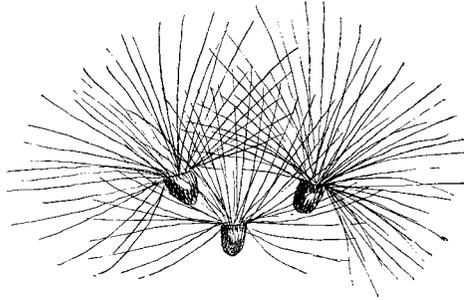


LITTLE WANDERERS

LITTLE WANDERERS

BY

MARGARET WARNER MORLEY



YESTERDAY'S CLASSICS
CHAPEL HILL, NORTH CAROLINA

Cover and arrangement © 2009 Yesterday's Classics, LLC.

This edition, first published in 2009 by Yesterday's Classics, an imprint of Yesterday's Classics, LLC, is an unabridged republication of the text originally published by Ginn and Company in 1900. For the complete listing of the books that are published by Yesterday's Classics, please visit www.yesterdaysclassics.com. Yesterday's Classics is the publishing arm of the Baldwin Online Children's Literature Project which presents the complete text of hundreds of classic books for children at www.mainlesson.com.

ISBN-10: 1-59915-317-3

ISBN-13: 978-1-59915-317-9

Yesterday's Classics, LLC
PO Box 3418
Chapel Hill, NC 27515

CONTENTS

WHY PLANTS TRAVEL	1
THOSE THAT FLY WITH PLUMES OR DOWN.....	4
DANDELIONS	4
THISTLES.....	14
MILKWEEDS	19
LETTUCE.....	23
CLEMATIS	25
ASTERS AND GOLDEN-ROD	27
THE WILLOW	29
CATTAILS	35
GERANIUMS	37
COTTON	39
OTHER FLY-AWAYS	43

SEEDS THAT FLY WITH WINGS	45
MAPLES	45
ELMS	49
ASH TREES	51
PINES	53
SEEDS THAT FLY WITHOUT WINGS OR PLUMES	56
OTHER SEEDS THAT ARE MOVED BY THE WIND	58
TUMBLEWEEDS	60
WANDERERS THAT CLING	62
BURDOCKS	62
COCKLEBURS AND SAND SPURS	65
TICK TREFOIL	67
STICK-TIGHTS	70
AGRIMONY AND OTHER WEEDS	73
FLAX	75
MISTLETOE	77
OTHER PLANTS WITH STICKY SEEDS OR SEED PODS	79

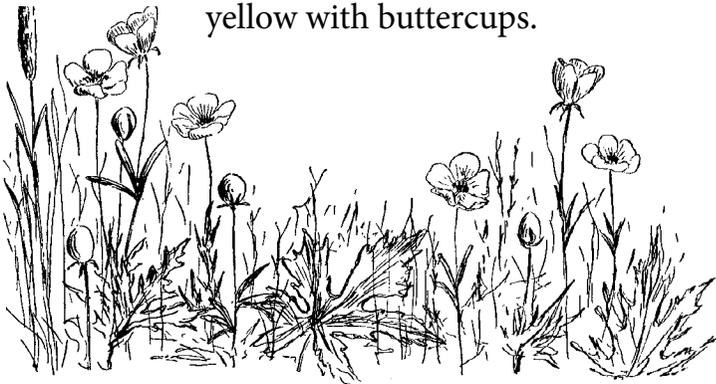
WANDERERS THAT FLOAT	81
SEEDS THAT ANIMALS LIKE TO EAT.....	84
THE HICKORY.....	84
WALNUTS AND BUTTERNUTS.....	87
THE CHESTNUT	89
OTHER EDIBLE SEEDS.....	91
BERRIES.....	93
CHERRIES	95
APPLES	97
SEEDS THAT ARE SHOT AWAY	99
OXALIS	99
WITCH-HAZEL.....	101
TOUCH-ME-NOT	103

WHY PLANTS TRAVEL

PLANTS are great travelers; they often wander far and wide. Sometimes they even cross the ocean and take up their abode in a new land.

The oxeye daisy, our common meadow buttercup, and the little Canada thistle, now so abundant everywhere, are not native Americans, but came here from Europe.

Very likely they sailed in the ships with the early settlers and took possession of the New World with them. They are so much at home now that most people think they always grew here. But they did not, and when the Pilgrim Fathers looked over their new home the fields were not white with daisies nor yellow with buttercups.



Buttercups

LITTLE WANDERERS

No doubt the Pilgrim Fathers were glad of this, for daisies and buttercups often cover the fields and spoil the hay, and while “daisies in the meadow” seem very lovely to the city people who go to the country for the summer, daisies in the hay are another matter, and the farmers do not think them lovely at all.

It is not the grown-up plants that travel, as a rule, though some of them do. For you must know the plant world is a topsy-turvy kind of place where the parents stand still at home and the children wander about.

Of course the children are the seeds, and they are free, but when they once settle down and begin to grow their wandering days are over.

Plants with roots are great home-bodies; nothing short of actual violence can make them move from the spot they have chosen. Frequently it happens that they die if moved.

Not so with the seeds, however.

They wander about, and their parents often take great pains to send them out into the world.

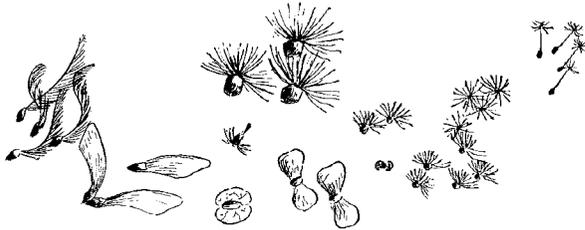
For the children of the plants are very apt to die if they remain at home too long. They need to find a place in which to settle down and grow, and it is often better for them to do this at a distance from their parents.

Plants eat what is in the soil, and each kind of plant needs some particular earth food. When plants of one kind are crowded too closely in a place the earth is often impoverished, and the plant might die out if it were not able to find a fresh growing place. Then, again, if

WHY PLANTS TRAVEL

the seeds always fell close to the parent plant, the earth would soon become too crowded to support more than a very few new plants.

So for these and other reasons it is best for the seeds to go while they are able and find a place for themselves.



Some happy wanderers

Nearly all seeds are provided with some way of moving about, and while some of them go very short distances others go very long ones.

They travel for their profit, and why may we not say for their pleasure? For if a plant is able to feel and enjoy at all,—and I for one believe it is,—then the dandelion seeds must feel very joyous sailing before the wind in the early summer, and later the thistle-down and the milkweed seeds, scudding before the breeze.

THOSE THAT FLY WITH PLUMES OR DOWN

DANDELIONS

EVERYBODY is well acquainted with the dandelion, but not everybody knows that it was brought to this country from Europe. It is not probable that a dandelion seed could come on the wings of the wind three thousand miles across nor is it probable that people would bring it on purpose.

Very likely accidentally mixed seeds brought from World.

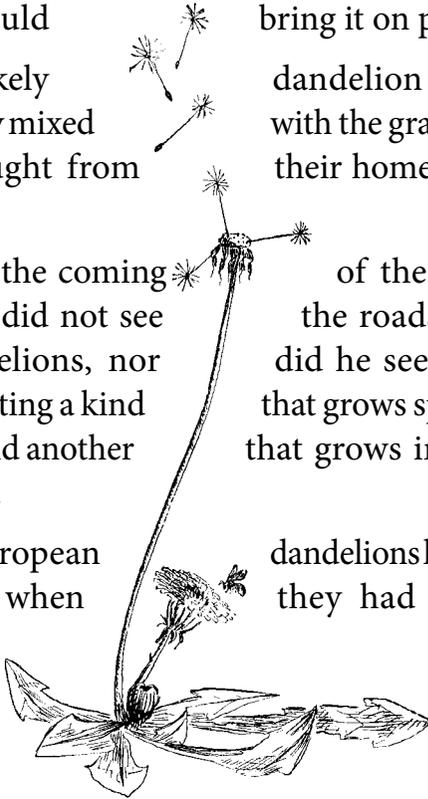
Before the coming of the Indian did not see with dandelions, nor at all, excepting a kind up north and another Mountains.

The European World and when

dandelion seeds were with the grass and clover their homes in the Old

of the white man the roadsides yellow did he see dandelions that grows sparingly way that grows in the Rocky

dandelions liked the New they had the chance



DANDELIONS

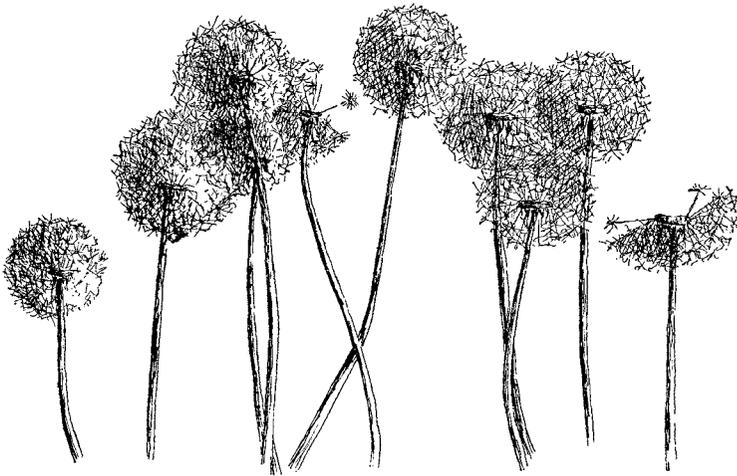
spread very fast, so that now they are everywhere—at least in the East.

The reason they were able to spread so is that the dandelion seeds were able to fly.

If they had not flown away but had dropped down close to the parent plant and grown there, they would not have been allowed to spread much; for people do not like dandelions in their fields and lawns, and try hard to root them out.

This would be easy if the dandelions kept together in patches. But they seem to say “catch me if you can” as they fly on the wings of the wind, dropping down here, there, and everywhere, striking root and merrily growing.

The parent dandelion takes very good care of its seed children, and plans for their future success by



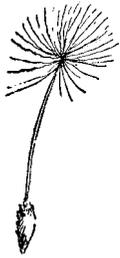
White-headed dandelions

LITTLE WANDERERS

giving each one a little plume by which it can be blown about by the wind.

Everybody knows the pretty, fluffy, white-headed dandelions that come after the yellow flowers.

Children often blow on them “to see what time it is.” If all the seeds fly away but one, they say it is one o’clock; if two remain, they say it is two o’clock, and so on.



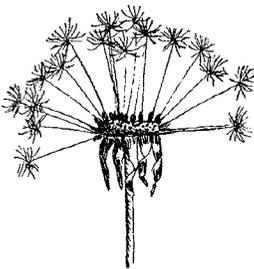
*Seed case
and plume
magnified*

They also blow on them to see if “mother wants me,” as every child knows.

Each little silky part that flies away is a seed case and its plume.

If you look carefully at the part of the dandelion that flies about, you will see the little brown seed case at one end, shaped something like a tiny cucumber, and with little teeth near its top.

Out of its top grows a silky white stalk, and at the end of this is a tuft of soft little hairs by means of which the seed case can float in the air.



*The flat cushion with
a few seeds attached*

Each dandelion seed case contains one little seed, but the case fits the seed so closely that most people speak of the whole thing—seed case and seed together—as the seed. The proper name for such a seed case and its seed is akene.¹ Not all akenes have plumes.

¹ â-kēn’

DANDELIONS

The top of the dandelion stem is a flat cushion, and the little akenes, when the seeds are ripe, stand on it, pointing out in different directions so there may be room for every one with its spread-out plume.



*Before
the plume
opens out*

The plumes do not open out until the seed is ready to be blown away, and the akenes do not stand pointing out in all directions until the time to fly has come. Before that they are all packed closely together.



*All closely
packed together*

Because the little akene is so light and feathery the breeze bears it along, sometimes for quite a distance, but at last it drops down to the earth or else is blown among the grasses or weeds or stones and lodges there, and when the right time comes the seed that is in the little brown seed case sprouts.

Sometimes the air seems to be full of dandelion akenes floating about.

Although the dandelion is so bright and pretty, people do not like it in their lawns.

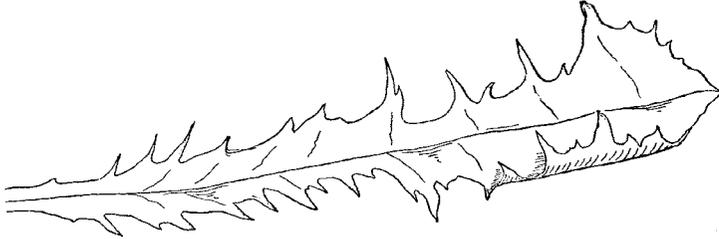
Excepting when in bloom or when it is “white-headed,” it is not as pretty as grass. It does not make a beautiful velvety carpet to the earth, but its leaves look ragged and uneven and spoil the appearance of the lawn.

It is from its leaves that the dandelion gets its name, for “dandelion” means “tooth of a lion”; and if you look

LITTLE WANDERERS

at a well-grown dandelion leaf you will understand why it came to have such a fierce name.

Dandelions are very fond of growing in lawns. They



A well-grown dandelion leaf

like to be taken care of, and they seem to like to have their heads cut off.

Anyway the lawn mower does not trouble them in the least.

Their leaves grow close to the ground, in the shape of a rosette, and when the lawn mower passes over, only the large outer leaves are harmed; the young ones towards the center of the rosette remain unhurt and have more light and air and space to grow in; so our dandelion flourishes in spite of its pruning.

When a dandelion once gets its roots started it does not make so very much difference if it has its flowers cut off, for it does not die when winter comes. Only its leaves die. Its root continues alive in the earth, and in the spring wakes up and puts out new leaves.

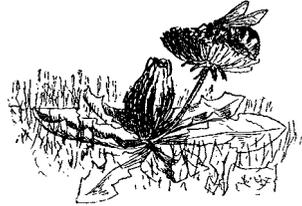
So cutting off the flowers does not destroy the dandelion, it merely prevents seeds from forming, and more dandelions from starting.

DANDELIONS

Dandelion roots kill the grass by pushing it aside and taking the earth-food for themselves.

So if dandelions get started in a lawn they will soon kill out the grass, and then there will be a dandelion lawn instead of a grass lawn!

A dandelion lawn is very beautiful for a little while in the early summer. Sometimes it looks like a carpet of gold, the yellow flowers are so thick and fine. But when they are done blossoming the lawn is a sorry looking sight.



Dandelions do not trouble the hay fields, for where the grass is allowed to grow tall it soon smothers them.

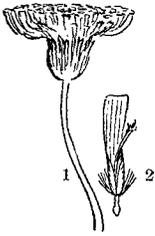
Boys are often hired to dig dandelion roots out of lawns, and near large cities poor women may often be seen digging them out for the sake of the young leaves which, when they first come up in the spring, make very good “greens.” These people sell them or eat them instead of spinach. Tender young dandelion leaves are very good indeed, and some people like them better than spinach.

Dandelion plants have a wise way of protecting their seed children until the time for flight.

The flower buds come out of the center of the leaf rosette, close to the ground. They have very short stems and seem to sit right on the rosette.

There are a great many flowers in one dandelion head.

LITTLE WANDERERS

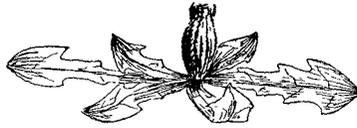


1. A cluster of flowers.
2. One flower magnified

Each little yellow part of the dandelion flower head is a separate blossom, and each separate blossom has one seed case with a seed inside growing to the bottom of it.

All of these blossoms are shut up at first in a case of green, leaf-like parts, and form the bud.

As the bud grows older its stem lengthens a little, as you can see in the picture on page 9—unless it is on a lawn. Then it does not lengthen; it seems to know the lawn mower will come along and take off its head if it grows taller, so it stays close to the ground. After a while the green bud opens, the many little yellow flowers push their way out, and the dandelion is in bloom.



The bud

Towards night the dandelion shuts up again; the tiny yellow flowers press close together, and the outer covering of green bracts, as they are called, closes up, too, and shuts them in all snug and safe.

When the dandelion has once closed it does not open again. But its stem, which was very short, begins to lengthen.

It is a hollow stem, as you know, and has a bitter, milky juice.

Longer and longer grows the stem with the closed-up flower cluster at its top. But this wise stem does not

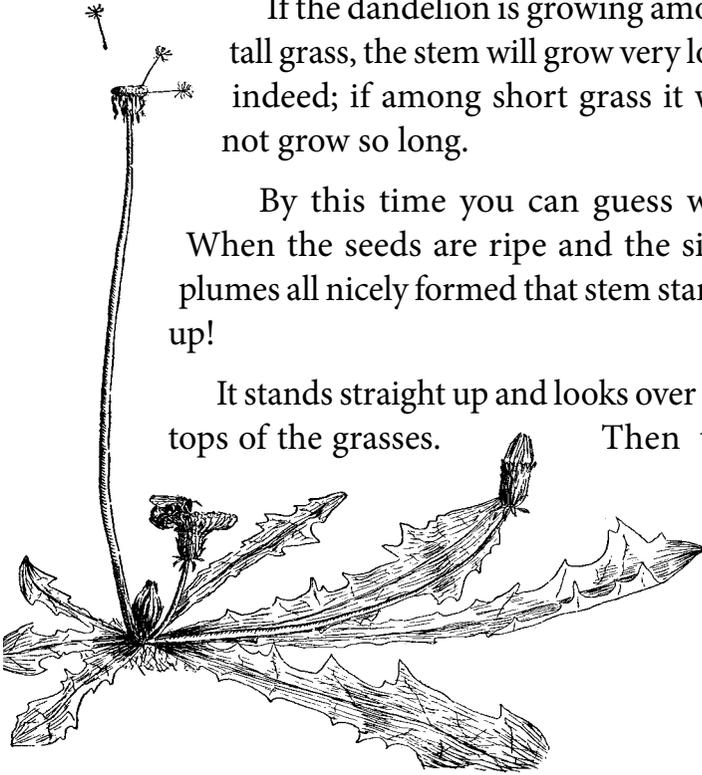
DANDELIONS

stand up. Oh, no, indeed! it lies down or leans over, concealed by the grass and weeds, unless it grows on a lawn. Then the wise stem does not lengthen much; it is afraid of that lawn mower.

If the dandelion is growing among tall grass, the stem will grow very long indeed; if among short grass it will not grow so long.

By this time you can guess why. When the seeds are ripe and the silky plumes all nicely formed that stem stands up!

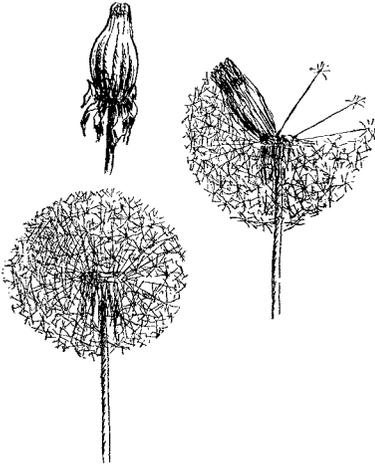
It stands straight up and looks over the tops of the grasses. Then the



green bracts on the outside turn back, and the silky tufts spread out and pull themselves free from the remains of the tiny flowers which have withered and are no longer yellow. They do not fall off when the flower first closes, but make a little cap to protect the growing akenes, and when these get ready to open out the cap is pushed off by them.

LITTLE WANDERERS

The hollow stem stands up, and its lovely silky head of plumed akenes shines in the sunlight.



*Opening out and
pushing off the cap*

There is nothing much prettier in the plant world than this head of fairy dandelion akenes all ready to fly away.

They stand and shine until a breeze comes along that is strong enough to dislodge them, then all in a moment they are off sailing through the air.

The parent plant is not sorry to have them go, for this is what it has worked so hard to accomplish; and as they float away, if it thinks at all, it no doubt hopes that each little shining wanderer will alight at last in a beautiful home of its own with plenty of space and sunlight and food for its growth.

If there is not breeze enough to carry away the dandelion akenes, when night approaches or a storm gathers the careful parent plant does not allow these silky treasures to become soaked and spoiled by moisture.

Each little plume shuts up again! The silky tufts no longer spread out, and the green bracts, too, turn up and cover them safely as before. They go to sleep, hoping, no doubt, for better luck next day.

DANDELIONS

There is no better fun than to watch the dandelions do these things.

When children blow the heads of dandelions away, that is just what the dandelions want, for it sets all the akenes flying about in the air above the earth.

The main thing for a dandelion seed is to get started. If it can get up in the air free from the weeds and grasses, it will be sure to take quite a journey and will doubtless settle in a new home.

The bitter milky juice of the dandelion very likely protects it from being eaten by various plant-eating creatures.

This juice is familiar to country children who pick the long stems of the dandelions, split them, and “curl” the parts in their mouths.

These pretty stems make very long and fine curls, as every little country girl knows.

