



Father and Daughter

In a certain little market town in Guelderland, there lived more than a hundred years ago an upright and intelligent man named Jacob Rode. He had come there as a poor boy to learn the trade of gardening in the gardens of the castle of the Count of Terborg. His many excellent qualities of mind and heart, the readiness with which he set about everything he was asked to do, and it must be added, the frank and kindly expression of his face, attracted the attention of the noble family he served. He soon became a favourite with all its members and would be called upon to do many little duties in the castle. When the young Count, after finishing his studies, set out on his travels, Jacob was made one of his retinue. In the course of these wanderings the young man saw many strange cities and was brought in contact with people

of different countries and habits. This enabled him to enrich his understanding by a great variety of knowledge. By mixing with cultured people, he also learned how to speak well and improve his manners. This meant that on his return to Terborg, he gave pleasure to those who knew him by the evident good use he had made of his opportunities for educational purposes. As well as that he brought back a heart and mind unspoiled by their contact with the great world.

During all this time Jacob had greatly impressed his master. When they reached home one of the Count's first thoughts was how best to reward his servant for his diligence and loyalty; after some consideration he decided to offer him the stewardship of his palace in the capital, which was a position of great trust and importance. Jacob, however, had no desire to live in the city; he had seen enough of them, and longed for a quiet, useful life in the country.

It happened that just at this time a small property belonging to the Count became vacant; it was just the kind of house Jacob desired and so he asked his master to let him have it. The Count, eager to reward his faithful servant, granted his request; but he was more generous than Jacob could have

expected, for he allowed him to enjoy the place rent-free for as long as he lived, and in addition promised him as much corn and wood for his future household as would be required.

This to the humble-minded Jacob was a princely fortune, and enabled him to complete his happiness, as far as this world's goods are concerned, by marrying a virtuous young woman of Terborg with whom he was very much in love. His days now were spent in perfect calm and content. He rose early and worked late, tilling and taking care of his little property which was his for life. It consisted of a pleasant little house in the midst of a large garden, half of which was planted with fruit-trees, while the other half was laid out for vegetables.

After Jacob had lived many happy years with his wife, who was in every respect a most excellent woman, she was taken away from him by death. His pain at her loss was inexpressible. The good man, who was by this time getting old, aged visibly, and his hair grew daily whiter and whiter. Now, the only friend he had in the world was his daughter; she was the only one left of several children, and at her mother's death was but five years old. She was called Mary after her

mother, of whom she was in all things a perfect image.

Even as a child Mary was uncommonly pretty; but as she grew in years her piety, her innocence, her modesty, and her unfeigned kindness towards all she came in contact with, gave her beauty a rare and peculiar charm. Before she was fifteen years of age, she was able to take the entire charge of her father's house; and never was a home better cared for. In the bright little living-room there was never a speck of dust to be seen; the pots and pans in the kitchen shone as if new, and the whole house was a pattern of order and cleanliness. Besides attending to all these things indoors, Mary managed to find time to help her father with the work in the garden, and the hours she spent with him out-of-doors were amongst the happiest of her life. For the old man, who had enriched his mind with knowledge and wisdom, was able, by his instructive and entertaining conversation, to make labour a pleasure and delight.

Mary had grown up in the midst of plants and flowers. Her whole world was the garden. From her earliest childhood she showed the greatest delight in flowers. Her father, therefore, each year would search out

for her a few fresh seeds, roots, and cuttings. He would then allow her to plant these all round the edges of the beds in the garden. Mary loved to watch them grow. This was the occupation of her leisure hours, and it was the pleasantest of employments. Each little plant was tended with the greatest care; its growth and development were watched with increasing interest day by day, until, when the time came for the flower to unfold itself, her anxiety to see what it was like would almost get the better of her judgment; but, being schooled in self-restraint, she would wait with patience, and then, when the bud at last burst and disclosed the flower in all its beauty, her pleasure was indescribable.

Mary's father would say "Yours is a pure and innocent pleasure. Many parents give more shillings for jewellery and pretty dresses than I give pence for flower-seeds, and yet do not give their daughters one-half the pleasure that I give you."

What was more, for Mary fresh joys blossomed every month, even every week. Often she would exclaim in her delight: "The garden of the Castle itself can hardly be more beautiful than ours!"

It was indeed very beautiful, so beautiful that people as they passed by would stop

and admire, praising the garden and the gardener. And children, as they went to and fro, could not help lingering and longing as they looked through the fence at the rich array of flowers. If Mary happened to see them, she would often send them on their way with a sweet posy of blossoms to carry home.

The wise father, however, while rejoicing to see his daughter take so deep a delight in flowers, knew how to turn her pleasure to a higher purpose. He taught her to see and admire in the beauty of flowers the unvarying goodness, wisdom, and omnipotence of God. He was accustomed to devote the first hour of the morning to devotion; and in order that the day's work need not be interfered with, he rose an hour earlier than his labour required. It was in his opinion that his life would be worth little if he could not spend an hour, or at least half an hour with his almighty God. So in silent prayer and meditation he would prepare for his daily work.

In the beautiful spring and summer mornings he would take Mary with him to a little arbour at the end of the garden, where, amid the songs of birds, they could sit and look upon the garden, rich with

blossoms and sparkling with dew, and upon a far-reaching landscape bathed in the golden rays of the morning sun. Here he conversed with her about God, who causes the sun to shine, and sends the fertilizing rain and dew, who feeds the birds of the air and clothes the flowers of the field in such regal beauty. Here he taught her to know the Almighty God as the loving Father of all men. He told her about the Almighty Father who draws us to him and wins our love through his beloved and only begotten Son. Here Jacob taught his daughter to pray by kneeling with her and yielding up his soul in heartfelt prayer. This all contributed greatly towards planting in Mary's heart the seeds of piety and devotion.

Mary's favourite flowers were the violet, the lily and the rose. Jacob loved to point to them as emblems of the virtues most becoming to a woman. In early March when she brought the first violet to him and joyfully called upon to admire it, he said: "Let the modest violet, my dear Mary, be to you an image of humility. Let it remind you of the benefits of doing good in secret. The violet clothes itself in the tender colours of modesty; it prefers to bloom in shaded, secret corners; it fills the air with its fragrance while remaining hidden

beneath the leaves. May you also, my dear Mary, be like the retiring violet, avoiding vain display, not seeking to attract the public eye, but preferring to do good in quiet and peace."

One morning when the roses and lilies were in full bloom, and the garden appeared in its richest array, Jacob said to his daughter, as he pointed to a beautiful lily, which was beaming in the morning sun:

"Let the lily, my dear child, be to you the emblem of purity. Look how beautiful, how pure and fair it is! The whitest linen is as nothing compared with the purity of its petals; they are like the snow. Happy is the young woman whose heart is as pure and as free from stain! But the purest of all colours is also the hardest to preserve pure. The petal of the lily is easily soiled; touch it carelessly or roughly and a stain is left behind. In the same way a word, or a thought may stain the purity of innocence!"

Then pointing to a rose he said, "Let the rose, my dear Mary, be to you an emblem of modesty. More beautiful than the colour of the rose is the blush that rises to the cheek of a modest girl. It is a sign that she is still pure of heart and innocent of thought. Happy is the young girl who blushes at even the

suggestion of a wrong or impure thought. This means that she is put on her guard against the approach of danger.”

Jacob plucked several roses and lilies, tied them together in a bunch, and gave them to Mary, with the words:

“The lily and the rose, sister flowers as they are, belong one to the other. They are both incomparable in their beauty, they are made even more lovely by being together. In the same way, my dear child innocence and modesty cannot be separated. Yes, God designed that modesty should be the constant and faithful sister of innocence. Modesty preserves Innocence and protects it from danger. Remain modest, my beloved daughter, and you will also remain innocent. May your heart be ever pure like the snow-white lily, and your cheeks will ever resemble the rose in beauty.”

Among the many fruit-trees that adorned the garden there was one that was prized above all the others. It was an apple tree, not much larger than a rose bush, and stood by itself in a bed in the middle of the garden. Mary’s father had planted it on the day that she was born, and every year it bore a number of beautiful golden apples. Once it blossomed earlier than usual and with

unusual luxuriance. The tree was one mass of blossom. Mary was so delighted with it that she went every morning as soon as she was dressed to look at it.

Once, when it was in full bloom, she called to her father and said:

“Look, Father, how beautiful! Was there ever such a lovely mingling of red and white! The whole tree looks like one huge bunch of flowers!”

The next morning she hastened into the garden to feast her eyes once more upon the tree. But what was her grief to see that the frost had nipped it and destroyed all its flowers. They had all become brown and yellow, and when the sun came forth in its strength they withered and fell to the ground. Mary wept bitter tears at the sight.

Mary’s father turned to her and said: “This is how sinful pleasure destroys the bloom of youth. Always remember, Mary, how dreadful it is to be seduced from the right path! This apple tree is an example of what would happen if you were to wander from the way. Mary, up to now your life shows much promise. If this promise was not fulfilled, if you wandered away from the right way, life would have no joys for

me. With tears in my eyes I should go down sorrowfully to my grave!"

As he spoke tears pricked his eyes. Mary was deeply moved. His words made so profound an impression upon her she never forgot them.

Under the eyes of a loving and wise father, and amid the flowers of her garden, Mary grew daily in stature and intelligence - blooming as a rose, pure as a lily, modest and retiring as a violet, and as full of promise as a tree laden with blossom.

Jacob was always happy to see how his hard work was rewarded by the fruits of his garden. But his true happiness was when he looked upon the pious heart and mind of his beloved daughter!