

## THE SWALLOW-WORT.

SPRING was returning to bless the earth. The trees, flowers, and woods sung of his blessed advent, nature awoke to new life and vigour and was glad and gay. The joyous news spread from throat to throat, and all successively took up the chorus. Its sound flew across the sea, far, far away to the sand deserts of Africa; it played round the head of the Sphinx, and its wondrous searching eyes appeared to read the glorious message and to relax somewhat from its stony imperturbability.

Still the tidings sped on, on, till they reached the swallows who were passing the winter far from Europe's shores in Africa's sunny climes. They heard them gladly, and carolled one simultaneous song of glee.

"We will go home, go home," they warbled. For the swallow, though it flies away each autumn, holds Europe to be its home, and loves its green wooded uplands better far than the sand-wastes of Egypt.

So they all made them ready to depart from their winter quarters, and at a given signal from the leader spread their large wings, lifted their forked tails, and flew away with lightning speed. Over the desert, over the heads of the palms where the giraffes were lazily feeding, over the lairs of the lion and hyæna, over the gleaming sycamore-fringed Nile, over Cairo's narrow streets and gilded minarets; away, away. When they had passed the vast heaving ocean, they rested a while from their flight; and now began a great chattering and leave-taking, for it was here their various paths diverged: some went to east, some to north, south, or west; new leaders had to be chosen, old friends parted from, and a happy reunion at the banks of the Nile to be wished.

Among these busy chatterers were a swarm who had again to cross the sea as they were bound for England, where they had left their homes under many a thatched eave and gabled roof, by many a barn or granary. Of this number was a swallow who was more anxious than all the rest to return, for she wished to seek the nest where she was born and that her mother had bequeathed to her as a dying legacy. For had not that very amiable young bird, who had been so attentive to her all the journey and shortened the dulness of the voyage by his amusing anecdotes, promised that if she could find that nest again which her mother had built under the thatched eaves of the vine-clad cottage, shaded by the slim mountain-ash that she

had told him of, he would come and live with her? Would not that be pleasant? But if she should not find it? if the inhabitants of the cottage had pulled it down? or, worse still, if she had forgotten the way?

So our poor little swallow felt very nervous, and got more so the nearer she came to England, till at last her friend received such curt answers to all his questions and tender inquiries that he began to fear lest she were angry with him or had changed her mind, and also grew dejected and sad.

"May I come with you?" he asked timidly, as they were all parting company.

"If you like," she replied, and he followed her rapid flight. At length she saw the grey roofs of her natal village and the copse where she had so often sought for food; and there, yes, there was her own nest safe and sound as she had left it when the vine-leaves among which it was hid were turning red and yellow. Now they festooned around it with pale luscious green.

Eagerly the swallow pounced down upon her home, and was about to enter it in great haste, when to her horror she found her passage obstructed. The nest was occupied. A moment later, and a tiny sparrow sprung out and demanded what was her business in his house.

"Your house," gasped the enraged swallow, "your house indeed! Pray, did you build it?"

"No," answered the sparrow with cool indifference, "but I've lived in it undisturbed all the winter, and that is pretty much the same thing. So you had better leave and build yourself a new nest; and if you made this, I can only say I recommend you to construct it on the same pattern, for this is very comfortable;" and so saying, the bird drew away his head from the little aperture, and disappeared.

"As you will be busy building the next few days," said the swallow's friend, who had overheard the whole conversation, "why, my dear, I fear I shall only be in your way. I won't offer to help you, for I hate work, and my temper is not sweet when I am forced to it. I will go for a short voyage, and if in its course I do not find a comfortable home, perhaps I will return to share yours. Adieu, my love; I am sorry such a little unpleasantness should occur the first thing on your return."

"No, stay, stay," cried the unhappy swallow. Was she to lose all, her home and