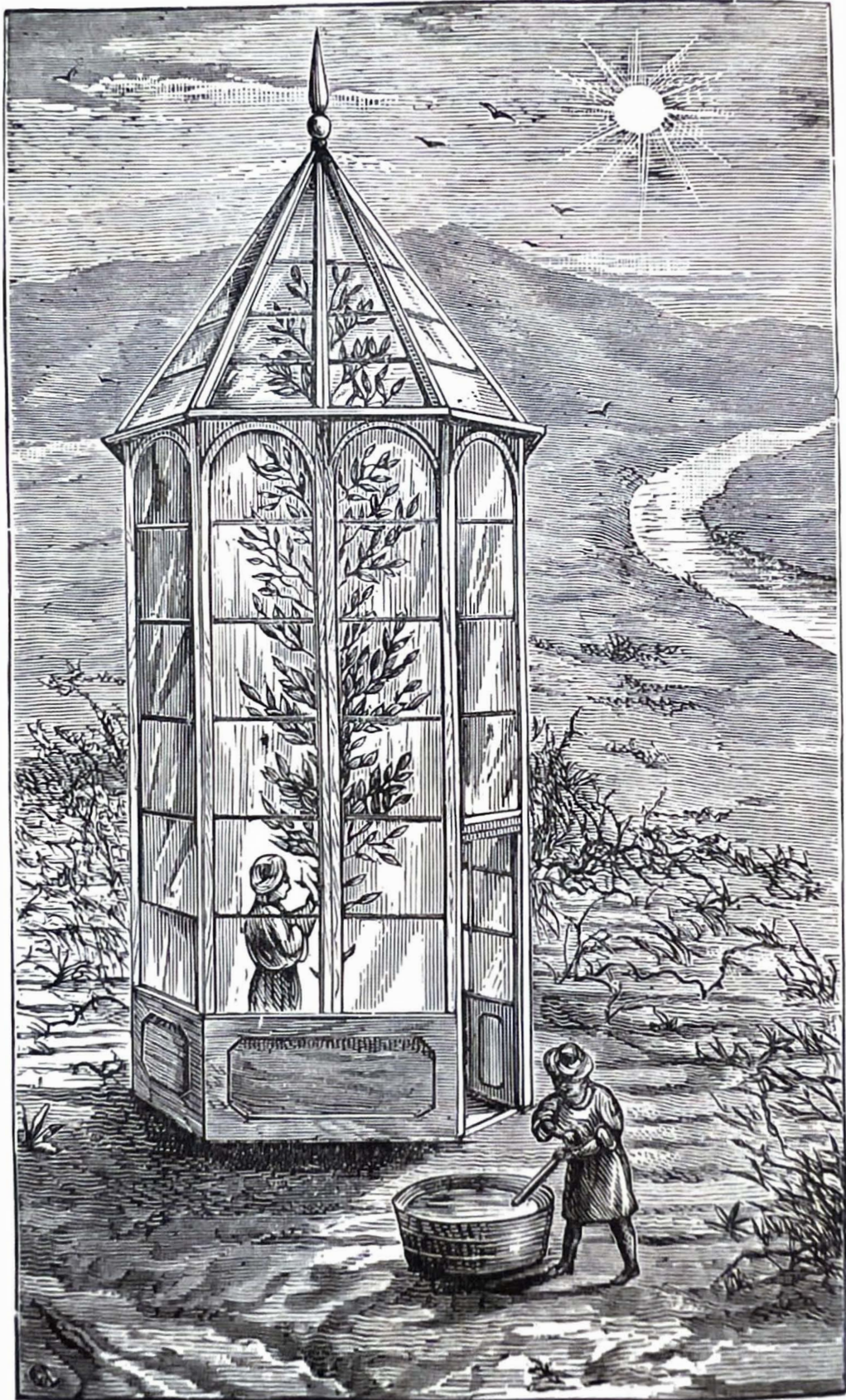


AN ALLEGORY
OF
CHRISTIAN LIFE.

(Reprinted from "The Young Believer.")

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"THE PLANT WAS A SHOW." See page 29.

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PREFACE.




THIS little Story (reprinted from the pages of "The Young Believer") is written mainly for one object, and that is, to point out to the Christian the inestimable importance of reading the Word of God and of Prayer, in that they bring the soul into direct communion with Christ, the fountain and source of all our strength. It is the outcome of many addresses to the young, where the simile of a plant or tree taken from Ps. i., Jer. xvii., and Matt. xiii. has been found of great use. An endeavour has further been made to expose the folly of the practice, not alas! at all uncommon, of feeding the young soul on doctrines and dogmas instead of on the Living and the written Word. It is not for a moment denied that the Word contains both dogmas and doctrines, but it

is one thing to feed a soul on the Word which contains so much of Christ personally as well, and quite another to foster self-conceit by a rapid and easy growth in head knowledge, which too often ends in developing the worst symptoms of spiritual pride.

The fact that the story was written for young christians will help older readers to overlook the simplicity of the language used. One word in conclusion; part of which, at any rate, is sought to be enforced by this allegory:—“ True spirituality must spring from communion with Christ, maintained by the Word of God and prayer, and does not consist in an acquaintance, however perfect, with spiritual phrases, things, or people, but in a humble Christlike walk ‘ *bearing much fruit,*’ because ‘ *abiding in Him.*’ ”



CHAPTER 1.—THE SEED SOWN.

N the midst of a wide *desert* that was under the power of a very wicked *prince* (1),* was a tiny plot of ground belonging to another owner, a *great king* who lived far away. In point of fact, the whole desert was really his, but at this time the only part over which he asserted his rights, was that of which we are speaking. Although this *plot of ground* was so small, and in the midst of an enemy's country, it was an object of the greatest interest to the king.

I cannot tell you all the trouble he took with it. The soil was now utterly barren, and produced nothing but crops of weeds, though there was a tradition that a long time ago it once had been very good (2). For thousands of years the king had sent his *best gardeners* with orders to fence it, dig it, and use every effort to make it fertile (3). They **MAN TRIED AND** did what they could, but all in **FOUND WANTING.** vain. Whenever the king passed that way, expecting to see some result for the labour that had been expended on it, he found

* Δ reference text should be found for the words preceding each number in brackets

nothing (1), except a most luxuriant crop of *weeds*, of which the land, desert sand as it was, always produced a great abundance. We can well understand how rejoiced the wicked prince was when he saw the weeds coming up; for they grew and throve, although the soil was not only excessively poor, consisting of nothing but the common yellow sand of the desert, but also very thin, with nothing beneath but the solid *rock*. At length even the king himself said he had done all he could for it, and that in its present state it was utterly worthless (5).

Just at this time, however, it happened that
 THE some new *seed* had been
 GOSPEL SEED. discovered of wonderful growing properties, which, if properly managed, would produce fine trees (6).

Even this seed, however, required better soil than that in the little desert plot; so as the king was determined to give it a fair trial, at an immense expense he sent a body of men to the spot, with orders thoroughly to break up the rock that lay underneath. Being fully supplied with suitable
 THE HEART tools, they set to work with a
 PREPARED. good will, and by means of blasting and hammering, they succeeded in breaking the rock into small pieces (7), and this, when mixed with the sandy ground above, formed a sufficient soil for the seed to grow in.

The plot having now been prepared, the king sent a sower with a basketful of the precious seed (8). As he sowed it broadcast, some fell on the



“THE KING SENT A SOWER.”

desert near, some fell on pieces of the rock, some
 THE SEED SOWN. amongst the tall thorns that were
 still growing near the edge of the plot, while some
 fell on the prepared soil.

The history of the first three is quickly told.
 THE DEVIL, That which fell on the hard sand
 THE FLESH, of the desert was soon picked
 AND THE WORLD. up by troops of hungry birds ;
 some of the seeds which fell into crevices on the
 rocks actually managed to spring up for a little
 while, but having no real soil to grow in, were soon
 scorched by the hot sun (9) of the desert. Those
 which fell into the *thorns* also sprang up, and might
 have proved strong and vigorous plants had it not
 been for these tall weeds on every side, which,
 shutting out every breath of air and sunshine, choked
 the good seed, so that it too withered away. Thus
 three-fourths of it came to nothing ; and greatly was
 the prince delighted, when a few days after he came
 to look at the plot he so greatly coveted for his own,
 to find that again apparently all the king's efforts
 had been thrown away, and that no result had come
 of all the sowing. He was much pleased as he
 noticed the footprints of the birds around, the
 withered stalks lying on the bare sun-burnt rock,
 and the tall thorns still flourishing as if they could
 grow anywhere. He carefully surveyed the good
 ground, but even his keen eye could not see where
 one tiny seed was just hiding its head beneath a
 little piece of earth, waiting for him to go, before
 it pushed itself up up into the air and sunshine.

CHAPTER II.—THE YOUNG PLANT.



It was a bright sunny day when, for the first time in the history of this little plot, a tiny plant was seen opening out its first two leaves. They were so green and pretty that the tall thorns and weeds looked down with something like envy at the *new comer*, who was to dispute with them the possession of the king's ground. They were rather amused at the vigorous growth of the little plant, which looked as if it actually thought that it had a chance of living. *They* knew better than that. It was all very well for them, who were at home in the place, to grow in rank luxuriance in a soil that suited them, favoured as they were by the prince, who regarded them with as much pride as if they were valuable plants, but they had seen too many vain attempts to cultivate the barren soil, to suppose for a moment that the little plant would succeed in living.

As spring advanced, however, it grew wonderfully, and in a few months' time was almost as tall as the weeds themselves. Every week it was carefully watered ⁽¹⁾ by some *gardener* who was sent direct ⁽²⁾ from the king, as he took the greatest interest in the plant's welfare. It had indeed been a matter of

ISAAC AND
ISHMAEL.

PASTORAL
CARE.

great surprise in the *court* that such a mighty king could occupy himself with such a barren plot at all, and still greater was the astonishment when the welfare of the young plant formed a daily topic of interest; until it was found out that the seed had been brought at a great expense (3) from a far country by the *king's son*, and that it was for his sake (4) that it was so precious to the king.

You will wonder, when you hear that the plant was watered at least *once a week*, where the water came from in such a desert. I have already told you that although the desert was entirely under the power of the prince, it really was the king's property (5), and it was said that *some day* he would assert his right over it and resume his sway. There were some *old books* in court that alluded to this glorious time, and which stated

MILLENNIAL
GLORY.

that the barren desert itself should then "blossom like a rose," that the waste places should sing for joy (6), when the prince no longer should rule over it, but the king, or, as the book said, the king's son.

Some time before the little seed was sown, partly, no doubt, with a view to this coming time, the king's son, at an immense expense, had

CHRIST, THE ONLY
SOURCE OF BLESSING.

constructed a *river* through the desert, which passed about fifteen yards on one side of the king's plot. Its source was in the city of the king, and it was always kept brimful winter and summer. Now it was from this river (7) that the gardeners obtained their water

Spring brightened into summer, and summer faded into autumn, and still the plant throve. Its roots were not very strong or very long, but then it was so well cared for and regularly attended that it got on very well. As winter drew on, and the plant for the first time began to feel the fierce **GOD'S SHELTERING** *cold blast*, many of its leaves **CARE FOR** shrivelled a little, but it got no **YOUNG CHRISTIANS.** real harm itself, for the king gave orders that (as it was its first season) it should be well protected with plenty of matting and straw.

You may perhaps be surprised that all this time the prince did not seek to destroy the plant, but the fact was he had very little opportunity to do much, for one or other of the gardeners were sure not to be far off, besides which, although he **THE FLESH LUSTETH** hated the king, he feared him, **AGAINST THE SPIRIT:** and dared not, therefore, offer any direct violence to what was his. However, he did all he could; he looked after the thorns and weeds, and by helping on their growth as much as possible, he hoped eventually to choke the seedling.



CHAPTER III —THE FIRST FAILURE.



NEXT spring, however, the plant itself favoured his devices, and injured itself in a most unexpected way. Secure from injury through the king's care through the winter, when the growing season returned it felt so strong and vigorous ⁽¹⁾ that it began to get discontented with the little plot of ground that had been so carefully prepared by the king, and seeing the weeds flourishing so well in the sand, thought that it too would begin spreading its roots. Although still carefully watered, it did not see why it should be entirely dependent on the *gardeners*, and why it should not seek *food* for itself. Now this was a right thought in its way, but the plant carried it out in a very wrong manner, hence its first efforts at independence were a terrible failure. If the plant had pushed out its roots by the river ⁽²⁾ all would have been well, but instead of doing so it began to send long *fibres under the sand* in search of nourishment. One day the prince perceived one of the little roots that, being near the surface, had been laid bare by the wind, and he saw at once a new means of injuring the plant. Every night he carefully watered the sand around, so that the plant, instead of finding its roots parched with the heat, actually found they

were moist and fresh, and as burrowing beneath the sand was so much pleasanter than trying to find food among the rocks and stones, it pushed root after root in the same direction, lured on ⁽³⁾ to its own hurt.

As soon as the prince thought it had grown as far in this direction as it would, he discontinued the watering. Summer was now coming on, and the sand soon began to get burning hot. The poor plant found out its mistake, but discovered too that it is easier to *shoot out roots* than to *pull them in* again; so it had to suffer and find out by bitter experience that the soil that suited the thorn, was not fitted for the king's seed. ⁽⁴⁾

It was surely no wonder that its *leaves and branches* began to *droop* in such a way as greatly to perplex the gardeners. They had continued carefully watering the plant, little thinking that half the water was wasted in the desert sand. The plant had thought to make itself independent of them altogether; now, alas, it found that even all the water could not keep it fresh while its roots were so far in the desert sand.

Driven to their wits' end, and not knowing the real cause of the mischief, instead of asking the king's advice, ⁽⁵⁾ who was always ready to confer with them about the plant, they thought they would take matters into their own hands, ⁽⁶⁾ and try and put things right. So they had a consultation together. One said, "What the plant wants is more stimulating food, something that will excite it to grow faster than mere water.



“ITS LEAVES AND BRANCHES BEGAN TO DROOP.”

“No,” said another, “it is not that at all. I think the summer has been too hot for it, and the coming winter will be too cold : it ought to have a more even temperature.

“Whatever we can do we cannot alter the *temperature*,” broke in a third. “Besides, if we did, it would do little good, for the fierce winds do just as much harm as the cold.”

If you had not interrupted me,” pursued the other, “I could have told you of a plan that has long been in my head, that would both regulate the heat, and shut out the winds as well.”

“Tell us your plan,” said the other two.

“Well,” he replied, “I should erect a glass house, this autumn, over the young plant, and then with a good stove we could defy both the winds and cold.”

“Capital,” they both replied, “let us set about it at once.”

“Let me have a word first,” broke in the fourth
A TRUE gardener, who had not spoken yet. “I
PASTOR. think you are all wrong. When the king sent us to nourish this plant he did not give us authority to try new-fangled plans of our own inventing, (?) but told us to do nothing but regularly water the plant with *pure water* from the river. He especially said that nothing was to be mixed with it, and also that this winter there was to be no matting, as the plant was hardy enough now to do without.”

“But the king does not know how sickly the

plant is," rejoined the gardener who had proposed the glass house.

"Then you should let him know."

"And meanwhile the plant would be dead. No, no. I say if we have *intellects* we are meant to use them."

"But not in the king's affairs." (8)

"On the contrary, I think that it is then we ought to use them the most. So if my two friends are agreed we will put up the house and try our plan, and you will see if the king will not be pleased with the plant's appearance next spring."

"Your plan," rejoined the old gardener, "*seems* a good one, but as it is not in *my orders* I cannot help you in it."

So saying, he wished the three good-bye and set off home, leaving the others to use their intellects to the best advantage.

CHAPTER IV.—THE GARDENERS' PLAN.



THE joy of the three gardeners was great, as they saw the old man departing, and felt they were now free to do as they pleased.

“I have long thought that these cans were not fitted for such a young plant,” said one, as he threw his away, “what we want are fine syringes which we can fill with some good mixture, and direct in a gentle stream just where we wish.” “It is a great mistake,” added another, “to allow these weeds to be here. They are an injury to the plant, and we must clear every one of them away.” “First of all, let us put up the house,” said the third, “and then we’ll soon manage the rest.” So, after a great deal of talk, they decided upon its shape and size. It was to be very narrow, but very lofty. so as to allow plenty of room for the plant to grow in height, but not in breadth. How and where they got their materials, I cannot tell, but so great was their diligence that in a few weeks the framework was up, and in another the glass was in. They then put in a patent self-regulating stove, warranted to maintain the same temperature in winter and summer.

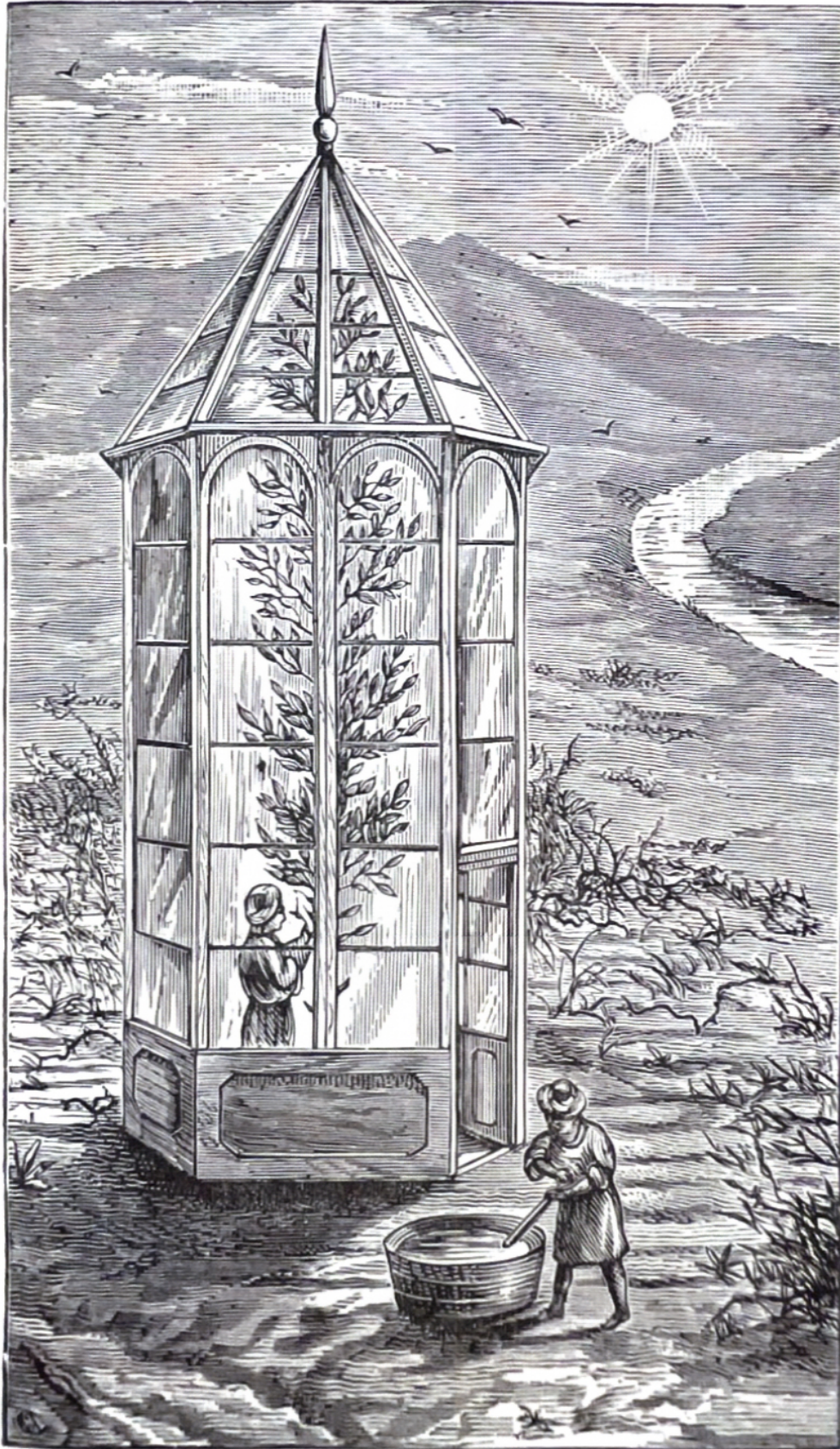
During all this time the plant got worse and worse, and at last it was nearly dead for want of water, for the gardeners were too busy now to think of running down to the river.

I must say, however, that when the house was finished and painted, it looked very well, and even the prince would occasionally come and admire it. Indeed, all the time they were building it, he had not displayed at all the same animosity as formerly, when he used often to hinder their fetching water and overturn their cans.

Having now got everything ready, our friends were greatly delighted the first wintry day to find how snug and warm the house felt. Indeed, I may say, although no doubt the plant was the first object, that the thought did just cross their minds how much more comfortable they would be at their work now, than when they had to fetch water in the bitter cold weather the last winter.

Turning their attention at last to the plant, they saw at once what it wanted, and thinking the idea
ADULTERATING of a syringe very good, they
THE WORD. provided themselves with one
 apiece, and then mixing a small quantity of river water with a large proportion of an artificial stimulant some one had recommended (it is said it was one of the prince's agents), they watered the plant with a soft and steady stream.

The effect was most gratifying. In a few days the genial warmth and plentiful moisture soon made the plant revive, and apparently everything succeeded as they expected.



"THE PLANT WAS A SHOW."

One thing remained to be done, several weeds had of course been included in the space covered by the house. Every vestige of these was cleared away and the place made tidy and respectable. Beneath the soil, however, all the old roots remained, waiting for a favourable opportunity to sprout again.

Spring is the growing time for plants, but now that it was always spring in the glass-house the plant was always growing. Shoot succeeded shoot, and leaf followed leaf, until it made a grand show. Owing to the construction of the house, it was greatly drawn up, and the stalk, or rather trunk, of the young tree, for it was already covered with green bark, was very long and slender. The great show of leaves at the top seemed rather heavy for it, but still all went well. Indeed, here and there was some indication of coming fruit. The comfort too, of the house to the poor gardeners was so great that they sincerely hoped it would be allowed to remain. At last winter was over and spring came. The plant was a show. It had nearly reached the top of the house, and everything seemed to testify to the superiority of the new way over the old.

The three friends now anxiously awaited the visit of the king, quite confident of his approval. If ever a doubt did cross their minds as to what he would say, it was only at such times as the old gardener (who had left them, *they said*, because he could not have all his own

way) paid them a visit. He generally said nothing but looked carefully at the plant and went away shaking his head.

One day the king came. He had not been expected, and one of the gardeners had just given the house a fresh coat of paint, in consequence of which the leaves of the plant had turned rather yellow; so they were all very busy with their syringes trying to make it look all right.


“Where are your cans?” was the first word he said, on which there was a great deal of fumbling and searching, and at last they were produced, and the one who had proposed the glass-house being spokesman of the three, explained that they found the syringes very much more effective. “Effective for what,” said the king, his brow clouding over. “For the growth of the plant, my lord,” answered the gardener, “you see how high and handsome it is. Those bits of yellow,” he added, seeing the king looking at the yellow leaves, “are nothing, they are only caused by the smell of the fresh paint we put on the house.” “Who erected this house?” said the king. “I did, my lord,” replied the builder. “By whose orders?” “We did it for the good of the plant, my lord. It was very feeble, and you see, now, how it has grown.”

“Your only excuse,” sternly replied the king, “is that your real desire was to benefit the plant. You have disobeyed my orders, and imagined that you could improve upon them. You have adulterated the pure water of the river. You have erected

this miserable glass-house, and by its means have nearly destroyed the plant. Far better that some of its leaves should wither than the whole plant FORCING IS NOT GROWTH. should be as it is. It has not *grown*, it has been *drawn up*. As you have, therefore, betrayed your trust, it is taken from you and given to another." The king then commanded that the house should be utterly destroyed, and every vestige of it and all the new tools burnt. He then left the plant in sole charge of the old gardener, with strict orders to put no further shelter about the plant, summer or winter, and to use nothing but the pure water of the river.

Such was the end of the gardeners' plan, and as the old gardener looked on the charred remains of the once boasted glass-house, and the sickly appearance of the tall young tree, he thought of some words that he had once read: "The fire shall try every man's work, of what sort it is. If any man's work shall be burned, *he* shall suffer loss."

CHAPTER V.—THE RESULT OF FORCING.


WHEN the plant first saw the glass house rising around it, it felt both joy for the shelter it would get and pride at the wonderful attention it was receiving. "What an expense they have gone to," it said, as the beautiful house was finished, never thinking of the infinitely greater expense of the river, on which it had never bestowed a thought. The fine spray of the carefully prepared liquid was also much pleasanter than the drenching it used to get with the cold river water, and when its stem began to get covered with bark and its crest to rise higher and higher it was quite delighted with itself.

"It is of no use," it said to itself, "for me to be pushing out and strengthening my roots in the soil, no rough winds can shake me in this lovely house. I am quite secure, and can devote all my **SELF** strength to growing higher and **SATISFACTION.** higher. The gardeners were very tall men, and always carried their heads very high, and the great desire of the little tree was to grow as high as they were. So it drew in all the sap from its roots, and devoted all its energy to push out shoot after shoot, leaf after leaf, and above all to send its central stem higher and higher. Its roots under the sand gave very little

trouble now, for they were almost dried up (so far, indeed, though without knowing it, the glass house did good). It was a proud day for the young plant when it saw all its old enemies the thorns and weeds cleared away, and it looked round with the utmost complacency at the bare ground, where not one weed was to be seen. "Now at last," it said, "I have got a complete victory over them all, and not a vestige of them remains."

It was rather foolish to say this while all the roots were left, but then the young tree had forgotten that. It was a sad day for the plant when the king came and all its beautiful house was destroyed, all the fine syringes burnt, and worse than all, its own height not admired. "I could have borne the rest" thought the plant, "but to say I have not grown, and am only drawn up is really too bad. Certainly my top leaves are *rather* heavy, I must confess, for my strength, but still they are very beautiful."

But a sadder day than this soon came to the
GETTING TO ITS poor tree. It was a gusty day
TRUE LEVEL. at the end of April, when the
 wind kept coming in great puffs, first from one point then from another. The young plant first bent to one side then to the other, till its thin roots quite shook in the earth. "The wind has a special malice against me," sighed the young tree, "for it sees I am quite at its mercy now." This was true, though the tree did not know it, for the prince, seeing his opportunity, had raised the storm against it. At last a tremendous gust came,

down went the head of the tree, lower and lower, till its roots were almost torn out of the soil. It could not bend another inch without being uprooted altogether; the wind came harder and harder, and at last with a great crash all the top broke off, and hung in a confused mass at its side.

Poor tree! this was a dreadful blow; to have all the apparent progress of months broken off short in the first storm. "If I only had had RESULTS OF SURFACE WORK. longer roots," it said, "I think I could have bent a little more; but my roots are so small, I seem all above the surface." Still the wind howled, and did not subside till every high branch had been blown off. When the gardener came next day, the tree was a piteous spectacle. Its shattered state gave it great pain, but it suffered still more when the gardener, instead of tying up its broken branches (as it had hoped), took out his sharp knife and cut them all off short. When it was all done, and many a long offshoot cut back as well, you would hardly have recognised the tree at all. I am sure if the three gardeners could have seen it, they would not have owned it.

Relieved of all its lofty shoots the young tree set to work to strengthen its roots. No longer RETURN TO REALITY. forced by stimulating nourishment and artificial heat, but watered with the pure river water, it soon got strong and hardy. The prince saw that although it had lost its pride, the storm had done it no real injury, and he almost began to despair of success, when



"POOR TREE! THIS WAS A DREADFUL BLOW."

a circumstance occurred that greatly favoured his plans.

This was nothing else than the departure of the old gardener. He had received orders unexpectedly for some wise reason, to leave the plant entirely alone for a year, and not even to give it a drop of water. Great was the astonishment of the plant when one day it saw the gardener pull down the little tent he had erected for his shelter near the spot, and go away with his watering can.

We almost forgot to mention that the weeds by this time had sprung up again, all except a few that grew close round the tree, and that now were so overshadowed by it that they could not grow at all.

The gardener left at the close of summer, and although the young tree had never cared for him as much as for the other three, it really felt sad as it saw him disappearing across the desert sands.

CHAPTER VI.—HELP IN TIME OF NEED.

FOR some time after the gardener left the young tree got on pretty well. The ground was very moist all around beneath the surface, and as its roots now stretched all over the little plot of ground owned by the king, it could take full advantage of every drop of water it had received. But by degrees the power of the sun not only dried up the earth on the surface, but DEPRIVED OF PASTORAL CARE. made itself felt by the uppermost roots of the plant, which got sadly burnt in the hard soil. But still the young tree kept heart, and kept sending its roots deeper and deeper in search of moisture. It was evident, however, that such a state of things could not last long. Either some one must take pity on the plant and give it some water, or, to all appearances, it would certainly die.

But no one came. and that autumn the sun blazed unusually fiercely. The prince, indeed, saw that now, if ever, was the time to kill the tree, and if he could only dry up its roots, he knew the winter frosts would completely freeze the life out of all that was above the ground. It was he DRIED UP BY THE SUN OF PERSECUTION. that kept the sun blazing down upon it (for not only had he rule over the

desert, but he had also a great power in the air as well). He too raised blinding storms of hot sand against it, burying and shrivelling up its leaves as if they were in a furnace. Indeed, the hot blast of the desert was far more trying now to the plant than the rays of the sun. Formerly, it had been able to retire into its roots when the heat came, but now they were so parched and dried they could give no refreshment. Day after day passed on, no relief came; all the plant's beauty had gone. Not only had the leaves begun to fall as usual at the approach of winter, but those that remained were all withered up.

The prince now spent nearly all his time watching the plant, and great was his joy at its weak state. He had been pleased at the building of the glass house, for he foresaw plainly how the gardener's folly would end, but now he was positively delighted. "At last," thought he, "I shall have my triumph, and prove that, after all, not all the king's power, nor all the king's seed, nor all the king's gardeners can keep a plant alive in my desert. No doubt, ere long, I shall get full possession of this little plot."

But even as these thoughts passed through his mind, one thing kept troubling him, "Why had the king sent the old gardener away? The tree had got on very well under his care, it had grown strong and hardy with the regular watering, and WITHOUT ANY EARTHLY HELP. yet all had been suddenly stopped, and if the plant did die, it was evidently quite as much for want of water as

from the sun's heat. That is to say, to all appearances the king was as anxious to kill the plant as himself. This greatly puzzled him, and the more he thought of it the less he felt he understood it. Still, in one sense it did not concern him, all *he* was anxious about was the death of the plant, and whether it was by fair means or foul did not greatly matter.

So still the hot wind blew, still the ardent rays of the sun beat down upon the tree until it was near death's door. On its part all hope had now departed, and the prince's success seemed certain, and the very thorns and weeds themselves, that still flourished, gazed with delight at the wretched appearance of the plant.

An event now happened that upset all their calculations. The tree had, as we have said, sent its roots deeper and deeper into the soil, but even these failed now to find any moisture. Others of the roots had spread out nearer the surface, and one in particular had not only traversed the entire plot, but run into the desert beyond, in the vain hope that somehow or other it might meet with a little moisture. All these fruitless efforts, however, only exhausted the plant. One day, THE CHRISTIAN however, a day never to be forgotten LEARNS. by the tree, this long root fibre, in burrowing along under the sand, came upon some firm, tenacious earth such as it had never met before, which appeared quite moist.

Gathering up all its strength with one dying effort, the plant succeeded in forcing its way by

some means through this stratum of clay, which at that part was very thin, and the next moment a thrill of strange delight was felt in every part of the long root, whose end had now reached *the river itself*. In a few moments the cool, refreshing stream had reached the trunk, spread along the other roots, and was rapidly ascending the branches. Higher and higher it went, for the supply was boundless, till every leaf that still remained on the almost bare branches felt its invigorating power. All the bent and drooping twigs began again to revise and straighten themselves.


The weeds looked on in amazement at the sudden change, for there was no apparent cause for it. The river rolled where it ever did, but never had the roots of a plant stretched so far, and they had been so long accustomed to its being there that not for one moment did the thought strike them that it might be the source of the tree's refreshment. For a long time they believed that the old gardener paid nightly visits with his can, and thus sustained the plant.

Intense, indeed, was the mortification of the prince next morning, and great was his astonishment at the altered appearance of the plant. A night spent in company with the precious river had wrought wonders. Not only had all the old leaves revived, and spread out their glossy surfaces to the sun they no longer feared, but the whole plant looked as vigorous as if it had never suffered at all.

He saw at a glance he had again been foiled; how he knew not, and as the sunshine now only seemed to nourish the plant, and even the wind did not hurt it, he left off his attacks, and retired vanquished from the scene.



CHAPTER VII.—TRUE INDEPENDENCY.


WHO shall tell the joy of that first winter. The cold was intense, and all above ground looked bare and dead enough; except where here and there the few leaves that had not already fallen off still preserved a greenness and freshness quite unnatural at that season of the year. But the main life of the tree was down in its root. There all was fresh and moist the water was drawn in just as it was wanted from the inexhaustible river, and the young tree felt as it drank in the soft stream that flowed direct from the city of the great king that it had a new link formed in that far off desert with the one who reigned there. Not content with having one channel of supply, with some difficulty the young plant drove a second root through the clay bed of the river into the stream, and these two roots soon grew thick and strong, so that when spring came round crowds of buds everywhere told of a new and vigorous life; and the plant, instead of dreading the recommencement of the summer's heats under which it had nearly died the year before, looked forward to it with joy as a time when it would most fully prove the boundless resources of its now friend.

At the close of spring the tree was not only

THE CHRISTIAN WHOSE
 RESOURCE IS IN
 CHRIST ALONE.

covered with fresh leaves, but strange to say not one of last year's leaves had yet fallen off. Darker in colour than the rest they were just as full of life, for from the moment that the root of the young tree first touched the river, it became an evergreen, no more to cast its leaf, but alike in the coldest winter as in the hottest summer, to gratify and refresh the eye with a verdure that never faded.

You can well imagine the surprise of the old gardener when, after a journey full of painful forebodings, he first caught sight of the tree one summer's day. All along the road he had pictured to himself the dead and leafless branches of a withered tree, and he had wondered how the king, who had taken such an interest in it could have allowed it thus to die, when at last—there it stood before him, instinct with life in every branch. He rubbed his eyes, and walked round it on every side, looking again and again at the fresh leafy verdure, and utterly unable to understand it. “I think,” he said at last, “my three friends must have stolen a march on me, and been watering this tree behind my back. But on looking carefully around he could discern no track of footsteps anywhere about the plant. Looking again at the tree his keen eye detected many of last year's leaves among the new foliage, which was a fresh source of amazement. “Well,” he said, “I cannot tell who has nourished the tree, but whoever or whatever it is, it answers a great deal better than the glass house. It scarcely seems

that my watering can is needed now. One thing is certain, the king knew what he was about when he sent me away for a year, for instead of suffering, the plant has benefited, and I doubt not he knows, too, what I am sent back for, so I'll just go on the old way with my watering can." So he pitched his little tent again near the tree, and opening out his instructions he found that he was not to water the plant regularly as before, but at irregular intervals, leaving it sometimes alone for days together.

Ah," he said, "that is to show that the plant is no longer dependant on the old gardener, and that though he is still a help it can get on without him.

The watering can, however, did wonders; and although the plant now drew water direct from the river, it never was so grateful for the refreshing showers poured over its leaves from the can. It grew apace in two ways. In the first place, it spread its lower branches nearly all over the plot, so that thorn after thorn died down to the ground, deprived of light and air by the thick overhanging boughs. The roots were still left, but as they did not get a chance of growing the weeds were practically dead. Some few small ones still lingered beyond the shade of the branches, a poor remnant of what had once held undisputed possession of the soil. The other way in which the tree displayed its vigorous life was in producing fruit. On many a bough were seen the small green bunches waiting for the summer's sun to ripen them. There were no flowers, for this tree was alone

amongst all the vegetable kingdom in its mode of growth. It bore no bloom till its fruit-bearing seasons were over, and then it burst forth on every branch with never-fading flowers.

Great was the delight of the gardener at seeing the fruit mellow in the summer's heat, and to think that although the plant was no longer absolutely dependant on his care, still it had greatly flourished under it. At the close of summer he again struck his tent; but oh, with what different feelings from the year before. Then all was darkness and doubt as to the plant's future, now he *knew* all would go well with it, and left it in perfect confidence, not yet having discovered the hidden source of its life, though he had begun strongly to suspect it. Best of all he carried away with him the first fruits of the young tree to grace the table of the king.

CHAPTER VIII.—THE ENEMY'S DEVICES



HE tree saw the departure of the gardener without fear, and looked forward to the coming winter with confidence. The prince had paid several visits to the place, seeking to find out the secret of the plant's strength, but so far in vain. So all through the winter the tree continued green and fresh, the one solitary spot in all that desert in which *life* was to be seen. The tree's life no longer hid itself in the roots from the winter's frost, but displayed the beauty of its verdure, though the snow lay thick upon its branches. One day in March when the wind had been blowing hard all night, the prince was taking a walk round the King's plot, his head turned away from the river, the sight of which he hated even more than the plant, when suddenly he was nearly tripped up by something that lay across his path.

WHEN SATAN EVER SUCCEEDS IN Stopping to look down at the obstruction, he saw it was a root of the tree that had been blown bare by the wind. He was about to pass on carelessly, when he stopped, all his face lighted up with a savage joy. "I have it all," he said in triumph. "Fool that I was, not to have guessed it before. *It is the river that keeps the plant so green.* Now I understand its sudden recovery last year. Tho

thing is as clear as possible." So saying, he went home, and soon returned in excellent spirits, armed with a sharp axe and a spade. A few blows soon STOPPING OUR PRIVATE READING cut the root in two. The enemy was, however, too astute not to know that when there was one root there might very likely be two. Accordingly, he set to work with the spade, and in a few minutes laid bare, in the sandy soil, the second root of the poor tree. Again the cruel axe did its work, and now all direct connection between the plant and the river was cut off, and with these two AND PRAYER strokes the prince had done more injury to the tree than the hottest sun or the fiercest wind could effect. Carefully covering up the severed roots that the gardener might not perceive what he had done, he returned home in triumph, quite satisfied that now, at last, he had struck the fatal blow.

For a few days the plant lived on the store of nourishment it had accumulated in its roots, but it had now grown to a large size, and required therefore much more support than when it was a tiny seedling. Spring was a trying time for the tree now. It made an effort to keep up a fresh appearance, but this soon died away, OUR FRESHNESS ALL GOES, and when the old gardener returned, and once more pitched his tent in the old spot, a sad change had passed over the tree he had left so flourishing. Every branch and leaf was drooping, hardly a new shoot was to be seen. The poor man was much puzzled. He set to



'A FEW BLOWS SOON CUT THE ROOT IN TWO.'

work with his can, but soon found that it had now quite outgrown his strength. All that he could do did not produce much effect. He certainly helped to keep the tree alive in the hot summer, but he

AND OUR LEAVES did not revive its drooping
DROOP. looks, which said as plain as words could speak, "We want more water than you can supply." Convinced that somehow or other the enemy had interfered with the plant's growth, he was walking one day near the river when he noticed a certain spot where the earth had evidently been beaten down with great care. Returning to his tent, he fetched out a spade and began to dig carefully at the place. He soon came upon the severed roots, and at once the whole tale was told, both of secret sources of the plant's prosperity, and of its present drooping state.



CHAPTER IX.—THE ENEMY'S DEVICES.

(Concluded.)

“**N**OW I see,” said the gardener to himself, “the reason of everything. I was sent away by the King in order that in its extremity the plant might discover the real source of its strength, and be able to draw its supplies direct from the river. I was only allowed to nourish the plant at uncertain intervals on my return, in order that I might see that the plant did not depend on my efforts, and now I have been sent again to find out, and, if possible, to repair the mischief the prince has wrought, for I doubt not it is his hand that has done all this.”

The gardener therefore set earnestly to work to unite the severed ends of the two roots, feeling while doing so that it was a higher honour to seek to enable the tree again to find its own nourishment, than merely to give it water. To restore the action of the roots was, indeed, no easy matter. The end that was still in connection with the plant was still alive, but the severed end appeared almost dead. Nothing daunted, however, and feeling sure that in doing this work he was fully carrying out the wishes of his master, he

THE BEST WAY
TO HELP A SOUL.

first dug a very deep trench along the line of the roots from the tree to the river; he then carefully bound the severed ends together and laid them deeply down at the bottom of it. After putting in a little soft earth, he then filled the trench up with the hardest rocks he could find, and covered the whole so completely with the sand that not even the prince himself could tell what had been done, as during the time the work was carried on, he had been absent in another part of his territory. He was much annoyed on his return to see that the plant was not looking nearly so badly as he expected. Still he waited on confidently expecting to see the tree die.

It had certainly had a very narrow escape, and if it had not been for the gardener's skill in repairing the broken communication it would have perished under the hot summer's sun. This may be a useful hint to gardeners, that when they see plants drooping, the watering-can is not everything; a more difficult, but at the same time a more valuable work being to discover whether there is no hidden injury to the roots. It is here the enemy loves to work. He knows well enough that breaking branches and pulling off leaves, though it may injure a plant's beauty, cannot affect its life; but that if only he can cut the roots, through which it draws its nourishment, he has fatally injured the tree.

IS TO LEAD IT TO
RESUME.

PRIVATE READING
AND PRAYER.

CHAPTER X.—LIFE IN THE DESERT.



ONCE securely united and buried beyond possibility of further injury, the severed roots soon united, and now again the tree felt the refreshing power of the river in every pore.

Gradually it grew higher and higher, not in the quick unhealthy way it had been drawn up in the glass house, but developing in strength even faster than in height. So thick was its trunk that the fiercest blasts never shook it. It stood a monument of the triumph of the King's seed, of life in the midst of death. Many came year after year to see the tree, which was indeed a wonderful sight. Green all the year round, its

A CHRISTIAN
FLOURISHING.

refreshing foliage, seen afar off, like an oasis in the desert, across the burning sand, gladdened the eye in the hot summer's day; just as in winter, the only green spot in a white world of snow, it still asserted the power of its changeless life. Great was the curiosity of many of the travellers to find how such a mighty tree flourished in a wilderness, in spite of howling winds and barren sands, and equally great was the delight of the old gardener, who now lived on the spot, to tell the

BY DEPENDING ON
CHRIST ALONE.

story of the plant's hidden sources of strength. Every season quantities of ripe sweet fruit was sent from the far off desert to the King's table, and it is said that



“AT LAST, THERE IT STOOD BEFORE HIM.”

amongst all his dainties there was nothing the King enjoyed so much as the fruit of the desert tree. What delighted the plant the most was, that none of the praise was bestowed on itself; for it had lost all the pride it had long ago. Some praised the gardener's care and skill, some

IS A REFRESHING
SIGHT ON EARTH: the King's love and wisdom, but most delighted to stand by the

broad river, and, in its cool refreshing waters to see the sources of the life of the desert tree. The prince, discouraged and utterly baffled, no longer hoped to gain the little plot for his own, for not only did the spreading branches of the King's tree take all life out of the few remaining thorns and weeds, but they stretched over the desert itself. Worst of all in one of his walks he noticed some tiny plants opening their first leaves under the protection of the tree, that were evidently neither thorns nor weeds, but must have sprung from seeds dropped by the King's plant. News

AND AFTER LEADING
OTHERS TO CHRIST. also of the approaching end of his own rule over the desert began to

reach him. In his rage he did all he could. The fiercest heats the tree had known, beat down upon it in the summer, the most withering blasts howled through the desert, the most piercing cold froze it in winter; but so great was the strength it got from the river, that they could not cause even its leaves to fade. There it stood, a tower of strength, a grateful shelter to the passing traveller, causing him to sing songs of praise to the One who had made such an oasis in the

desert, a monument to the life giving power and satisfying waters of the river of the King. Sometimes the tree wondered what was to be its ultimate destiny. Was it ever to be surrounded with nothing but a trackless desert, was it always to bear the sun and frost. Rumours had reached it from time to time of other lands where there were no burning sands or cruel enemies, and sometimes it longed to be there, but then again it thought, no! I would rather have all the trials of the desert and my beloved river to sustain me, than the most luxuriant soil without it. It had heard of a coming day when all the desert should revert to the King, and it contented itself with the thought that perhaps it should live till that time.

One day strange news came to the desert. The old gardener received a hasty message to say that, as fruit-bearing time was now over, and that as the King was satisfied with the success of the seed which had fully proved its power by means of the water of the river, to live in a desert where everything was against it, as it had thus triumphed in the midst of a scene of death, he was now going to have it transplanted to his own garden, by the side of the river's fountain-head, there to rejoice him and all his court with the display of its never fading flowers, while it still drew its strength from the same waters that had sustained it in the desert.

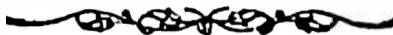
The old gardener's feelings were very mingled as he read all this. Joy for the plant, sorrow that the King had not sent for him yet, and yet

joy again as he thought that his tried and faithful master must have some further work in the desert for him, ere he called him home. "Ah," he said, "he means me to stay awhile and care for the little seedlings left behind."

The plant was now covered with a wonderful show of fruit, all of which the gardener carefully gathered, knowing it was the last time he should ever see any on the much-loved tree, and then despatched as usual to the King. Somehow or other the plant got to know the news. At first it

WITH GREAT JOY. was filled all over with a strange trembling joy at the thought of the eternal pleasure in store for it, so far beyond its highest thoughts, and then a new thought struck it as it looked at the tiny seedlings so confidently trusting to its shelter. "Ah, what will they do," it thought, "when I am gone. Is there nothing I can do to help them?"

After much thought one evening, when all was hushed to silence, and nothing was to be seen but the silent stars as they kept watch over the desert, the old tree thus addressed the seedlings :—



CHAPTER XI.—EXPERIENCES

“**Y**OU have heard that in a few days I am going to leave you. The King has sent for me, now that my time of fruitbearing in the desert is over, to bloom in his own garden; and as I do not know on what day I may have to go, I would like to give you a few words of counsel now. When I am gone you will have to pass through many trials, of which at present you can have no idea. In the first place the thorns and weeds will all revive and do their best to choke you. Your only way really to overcome them is to absorb all the nourishment you can, and to gradually overshadow them as I have done. If you don't choke them they will choke you, and remember they have the prince on their side. Beware of him. I once was nearly killed by his cunning. I had got discontented with my gardener, and thinking I would like to be independent, I pushed out my roots into the sand, which he continually moistened, (to persuade me I was getting nourishment from it), and then when he had me in his territory, he dried up the sand to a burning heat, and nearly scorched up all my life. Do not think for a moment there is a single

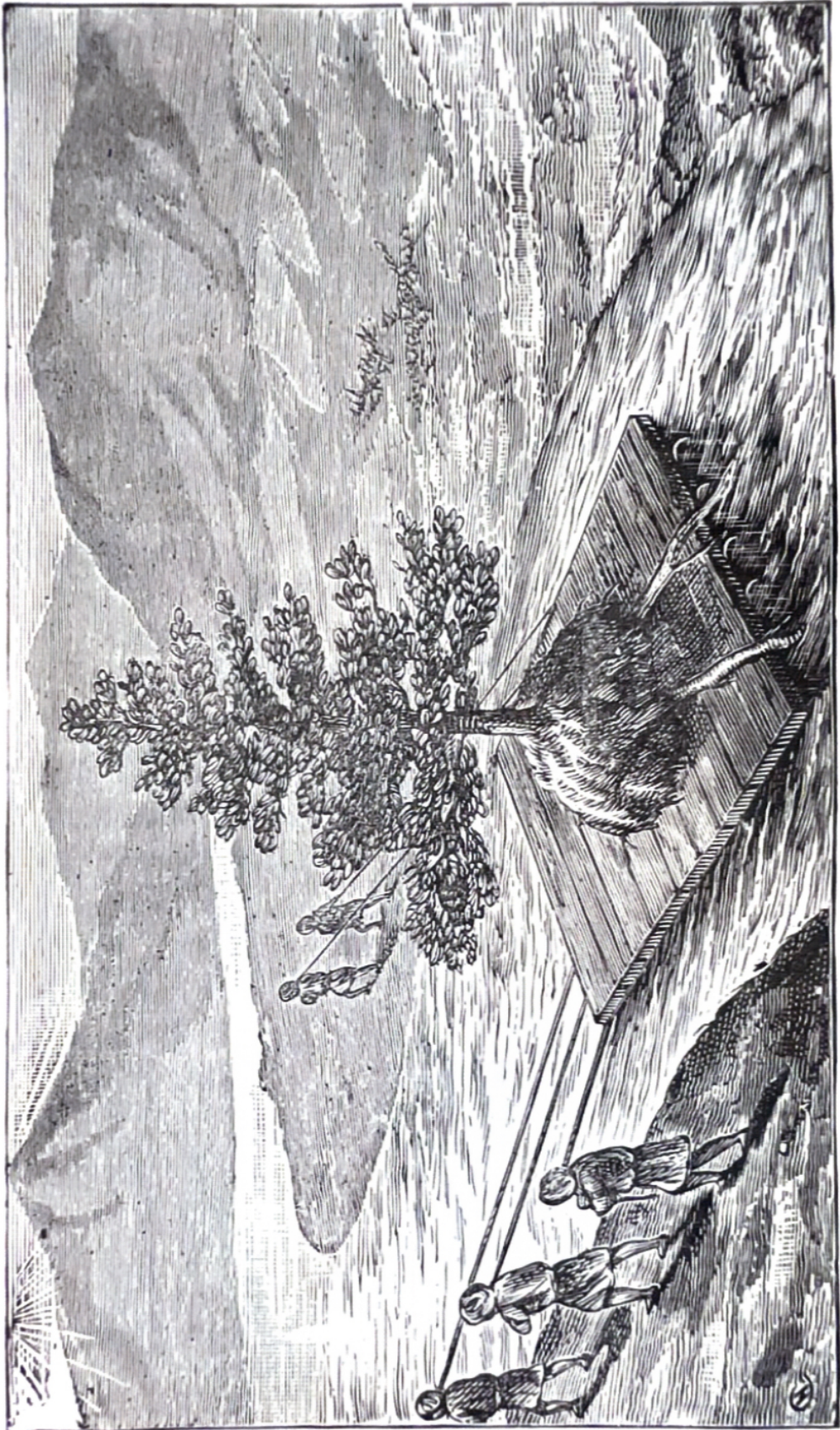
thing that can help you on in this desert but the waters of the river. This you can get at present through others. Be thankful for this, and value their care to which you owe so much ; but, on, never, never rest until your own roots go into the river. It was a sad long time before I learnt this. Indeed, I never should have found it out if the King had not driven me to it by taking away the gardener." Then, indeed, had I not found out the river I should have perished. Oh! the joy of the moment when I first drank in its water myself! Seek then without delay to have two roots at least stretching into the river.

Another danger I would warn you of is from a different quarter altogether. The gardeners are not to be trusted implicitly. Even they may err, as they did in my case. Thinking to be wiser than the King, they built a glass house round me, and watered my roots with mixtures of their own preparing, instead of the pure river water. Beware of this. Remember, I have proved that the water of the river is all that a tree requires to live vigorously, and to produce fruit in this desert. I am not now being taken away because I was unable to live here, but because I *was* able. Refuse, then, everything that is adulterated or mixed. Beware, too, of the glass house ; if once you are enclosed in it, you will get so vain of your own importance, and go shooting higher and higher, regardless of your strength, that you are certain to have a downfall as I did, when the house is gone. It is far better to grow

in strength than in height. Never aim at making a show.

Remember, too, that it is only when you have your own roots in the water that you become an evergreen; unless you do this you will only keep green in summer while you are watered, and lose all your leaf (not your life, *that* is in the roots in the winter. Do not make the mistake I did in letting the roots, on which all your strength depends run near the surface. Let them be deeply buried where none can find them, so that their existence is only known by the fruit they produce. If these roots are secure you can defy the sun, the wind, the frost, the burning sand, the thorns, and all the enemy's devices. If these are touched, not all the watering will suffice to keep you vigorous. And when in the prime of your life your broad branches afford a grateful shade to the weary traveller, and your boughs are laden with fruit, never, never forget that you owe all to the King's Son. It was he that obtained the seed, and it is his river that keeps you alive."

Such were the words of counsel the King's tree addressed to the seedlings. Next morning a number of men were seen coming across the desert. They were servants from the King sent to transplant the tree. This was a moment the plant had rather dreaded, for it expected to get a great shaking, especially in its long outstretching roots. With wonderful skill, and in quite an unexpected manner, however, the skilful workmen avoided all injury to the plant. Finding that its two main roots ran into



"THE TREE WAS GENTLY FLOATED ALONG TO THE CITY OF THE GREAT KING."

the river, they carefully lifted the tree with a large ball of earth into a large wooden stage which they wheeled towards the river, gently lifting the two roots out of the ground as they went along. They then pushed the wooden platform like a raft into the river leaving the ends of the two roots in the water they so greatly loved, and then the tree was gently floated along, on the broad bosom of the river without a jar, to the city of the great King. It was planted in his garden near the fountain head of the desert river, and thus its roots still drank in the same precious stream, only in greater abundance, that had been their strength and delight in the desert land. So that from that never-to-be-forgotten time, when in the dark hour of its despair the tree first struck root into the water it never left it again.

Thus ends the story of the desert tree. We leave it in the royal garden in a soil of surpassing richness, never more to bear the burning sun and rough desert blast, but before all the court to bear witness, by its never fading flowers, to the sustaining power of the river. Surely the tree was satisfied far beyond its highest wishes. The King's Son loved to gaze upon it, the fruit of his toil and hard labour, grown from the seed he had found, nourished by the river of his love and as he looked upon its beautiful flowers—he, too, was satisfied.

CHAPTER XII.—WHAT IT ALL MEANS.



ALTHOUGH the last chapter, "Experiences" almost takes away from the necessity of any explanation of this "Allegory," still, as we have promised one to many of our readers, we just add a few words.

The first chapter (p. 11), as indicated by the side notes, represents the reception of the gospel into the human heart, after it has been prepared by the action of the Word (p. 12). The desert is the wilderness of this world, of which Satan is the god and prince.

Chapter II. (p. 16) gives the early growth of the new gospel seed, cared for by God, and looked after by pastors and teachers sent by Him; the saved soul being of the greatest interest to Him, as saved by the work of His beloved Son. On Lord's days especially (p. 17) the young Christian gets fed and watered by God's servants. The source of all blessing to the soul is Christ: hence He is the river whose source is in heaven, and which refreshes and sustains all His people here. Temptations and trials, of course, arise, but it is wonderful to see how often (p. 18) God shields the young Christian from the severity of these until he is established and strong in the Lord. Therefore just at this time, surrounded by care, and well nourished, the believer has not much to fear.

In chapter III. (p. 19), we have a change : the love of the world begins to reassert its power in the young Christian's heart, and he begins to seek for refreshment in the desert sands around. This, of course, pleases the enemy, who, *by mixing up a little religion with the world*, lures the unsuspecting believer on. The worldly element, however, soon takes the heart away from Christ, and the Christian gets cold and careless from thus back-sliding from Christ. Now comes the time for spiritual guides to show (p 23) their wisdom ; but in this case instead of doing so, mistrusting the power of Christ alone to nourish and sustain the soul, they prepare to encase it in some religious system of man's devising, where it will be comparatively secure against danger from without. The true pastor, mistrusting such plans, retires for a while (p. 24). The system in this case (for they vary greatly) appears to be specially designed to foster spiritual pride. The Word of God is not shut out (the water), but it is adulterated (p 26) ; all outward gross sins are discontinued (p. 29). The young Christian, however, inflated with self-importance, though outwardly flourishing in the unhealthy atmosphere around, is not truly growing in grace, and on the visit of the king (p. 30), all is condemned, and he is delivered from it.

The young believer, brought to himself again, soon loses the artificial height to which he apparently had attained (p. 33), and gets to his true level. Assisted by the faithful though unsparing teaching (p. 34) of the true pastor, he ceases to devote his attention to

outward growth, but seeks to progress inwardly in soul. About this time, however, in the wisdom of God, he is suddenly deprived of all Christian teaching, and left for a while quite alone in the world. Now is the enemy's opportunity, and well does he use it against the young soul (p. 38). The absence of all Christian fellowship proves even more serious to the young believer than his first straying after the world, and his new life almost ceases to act, when, while reading the Word it may be, his heart for the first time casts itself in reality on Christ alone, and holds communion with Himself, unaided by any human help or teaching. From this time, the soul has learnt a very deep secret—the *all-sufficiency of Christ*, even in the most trying circumstances. It has also learned that communication with Christ is direct, by means of the private study of the Word of God and prayer, and that these are indeed the roots of the soul (Psalm i.), by means of which, for the first time, he can really flourish when all around is against him (p.44). Having now become independent by learning the secret of direct dependence on Christ, God restores the pastoral care, which the soul now rightly values. The young believer “abiding in Christ” (John xv.) now begins to produce fruit.

In chapter VIII., however, we find Satan again at work, and at last he gets his opportunity, and by repeated efforts induces the believer first to neglect, and then to give up, *private reading and prayer* (p. 47). This done, the rest soon follows. The Christian loses his freshness, and the pastor strives

in vain to make up for want of communion with Christ (p. 52). When, however, he discovers what the real reason of decline is, and that Satan has succeeded by some means in hindering or stopping communion, if he be a true pastor, instead of seeking to sustain the soul with ministry, he rather tries to lead it back to Christ (p. 53), to find again for itself in Him refreshment for the soul. Surely to be the means of restoring a soul to communion with Christ is the highest form of pastoral work. How little, alas! do we know of this! Now that the Christian is firmly restored (p. 54) he rapidly grows, not in pride or self-esteem, as when artificially forced on at the first, but with the gentle natural growth in grace and in strength, rather than in appearance, that is true Christian development. Such a Christian is, indeed, a monument to the sustaining power of Christ, and brings great glory to His name. He is *satisfied* with Christ, which in itself is great testimony to His worth; he bears fruit to God's glory, which is a great testimony to His power; and finally the grace that he receives flows out to others, and from his simple and consistent testimony others rise up to believe in Christ's name (p. 57). The end of such an one is truly blessed, and he is fitted to give great help and instruction to those who are just beginning their Christian career (p. 60). Summoned at last to depart and be with Christ, which is far better, he still finds in heaven as on earth that same One, only now in unhindered enjoyment, the food and delight of his soul (p. 62)

Such is the meaning of the "Allegory of Christian Life," and if it should help on any young believers in the narrow path, or enable them to avoid any of Satan's snares, the object of the writer will be gained and his prayers answered.

