

THE FLOWER OF THE FLOCK

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The Flower of the Flock by Mrs. Ellen Ross

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MRS. ELLEN ROSS

**THE FLOWER
OF THE FLOCK**

THE FLOWER OF THE
FLOCK

BY
MRS. ELLEN ROSS

AUTHOR OF "A CANDLE LIGHTED BY THE LORD," "WINIFRED MARLIN,"
"LITTLE MOTHER MATTIE," ETC., ETC.



WILLIAM MULLAN AND SON
LONDON AND BELFAST

1879

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THE FLOWER OF THE FLOCK.

CHAPTER I.

A FRAGILE BUD.

SIMON KING sat cross-legged on a strong, much-used table, close to his work-room window, stitching away as became a busy tailor, and a husband and father with ten mouths to feed.

The room in which he sat, which was littered with paper patterns, cuttings of cloth, thread, etc., I call his work-room, although it was used for many other purposes besides sewing. It was originally intended to be the parlour of the house, and was in fact used as such when Simon began his married life, and required accommodation merely for his wife and himself; but as time went on, and the

inmates of the house increased at the rate of one every eighteen or twenty months, the parlour gradually merged into work-room, kitchen, nursery, and even bedroom.

Simon was always talking about leaving the place for a house better suited to their needs ; yet they remained on year after year in spite of its inconvenience, feeling both unable and unwilling to turn out and incur heavier expenses in a larger one.

“ Some of the bigger children will soon be out of the way,” said Mrs. King, “ and then there’ll be room enough ; and we’re well known and quite established here, and I like the old place that I came to the day I was married, and where all our children were born ; and I think I’m too much like a cat to be able to feel comfortable in a new house ; so we’ll just make shift with this somehow, and perhaps me and Simon ’ll be able to end our days here.”

“ But there are seven children come already,” said Simon, not looking quite so nappy as the man who hath his quiver full is expected to do ; “ and if the family

increases, we shall have to turn out, that's all about it, unless Dick and Fred soon find places out of doors."

"But the family won't increase," said Mrs. King, in a comforting tone; "and we're not so badly pushed for room, after all, now we've made this downstairs into a sleeping-room."

However the family increased, just one more, and that was all; and it happened that on the very day when I speak of Simon sitting near the window sewing, he was congratulated by his neighbours in being the father of eight living children instead of seven.

He looked anything but happy as he sat working away with needle and thread, and using his goose gently, as if afraid of disturbing the house by his work. He was thinking rather anxiously of the new responsibility added to his large share, and wondering whether it would be strong and healthy, or a sickly child to increase the burdens of his over-worked wife, who was a weakly woman.

Simon had a habit of foreboding, and

of looking at the darkest side of things generally. And just now, instead of thinking that a new blessing had been bestowed upon him, and being thankful for it, he was looking forward into the future with anxiety, and with many fears of many kinds, trying to carry the troubles of the next week, and month, and year, instead of being content with that small portion which a wise Providence had allotted to him for that particular day, and instead of having sufficient trust to save him from taking anxious thought for the morrow.

It was a lovely October day, and the warm afternoon sunshine was beginning to throw long shadows across the streets of the quiet little town in which Simon lived. The one in which his shop was situated was composed of a variety of buildings, ranging from the old-fashioned substantial private dwelling, and cosy thatched cottages, down to the modern shop with its plate-glass front. It was of course altogether irregular, but there was *a picturesqueness* about it which always