

## THE PROUD LITTLE GRAIN OF WHEAT

There once was a little grain of wheat which was very proud indeed. The first thing it remembered was being very much crowded and jostled by a great many other grains of wheat, all living in the same sack in the granary. It was quite dark in the sack, and no one could move about, and so there was nothing to be done but to sit still and talk and think. The proud little grain of wheat talked a great deal, but did not think quite so much, while its next neighbour thought a great deal and only talked when it was asked questions it could answer. It used to say that when it thought a great deal it could remember things which it seemed to have heard a long time ago.

"What is the use of our staying here so long doing nothing, and never being seen by anybody?" the proud little grain once asked.

"I don't know," the learned grain replied. "I don't know the answer to that. Ask me another."

"Why can't I sing like the birds that build their nests in the roof? I should like to sing, instead of sitting here in the dark."

"Because you have no voice," said the learned grain.

This was a very good answer indeed.

"Why didn't someone give me a voice, then--why didn't they?" said the proud little grain, getting very cross.

The learned grain thought for several minutes.

"There might be two answers to that," she said at last. "One might be that nobody had a voice to spare, and the other might be that you have nowhere to put one if it were given to you."

"Everybody is better off than I am," said the proud little grain. "The birds can fly and sing, the children can play and shout. I am sure I can get no rest for their shouting and playing. There are two little boys who make enough noise to deafen the whole sackful of us."

"Ah! I know them," said the learned grain. "And it's true they are noisy. Their names are Lionel and Vivian. There is a thin place in the side of the sack, through which I can see them. I would rather stay where I am than have to do all they do. They have long yellow hair, and when they stand on their heads the straw sticks in it and they look very curious. I heard a strange thing through listening to them the other day."

"What was it?" asked the proud grain.

"They were playing in the straw, and someone came in to them--it was a lady who had brought them something on a plate. They began to dance and

shout: 'It's cake! It's cake! Nice little mamma for bringing us cake.'

And then they each sat down with a piece and began to take great bites out of it. I shuddered to think of it afterward."

"Why?"

"Well, you know they are always asking questions, and they began to ask questions of their mamma, who lay down in the straw near them. She seemed

to be used to it. These are the questions Vivian asked:

"'Who made the cake?'

"'The cook.'

"'Who made the cook?'

"'God.'

"'What did He make her for?'

"'Why didn't He make her white?'

"'Why didn't He make you black?'

"'Did He cut a hole in heaven and drop me through when He made me?'

"Why didn't it hurt me when I tumbled such a long way?"

"She said she 'didn't know' to all but the two first, and then he asked two more.

"What is the cake made of?"

"Flour, sugar, eggs and butter."

"What is flour made of?"

"It was the answer to that which made me shudder."

"What was it?" asked the proud grain.

"She said it was made of--wheat! I don't see the advantage of being rich--"

"Was the cake rich?" asked the proud grain.

"Their mother said it was. She said, 'Don't eat it so fast--it is very rich.'"

"Ah!" said the proud grain. "I should like to be rich. It must be very fine to be rich. If I am ever made into cake, I mean to be so rich that

no one will dare to eat me at all."

"Ah?" said the learned grain. "I don't think those boys would be afraid to eat you, however rich you were. They are not afraid of richness."

"They'd be afraid of me before they had done with me," said the proud grain. "I am not a common grain of wheat. Wait until I am made into cake. But gracious me! there doesn't seem much prospect of it while we are shut up here. How dark and stuffy it is, and how we are crowded, and what a stupid lot the other grains are! I'm tired of it, I must say."

"We are all in the same sack," said the learned grain, very quietly.

It was a good many days after that, that something happened. Quite early in the morning, a man and a boy came into the granary, and moved the sack of wheat from its place, wakening all the grains from their last nap.

"What is the matter?" said the proud grain. "Who is daring to disturb us?"

"Hush!" whispered the learned grain, in the most solemn manner.

"Something is going to happen. Something like this happened to somebody belonging to me long ago. I seem to remember it when I think very hard. I seem to remember something about one of my family being sown."

"What is sown?" demanded the other grain.

"It is being thrown into the earth," began the learned grain.

Oh, what a passion the proud grain got into! "Into the earth?" she shrieked out. "Into the common earth? The earth is nothing but dirt, and I am not a common grain of wheat. I won't be sown! I will not be sown! How dare anyone sow me against my will! I would rather stay in the sack."

But just as she was saying it, she was thrown out with the learned grain and some others into another dark place, and carried off by the farmer, in spite of her temper; for the farmer could not hear her voice at all, and wouldn't have minded if he had, because he knew she was only a grain of wheat, and ought to be sown, so that some good might come of her.

Well, she was carried out to a large field in the pouch which the farmer wore at his belt. The field had been ploughed, and there was a sweet smell of fresh earth in the air; the sky was a deep, deep blue, but the air was cool and the few leaves on the trees were brown and dry, and looked as if they had been left over from last year. "Ah!" said the learned grain. "It was just such a day as this when my grandfather, or my father, or somebody else related to me, was sown. I think I remember that it was called Early Spring."

"As for me," said the proud grain, fiercely, "I should like to see the man who would dare to sow me!"

At that very moment, the farmer put his big, brown hand into the bag and threw her, as she thought, at least half a mile from them.

He had not thrown her so far as that, however, and she landed safely in the shadow of a clod of rich earth, which the sun had warmed through and through. She was quite out of breath and very dizzy at first, but in a few seconds she began to feel better and could not help looking around, in spite of her anger, to see if there was anyone near to talk to. But she saw no one, and so began to scold as usual.

"They not only sow me," she called out, "but they throw me all by myself, where I can have no company at all. It is disgraceful."

Then she heard a voice from the other side of the clod. It was the learned grain, who had fallen there when the farmer threw her out of his pouch.

"Don't be angry," it said, "I am here. We are all right so far. Perhaps, when they cover us with the earth, we shall be even nearer to each other than we are now."

"Do you mean to say they will cover us with the earth?" asked the proud grain.

"Yes," was the answer. "And there we shall lie in the dark, and the rain

will moisten us, and the sun will warm us, until we grow larger and larger, and at last burst open!"

"Speak for yourself," said the proud grain; "I shall do no such thing!"

But it all happened just as the learned grain had said, which showed what a wise grain it was, and how much it had found out just by thinking hard and remembering all it could.

Before the day was over, they were covered snugly up with the soft, fragrant, brown earth, and there they lay day after day.

One morning, when the proud grain awakened, it found itself wet through and through with rain which had fallen in the night, and the next day the sun shone down and warmed it so that it really began to be afraid that it would be obliged to grow too large for its skin, which felt a little tight for it already.

It said nothing of this to the learned grain, at first, because it was determined not to burst if it could help it; but after the same thing had happened a great many times, it found, one morning, that it really was swelling, and it felt obliged to tell the learned grain about it.

"Well," it said, pettishly, "I suppose you will be glad to hear that you were right, I am going to burst. My skin is so tight now that it doesn't fit me at all, and I know I can't stand another warm shower like



the last."

"Oh!" said the learned grain, in a quiet way (really learned people always have a quiet way), "I knew I was right, or I shouldn't have said so. I hope you don't find it very uncomfortable. I think I myself shall burst by to-morrow."

"Of course I find it uncomfortable," said the proud grain. "Who wouldn't find it uncomfortable, to be two or three sizes too small for one's self! Pouf! Crack! There I go! I have split up all up my right side, and I must say it's a relief."

"Crack! Pouf! so have I," said the learned grain. "Now we must begin to push up through the earth. I am sure my relation did that."

"Well, I shouldn't mind getting out into the air. It would be a change at least."

So each of them began to push her way through the earth as strongly as she could, and, sure enough, it was not long before the proud grain actually found herself out in the world again, breathing the sweet air, under the blue sky, across which fleecy white clouds were drifting, and swift-winged, happy birds darting.

"It really is a lovely day," were the first words the proud grain said. It couldn't help it. The sunshine was so delightful, and the birds

chirped and twittered so merrily in the bare branches, and, more wonderful than all, the great field was brown no longer, but was covered with millions of little, fresh green blades, which trembled and bent their frail bodies before the light wind.

"This is an improvement," said the proud grain.

Then there was a little stir in the earth beside it, and up through the brown mould came the learned grain, fresh, bright, green, like the rest.

"I told you I was not a common grain of wheat," said the proud one.

"You are not a grain of wheat at all now," said the learned one, modestly. "You are a blade of wheat, and there are a great many others like you."

"See how green I am!" said the proud blade.

"Yes, you are very green," said its companion. "You will not be so green when you are older."

The proud grain, which must be called a blade now, had plenty of change and company after this. It grew taller and taller every day, and made a great many new acquaintances as the weather grew warmer. These were little gold and green beetles living near it, who often passed it, and now and then stopped to talk a little about their children and their

journeys under the soil. Birds dropped down from the sky sometimes to gossip and twitter of the nests they were building in the apple-trees, and the new songs they were learning to sing.

Once, on a very warm day, a great golden butterfly, floating by on his large lovely wings, fluttered down softly and lit on the proud blade, who felt so much prouder when he did it that she trembled for joy.

"He admires me more than all the rest in the field, you see," it said, haughtily. "That is because I am so green."

"If I were you," said the learned blade, in its modest way, "I believe I would not talk so much about being green. People will make such ill-natured remarks when one speaks often of one's self."

"I am above such people," said the proud blade "I can find nothing more interesting to talk of than myself."

As time went on, it was delighted to find that it grew taller than any other blade in the field, and threw out other blades; and at last there grew out at the top of its stalk ever so many plump, new little grains, all fitting closely together, and wearing tight little green covers.

"Look at me!" it said then. "I am the queen of all the wheat. I have a crown."

"No." said its learned companion. "You are now an ear of wheat."

And in a short time all the other stalks wore the same kind of crown, and it found out that the learned blade was right, and that it was only an ear, after all.

And now the weather had grown still warmer and the trees were covered with leaves, and the birds sang and built their nests in them and laid their little blue eggs, and in time, wonderful to relate, there came baby birds, that were always opening their mouths for food, and crying "peep, peep," to their fathers and mothers. There were more butterflies floating about on their amber and purple wings, and the gold and green beetles were so busy they had no time to talk.

"Well!" said the proud ear of wheat (you remember it was an ear by this time) to its companion one day. "You see, you were right again. I am not so green as I was. I am turning yellow--but yellow is the colour of gold, and I don't object to looking like gold."

"You will soon be ripe," said its friend.

"And what will happen then?"

"The reaping-machine will come and cut you down, and other strange things will happen."

"There I make a stand," said the proud ear, "I will not be cut down."

But it was just as the wise ear said it would be. Not long after a reaping-machine was brought and driven back and forth in the fields, and down went all the wheat ears before the great knives. But it did not hurt the wheat, of course, and only the proud ear felt angry.

"I am the colour of gold," it said, "and yet they have dared to cut me down. What will they do next, I wonder?"

What they did next was to bunch it up with other wheat and tie it and stack it together, and then it was carried in a waggon and laid in the barn.

Then there was a great bustle after a while. The farmer's wife and daughters and her two servants began to work as hard as they could.

"The threshers are coming," they said, "and we must make plenty of things for them to eat."

So they made pies and cakes and bread until their cupboards were full; and surely enough the threshers did come with the threshing-machine, which was painted red, and went "Puff! puff! puff! rattle! rattle!" all the time. And the proud wheat was threshed out by it, and found itself in grains again and very much out of breath.

"I look almost as I was at first," it said; "only there are so many of me. I am grander than ever now. I was only one grain of wheat at first, and now I am at least fifty."

When it was put into a sack, it managed to get all its grains together in one place, so that it might feel as grand as possible. It was so proud that it felt grand, however much it was knocked about.

It did not lie in the sack very long this time before something else happened. One morning it heard the farmer's wife saying to the coloured boy:

"Take this yere sack of wheat to the mill, Jerry. I want to try it when I make that thar cake for the boarders. Them two children from Washington city are powerful hands for cake."

So Jerry lifted the sack up and threw it over his shoulder, and carried it out into the spring-waggon.

"Now we are going to travel," said the proud wheat "Don't let us be separated."

At that minute, there were heard two young voices, shouting:--

"Jerry, take us in the waggon! Let us go to mill, Jerry. We want to go to mill."

And these were the very two boys who had played in the granary and made so much noise the summer before. They had grown a little bigger, and their yellow hair was longer, but they looked just as they used to, with their strong little legs and big brown eyes, and their sailor hats set so far back on their heads that it was a wonder they stayed on. And gracious! how they shouted and ran.

"What does yer mar say?" asked Jerry.

"Says we can go!" shouted both at once, as if Jerry had been deaf, which he wasn't at all--quite the contrary.

So Jerry, who was very good-natured, lifted them in, and cracked his whip, and the horses started off. It was a long ride to the mill, but Lionel and Vivian were not too tired to shout again when they reached it. They shouted at sight of the creek and the big wheel turning round and round slowly, with the water dashing and pouring and foaming over it.

"What turns the wheel?" asked Vivian.

"The water, honey," said Jerry.

"What turns the water?"

"Well now, honey," said Jerry, "you hev me thar. I don't know nuffin

'bout it. Lors-a-massy, what a boy you is fur axin dif'cult questions."

Then he carried the sack in to the miller, and said he would wait until the wheat was ground.

"Ground!" said the proud wheat. "We are going to be ground. I hope it is agreeable. Let us keep close together."

They did keep close together, but it wasn't very agreeable to be poured into a hopper and then crushed into fine powder between two big stones.

"Makes nice flour," said the miller, rubbing it between his fingers.

"Flour!" said the wheat--which was wheat no longer. "Now I am flour, and I am finer than ever. How white I am! I really would rather be white than green or gold colour. I wonder where the learned grain is, and if it is as fine and white as I am?"

But the learned grain and her family had been laid away in the granary for seed wheat.

Before the waggon reached the house again, the two boys were fast asleep in the bottom of it, and had to be helped out just as the sack was, and carried in.

The sack was taken into the kitchen at once and opened, and even in its



wheat days the flour had never been so proud as it was when it heard the farmer's wife say--

"I'm going to make this into cake."

"Ah!" it said; "I thought so. Now I shall be rich, and admired by everybody."

The farmer's wife then took some of it out in a large white bowl, and after that she busied herself beating eggs and sugar and butter all together in another bowl: and after a while she took the flour and beat it in also.

"Now I am in grand company," said the flour. "The eggs and butter are the colour of gold, the sugar is like silver or diamonds. This is the very society for me."

"The cake looks rich," said one of the daughters.

"It's rather too rich for them children," said her mother. "But Lawsey, I dunno, neither. Nothin' don't hurt 'em. I reckon they could eat a panel of rail fence and come to no harm."

"I'm rich," said the flour to itself. "That is just what I intended from the first. I am rich and I am a cake."

Just then, a pair of big brown eyes came and peeped into it. They belonged to a round little head with a mass of tangled curls all over it--they belonged to Vivian.

"What's that?" he asked.

"Cake."

"Who made it?"

"I did."

"I like you," said Vivian. "You're such a nice woman. Who's going to eat any of it? Is Lionel?"

"I'm afraid it's too rich for boys," said the woman, but she laughed and kissed him.

"No," said Vivian. "I'm afraid it isn't."

"I shall be much too rich," said the cake, angrily. "Boys, indeed. I was made for something better than boys."

After that, it was poured into a cake-mould, and put into the oven, where it had rather an unpleasant time of it. It was so hot in there that if the farmer's wife had not watched it carefully, it would have

been burned.

"But I am cake," it said, "and of the richest kind, so I can bear it, even if it is uncomfortable."

When it was taken out, it really was cake, and it felt as if it was quite satisfied. Everyone who came into the kitchen and saw it, said--

"Oh, what a nice cake! How well your new flour has done!"

But just once, while it was cooling, it had a curious, disagreeable feeling. It found, all at once, that the two boys, Lionel and Vivian, had come quietly into the kitchen and stood near the table, looking at the cake with their great eyes wide open and their little red mouths open, too.

"Dear me," it said. "How nervous I feel--actually nervous. What great eyes they have, and how they shine! and what are those sharp white things in their mouths? I really don't like them to look at me in that way. It seems like something personal. I wish the farmer's wife would come."

Such a chill ran over it, that it was quite cool when the woman came in, and she put it away in the cupboard on a plate.

But, that very afternoon, she took it out again and set it on the table

on a glass cake-stand. She put some leaves around it to make it look nice, and it noticed there were a great many other things on the table, and they all looked fresh and bright.

"This is all in my honour," it said. "They know I am rich."

Then several people came in and took chairs around the table.

"They all come to sit and look at me," said the vain cake. "I wish the learned grain could see me now."

There was a little high-chair on each side of the table, and at first these were empty, but in a few minutes the door opened and in came the two little boys. They had pretty, clean dresses on, and their "bangs" and curls were bright with being brushed.

"Even they have been dressed up to do me honour," thought the cake.

But, the next minute, it began to feel quite nervous again, Vivian's chair was near the glass stand, and when he had climbed up and seated himself, he put one elbow on the table and rested his fat chin on his fat hand, and fixing his eyes on the cake, sat and stared at it in such an unnaturally quiet manner for some seconds, that any cake might well have felt nervous.

"There's the cake," he said, at last, in such a deeply thoughtful voice

that the cake felt faint with anger.

Then a remarkable thing happened. Some one drew the stand toward them and

took the knife and cut out a large slice of the cake.

"Go away," said the cake, though no one heard it. "I am cake! I am rich! I am not for boys! How dare you?"

Vivian stretched out his hand; he took the slice; he lifted it up, and then the cake saw his red mouth open--yes, open wider than it could have believed possible--wide enough to show two dreadful rows of little sharp white things.

"Good gra--" it began.

But it never said "cious." Never at all. For in two minutes Vivian had eaten it!!

And there was an end of its airs and graces.