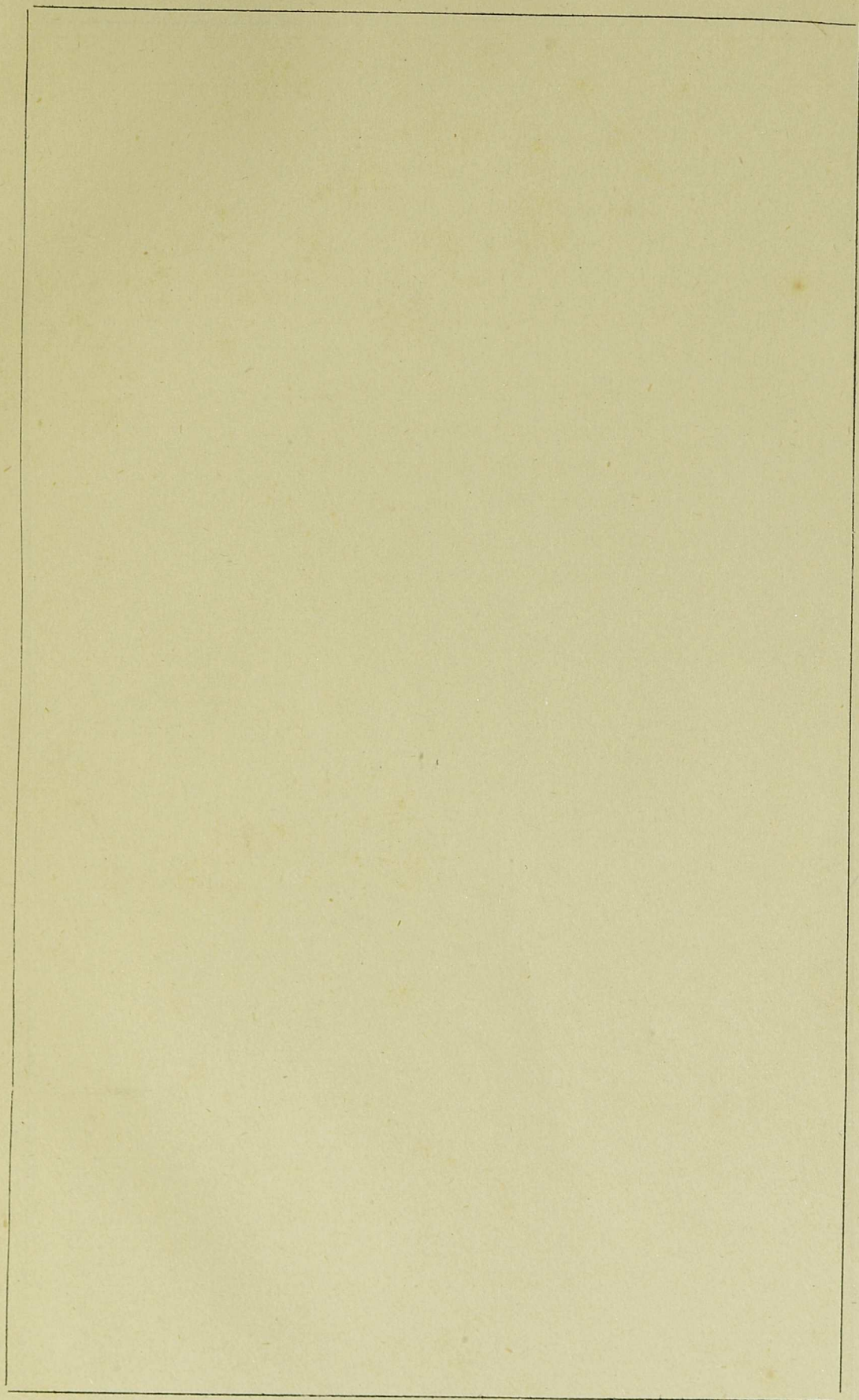
Sixty-three were in the steamer
When she struck the fatal land,
All the night the raging billows
Every hope of succour banned :
How could man avail to save them ?
One by one felt Death’s stern hand.

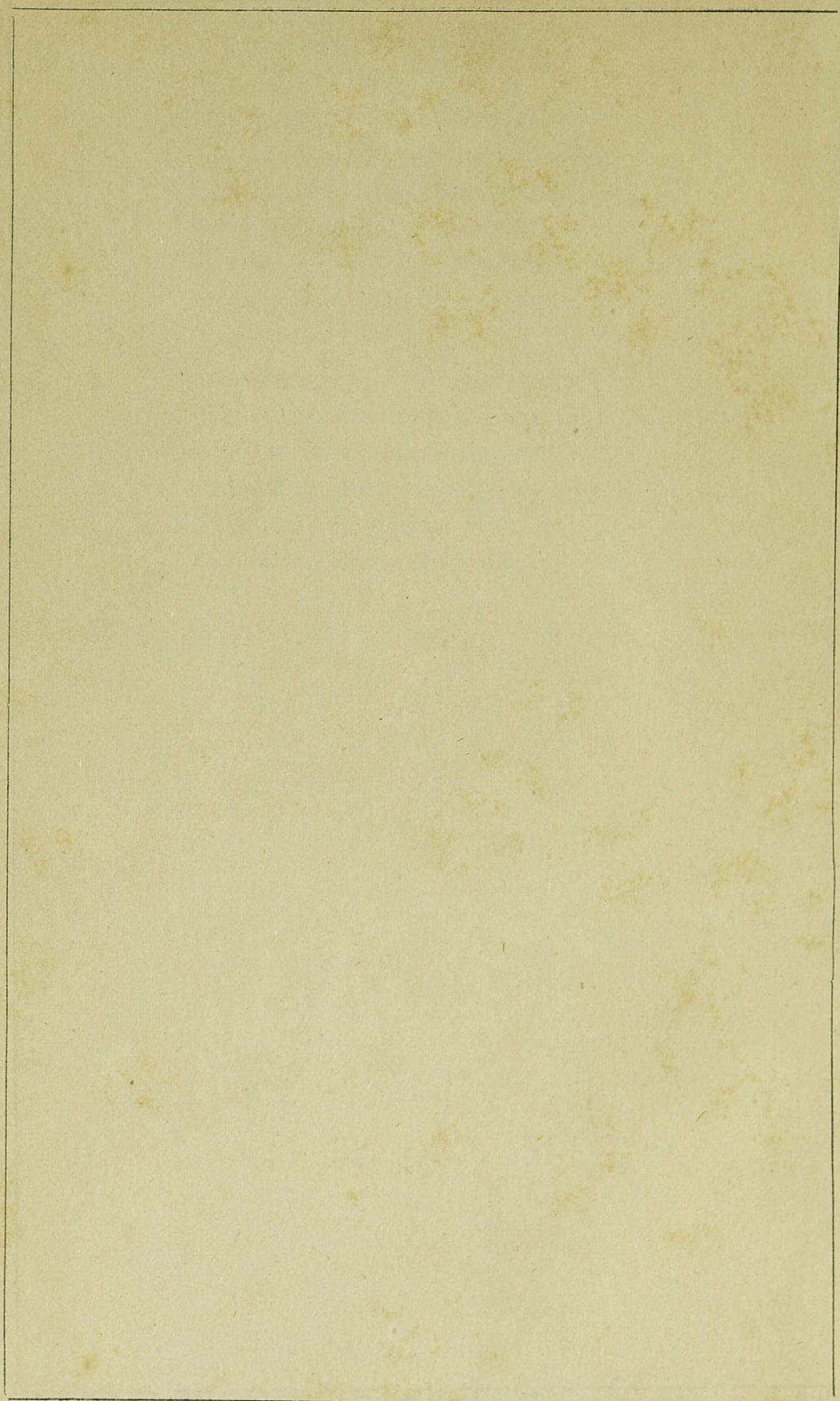
But the nine who clung despairing
All that wild and dreadful night,
Heard a cry of help come ringing
Through the air with morning light,—
Little marvel that the maiden
Seemed to them an angel bright.

Saved them all ! The thrilling story
Ran through England far and wide :
Whilst Grace Darling's fame and glory
Were proclaimed on every side,
She lived humbly in her light-house,
Humbly in her light-house died.

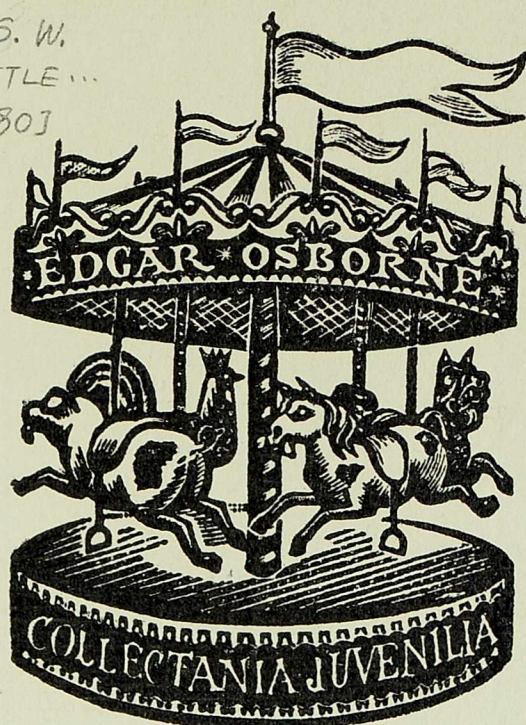
Come with me, my darling children,
We will wander where she lies,
Gaze upon her simple head-stone
Crumbling 'neath our angry skies ;
But her memory lives for ever,
Such grand lesson never dies.

May, 1880.





(P)
R. S. W.
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