ORD DUNCAN leaned from the saddle and stretched forth his hand to his brother. "Farewell, dear lad," he said. "Thou hast understood my behests and thou wilt have all in readiness, even upon the seventh day, for the coming of the fair Madeleine?" "Fear not but that all shall be according to thy wish," answered the boy, placing his slim fingers in the gauntleted hand reached toward him. "Yet one thing more!" said Lord Duncan (trying in vain to quiet his eager steed). "The poor pine yonder that grows at the left of the entrance, I charge thee to have it cut down. So twisted and distorted a thing must not remain to offend the taste of my bride. See to it, Jeffrey, that the tree be removed." "Nay, Brother, I pray thee," said the youth earnestly, "spare the tree." "Ah, lad!" cried Lord Duncan, "Dost thou then prefer the ugly? Always thy liking has been for the perfect in nature as in all things else." "Nay, ask me not, my lord," and the boy's eyes that were so large and dark shone with sudden tears. "But grant that the tree remain, at least until such time as the fair Lady Madeleine shall see it. And this I promise thee, if to her sight it proveth distasteful, I will with my own hands dig it up, root and branch." At this Lord Duncan laughed, for it amused him well to picture those slim hands at work with pick and spade, and moreover because of the joy in his heart. Therefore he answered in all good humor, "As thou wilt, my princeling, but I doubt thy tree will survive this day one week." So saying, he signaled to his attendants and started forth.

Till the last of the gay troop had disappeared through the gates the boy watched, and then, with the halting step of a cripple, he made his way back to the castle. He paused before the portal to regard two pines that grew there, one on either side. Because he felt alone and heavy at heart, he spoke aloud to them, as to human beings. First he addressed the tree which stood at the right of the portal, saying,—"Oh, thou strong and mighty one, thou dost indeed fulfil the mission for which thou wast put upon the earth. Thy head stretcheth to the heavens and inviteth the rains; thy roots reach deep into the ground so that thou art not shaken to trembling in the storm; thy branches spread wide and are as a mighty shield at the entrance to our father's home." Then he addressed the tree which stood at the left of the portal, saying,—"And thou, child of mischance, through what hope persisted thou to draw sustenance from the soil and warmth from the light of heaven? Thinkest thou that, though of no use, there is beauty in thy shrunken trunk and palsied
limbs? Gaze thou in the mirror of the moat and be thou unde-
ceived!"

As he thus spoke a breeze passed by causing him to draw his
cloak about him. And he smiled sadly to note that, while the great
pine remaineth undisturbed, the dwarfed tree shivered and sighed
as though grown suddenly cold. "Yea, my piteous one," he cried,
"we two are as instruments that vibrate to the same touch. Let an
invisible hand but brush thy softest string, from my heart will rise
a note responsive!"

For a moment he buried his white face in the dark foliage of the
pine, as though he would listen for an answer to his words, then
drawing back he continued,—"Yet will I suffer thee not to go hence
alone; for eyes that look askance at thee must find in my poor frame
offense indeed!"

NOW, though he spoke thus mournfully when alone with the
trees, the young Lord Jeffrey showed a brave countenance to
the inmates of the castle and ordered all things to be made
ready for the coming of the Lady Madeleine, even as his brother
had wished. Yet, when the fateful day arrived, he found himself
too sad of heart to ride forth to meet the bride. Moreover he dreaded
to bedim her early happiness by showing himself, so lame and pale.
But as the day drew to a close, a strong desire came upon him to
see her and to learn the destiny of his beloved tree. Long he watched
from his window, until at last, when the shadows of the castle stretched
far to the east, he beheld his sister step out upon the terrace in com-
pany with her waiting-woman.

Then did he dress himself as a common gardener, concealing his
fragile body in a loose blouse, his curling locks and wan face under
a wide hat, also his delicate hands in coarse gloves, and, taking pick
and spade, he presented himself before the Lady Madeleine.

"It is my lord's will," he said, "that I should consult thy pleas-
ure concerning various improvements to be made in the grounds at
this part. First, with thy gracious permission, I will remove this
pine which has too long been a blot upon the scene, and must of
necessity find disfavor in thy sight." Whereupon he began dili-
gently to clear away the needles and cones that had dropped from
the branches, and to prepare the ground for digging. "Nay, my
good man," the Lady Madeleine said kindly, "the tree doth no
harm, I pray thee let it be." "And yet," replied the youth, not
pausing in his labor, "canst thou think of aught good that it doth?"
"Indeed," she answered quickly, "doth it not offer protection from
the sun in time of summer, from the snow in time of winter, and,
moreover, doth it not stand at the very threshold of the castle to offer welcome to the stranger?" "Ah, dearest lady," replied the youth, "all thou sayest may be true of yon straight and hardy tree, that, like Lord Duncan, thy husband, is fit to grace the highest station. But this sapless, withered thing is more like poor Lord Jeffrey, and is scarce worthy of its place." "As to that I can give no answer," said the Lady Madeleine, "for Lord Jeffrey I have not yet beheld. Howbeit," she added pensively, "he doth seem less kind than our pine tree in that when I came this morning, he stood not at the threshold of his home to give the stranger welcome." With this she would have moved away to where the lady in attendance was plucking roses. But Lord Jeffrey called to her, and, throwing off his disguise, stood before her in all his frailty. Timidly he took her hand and raised it to his lips. "Forgive me, my sister," he said, "and believe that it was fear and not unkindness which this morning prevented me from giving thee fit welcome."

Then, from out the castle door strode Lord Duncan, well pleased to see the two whom he best loved thus holding friendly converse. "How now, my lady," he laughed, "hast thou persuaded this whimsical lad to have yon unsightly stump removed?" "Nay," answered the bride, turning a serious face to his merry one, "so long as I am mistress of this castle, so long must this pine remain in its place, and if ever I go to another home then must it go with me. For know, my lord, that all trees are my friends, but this one is my brother whom I greatly love."

THE BUILDERS

ONE built a city on a hill,
    One built a lowly song;
One built great towers and domes that thrill
    The worldly throng.

A few brief years—they were not long—
    The city fell to ashen flakes;
Now, when I hear that old, old song,
    My heart still breaks.

CHARLES HANSON TOWNE.