

a shadow seemed to pass across the pleasant world; and as the hum of insects in the woods dies away as a cloud comes between the world and the sun, so the chatter and the laughter of the fairies failed for a time.

“‘ Thus I heard Rohe,’ said Rau, ‘ a fairy among fairies, a princess among princesses. Now we will clamber among the trees and flowers; and you shall see the many haunts of my companions among the wells of nectar. You shall see the nesting birds, watching us, unalarmed, from their nests, or from the boughs where they sit, sweetly singing—tui, korimako, and robin. But there is a tugging at your heart, Rona; for all the beauty around you there is in your heart a wish to be away. Your heart is not yet altogether with the fairies—your thoughts are elsewhere;’—and as her words faltered, her form changed, quivering, quivering—was it bird, or flower, or butterfly?—a butterfly indeed it was, fluttering up, and up, and up, till lost in the heights of a towering totara.

“ Then, indeed,” said Rona, “ I knew I had almost been with the wood-fairies; and I knew it was the far calling of the lord of Marama that had tugged at my heart; and Rau had known it; had known that that call was stronger than the call of Rohe and all her joyous companions. Back I went through the woods, the thought of what I had seen and heard chasing wild dreams through my heart, until in very truth I could not say if I moved waking or sleeping.”

And, coming to an open glade, there above them, as it were resting on the tree-tops, there lay the thin form of the moon, far in the sky, pale, for night was not yet fallen. And lo, as she had appeared, so now Rona faded away; and Rama, seated under the ponga, gazed upwards, and saw the beaming trail as of pollen, that again dispersed as a flash like a star-ray glowed along it, up, and away from the pleasant-gladed woods.

Had she slept?—she could remember neither falling asleep, nor waking from sleep; had she seen Rona, or Rau, or Rohe, or had she seen none of them? Whether dream or waking, she felt no fear, but thought with pleasure, as she sat there, of the delight that had been hers. Wonderful if she had seen them; had spoken to them; yet more wonderful if she had not, for then all these, and their songs, and their tales, and their laughter, lay closely in her own heart. And why not so?—for did she not know that in the young fern frond lay coiled, one within another, the many fronds and frondlets that made the one great frond that arched above her, beautiful against the blue sky?

And what has the nest of ivory balls to do with Rama? Nothing, except that in the heart of Rama lay concealed a wonderful nest of tales, one within another, more bewildering and more beautiful than can ever be told.

“ Fires on the Hills.”

AS a boy of six or seven, I remember a walk to the top of the Sugarloaf, a peak overlooking Lyttelton Harbour on the one side, Christchurch and the Canterbury Plains on the other; so when, on some summer night we looked from our home to the hills and saw the rings of fire in the distance, I knew it was the long tussocks that were burning. “ Fires on the hills,” the first one to see the glow would cry, and brothers and sisters, yes, and parents too, would come out and watch. “ There’s another!” one would cry, as a new fire began in another part of the hills, and we wondered and wondered. Of course, we were told that it was so that the young grass might spring up among the ashes, the same as the young phoenix springs from the ashes of the burning nest. But why will people tell such things to their children? We knew quite well that the story of the phoenix was a fable, so knew what to think about the young grass. It was not until I myself was grown up that I really knew the reason for the fires; and our best poet, Jessie Mackay, knew when she wrote:

The running rings of fire on the Canterbury hills—
Running, ringing, dying at the border of the snow;
Mad, young, seeking as a young thing wills,
The ever, ever living, ever buried Long Ago!

The scent of burning tussock on the Canterbury hills!
The richness and the mystery that wakens like a lyre
With the dearness of a dreaming that never yet fulfils!—
And we know it, and we know it, but we love the moon of fire!

In the shelter of the tussocks the skylarks build their nests; and have you never heard the tussocks whispering in the wind?—they are then telling tales to the young larks; and very quiet these young things are, as they sit with their mother in the nest listening. When they are able to fly, and soar up and up till they are above the very hills, are they not then singing of the tales they heard in the nest? Often have I listened to their songs; so I should remember something of the tales—and you shall hear.

“ My home,” whispers the tussock-spirit, “ is not here, where cold rains fall on the earth, and cold winds blow, and white frosts freeze my limbs and breast; my home is far up,

near the blue sky, upon those fields of cloud you see lying like hills and mountains high above the mountains of the earth. There it is always sunny, even though below us the earth is dark and cold, and the air above it thick with driving rain or drifting snow. Those fields float on the winds here and there about the blue heavens. They are not frozen into one place by the icy winds of winter like the snow-clad earth-mountains, nor burnt and dried and choked with dust by the hot winds of summer. It is pleasant up there in my home."

"But why then did you leave it?" asked the young birds.

"I did not leave it willingly," answered the tussock-spirit, as it bent its head lower in the wind-gusts; "through pride I was compelled to leave my home and live upon the earth."

"But the earth is a beautiful place," said the birds.

"Yes, it is beautiful, but home always seems best; and there it is always bright sunshine, or quiet star-shine; and rainbows are the light-woven bridges from cloud-home to cloud-home. Our feet are never bruised with rocks sharp and hard; nor do the winds beat there; for should the wind blow, our cloud-world sails upon its breath. But, indeed, it was because I scorned that quiet world that I was sent here until there should be no scorn left in me. 'Why should there be colours and brightness down there where we do not live?' I asked. The thousand, thousand gleaming dewdrops that flash all colours in the sun were scattered by my sisters and by me; tiny drops, floating in the air, built our rainbow-bridges; and I resented that any should be scattered and broken, away below upon the hard earth. But I think differently now."

And the tussock-spirit told the young birds of the cloud-elves, and the star-sprites, and countless beings lighter than thistledown, and delicate as moonbeams, that float unseen under the blue sky, hovering between the clouds and the stars.

The larks soared up, and up, singing; and in their songs they told the sisters of the tussock-spirit about the goodness of her who was banished upon earth; how she sheltered their nests, and many young growing things. "We are able to come up and tell you so," sang the larks; "*tirra lirra, tirra lirra*; and there are others who would do so were they able; the wild violets, the daisies; they are eager, but are so firmly rooted in the ground that they cannot come—see how they stretch their necks and look towards you, day-long and day-long." And so it is; the wild white violets, the tiny mountain-daisies, are set on long thin stalks, as if they really were stretching their necks to see the beauties of which the tussock-

spirit spoke when she told her tales to the young birds; and their eager upturned faces seem to say: "It is true; it is true what the larks say; she shelters us, and is full of kindness; there is no scorn in her."

Then, in the hot summer, the dreadful pitiless fires sweep across the hills, burning the tussock, and the flowers, and many birds, and when the dusk of night is on the world, the children on the plains look towards the hills, and see the glow, and "Fires on the hills!" they cry. The younger sisters of the tussock-spirit, too, up yonder on the quiet clouds, see the trails and sheets of fire, and the rolling glowing smoke-wreaths—and they cry: "Our proud sister down below is trying to fill the world with sunset-glows. Should she not be punished?—and shall we quench her glows with cold rains, though they ought to be quenched with her tears?" And the clouds, floating above the hills, let fall their rains. "How her glows dim and die away, till there remain but sparks like stars, that one by one are blotted out: that will humble her," cried the younger sisters; not knowing that the rains had fallen in kindness, and were welcomed by the tussock-spirit, who lay upon the hills, scorched and blackened as if dead. "Now she looks like a disagreeable black rain-cloud," said the younger sisters when they looked down in the morning; and into the blue sky they danced, and thought no more of it.

The young grasses sprang up amid the blackness and ashes, and the sheltering tussock grew again, and the birds came again. But as the years pass, the tussock springs less and less readily, and slowly dies away; and on many parts of the hills, and over great part of the plains, where once it grew abundantly, it is now never seen. "It is slowly going," people say; "it is getting burnt out, and there is no need for it now." But did they know as much as the larks, they would know that the reason the tussock is going is that the banishment of the tussock-spirit is ending; she is going to rejoin her young sisters, now grown wiser, in the cloud-world.

And the larks who heard her whispered tales;—had they nothing to tell her?—no tales to tell of the lands from which they came, miles and hundreds of miles across the grey ocean? You shall hear.

On the hill-side, and among the tussock, stood a clump of gorse, covered with its fragrant yellow bloom as the young birds lay in the nest; and close beside it a bush of sweet-briar showered the earth with fragile pink petals of fallen flowers. One day a terrified rabbit had taken shelter in the gorse from a roving dog; and the mother-lark had said: "You see, there are always oppressors; creatures who persecute

“‘ And if I win, the love-season will be but brief—and with a bitter ending to the heart-ache;—but let that by;—have you company?—and where is the ostler?—ahoy!’ he called, as the ostler appeared at the stable—turning again to her for reply.

“‘ There is but one,’ she said, ‘ and him I do not know; yet without knowing a reason, a dislike troubles my heart.’

“The ostler took his horse, and the rider stepped up to the low wide porch, seating himself at a heavy table, where presently she brought to him short cakes and cider, and a heaped dish of apples, shining of the sun, and smelling of the summer.

“‘ Your own baking, your own brewing, and your own growing;—happy land, where folk can thus minister to their own needs, and whose ministering is so agreeable; happy land,’—but he broke off, and his laugh had the faintest tinge of bitterness;—‘ at least, it is what I wish it,’—and the little shadow was gone. ‘ I do think that first after the water of the spring came the juice of the apple; and hey, to some it has been indeed as the drink of the forbidden fruit, and it has lost them innocence.’

“She sat on a bench near him, stitching at the broidery she had put down on hearing him in the distance, and they chatted of one thing and another. He told her of his morning ride; of the flocks passed; of the orchards; of the wheat-fields where the poppies were shewing; of far friends. ‘ But where my path leads now,’ said he, ‘ I have not yet determined; the stages of my journeying were definite no farther than to this haven.’

“A short silence lay on them, and both had golden dreams; and neither saw the movement of the casement-curtain, or the unfriendly face within. He rested, and then asked would she walk for a while in the orchard. ‘ There,’ said he, ‘ the freedom of heaven is with us;—might I enjoy with you some moments of that freedom?’ He arose, frank-eyed and smiling, his hat still in his hand. She too arose, though as if there were reluctance to be overcome;—but her eyes were downcast, for in them was no reluctance.

“The trees were heavy with fruit, much ripe, and soon to be gathered, and some just taking the tints of the sun. ‘ And when last I saw you here,’ said he, ‘ they were massed with bloom, and the thrushes were full-throated. To think that amid such loveliness human beings refuse to dwell in peace—so that some play the oppressor, and I play the renegade;—and you know, my Lady Greensleeves,’ said he, standing back from her—‘ you know that there is a price upon my head—though that shall put no burden upon my heart.

‘ The apple-tree for Eden,
That girl and boy we hungered for,
Unknowing then that Eden
Close about us lay.’

so again he ended singing.

“‘ Eden seems never to have lain far from you, my lord,’ she said smiling; ‘ for a song is ever on your lips, or words of good-fellowship’—and he broke in as a tremor seemed to take her voice—

“‘ So far away, rather, that I needs must try to bring it nearer by singing.’

“‘ And instead, by your singing, you may bring those who do not wish you well.’

“‘ So long as one who does wish me well is with me,’ and he snapped his fingers towards the highway, ‘ they may lurk where they will.’

“They moved among the trees, chatting earnestly at times, at times with laughter; but not as lovers, for he, a hunted man, would not ask her love—and she would not confess love for one whose rank was far above her own. He had been despoiled, and yet more embittered the despoilers by playing the highwayman upon them as chance served, giving to the poor, from their purses, a little of what he had once freely given from his own.

“They had been together for an hour, or perhaps two, and afternoon was drawing towards evening, when a far-distant sound caught his ear; the sound of horses on the highway. Involuntarily his eyes widened, but he made no sign—a moment afterwards, however, she too heard the sound.

“‘ Troops,’ she whispered, as if they were already within earshot; and for a moment, as she stepped towards him, her hand rested on his breast.

“‘ Ever a cloud comes at the brightest,’ he said; ‘ they may be troops, but who can tell?’

“‘ You must go, my lord,’ she said.

“‘ I would obey more readily,’ he answered, ‘ did you bid me stay.’

“‘ And troops near?’

“‘ Ay, and troops nearer.’

“‘ But go; or—or—you may never hear that other bidding.’

“He bent, took her hand, and kissed the palm, joy in his heart. Were they troops, at least they must not find him with her. They left the orchard; but the ostler had slipped away, and it was some time before he had opened the stable and mounted his horse.

"Enemies had been close about him that day; and his horse fell lame as, leaving the inn, he put it to the hill-side towards the upper downs. His enemies were in sight, and with them were soldiery; and soon they were within gunshot. He was not far up the slope when a shot struck him. He urged on his horse, but it too was struck, and fell under him. They followed him up the hill; but freeing himself from his horse, he drew his pistol, fired among them once, twice, and reloaded. They desired no nearer encounter and drew out of range, slowly hemming him in, till with their carbines they could make an end of him.

"But when he fell, it was no enemy that first reached his side. When these, hardened soldiers, approached, it was the Lady Greensleeves who knelt beside him.

"'You shall not go,' she cried.

"'Ah,' said he as he smiled to her; 'I rejoice to hear the second bidding—though it comes too late, I fear,' and his eyes closed on the love he no longer concealed.

"'Come mistress, leave him to us,' said a soldier, not unkindly, 'and go your ways; at the side of death is no place for you.'

"But she did not heed, and bent over the dying man.

"There was another, not a soldier, standing by; one whom the soldiers obeyed, but evidently did not respect; a richly dressed man, young in years, but overbearing in manner. He had shewn little but impatience until, approaching when he saw that the rider was helpless, he also saw the beauty of her who knelt there.

"'Leave her to me,' said he, and the soldiers stepped aside.

"Still she did not heed when he spoke; and his impatience, never far away, soon broke out—'Who are you,' he cried, 'who do not answer your betters? And what is your business here, in the place of the hangman?—and he seized her roughly by the shoulders.

"But she sprang up and turned on him fiercely, and with a light dagger struck him twice, so that he stepped back with an oath, and she turned again to her lover.

"'You shall not go,' she said again.

"But so the Dawn said to the Stars; and the flowers, breathing their dreams, awoke heavy with dew.

"Now the troopers have disappeared," said the lark, "and the rider, and the Lady Greensleeves, they too have disappeared; but where she knelt grows a graceful bush of sweet-briar, its young green leaves filling the warm sunshine with the faint smell of apples, before the unfolding of its

delicate pink flowers; and its branches are well set with sharp dagger-like thorns, so that none dares seize it roughly. Near it blooms a rounded mass of gorse, a glorious glow of blossom; and ever and again through the hot summer day there come tiny crackings as of fairy pistols, as the seeds are shot from the ripening pods. *Tirra lirra, tirra lirra*, these two were once the Lady Greensleeves and the gay rider," and the larks soared in the sky, and the tussock-spirit was with her sisters.

And we know that as the rider was an outlaw then, so he is an outlaw now, and laws are passed against him—against "gorse, sweet-briar, bramble, and broom,"—even the law cannot help being poetical when speaking of these. And the gorse shoots its seeds as the rider shot his bullets; and the seeds spring up in hundreds, and carry on the never-ending warfare; and the stoben gold is flaunted in the very faces of the wrathful law-makers.