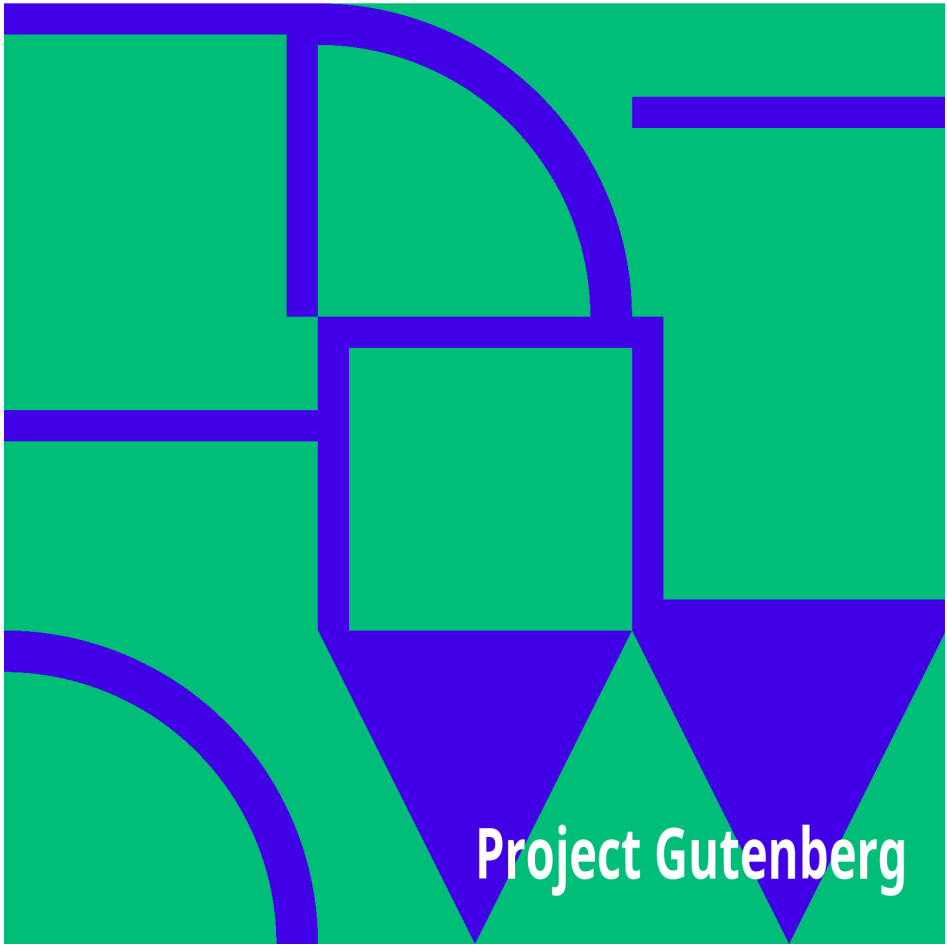
Piccolissima

Adélaïde de Montgolfier



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PICCOLISSIMA

BY

MRS. FOLLEN

With illustrations by Gammatt Billings and others

PREFACE.

This little story I have translated from the French of Mademoiselle Montgolfier. If children enjoy it as much as I have, and think it as pretty, they will not regret that I have preferred it to any thing I could write for them.

Mademoiselle Montgolfier says in her preface to the little book, "Notwithstanding the fanciful character of this story, it is, in fact, simply a little lesson in Natural History," and that "she would engage for the truth of all that Piccolissima relates of the manners and customs of the insects with whom she makes acquaintance."

It may also interest our young, and, perhaps, our more advanced readers, to know, that Mademoiselle Montgolfier is the daughter of the celebrated Montgolfier who invented balloons, and made the first ascension. I had, when in France, the pleasure of seeing this very interesting lady, and know her affection for children; and I am sure that it will please her to know that her tiny naturalist is welcomed by the American children. I therefore feel a particular pleasure in introducing the wonderfully small Piccolissima to their acquaintance, and recommending her to their affectionate regard.

E. L. F.
BROOKLINE, October, 1857.

PICCOLISSIMA.

Piccolissima was descended on the father's side from the famous Tom Thumb, so well known to all children. On the mother's side, her lineage was no less distinguished. Mignonette Littlepin (this was the family name of Madam Tom Thumb) was the great granddaughter of the wonderful Princess, who once lodged in a spectacle case, out of which she came so splendidly attired that the brilliancy of her little person illuminated all surrounding objects. A trustworthy biographer tells us that nothing occurred in the history of Mr. and Mrs. Tom Thumb to disgrace their illustrious parentage, and they were considered none the less good citizens because they were rather smaller than other people.

In the mean while, however, our humble couple became suddenly celebrated by the birth of our heroine; this small creature was so delicate, so exquisite, so pretty, and so lively and full of spirit, that from the age of two years she became the object of general admiration. She was not more than one inch in height, and her mother, who had prepared the cradle and baby linen for a child of the usual size, was puzzled to know what to do. Finally, the half of a cocoanut shell, lined, and furnished with soft cushions of thistle down, made a good bed for the little wonder; and the nursery maid, wife of a neighboring clockmaker, and a person of ingenuity, conceived the admirable idea of suspending the cocoanut cradle from the pendulum of a great clock, in order that the infant might be rocked all the time. Madam Tom Thumb was enchanted with the invention. She adhered to the old-fashioned notions, and could not suppose it possible that her little one could sleep without rocking. What the good little mother found the most trouble from, in the extreme smallness and delicacy of the limbs of her new-born doll baby, was the impossibility of swathing and dressing it. So she was forced to resign herself to doing as the birds do, and bring up her little one on a bed of moss and down. She hardly dared to put upon the little

arm, smaller than her own little finger, a little shift made of the fine white skin of the inside of an eggshell. The boots of the little one had soles cut out of the inside husks of the corn; a poppy leaf made her an ample bonnet. The spider's web which the dew whitens, and the wind winds up in balls, seemed too coarse too weave her sheets with, and the cup of an acorn was big enough for Piccolissima. Her parents obtained all her wardrobe, and all the small furniture for her use from those thousands of skilful laborers, so adroit, and yet of whom we think so little, who hide themselves in all the walls, in the leaves of the trees turned up like horns, under the bark of the trees; in short, that are found in all the corners and crevices of creation.

Mr. and Mrs. Tom Thumb were not people who could be astonished. Simple themselves, every thing appeared simple to them. Mrs. Mignonette was at first a little disconcerted at finding that a drawer of baby linen which she had taken so much pains to make was of no use, and that one of the stockings which she had knit was big enough for her child to get into. But, when she was convinced that the baby could do just as well without stockings, and that the cushions of thistle down were sufficient to keep it warm, she was no longer troubled, and she said to her neighbors, who were eager to see her little wonder, "It is very natural that the little one should be so very delicate; from the first we called it Piccolissima; then, neither Mr. Tom Thumb nor I are very large; and I am told that our ancestors were still more delicately formed; what then is more natural than that this little one should be such a wee wee thing?"

The tranquillity of Mrs. Tom Thumb had this good effect; it appeased the curiosity of the neighbors. At last, like her, they came to the conclusion "that it was very natural that the child was smaller than the mother." and all went on as usual around our heroine, while she was quietly rocked by the passing hours, and was amused with the sound of the silver clock bell. When, however, Piccolissima was two inches high,

and lively as a grasshopper, she became restless in her cocoanut shell; she was desirous to get out of it, to walk, and to jump, and she not only deranged the clock, but she was in real danger.

She was now as much as seven years old, and she amused herself with all sorts of little pranks, and loving ways, with one of her brothers eighteen months old. The great boy, in a sort of ecstasy at some of the drolleries of his little sister, seized her and put her in his mouth, taking into it nearly the whole head of the poor little thing. Her cry was so shrill that the baby boy opened his jaws and let the unfortunate Piccolissima fall on the floor. She did not recover for a long time from this fall. Another time, a large cat, a great mouser, ran after her, and it was with difficulty they rescued Piccolissima from the claws of Raminagrobis. The father, Mr. Thumb, could not repress some anxiety about the fate of his amiable daughter, who had more than common intelligence, and who, by her extreme smallness, was exposed to so many dangers.

Piccolissima did her best to acquire knowledge. She had the best intentions in the world; she desired in every thing to please all who approached her; but her extreme restlessness led her away in spite of herself. One evening she lost herself in the solitude of a drawer in which was kept some tobacco; she came near dying from the effect of it. Once she was near drowning in a superb salad dish of frothed eggs, which she may have taken for snow mountains. She had a passion for discovery, she had a prodigious activity of mind and body, and yet they could find nothing for her to do, "because," they said, "she is so little, so delicate." She could not play with children of her own age, she was not allowed to run about, and without object, without employment, without means of studying, with no companions, no sympathy, the poor little thing was in danger of falling into a state of apathy, more to be feared than the accidents from which they wished to preserve her.

One day, towards the end of February, Piccolissima had been placed upon the mantelpiece. Her mother had gone out; her father, who did not wish to have the trouble of watching over all his little daughter's

movements, seated her upon a pincushion in which there were no pins, and putting the dictionary as a sort of rampart before her, he gave her a stick of barley sugar to entertain herself with, and after the usual admonition, left her to her dreams. Leaving the sugar to slip down by her side, she remained lost in melancholy reflections from which she was drawn by a light murmur, such as one hears sometimes in the silence of the night when persons are speaking in a low voice in a distant part of the house. Piccolissima listened with deep attention for some time. Usually she disliked the sound of conversation; it struck harshly on her organs, and seemed a sort of mimic thunder; but these sounds had nothing discordant, nothing disagreeable in them, to her ear. As Piccolissima had been forced to observe rather than to act, her faculties took a new direction, and a development of which she was unconscious herself took place, and her joy and her surprise were great when she found that, in what had at first appeared to her a confused murmur, she distinguished, as she listened attentively, intelligible words.

"It was hardly worth while," said a small, sharp voice, "it was hardly worth the trouble it cost me to leave my cradle. I have come into the world where all is dead around me. Ah! if I had only known that this world was so cold and dull, I should not have made efforts which almost destroyed me, to break the roof and leave my narrow house."

"Patience," replied another voice, a little quieter, but much like the other; "I have lived longer than thou, who art only a few seconds old. I have learned that one minute does not resemble another; that cold is near to heat, that light is near to darkness, and that sweet follows bitter. It is now two hundred and twenty-one thousand, seven hundred and sixty-one minutes, and twenty-four seconds, since I broke my shell. This sun, which you now see so pale in the dusk, glowed then with more fervor, and sent every where more rays and sparkles than I can count seconds in my long life. I was all wet as you are now—poor, helpless thing; but I turned myself to some of those brilliant rays, and my wings directly became strong, as you now see them, embossed and painted

with seven different, changing colors, reflections of the rays of the sun. See! there is one of these rays now; come forth; spread thy moist wing, already shrunk and chill; thou shalt take thy part in the blessings which come from on high."

Piccolissima, all attention and full of curiosity, looked around her, and saw coming out from the window frame two flies, who appeared to be talking together. The wings of one of them remained stuck together on its back, and it made a great effort to extend them. Delighted at the discovery of companions in her solitude, companions, too, whose language she could understand, Piccolissima was eager to make their acquaintance; so she offered them her stick of candy. One of the flies—it was the elder—having fixed upon the little prodigy one of the thousand faces of his brown, sparkling eyes, surrounded with golden eyelashes, he then placed, one by one, his little black feet upon the stick of sugar candy, stretched forth his trunk, and began to suck with eagerness.

Piccolissima had now time enough to contemplate a being whose organs she thought were like her own in their weakness. She found pleasure in examining the extraordinary form of its almost cylindrical body, divided into three parts, and a head wider than it was long, an irregular globe surmounted by two horns, or antennae, as they are called. The eyes most excited her curiosity. She attempted to count their numerous little faces, so regular, so finely cut into hexagons, more polished, more brilliant than diamonds. When Piccolissima had counted one hundred, she drew from a very small box, which was a family treasure, some minikin pins, and stuck one of them into the cushion on which she was seated, intending thus to mark every hundred that she counted; but she had not counted thus half a thousand, before she found that breath and knowledge failed her; in truth, she did not know enough of arithmetic to count the eyes of a fly. In the very first group which she undertook to count, that on the right side of the fly, she had not counted a sixteenth part. Piccolissima, from her education, resembled the flies a little too much to boast of her perseverance. So she gave up her project.

While bending her small head over these eyes, she distinguished, at the bottom of these crystals, a moving dark spot, and thousands of little Piccolissimas, one after the other, smiled upon her from these little mirrors. O, wonderful! these thousands of crystal groups on each side of the head were not all; a triangle of three diamonds crowned the forehead of the fly. Piccolissima did not know the name they give to these small eyes, nor that a writer on the subject had said, that the diadem of the fly outshines that of queens, but she could not refrain from saying aloud, "O, my little friend, pray tell me what you do with so many eyes?"

"What do I do with them, indeed! why, I look," answered the fly, a little vexed at being disturbed in his repast. "Are there not fingers, nails, pins, pincers, jaws, claws, beaks, which menace me on every side? Do I not want eyes to see at a distance, and eyes to see near? And do you not know that my head is better put on than yours, which cannot turn to all points of the compass?"

"What! can you look behind you without turning your head?" replied Piccolissima, with an air which probably appeared to the fly not very sensible; for, shrugging up his right wing disdainfully, he returned to his sugar candy.

After a little reflection, she looked down again, and perceived, to her great astonishment, upon the stick of candy, which was of an amber color, a drop of water. She was sure, however, that she had done the civil thing to the flies, and given it to them first. How, then, was the candy moist? thought she; but she did not dare again to ask questions which excited such a rude buzzing in reply. So she rested her two little elbows on her knees, and her small head upon one of her hands, and continued to examine the fly. "Is it his nose?" said she, in a low voice, (for, having very rarely any one to talk with, she had a habit of talking to herself,) "is it his nose that he stretches out thus upon my sugar? I have heard papa say that there are animals, much larger than he, and which they call

elephants, I think, who take up with their noses all the food they put in their mouths, and that they call this nose a trunk. Perhaps this is a little person of the family of elephants."

Piccolissima had hardly uttered these words, when the fly, whose antennae were longer than usual, and were turned towards the little prattler, gave such a leap that Mademoiselle Tom Thumb trembled. The wings of the insect fluttered, and made a little sharp noise, which, however, had nothing terrible in it, and Piccolissima perceived that her companion was laughing. It was evident that the fly must laugh with his wings, because he could not laugh in any other way. It was with his antennae that he had listened; they evidently served him as ears; and, when he recovered his gravity, he flew on the little girl's hand, and began to talk with her; then Piccolissima observed him more intelligently.

"It appears to me, little pet," said the fly, "thou must be very green to compare my delicate trunk, this instrument so nicely made, with the enormous and coarse cylinder upon which, in hot weather, I have often travelled. How can any one suppose that I have any relationship to the deformed and gigantic monster of which you have just now spoken?"

Piccolissima thought that the little person was not wanting in vanity, and, while the fly was taking breath, observed that the trunk had disappeared, and that there was no possibility of discovering what the insect had done with it. The look, gloomy, and a little sullen, of the fly, recalled somewhat the funny mask of a harlequin, and Piccolissima was on the point of showing how one laughs with the lips, by laughing in the fly's face, when the latter forced air slightly through the breathing holes which open under the wings; the two little double scales, the winglets, which unfold at birth, began to vibrate; and Piccolissima, who just now remarked that this was the method that her new acquaintance took to emit sounds, was eager to listen to what he might say; so she made an effort to command herself, and became serious.

"Do you not see, with your dull human intelligence, that my trunk is a pump, a hollow tube, an instrument for sucking which I stretch out and draw in at my pleasure?"

While speaking thus, the fly thrust half way out from the cavity in the middle of his head, just under his eyes, a trunk with two or three joints in it; at the end was an opening like two black lips, folded over, with grooves or little hollows. The fly, thus urged to show the use of his trunk, or, more probably, forgetting the sequel of a discourse upon which he had entered in such a pompous style, flew upon the sugar, and set himself again to sucking it.

Piccolissima again observed the little drops fall which she had noticed before. It seems that the fly, being only able to take up liquids through his trunk, wetted and dissolved the sugar that he might suck it up. It was a pleasant thing to see his lips swell out, and press, handle, and knead, as it were, the amber surface of the sugar in order to make it melt sooner, and enable him to draw it up faster. After having examined all these proceedings for some time, with great amusement, the little apprentice naturalist cried out, "Well, my little guest has a remarkable talent for eating barley sugar."

The other fly, timid, wet, and with his wings folded, so that he seemed naked, remained behind upon the frame of the window. "Come, poor little wet chicken as thou art," cried the elder fly; "thou wast complaining just now of having found in life only discomfort and cold; dost thou not see these rays of the sun? dost thou not perceive the perfume of this delicious food?" The young, inexperienced fly was disposed to take Piccolissima, the dictionary, and the barley sugar for a chain of mountains. However, when the little girl turned her gentle, child-like face towards him, the insect felt the pleasant warmth of her breath; it reanimated him, and gave him courage, and with one bound he flew upon the arm of Piccolissima. With a sudden familiarity he murmured in a low voice, "Art thou, perhaps, an elder sister of mine? Thou warmest me. Art thou placed in the sun to strengthen thy wings? Relate to me,

quickly, thy metamorphosis whilst I dry myself. Let us see, hast thou been a caterpillar, a worm? How many feet didst thou once have? I will lay a wager thou didst not have any. For me, I had three rows of feet, forty-two in all, at least. Come, then, speak, and tell me; answer my question."

Usually Piccolissima did not require to be urged to speak; but these questions were of such an extraordinary nature, so unexpected, that the little girl remained silent. "Whether I have been a caterpillar or a worm? A queer question at the commencement of an acquaintance."

In the mean time the questioner was silent. Occupied with the comfort of exposing all his little person to the sun, he extended his wings, which, intersected with nerves, became every moment more substantial, without losing any of their delicacy. This transparent network, divided like stained glass windows, by dark lines, resembled isinglass, sometimes decomposing the sun's rays, and showing the colors of the rainbow.

The head of the insect, as it dried, became shiny like satin; the eyes, of a reddish brown, glowed in a circle of silver. Over a little jet band, on the top of his head, three little soft eyes peeped out like those which the young observer had already noticed in the other fly. The brown trunk of this one seemed more delicate; his bronze corselet, reflecting like emerald, was garnished with fine hairs, like the down which the fresh morning spreads over beautiful fruits. The belly of the insect, which showed itself between and through the transparent wings, was of a beautiful shining black set off by six white crescents, symmetrically placed on the right and left. The legs appeared to Piccolissima brown, and very delicate. As she examined them, she remembered that the young boaster had vaunted itself of having forty-two of them; and she was upon the point of venturing to inquire what had become of the superfluous ones, when the lively fly, finding itself dry and strengthened, raised two of its legs and examined them very closely, and crossing them with great dexterity rubbed the soles of his feet one against the other.

Piccolissima was tempted so to call the two balls of flesh covered with hair, and armed with two nails which terminated the foot bones. The fly, having cleaned his brushes or sponges,—for they were as much like one as the other,—employing his trunk very skilfully, began to rub them over and under his wings, and over his little face, his eyes, and his antennae. He combed, brushed, sponged, and cleaned himself all over. Hardly had he finished one side before he began upon the other, using those of his six feet which were the most convenient. At last, he seemed weary of being watched by Piccolissima; and, shaking himself, he just grazed the eyelids of the little girl with his wings, and all of a sudden flew away, and alighted on the window pane, where he marched backward and forward with his head now up, and now down, quite indifferent to the laws of gravity.

Piccolissima followed him with her eyes with less surprise than curiosity; not being able to contain herself any longer, she determined to speak to the old fly.

"How does your companion contrive to walk with his head down in that way?"

The old fly, satiated with sugar, turned half round to the right, and with one spring placed himself opposite the little girl, and stared at her with such a stupefied look, that Piccolissima, although her good sense refused to believe it, thought for a moment that the ten or twelve thousand eyes were all fixed on her, forgetting, in her confusion at being thus stared at, that though each eye had thousands of faces to mirror all surrounding objects, still there was behind them all only one power of seeing, only one fly.

"What matters it, in the name of all that is sweet in the world? Of what consequence is it, when one walks, whether the head is on one side or the other, up or down? Poor infirm creature that thou art," said the fly; "dost thou see any difference?"

Piccolissima, somewhat mortified at having always walked with her head upward, remained stupefied and silent. It seems necessary, thought she, that every surface, in whatever direction it is placed, should have the same power to attract and support the feet of the flies as the ground and the floor to retain mine.

Ignorant as she was, the little girl had not yet heard of the gummy liquid which the wise ones had at one time supposed to be placed in the sponges of the flies, nor of the vacuum, by means of which the learned of the present day suppose these little cushions can adhere to the most polished surfaces; and she had not yet seen flies enough to form any opinion for herself.

"I see," said the little girl, in a small flute voice, "that you know much more than I; do not refuse, then, to instruct me. I cannot explain how it is you speak and breathe. Since you have kept your trunk in its case, I perceive above it your lips closed, and I do not see them move." Piccolissima, fearing she might be laughed at, did not dare to add, that she had supposed that the voice of the fly came from under his wings.

"I speak as all well-formed people speak," answered the haughty insect, "with four voices;" and four puffs of air issued from the oval breathing holes on both sides of his breast, giving a tremulous motion to his two little egg-shell wings, his two balance wings, and the roots of his two other wings. "I breathe through these openings of my corselet, and I have, in order to enable me to take in the inspiring air which was created to bear me up, as many mouths as rings to my corselet."

He then swelled out with a proud air his brown abdomen, which seemed formed of rings of shell; and while he was indulging in the admiration of himself and his powers, the sharp eyes of Piccolissima discovered that these circles were not, as we should say, soldered together, but were lying on a flexible membrane, or thin skin, which held them in their place, and which was folded up or extended at the will of the insect. On either side, between each ring, there was in this

membrane a little oval hole, smaller than those which, near the cavities of the corselet, emitted and modulated the buzzing sound which Piccolissima had just heard; these openings enabled the insect to breathe.

"You have many ways of speaking," the little girl said at last, with a sigh; "but covered as you are all over with brilliant armor, how can you touch any thing?"

The fly, who was at this moment digesting his dinner, and who did not like any interruption in any of his affairs, put forth his trunk without making any reply, shook a little the small beard that grew upon it, did the same with his antennae, rounded at the ends like little cushions, and furnished with feathery hair; then stretched forth his legs, as if yawning. Piccolissima comprehended that the two little cushions which ornamented the extreme end of the foot of the fly, in which she counted five joints, might easily possess the sense of touch, and that this also rendered them more useful for motion, and for the toilet; it was like so many intelligent brushes, all ready to perceive and sweep away the least grain of dust. The little beards she also thought might have the power of taste, like the antennae, at the same time that they listened to sounds.

"This young fly is doubtless your son," said Piccolissima to the insect which had taken his place on her neck, in order that the warmth might help digestion, without asking whether or not his nails might tickle the little girl.

"What! hast thou not seen directly that we were not relations? but I see how it is; I pity you, poor imperfect being with only two eyes and one mouth, and no trunk," answered the fly. "It is natural that thou hast only a superficial knowledge. This little upstart who devours the sugar as if he did not mean to leave any of it for any one else, this little person, who has but a few minutes ago escaped from his shell, yet hanging to a dead rose leaf long since forgotten as it lay there on the window, has not, as I have, four beautiful black streaks on his corselet. The white spots on his

back offend the eye; I prefer the modest color of my brown rings, and the soft shade of the color of the faded leaf on a portion of my wings does not contribute less to the majesty of my aspect than the colored feathers which ornament my antennae. As for me, I am the domestic fly."

"I was wrong not to have remarked the differences which strike me now," said the child; "but what does this young scapegrace mean by what he says of metamorphoses, and countless legs?"

"Yes, yes; that is well known; his race lives upon hairy prey; in my opinion there is nothing to boast of in that. Although thou knowest, it seems to me, very few things, still I think thou art not ignorant, of course, that parents place their offspring where it is best. The mother of this fly of the rose bush laid her egg in the midst of the flock which was to nourish her little one. This one came into the world in the shape of a worm."

"Why dost thou shudder?" grumbled angrily the fly. "This form is as good as any other; call this worm larva if it suits thy fancy; he has still to each of his fourteen rings three little feet; but he has not such elegant members as mine, a haunch, a thigh, a leg, and an instep with five joints." While speaking, the old fly displayed pompously one of his legs, which he began immediately to caress with the edge of his lips, because he saw a grain of dust on one of the small hairs.

"But," perseveringly asked Piccolissima, who wished to hear the history of the fly to the end, "who are these little flocks in the midst of which your friend has passed his early days?"

"They are the little red or green grubs which infest the rose bush; these he pierces and grinds up with his teeth, and sucks them up with his strange mouth one after another as he moves slowly among them upon those forty-two roots of feet, of which he is so vain, for I maintain that they cannot be called legs, or any thing like legs."

"You, then," said the little girl, "have better formed members."

The fly, who remembered that he had not at all better limbs, looked suddenly wearied with the conversation, and shaking his wings, flew away to the window.

"Of what color were you formerly?" asked the little girl of her only remaining companion; "you, who are now of such a pretty shade of brilliant green and bronze?"

"Me! I was of a pretty tender green. Weary of living on the ground, I took the resolution to retire from the world. I shut myself up in my skin, which soon became hard enough to serve for my retreat. My house was carried, I know not how, to that spot not far from you; I know not what artificial heat acted on me. I came to the belief that the time had come for me to spread my wings, and I uncovered the roof of my house in order that I might know what had been done during my absence. They call me the rose fly."

As he finished saying these words, the fly, quite satisfied, joined his companion in the window. Piccolissima was grieved that she could not follow them; she listened attentively to the noise they made in flying, and could distinguish musical tones. But, fatigued at last by this long tension of her mind, gradually her ideas became vague and wandering, her little blond head fell upon her arms, and she dropped asleep and dreamed.

She dreamed that her two new friends, the flies, returned, accompanied by an innumerable troop of winged insects. Each one carried something, one a blade of grass, another a stalk of a plant, another a petal, another a pistil. Two large beetles, with immense horns or talons, dragged along small branches loaded with flowers, such as Piccolissima had never seen.

All this troop set themselves to work and constructed the most charming, the lightest little aerial car that one can possibly imagine. A great fly, bristling with fine hairs, extended four strong wings, and

raising his voice, invited Piccolissima to mount, and at the same time politely offered her his paw.

The little girl accepted the invitation, and found herself immediately transported into the corolla of a beautiful white lily. There she found a throne prepared for her. Very skilful little paws lightly tickled her arms, and then her feet, in order to call her attention to the labors of invisible waiting maids, who were about dressing her in a robe of white velvet, cut out of the petals of a white camellia, confined round the waist by a turquoise clasp, borrowed from the myosotis.

A stamen of the lily served her for a sceptre; she took her seat; a rose leaf hung for a canopy over her head; the bells of the lily of the valley and the campanula sent forth their joyous chime. The bladder senna filled the air with the noise of its bursting petards. The artillery of the prickly furze played on both sides of the throne as the nations of flies approached to pay their homage to the queen.

To the cries of vivat, uttered with enthusiasm, Piccolissima replied by inclining her sceptre; a golden rain fell from it, and was eagerly gathered up by the surrounding crowds of humming courtiers, whose shouts and acclamations filled the air.

The young sovereign then had to endure a long and grave discourse from a fat drone bee who did not understand himself.

Ere long the little queen learned that her empire was in danger. Dreadful enemies menaced the frontiers. "They are spiders," said the flies. "They are the larvae of the rose bushes," said the grubs. "They are the ichneumons," cried a crowd of winged insects.

Every one accused some other one. Piccolissima did not know what to understand, but she hastened to arm herself. Two bees, as her body guard, placed upon her head for helmet a flower of the snapdragon. Two wasps, redoubtable hussars, brought her for a shield a piece of the gold bronze wing shell of a beetle.

At last, she extended her hand to seize her lance, when a clap of thunder shook the lily, dispersed the court, and the army, and Piccolissima awoke, and found herself in the hands of her mother, Mrs. Thomas Thumb, who said, very gently, "Tell me, dear little one, are you not very weary?"

"It is strange," said Mr. Tom Thumb, some months after, "that I always find now my ball of soap in its right place."

"It is because Piccolissima no longer rolls it into the corners for a plaything," replied Mrs. Tom Thumb. "The little creature improves—grows really intelligent."

"I am glad of it," said, a little while afterwards, one of the elder sisters of the miniature woman; "I am no longer obliged to hunt from place to place for my thimble and my scissors they are now always in my work box."

"The reason is, Piccolissima does not now make a well of your thimble, nor a spade of your scissors," answered her brother; "she has become tiresome; she no longer frisks around me when I return home; she has no longer any droll fancies which once amused me so much; she is now a genuine doll; I really believe that this minikin is putting on airs."

"Hold your peace, Monsieur," answered the busy chambermaid, in a scolding tone, while she cleaned the runnels of a chair, upon which the feet of the young man had left a good portion of the soil of the garden; "I should like to see the day when you are as well behaved as Mademoiselle Piccolissima. It was once Mademoiselle Touch-every-thing. Six months ago, no one dared to leave a drawer in the house open; now every thing remains quiet in its place; she is neither more nor less than a reasonable being; she is a waxen image, I tell you."

"Did I say any thing else, Madam Scold?" answered the school boy; "she is a real Liliputian statue, fit for nothing but to watch the flies fly. Ah! come, Piccola, Piccolissima!" he cried to the little one, who was behind the shutter of a half-open window, absorbed in the contemplation of a gnat who was up the window, singing a little air through his nasal trumpet, "tell us, Piccola, a little of what the flies say to you."

Piccolissima, who was always alarmed at a big voice, trembling, turned round and stared at her brother, who, shouting with laughter, made a pirouette, jumped over the balcony, which was near the ground, into the garden.

The complaints of Piccolissima's brother were not quite without foundation; she had become more reflecting, more observing; she was less restless and less communicative; more amused, but less amusing. She did not dare to repeat to her sisters her conversation with the flies, lest they should laugh at her, and she became more frequently occupied with her own thoughts, and more silent. Her silver voice was heard no longer in every corner of the house; she was no longer under every one's feet; the fragments of her dress were no longer caught by the nails in her brothers' shoes, under the legs of her sisters' chairs, or under the castors of the furniture; and her mother, who had a habit of saying, "This little wild thing gives me more trouble than all her brothers and sisters," said now, "Truly, if she does not help me, she does not hinder me." As for Mr. Tom Thumb, who loved to complete a remark by a proverb, instead of exclaiming, "It is not strange that she does not grow,—a rolling stone gathers no moss," murmured, rubbing his hands, "Whoever lives will see what I have always said: It is only weeds that grow fast."

In order to employ the activity of Piccolissima, her father had at one time given her some pots of flowers; for a long time, nothing came of them, for she turned over the earth incessantly, and kept looking at the roots to see if they began to sprout. Now that she no longer asked ten questions, one after the other, without waiting for an answer, and that

she left her plants to grow, and no longer took them up to look at their roots, she had in her garden, just under the window, one foot of potatoes, three feet of hemp, a bean, and a strawberry plant, in pots. Her brother, in jumping out of the window, had broken off some ripe strawberries, which the little girl had cherished for her mother, and Piccolissima went sorrowfully to examine the havoc, and pick up the fruit.

She no longer supported herself upon the flexible stalks of the nasturtiums and the convolvulus, which Mr. Tom Thumb cultivated, and who more than once had complained at finding them broken. She no longer seated herself on the branches of the mignonette, and then let the wind blow her at its will, backwards and forwards, a dangerous and monotonous amusement, which soon wearied. Now, with her elbow resting on the edge of the pot of strawberries, under the shadow of the Persian lilac, she remained in contemplation.

She observed running about some little creatures that she had never seen before, and which appeared to her so wild that she dared not begin a conversation.

"O, what is that?" she said at last, stooping down and resting her head on her hand, and forgetting her lost harvest of strawberries; "here is something very curious. They are smaller than the flies. A myosotis could accommodate a number of them in its delicate cup; their heads are wider than they are long, and on each side I perceive a sort of fine leg, which has a sort of elbow, and which the insect does not use in walking; the body is in three parts, all of a shining black; the head has these two threads, which are always moving, and which are of a lighter color at the ends; the corselet is smaller, rounder, and more brilliant than that of the flies; and the belly is covered with black scales. But these little beasts trot away, scamper away so fast with their nimble legs, that one cannot see them. What delicate forms they have! they must have worn corsets when they were young. Ah! there is a sort of knot in this thread which fastens

the corselet to the belly. Wait, little fellow, wait while I look at you a little nearer!" The small, thin finger of Piccolissima caught one of the little creatures, but she found some difficulty in holding him.

"Ah! at last I have you!" She held between her thumb and finger the two hind legs of the insect, who stretched himself out stiff and without motion, just as if he was sitting for his portrait. She then saw above the arms and hands of the head, (thus she chose to call the antennae,) two shining eyes, like two black buttons—naturalists discover three with a microscope. "He has no trunk," said Piccolissima, as she looked at a formidable mouth. At this moment, the insect disengaged one of his legs, and twisting himself with fury, and biting the finger which held him, he showed two jaws, which worked like a pair of pincers. Piccolissima was not sufficiently hardened to natural history. She shook her hand violently, and uttered a cry that brought her brother to her in a moment.

"Ha! ha! the great body," cried he, as he saw the trouble, and the cause of it; "this is not a worthy enemy; it is only one of the smallest ants. What would you say if you had to contend with the herculean wood borer? Your ferocious animal is only a modest fuliginosa, Madam Piccola; it is Formica fuliginosa, Latin words, which mean soot-colored ant."

"I should much prefer that they should be called at once by a name that I could comprehend, 'little blackeys,' instead of these long words, that it almost takes away your breath to pronounce."

"This is because you are ignorant, sister; but for that, you would love the Latin names, because they are so fine sounding, and can express so many things. For example, formica; can you guess? O, no, you will never guess," added he, with a knowing tone. "Very well! formica means crumb carriers, because the little cunning beasts carry all sorts of knickknacks."

Piccolissima, who once had only frisked and frolicked around her brother, and in whose eyes she had been hitherto a sort of amusing plaything, listened to him now with an air of intelligence and satisfaction, with which he was secretly flattered. "Besides the herculean borer," he continued, "there is another ant in the forests, much larger than your enemy, and who builds mountains. They call him rusa, which means russet. It is he who produces the formic acid, a poison which he sheds with his abdomen into the bite which he makes with his mandibles or jaws, which makes the wound a little red, and makes it itch and burn a little." He was going on to add that mandibula signified jaw bone; abdomen, meant belly. He might, perhaps, while he was in this mood, have declined all these nouns, but his little sister had ceased to listen; she was following with her eye a file of her small black ants, and she saw them go and come very busily upon a small stick which supported her only bean stalk. Doubtless the wind had blown into Piccolissima's garden one of the white cottony tufts which enfold the seeds of the poplar, for it was a young shoot of poplar which served as support to the plant, and as a garden for the ants. Upon the white cottony stem was an assemblage of these little animals, green, brown, yellow, and transparent, all plump, singularly alike, grave, immovable, like a Roman senate. Certain active little creatures with fine shapes walked among them, around them, over them, without appearing to hurt them, or disturbing their gravity. The ants carried their easy manners still farther; they struck lightly, rapidly, alternately, with their two antennae, the backs and the sides of these peaceable animals; they even went so far as to turn them over with their fore paws, and all the while the other insects did not move, and allowed them to do as they pleased.

"Look! look!" cried Piccolissima.

"Beautiful little wonder," answered her brother, "these are grubs, that's all; and who does not know nowadays, that these are the cows of the ants?"

"Their cows!" repeated the little girl; and she remained absorbed in her examination. The ants still continued, in a playful and irregular manner, to strike their little cows, whose trunks Piccolissima saw were thrust into the bark of the aspen. Sometimes an ant gave a little kick, and always one was at hand, with his jaws extended, and his mouth open, ready to receive a drop of sirup, which the eye of Piccolissima at last discovered falling from the extremity of the body of the grub. "I see, I see!" she exclaimed; "it is their way of milking. O the funny little pastoral people!" Whilst she was in this ecstasy, the ant with the ends of his antennae took the transparent little drop into his mouth; and then carefully cleansed with the brushes of his feet the sugared antennae which had served for fork and spoon, or rather for fingers.

"I should like to talk with him," said Piccolissima, as she saw the ant making his toilet, "but these are a very silent, a very reserved people; perhaps they are dumb."

The ant, who had just swallowed the drop of sirup, now quietly descended the aspen walk; his belly was well stuffed and shining, and he stopped now and then to rest, and wash his face. He met, as he went down, an ant who was ascending the path. The new comer ran up to him as to an intimate friend, as soon as he saw him, and eagerly struck him with his antennae. The motion was very rapid; the ant returned it by shaking his antennae, but more gently, and by opening his mandibles. "Are they going to dispute, and to bite each other?" thought Piccolissima. Not at all. The ant who had received the sirup upon the end of his tongue, now offered a little drop of it to the one who was hungry, who received it upon his tongue, while he continued to caress with his antennae, and even with his little paws, the friend who offered it. The joy of Piccolissima was so great at the sight of this mutual kindness, that she made one of her old leaps, and shook the frail stalk. Immediately there was a violent commotion among the ants, who in great crowds blackened the end of the twig. They ran hither and thither in the greatest terror, striking their antennae one against the other. Many of them caressed the

grubs more eagerly, in a violent and impetuous manner, as if to urge them to some exertion. Some of the grubs submitted to be taken gently into the jaws of the ants; others, with their trunks in the wood, looked as if they were too lazy to consent to move.

They were however, at last, (whether they would or not,) all carried rapidly away. Each ant, loaded with her cow, ran down the tree, and, following a little narrow path in the ground, reached a small, deep hole, into which the ants, one after the other, all disappeared.

"O Mimi! O Linette! O Fifine!" cried Piccolissima, running from her brother to her sisters, "they have carried away all their cows. Each ant has his cow between his teeth; one holds her by the belly, the others by the wings; come see! come see!"

"Cows with wings!" cried the astonished little girls. Mimi, who knew all this, startled his little sister by saying, "The pet is right; she has good eyes; there are many grubs with wings; come, come, my small sister, it appears to me that you are discovering many things already known. My ladies, the ants, ought to choose you for their queen."

The same day, Madam Tom Thumb, who began to feel some confidence in the reason of Piccolissima, carried her into the garden, to the great joy of the little creature. It was a delicious place; there were in it long covered alleys, and even a small wood, where one might enjoy a sweet freshness in the heat of the day. Around a great hall, covered with foliage, were seats of soft green moss. It was there that Madam Tom Thumb used to embroider with her elder daughters; and there she placed Piccolissima, allowing her to run at large, only recommending to her prudence and discretion.

The child, who was formerly idle and weary of every thing, was in a fair way to become a happy young girl, thanks to the attention she began to give to every thing she saw, and to the interest which the wonders around her excited in her mind. She was enchanted with the thousand

plants which embellished and covered the earth, and formed in the smallest flower an object of admiration which filled her soul. Very soon she met one of those beings who excited in her a lively curiosity,—an ant much larger than the little black ones of the shepherd race. The fine antennae, the three eyes, the top of the head, the legs, the belly of this one were blackish, but less glistening, and it was by the superiority of his shape, above middle size, and above all, by the reddish color of a part of his body, that Piccolissima recognized the russet ant of which her brother had spoken. The insect carried very laboriously a stick ten or twelve times as long as himself; a hillock of earth, which he met on his road, stopped him for some time, and Piccolissima, who was eager to help him through his difficulties, and who was tormented with a desire to enter into conversation with him, took it into her head to assist the insect, and hoped thus to render herself agreeable to him. She seized one end of the little rafter he was carrying, and in a tone which she tried to make as soft as possible, she said, "Will you allow me, little one, to help you?"

The ant, clinging to the earth with his hind legs, stood up straight, and threw out his antennae with a terrible expression. Piccolissima was so full of kind feeling that she never thought of exciting any anger; she thought that it was only a little struggle of his politeness; therefore she insisted, taking firmly hold of the bit of wood, and repeated, "I assure you it is a pleasure to me, and it will not fatigue me." Forced to loosen his burden, the ant opened his jaws full of formidable teeth, and advanced upon Piccolissima, walking on his hind legs; the two others stretched out in front, as well as his antennae, in sign of defiance; his body all bent, exhaling an odor of vinegar so pungent that Piccolissima, letting go the little stick, ran away as fast as she could, sneezing violently, and shutting her eyes. When she opened them and returned, thinking the ant was at her heels, she found her terrible adversary had again seized his big stick by one end, and had slid it over the lump of earth by means of a stone, which served him as a point of support. She

saw him sometimes push it before him, and sometimes drag it after him, walking backwards till he reached the flat ground, when he pursued his way very fast.

Piccolissima, who did not forget that her mother had recommended discretion to her, followed at a distance. As she went on carefully, she saw long trains of ants resembling her enemy; each one of them was charged with a burden more or less heavy. All of them took their way towards a mountain shaped like a cone, full of little openings which, from a distance, appeared to be semicircular vaults; Roman architecture Piccolissima would have thought if the multiplicity of details of little architectural ornaments, all of wood work, had not given her the idea of an old Gothic fortress. The rapid and violent motions of the wild mountaineers did not frighten her; she walked up slowly, hardly touching her feet to the earth, holding her breath, observing every thing, and she was soon convinced that this little, busy people took no notice of her. She came nearer and nearer to the place where two great roads, covered with ants, terminated. She heard a confused noise, like the hum of a great city, or as the sound of the rain among the leaves.

"I thought they spoke only by signs which they make with the arms that come out of their heads," said Piccolissima, still going nearer; "why, then, this noise?"

The little girl was soon convinced that this noise was produced by the numerous and busy footsteps of a solemn, austere, and preoccupied crowd of ants. Not a word was said, but every one ran rather than walked, and they seemed like a thousand individuals, all actuated by one purpose. Supported on the lower branch of a chestnut tree, Piccolissima placed herself a little higher, but very near the citadel, which was one living mountain.

How can we relate what she saw then? It would take volumes. There would be as many histories as individuals. Her attention was attracted by the perseverance of one ant who carried a burden; by another who

was striving to get over some obstacle. She saw them feed those who arrived laden and out of breath; she saw those who repaired the doors, who opened and shut the windows, which were not glazed like ours; others she saw as sentinels, standing on their hind legs, charged to watch over the general safety. The busiest carried in their mandibles, caressed with their legs and their antennae, licked with their delicate tongues, exposed to the sun, or carried quickly into the shade certain white balls which Piccolissima took at first for grains of wheat, because they had the form and size; but she was satisfied at last that these were the children of the ants in swaddling clothes. Piccolissima was so anxious to comprehend the mysterious talk, and the pantomime of all this innumerable crowd, that she became yet more attentive. The nurses caressed with their antennae in a peculiar way those eggs which were beginning to show life, and the little observer saw the slight movement of the incomplete being who, as soon as he was bidden, raised his head, which was almost imperceptible even to microscopic eyes, to receive the offered mouthful.

Whilst Piccolissima observed all this nursery work, an ant came and placed beneath her, in order to fill up a small hole, a sort of bundle of little sticks, which rolled away as soon as she left it. The ant took hold of it again, carried it to its place, and arranged it so as to make it firm; then, satisfied with her work, she went after something else to do. Shortly after this, a head, then some legs, then half of the body of a caterpillar came out of the living little fagot which the ant had mended her house with. It was a dead leaf in which an egg had been laid and nicely rolled up by the parent, and which my lady ant had taken for a beam, or something of the sort, and the vexed hermit scampered away, carrying his house with him, not caring at all for the hole which he and his house had been intending to mend.

Much amused at this, Piccolissima tried to find out what a great number of ants, all with burdens, were carrying. She was, with painful astonishment, soon convinced that these were the carcasses of all sorts

of insects. "It is a nation of hunters," she said, "more savage than those which feed their flocks on my aspen."

At this moment, a great ant attracted the attention of the child towards the lower part of the mountain. An enormous grub of the cockchafer race, a great white worm, rolled himself over, trying to liberate himself and to crush the ants, whose number increased on every side, and who tore off his transparent, soft skin, and pulled him in every direction. They climbed backward up the side of their citadel, and in spite of his desperate struggles, carried the poor insect, writhing with torture, to one of their little air holes. Piccolissima saw upon his wounds some drops of the sharp poison thrown by these terrible hunters, and the crowds of ants soon hid the sufferer from her eyes, which she gladly turned away from such a sight.

With her heart oppressed with fear and pity, the little girl collected her strength that she might glide down from her branch and run away, when a sudden alarm attracted a whole squadron of the insects to the place where she was about to put her foot. She immediately regained her place, and tried to understand what important and terrible news was being communicated from antennae to antennae, drawing together such a number of insects, with their frightful jaws all opened. The penetrating odor reached the frightened little girl; presently she perceived a very large ant, nearly six lines in length, very black, very shining, doubtless a Hercules who was defending himself against a whole army. His enemies fastened themselves on to each of his legs, but he still fought; a brown ant jumped upon his back and tried to break his brilliant cuirass; another, with his body bent double, covered him with poison. The Hercules still fought. At last, three of the fiercest of the ants worked with their sharp teeth upon the middle of his body, and at last cut him in two. The terrible head of the Hercules still held in his jaws two of his deadly enemies. Piccolissima screamed, and putting her hand before her eyes,

she perhaps would have fallen into the midst of this nation of savages, if her mother, who was anxious about her, had not taken her in her arms and carried her away.

From this time, Piccolissima became one of the happiest little creatures in the world. Her brother, instead of considering her only as a toy to play with, began to respect her. She had no more conversations with the flies, to be sure. Her mind grew, and she learned that, small as she was, she was superior to the best informed fly. She studied the habits and doings of the ants, and learned a great deal about their different tribes and nations. Sometimes her brother would take his sister's toilet cushion and put it on the table before him, and seating Piccolissima upon it, say to her, "Now, Piccola, dear, listen with both of your little ears to my big words, and I will read some wonderful stories to you." Once he read Gulliver's Travels to her. "O!" she exclaimed, as he read of the Lilliputians, "O, good! good! I am a Lilliputian, and you are all great, big Brobdignagians. Why did you not tell me this before?" So she began to dance and skip about, like a jack-o'-lantern. Her brother, who was delighted at her gambols, whistled a tune for her to dance by. Presently Piccolissima began to sing, with her small, fine voice, this song, which she made as she danced:—

Merrily, merrily, dance away!
Merrily laugh, and merrily play!
Though I am a tiny thing,
I can dance, and I can sing;
I can hear, and I can see;
I don't care who laughs at me;
I can learn all things to know;
So sing merrily, merrily, O!

The morning was lovely; the blue shadows, extending over the fields, made the leaves of the chestnut trees, wet with the morning dew, still more brilliant. Agitated by a light breeze, they glistened in the rays of the rising sun. Every blade of grass lifted its dewy head as soon as a ray fell upon it, and each in its turn was crowned with its halo of diamonds.

The flowers, in sweet accord, sent up their perfume towards heaven. Already the lark had saluted the day with his brilliant song, eternal hymn, ever repeated, never omitted. Every little bird sent up his clear note and his joyous song from his nest; the insects were beginning to hum. The sound of the voice of man, slow to join in the morning prayer of the whole creation, was not yet heard when Piccolissima, already awake, entered the garden.

She had obtained permission to do so the evening before. Her mother's confidence had increased with the growing prudence and good sense of the little girl; qualities which a habit of observation has the effect of strengthening rapidly.

The child was desirous to witness the morning labors of the ants, and to see how, when the dew had prepared their mortar, they built their long galleries. They commenced their work at the top, and Piccolissima would have liked to see them again raise and make their walls. She was, however, disappointed in her purpose, either that the earth dried too quick, as the sun was now high above the horizon; or the tiny republicans, with six feet, were employed in their interior halls, in bringing out the young ants, and were busy tearing off the veils of silk which confined the larvae, and in developing the wings of the males and females; or, whatever might be the cause, the ant hills were deserted.

The lazy amazons did not appear. Now and then a single miner might be seen wandering alone at the entrance of their subterranean dwelling.

Seated upon a piece of turf near the parterre, the little girl followed with her eye, all along the stem of a plant, two or three brown ants who led their flock of grubs to pasture, when a murmuring sound near her, which seemed to spread all over the beds of mignonette, attracted her attention to some large flies, of a dull color, who whirled about among the flowers, darting from one to the other, and seemed very busy.

"Can these be any of my old acquaintances?" said she; but she could not be satisfied with this idea; the new comers, much larger, had also a very different physiognomy from that of her old friends. They had oval eyes, with a network over them; a protruding jaw; antennae of twelve olive scales, terminated by a button. Their brown corselets covered with a tawny fur; their brilliant cuirasses, and their legs of unequal length,—all these things attracted the attention of the young observer.

She saw these flies rolling themselves over in the bosom of the flowers, with a joyous activity which amused her very much, and the reason of which she desired to understand.

There was, however, in their appearance and manners, something repulsive which prevented familiarity. Each one of them caused to vibrate four gauze wings, two large and two small ones. In their rapid and measured motions, these wings produced sound, and the air, issuing from little breathing places situated, as in the common fly, on each side of the corselet, produced a sort of a song.

As if attracted by the song, these insects flew in swarms to the flower-bed. Very soon it was evident that they were heavier when they went away than when they came. Two large, round, red and yellow, or rather golden balls loaded their brilliant brown thighs. Some of them plunged into the bosom of a lily. Raising herself on tiptoe, Piccolissima kept them in view. She saw their slanting teeth, which formed the point of their triangular head, open and close like two strong pincers, and shake the tops of the stamens. She had never noticed before, but now she perceived, at the end of the six threads in the centre of the flower, a sort of little green box; this was the anther. These flies pressed it and pulled it, till it opened and scattered a quantity of little yellow pellets, which covered the insects so thoroughly, that they and the flowers seemed to have changed garments, so completely were they clothed with it.

Piccolissima could contain herself no longer. She cried out to her sister, whom she saw coming towards her:

"O, come, come quickly! See the flies putting on their ball dresses, and making their toilet in the cup of a flower."

Linette, still at a distance, did not hasten her steps, notwithstanding the exclamations of her sister; and before she came, Piccolissima was convinced that the flies did not think much of their brilliant toilet. She saw them push off all their finery by means of the brushes with which their legs were furnished. These excellent little square brushes were placed on their hind legs mostly; they had brown horn backs, and short, stiff hairs, ranged regularly. These brushes did their work so well, that in less than a moment every fly had resumed his modest livery.

But what had become of the rich yellow powder? The insect had taken care to brush himself so rapidly that Piccolissima could but just see the dust he had collected pass from one part of his body to another, till the whole came to the third pair of his legs, and was collected together in a little oval cavity, surrounded by a thick circle of skin which closed in upon it. Every fly used his middle legs afterward to press and roll up into his basket his little store.

"Hast thou forgotten how to walk faster than a snail?" said Piccolissima to her sister. "These great flies were just now dressed with a cloak of gold, and now they carry their toilet in a bundle; look at the third joint of their largest legs, which they join together and let hang behind them when they fly."

"Nonsense! I know all about them," said Linette, as she saw them fly away with their burden; "these are bees who make honey, such as I have brought you for your breakfast;" and the young girl put into her sister's hand a double slice of bread and honey.

Without noticing her breakfast, Piccolissima eagerly tasted of what remained of the yellow dust of the stamens of the lily.

"But, Linette," said she, "this does not taste like honey."

"Very true; it is for the bees to entitle it to that name, and not for me. All that I know is, that they call them honey bees because they make honey. They also make wax; and I have often seen them carry away little balls of the dust of flowers. Whether they make it afterwards into honey or wax, is their business. You have only to ask them."

Piccolissima meant to do this as soon as she had courage. Meanwhile, she rubbed in her fingers the dust of the lily, yellowed the end of her nose in smelling of it, her lips in tasting of it, still without finding in it the consistency of wax, or the taste of honey.

"How do the flies do it?" said she. "I have tasted at the bottom of the tube of a honeysuckle, or of a jasmine, something more like honey than this powder." While speaking, she was going to her bread and honey, when she perceived some one had got the start of her. A number of bees were on the edge of it, and were so busily employed that Piccolissima had an opportunity of examining them closely without fear of disturbing them. It was a pleasure to see them. From under their chins protruded, as far as their teeth, a little case of shell, opening with two little leaves, whence projected a second little case, polished and shining, half open, from which was thrust a transparent tongue, covered with hairs. This tongue was stretched out and plunged into the honey, and was then moved round and round and soaked in it; soon it was contracted, and now again it became larger; the insect seemed to enjoy all these various movements. Through the hairs and the opening pores, Piccolissima saw the liquid ascend; and between the teeth of the bee, above its admirable trunk, she saw a pretty large mouth open to receive the honey.

The little observer was willing to give up all her breakfast to the little winged gormand for the sake of the satisfaction she received from seeing how he managed to eat.

"Do not let all your honey be swallowed by those greedy flies," said Linette, who was the economist of the family.

"O, it is only just that they should have part, if they have made it," said Piccolissima, still watching them. "These are larger than those other bees who carry away the golden powder. Are they not satisfied? How their antennae come down! Does it not seem as if they were tasting thus the perfume of the honey which their wonderful trunks draw up?"

"They are just the same flies; they belong to our neighbor Thomas; one is not larger than another. I have seen them ever since I was born. I don't see any thing wonderful in them," said Linette. "It is because you are so little that you are astonished at every thing."

"O Linette, it is true that every thing I see seems to me every day more curious. All that I look at seems to grow more wonderful and beautiful as I look at it; but surely these flies that are eating my breakfast are larger than those that are opening the boxes of sweetmeats in the flowers. Ah, look! there is one still bigger than the others, so funny, so hairy, so cross, and he scolds and hums all around this sweet pea."

"That is a drone; we must chase him away; he is good for nothing; he never makes any honey." And Linette drove away the shaggy drone bee.

Just at this moment, the greedy flies who were eating the honey, and their more temperate companions who were gathering the harvest of the pollen of the flowers, all flew away at once, as if by common consent.

"Ah, you have driven them all away!" said Piccolissima; and without perceiving that the sky had clouded over, she followed the insects with her eyes. Presently there began to fall some large drops of rain.

"It rains, it rains! there is a shower coming," cried Linette.

"Can it be that these cunning bees have foreseen it?" asked Piccolissima.

"What there is no question of is," said Linette, "that my poor frock will be spoiled. It is going to rain pitchforks. There will be water enough to drown you before we reach the house, and your mites of shoes will be lost; but come along. There, do you think the leaf of that cabbage will do for a shelter for you?"

"Sorores, sorores!" said a thundering voice; and in a moment Mimi was between his two sisters, whom he sheltered under a large umbrella; taking up Piccolissima and hiding her little feet in his waistcoat pocket, and asking as he went towards the house, what had kept her out so long.

"I know what you have seen," said he, with the air of a professor. "Insects of the order hymenopteres; if you ever learn Greek, Piccolissima, you will know that that means insects with membranous wings. Imagine what a fine thing it is to understand Greek. Every word contains in itself many others. For example, honey bees have a name still longer than the others; they are called mellificae. What do you say to that? They also call them anthophilai, which means lovers of flowers."

"Your new friends, in particular the domestic bees, were among the Egyptians the emblem of royalty. Are you not pleased with that, Piccolissima? The ancient kings of France had them on their arms; bees were embroidered on their shields, and on their standards; and it was very proper that they adopted them. Have they not the royal prerogative —honey and a sting? They amass treasures, and they know how to keep them. In truth I agree with you, sisterkin; I love bees and honey; finish your bread and honey or I shall eat it."

From this day Piccolissima dreamed ever of bees; her most earnest desire was to go and see a kingdom of apis mellifica, which her brother Mimi told her was in the possession of their neighbor Thomas, who kept twenty bee hives.

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK PICCOLISSIMA ***
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