

**ALMOND BLOSSOM;
A COLLECTION OF
VERSE AND PROSE**

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Almond blossom; a collection of verse and prose by Various

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VARIOUS

**ALMOND BLOSSOM;
A COLLECTION OF
VERSE AND PROSE**

ALMOND BLOSSOM

ALMOND BLOSSOM

*A COLLECTION OF
VERSE AND PROSE*

WRITTEN BY
CHILDREN OF TORMEAD

UNIV. OF
CALIFORNIA

LONDON
SAMPSON LOW, MARSTON & CO., LTD.

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Almond Blossom, Almond Blossom,
Like a fairy's wing.
Almond Blossom, Almond Blossom
Frailest, sweetest thing;
Almond Blossom, Almond Blossom
The fair first bloom of Spring.

Joan Evans (10 years)

TO VIMU
AMBROLLAO

INTRODUCTION

Books for children are legion, books by them, few hence these few are of especial value to all who watch with care how children develop.

Some of the work has been circulated privately, and it is in response to oft-repeated requests that it is now placed before the public in the sincere hope that it may be useful as well as interesting.

I have always maintained that it is possible for the average child to write verse, and I think this little collection goes far to prove that statement. Few children are colour-blind; few are tone deaf; the great majority enjoy the sense of colour, and the sense of sound, and in the same ratio are those who can write verse.

No one is so unreasonable as to insist that only great geniuses—the Shakespeares, the Miltons, the Dantes—should attempt to write poetry. Why should the privilege of expressing in verse things which touch the heart be confined to those who have studied the laws of Prosody? Such limitations would rob alike writers and readers of an innocent delight. Nature has room for her windflowers and buttercups, as well as for her Cedars of Lebanon, and there is sometimes as much real pleasure to be derived from the study of simple, natural and often charming verse, as from the perusal of *Hamlet* or the *Divine Comedy*.

I am sure, too, that it is meet and fitting that children should write as these do. Even as they learn to speak before acquiring rules of grammar, so they should be permitted to sing before they are worried by metrical laws. Thus, a casual study of Part I will show that no attempt has been made to achieve form, though most of the work is rhythmic. In Part II, both form and metre has been more closely observed, especially by the elder girls, the old

French verse forms being the most favoured, and there are a few really charming examples of Triolet and Roundel which seem particularly to appeal to the children.

Many of the verses are beautifully true in their observation and expression of Nature in her various guises, as she might appear to the eye of a child. All who know the Silent Pool will recognise the force of the injunction:

“ Oh, hist! Ye there must softly tread
Where the silver birch sighs overhead—”

Who has not felt the fearful shiver of the Dawn Wind? Who does not know the hush of peace attained at the evening of a golden day? What more lovely farewell message than the voice of the “Snowdrops in the border—the laugh of a faery—the grey dawn on the sea,” could be imagined?

Perhaps the most striking poem in the collection is Z. Gauntlett’s “The Mourners.” In a little eight-line verse, this child has achieved something so beautiful, so naturally and spiritually true that one is left in wordless amaze. It possesses the simplicity of true art, in that no attempt is made to achieve effect, and no extraneous object is introduced. No great demand is made, and yet none of the “Woodland Folk” could possibly refuse the soft request:

“ Let them remember the one who is dead,
And gently pass.”

Was it the requiem of a bee or a pixie? and could a human who had departed to another sphere of action require anything more helpful from his kind than this sweet and gentle memory.

The younger children are progressing on the lines of the elder, and are using eyes and ears to gather lore from the Book of Nature in all her moods, from grave to gay. They see, as we who have grown older and less vivid do not see, the magic behind the sheen on the leaves, or the song of the birds or the light on the water. They know

what we have forgotten, that the light steps of faery folk may be followed into realms of wonder by all who are single of heart, and their little hands may gather the myrrh and frankincense which lies at the shrine of all fresh-born things, when every morning, Day, with the eternal amulet of youth on his brow, steps over the Eastern hills. Dear to their hearts are the Nature Myths, and the homely god of the soil figures evidently in their writings; but Pan is lord of human hearts, in a curious way, even as he is ruler of less animate nature, so it is an easy transition from field, wood and garden lore to the heart which feels and observes it. Thus it is, above all, requisite that eye, ear and touch should be trained to observe correctly and sensitively, and that imagination should be cultivated in the highest possible degree.

A white poppy in a field transformed to a white cloud in the sky is an imaginative achievement from an applied sight, no less than the dashing of waters and cutting of the wind may be seen to symbolise the treatment and usage of life. The velvet bee is the faery postman, perhaps, and is there any real reason why "Blue-eyed boys with lovely golden hair" should not be dressed like little angels above the clouds of the sky? No more fitting or beautiful resting-place could be desired than a couch covered with misty grey sheen, and composed of the rose-leaves of loving memory. It is not beyond the bounds of possibility that flowers may quarrel with their kind, violet envying daffodil, or crimson poppy scorning white.

To conclude, the work is untouched, except by the children themselves, and nearly all is voluntary, and the product of their spare time. Many of the titles have been my suggestion—which accounts for repetition of subjects—but even there the children are quite at liberty to alter or reject should they so desire, and a picture or a scene has often been chosen in preference to a "word title."

It may be thought that some of the selections should be excluded, but from the large quantity of material subjected to me I have tried to choose only that which seems

to me to hold promise of artistic development, be it only by a single line, or a half-caught rhythm; and even if these children never fulfil the suggestion of their infancy, they will, at least, have acquired something that is going to be of inestimable value to them throughout the whole course of their life: a seeing eye, an ear which hears, a sensitive touch, and an imaginative understanding of nature, humanity, and the Divine Plan of the universe which will go far to make them good citizens, and really helpful in the struggle which humanity is making through the darkness to the dawn.

They will have, too, an ingrained love and appreciation for good literature—because I am sure that the impressions of tender years are the ones which ultimately triumph—and this will be a help and consolation to them when they encounter the trials of life; and a source of pure joy for moments of leisured ease.

To those who teach: open the books of poetry to your children, and "Composition" will never again be a dull and tiresome lesson.

To parents: read the songs of the world to your children, and watch the sparkle of joy in their eyes, which cannot fail to light a corresponding one in yours.

To children: learn for yourselves what the golden-voiced singers of all the ages have to say to you, and remember poetry is as true as it is beautiful, as cheerful as it is wise, and as strong as it is tender. This is what Sir William Watson said of poetry, and I think it is the truest description in the shortest space, of that vast subject, that I know:

"Forget not, brother singer! that though Prose
Can never be too truthful or too wise,
Song is not Truth, not Wisdom; but the rose
Upon Truth's lips, the light in Wisdom's eyes."

TORMEAD,
GUILDFORD.

K. M. JOHNSTON.