

FOR CHILDREN

Monarch butterfly caterpillar. K. Williams



A Lesson of Faith



Monarch butterfly. K. Williams

LET ME HIRE YOU as a nurse for my poor children," said a butterfly to a quiet caterpillar, who was strolling along a cabbage leaf in her odd, lumbering fashion.

"See these little eggs," continued the butterfly, "I do not know how long it will be before they come to life, and I feel very sick. If I should die, who will take care of my baby butterflies when I am gone? Will you, kind, mild, green caterpillar? They cannot, of course, live on your rough food. You must give them early dew, and honey from the flowers, and you must let them fly about only a little way at first. Dear me! it is a sad pity that you cannot fly yourself. Dear, dear! I cannot think what made me come and lay my eggs on a cabbage leaf! What a place for young butterflies to be born upon! Here, take this gold-dust from my wings as a reward. Oh, how dizzy I am! Caterpillar! you will remember about the food..."

And with these words the butterfly drooped her wings and died. The green caterpillar, who had not had the opportunity of even saying "yes" or "no" to the request, was left standing alone by the side of the butterfly's eggs.

"A pretty nurse she has chosen, indeed, poor lady!" exclaimed she, "and a pretty business I have in hand. Why did she ever ask a poor crawling creature like me to bring up her dainty little ones? Much they'll mind me, truly, when they feel the gay wings on their backs, and can fly away."

However, the poor butterfly was dead, and there lay the eggs on the cabbage leaf, and the green caterpillar had a kind heart, so she resolved to do her best.

"But two heads are better than one," said she; "I will consult some wise animal on the matter."

Then she thought and thought till at last she thought of the lark, and she fancied that because he went up so high, and nobody knew where he went to, he must be very clever and know a great deal.

Now in the neighboring cornfield there lived a lark, and the caterpillar sent a message to him, begging him to come and talk to her. When he came she told him all her difficulties, and asked him how she was to feed and rear the little butterfly creatures.

"Perhaps you will be able to inquire and learn something about it the next time you go up high," said the caterpillar timidly.

"Perhaps I can," answered the lark, and then he went singing upwards into the bright, blue sky, till the green caterpillar could not hear a sound, nor could she see him any more. So she began to walk round the butterfly's eggs, nibbling a bit of the cabbage leaf now and then as she moved along.

"What a time the lark has been gone!" she cried at last. "I wonder where he is just now? He must have flown higher than usual this time. How I should like to know where he goes, and what he hears in that curious blue sky! He always sings going up and coming down, but he never lets any secret out."

And the green caterpillar took another turn round the butterfly's eggs.

At last the lark's voice began to be heard again. The caterpillar almost jumped for joy, and it was not long before she saw her friend descend with hushed note to the cabbage bed.

"News, news, glorious news, friend caterpillar,"

sang the lark, "but the worst of it is, you won't believe me"

"I believe anything I am told," said the caterpillar hastily.

"Well, then, first of all, I will tell you what those little creatures are to eat," and the lark nodded his head toward the eggs. "What do you think it is to be? Guess."

"Dew and honey out of the flowers, I am afraid!" sighed the caterpillar. "No such thing, my good friend," cried the lark exultantly. "You are to feed them with cabbage leaves."

"Never!" said the caterpillar indignantly.

"It was their mother's last request that I should feed them on dew and honey."

"Their mother knew nothing about the matter," answered the lark. "But why do you ask me, and then disbelieve what I say? You have neither faith nor trust."

"Oh, I believe everything I am told," said the caterpillar.

"Nay, but you do not," replied the lark. "Why, caterpillar, what do you think those little eggs will turn out to be?"

"Butterflies, to be sure," said the caterpillar.

"Caterpillars," sang the lark, "and you'll find it out in time." And the lark flew away.

"I thought the lark was wise and kind," said the mild, green caterpillar to herself, once more beginning to walk round the eggs, "but I find that he is foolish and saucy instead. Perhaps he went up too high this time. How I wonder what he sees, and what he does up yonder."

"I would tell you if you would believe me," sang the lark, descending once more.

"I believe everything I am told," answered the caterpillar.

"Then I'll tell you something else," cried the lark. "You will one day be a butterfly yourself."

"Wretched bird," exclaimed the caterpillar, "you are making fun of me. You are now cruel as well as foolish. Go away. I will ask your advice no more."

"I told you you would not believe me," cried the lark.

"I believe everything I am told," persisted the caterpillar, "everything that it is reasonable to believe. But to tell me that butterflies' eggs are

caterpillars, and that caterpillars leave off crawling and get wings and become butterflies....Lark, you do not believe such nonsense yourself. You know it is impossible."

"I know no such thing," said the lark. "When I hover over the cornfields, or go up into the depths of the sky, I see so many wonderful things that I know there must be more. O caterpillar, it is because you crawl, and never get beyond your cabbage leaf, that you call anything impossible."

"Nonsense," shouted the caterpillar, "I know what's possible and what's impossible. Look at my long, green body, and many legs, and then talk to me about having wings. Fool!"

"More foolish you," cried the indignant lark, "to attempt to reason about what you cannot understand. Do you not hear how my song swells with rejoicing as I soar upwards to the mysterious wonder-world above? Oh, caterpillar, what comes from thence I receive on trust."

"What do you mean by that?" asked the caterpillar.

"On faith," answered the lark.

"How am I to learn faith?" asked the caterpillar.

At that moment she felt something at her side. She looked round. Eight or ten little green caterpillars were moving about, and had already made a hole in the cabbage-leaf. They had broken from the butterfly's eggs!

Shame and amazement filled the green caterpillar's heart, but joy soon followed. For as the first wonder was possible, the second might be so too.

"Teach me your lesson, lark," she cried.

And the lark sang to her of the wonders of the earth below and of the heaven above. And the caterpillar talked all the rest of her life of the time when she should become a butterfly.

But no one believed her. She nevertheless had learned the lark's lesson of faith, and when she was going into her chrysalis, she said: "I shall be a butterfly some day!"

But her relations thought her head was wandering, and they said, "Poor thing!"

And when she was a butterfly, and was going to die she said: "I have known many wonders, I have faith, I can trust even now for the wonder that shall come next." □

—Margaret Scott Gatty