

The Gardener

ONCE UPON A TIME there was a young man whom we will call Abdullah, who had been put in charge of a wonderful garden. The Master Gardener, who was really the owner of the garden, told him it was a most wonderful garden, but to the young man it seemed only a rather bare plot. True, there were little green things growing and dimly defined paths running here and there, while the grass was green and soft, and a wee brook rippled over the pebbles under the trees in the center of the garden.

He knew little of the work he was expected to do or how to go about it. The Master had given him a new set of tools, which were bright and beautiful, but what to do with them Abdullah did not know. The Master had also told him he must keep the garden clear of weeds, cultivate the tender plants, and straighten and clear the paths. "You have many days in which to work," the Master said, "but there is much to do. See that it is well done ere I come again."

"And the wage, dear Master?" asked Abdullah.

"The fruits of the garden," answered the Master, and He left Abdullah in the garden with his bright new tools.

For a while that first morning Abdullah worked well, but the sun grew warm. Its beams danced and played on the waters of the little brook, and enticed thereby he lay down on the green bank, quite forgetting his task.

So the hours of the first day slipped away and darkness fell, but the weeds had grown apace.

The Master Gardener had walked in the garden in the heat of the day, and noting the weeds and the sorry condition of the garden, He felt compassion for Abdullah, but silently went away.

In the morning, refreshed by the night's repose,

Abdullah arose, eager to work and reap the results of his labor, but the tender plants of the day before, though alive, were partly choked by the weeds, which seemed to have thriven on neglect.

The paths were quite overgrown and nearly hidden by brambles, which made walking hard for the unwary.

As Abdullah stood looking over his garden, wondering the while what to do first, a stranger passed by and looking over the fence said: "Why do you stand idling there? The weeds will kill the tender plants, and when they are dead there will be nothing to do but burn the garden over to destroy them. Pull them up, man!—pull them up, root and branch!"

"But which are the weeds? Abdullah asked, puzzled.

"There is one," the stranger answered, pointing, "and there another—and there—and there—and there....They are the weeds of Avarice, Greed, Lust, Falsehood, Hatred and many more. They will kill the lovely flowers of Purity, Truth, Love, Innocence, and Faith that the Master Gardener planted for you."

The stranger passed on, and Abdullah turned again to his garden. He worked busily for a while and tore up many weeds, but he did not notice the ripened seed pods, which opened, the seeds falling to the ground.

It was hard work, and as the sun rose in the heavens, Abdullah's zeal flagged, until, beguiled again by the dancing sunbeams, he flung himself on the soft grass beside the brook, and reaching out his hands lazily tried to grasp them and hold their gold for his own.

As he lay there, other strangers came and leaning over the fence advised him about his garden. Some of them told him one thing and some another.

Some were right and some were wrong, but being still young Abdullah could not distinguish between the right and the wrong. As the sun dropped low in the west, he arose again to his task, and as he stood he saw that a book lay at his feet.

He picked it up, and opening the pages he found that it was written by the Master Gardener himself and was all about gardening. "Now," said he, "I shall soon know all about my garden. There must be some way to get rid of the weeds besides working all through the hot day pulling them up!" So he sat down in the shade to read his book and find out how he could make his work easier.

But the more he read, the more puzzled he became. The words were long and the language hard to understand, so he took the book over to the fence and asked those who had given him advice before to read and explain it to him.

First, one man told Abdullah that he must take his interpretation entirely and by no means listen to any other. Another snatched the book away from the first and insisted that he knew all about the teaching. And so it went on till poor Abdullah was so bewildered he did not know which way to turn.

One told him that he must not destroy the weeds, for the Master had planted them as well as the flowers, and that one had as much right to live as the other. Another told him that the best way to make the flowers grow was to pull them up and straighten the roots out. But when he did it, the flowers died.

So between his own ignorance and the bad advice, he made slow progress with his garden. It seemed almost impossible to make the garden as the Master Gardener had told him, and anyway he liked best to lie by the brook and play with the sunbeams, so he did very little for that day or for many days thereafter, and the garden became a tangle of weeds.

The Master Gardener gave him a new set of tools. But because he did not know either how to use or care for them, they became dull and rusty.

Again and again the Master Gardener came and looked at the garden, but Abdullah's eyes had grown dim and he could not see the Master; his ears had grown dull and he could no longer hear Him when He called or spoke to him.

Then one day a man came running with great



Tempera on wood, Martin Schongauer (1430-1491), Unterlinden Museum, Colmar, France

Noli me tangere

If Mary Magdalene first thought the resurrected Christ was the Gardener (He is shown here carrying a hoe), we must credit her great love with intuiting a truth about Him who said "I am the vine," of Whom John the Evangelist says "in Him was life," who, in His cosmic aspect, is the reason for all that lives and grows on Earth, and whose sacrifice both atones for the expulsion from the (etheric) Garden of Eden and makes possible the conscious return to this realm through tending to the blooming of the roses on the cross of the physical body.

news, and told him the Master's Son was coming and was even then nearby. So Abdullah ran out to meet Him and asked Him to tell him of the garden and the book which he had found there.

The Son came to the garden with Abdullah and tried to help him understand the book. At first Abdullah grew very angry with Him because He insisted that Abdullah do the work himself. Abdullah had thought that the Son would do it all for him, because that was what the people who had looked over the fence had told him.

The Son was very patient, however, and taught Abdullah to read the book with understanding. Also He taught him the difference between the weeds and the flowers.

Then He went away. The days and nights passed, and still, though he knew much better now, Abdullah did little but play in the sun.

But one morning he awoke with a strange, new desire in his heart. He looked around at the garden and saw how all the beautiful flowers were drooping and how the weeds had taken the garden. For the first time he was ashamed, and set to work with a will. Using the new tools he had found by his side he quickly made great inroads on the weeds and was much encouraged, for when he grasped one weed to pull it up, several others came with it, so entangled were their roots. It was hard work in the midday sun. The cool, green grass and the singing brook were as alluring as before, and the sunbeams danced and beckoned him to come and play. But the flowers looked up at him with such grateful, loving faces as he cleared away the cruel weeds which had been sapping their lives that he worked on, forgetting all the heat and fatigue in the joy of the work. Thus did he come to understand one of the sayings in the book which for long had seemed very foolish to him.

So it came to pass that the work filled all his life. He found that when he worked in his garden and wove the sunbeams in and out among the flowers, he was infinitely happier than when he simply played with the sunbeams as he lay idly on the grass, letting the garden go to waste.

When he had cleared the flowers of the weeds and the paths of thorns and brambles, he rejoiced to know that more and more the garden became a haven of safety, beauty, and peace.

Each night when he put away his tools and lay down to his rest, he knew that he had done well, and that in the morning when he arose the Glory of the Garden would be awaiting him.

Once, when he was very tired in the heat of the day, he met the Master on one of the paths. "You have done well, Abdullah," said the Master, "so well that I can now send you out to teach others what you have learned; and some day you, too, shall be a Master Gardener."

So Abdullah became a Teacher of Gardeners, using as time went by tools far more wonderful than he had even dreamed of when he worked in his own garden. He went among other unskilled

"HOW READEST THOU?"

It is one thing to read the Bible through,
Another thing to read to learn and do.
Some read it with design to learn to read,
But to the subject pay but little heed.
Some read it as their duty once a week,
But no instruction from the Bible seek;
While others read it with but little care,
With no regard to how they read, nor where.
Some read to bring themselves into repute,
By showing others how they can dispute;
While others read because their neighbors do,
To see how long 'twill take to read it through.
Some read it for the wonders that are there,
How David killed a lion and a bear;
While others read it with uncommon care,
Hoping to find some contradictions there.
Some read as if it did not speak to them,
But to the people at Jerusalem.
One reads with father's specs upon his head,
And sees the thing just as his father said.
Some read to prove a preadopted creed,
Hence understand but little that they read;
For every passage in the book they bend
To make it suit that all-important end.
Some people read, as I have often thought,
To teach the book instead of being taught;
And some there are who read it out of spite.
I fear there are but few who read it right.
But read it prayerfully, and you will see,
Although men contradict, God's words agree;
For what the early Bible prophets wrote,
We find that Christ and His apostles quote.
So trust no creed that trembles to recall
What has been penned by one and verified by all.

—Unknown

gardeners as they worked—or more often lay on the grass in their gardens, playing with the sunbeams (as he had done so long ago), while the weeds grew thick around them.

Him, too, they called the King's Son, and he was infinitely patient with them, for he remembered so well how ignorant he had been long, long ago in his own garden, and how foolish he had been when he had loved most to lie on the grass and play with the sunbeams. □

—Prentiss Tucker