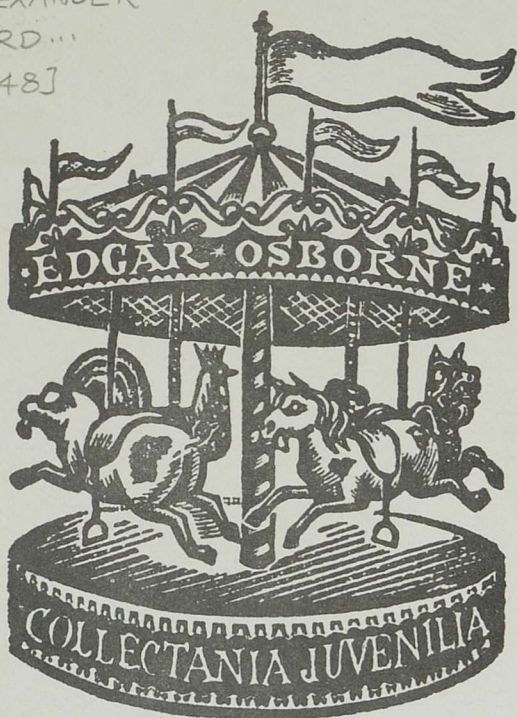




THE LORD
OF THE FOREST
AND HIS
VASSALS.



SB
ALEXANDER
LORD...
[1848]

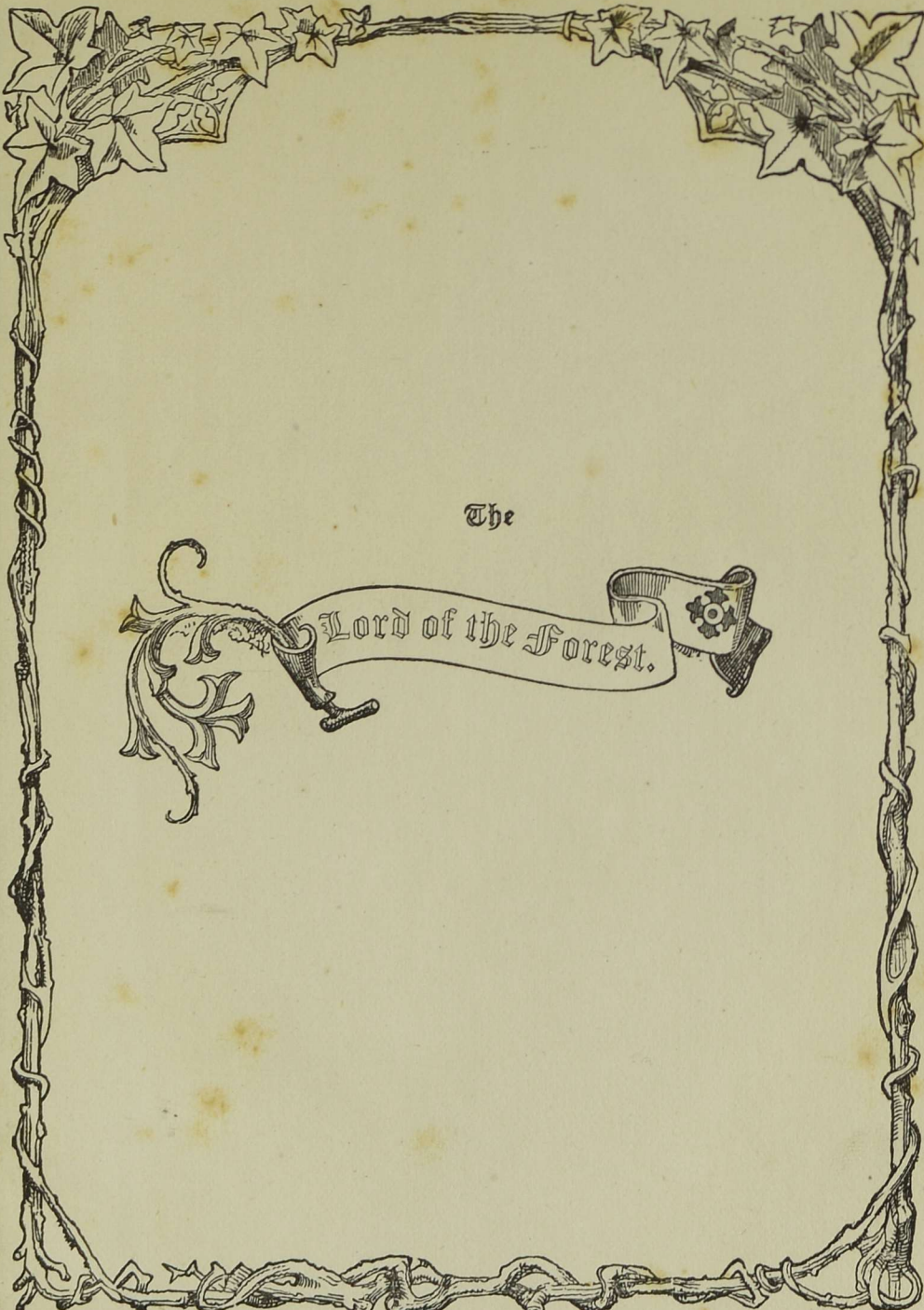


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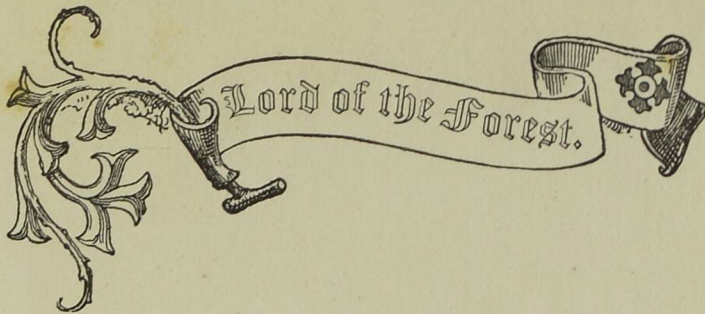
1847 or 1848?

C.F.H = Cecil Frances
Alexander née
Humphries?

[hymn writer - "All Things
(1818-1895) Bright &
Beautiful"
etc.]



The



Lord of the Forest.





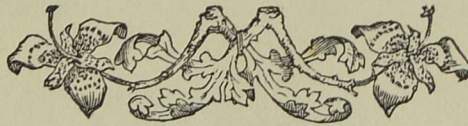
The

Lord of the Forest

and

His Vassals.

An Allegory.



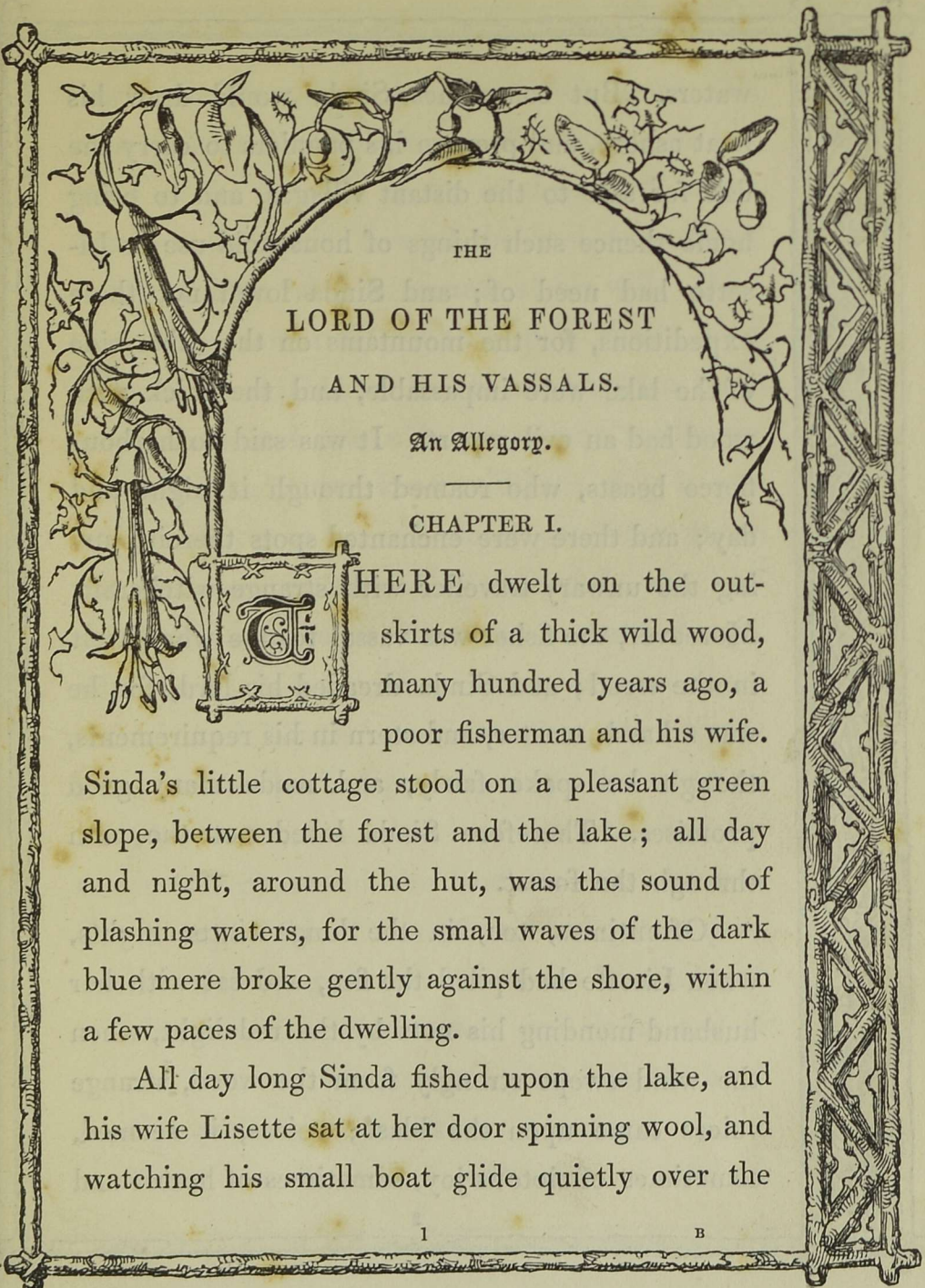
Joseph Masters London.

Illustration

TO MY LITTLE COUSIN, for whom
the amusement it was first imagined, I believe
the story of the King and his Terrors;
hoping they will recount that it represents a tale
not an imaginary story; that they will keep the tale
in view, and try in all things to be like Christians.

C. F. H.

1840



THE
LORD OF THE FOREST
AND HIS VASSALS.

An Allegory.

CHAPTER I.

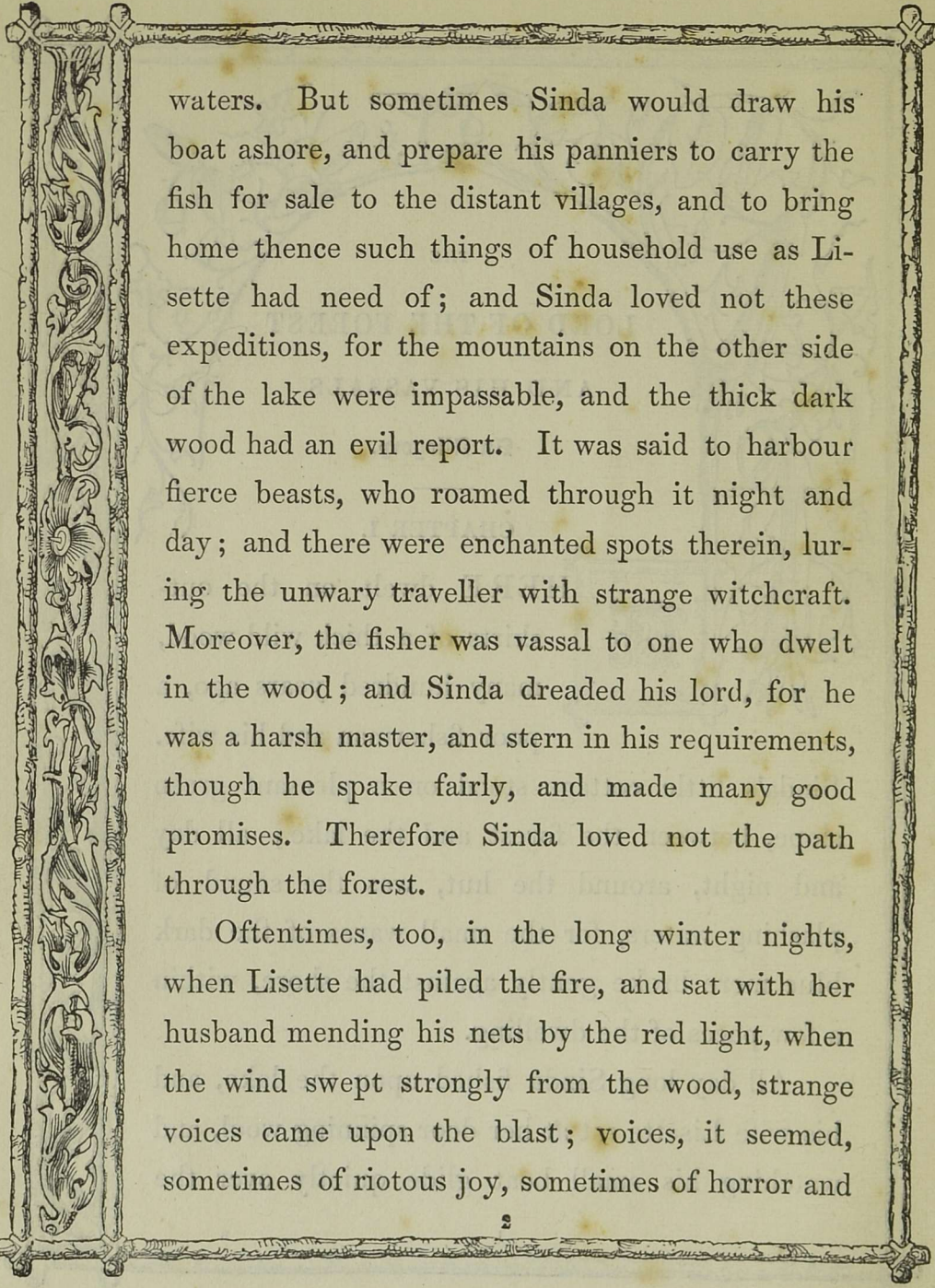


A

HERE dwelt on the outskirts of a thick wild wood, many hundred years ago, a poor fisherman and his wife.

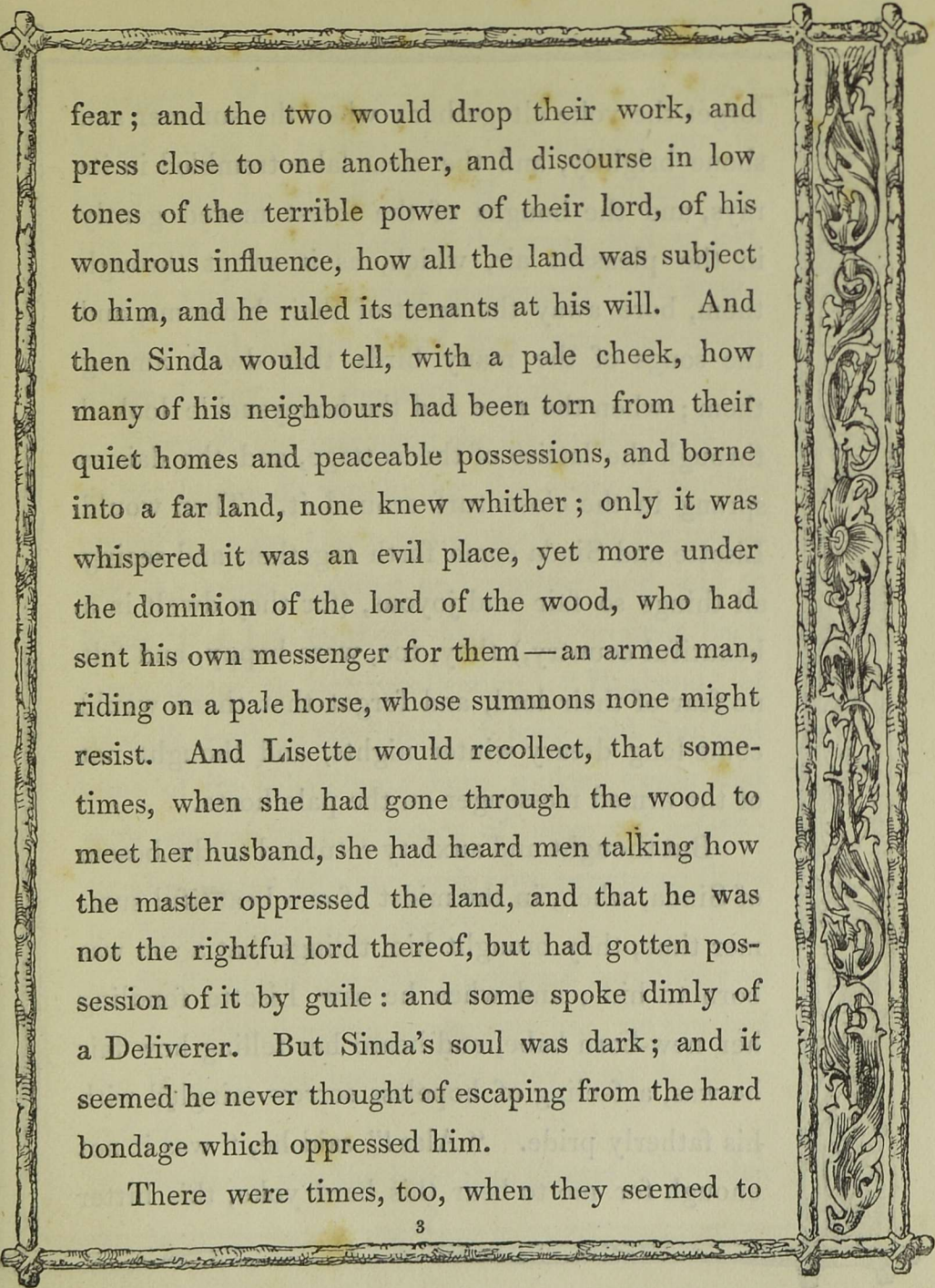
Sinda's little cottage stood on a pleasant green slope, between the forest and the lake; all day and night, around the hut, was the sound of plashing waters, for the small waves of the dark blue mere broke gently against the shore, within a few paces of the dwelling.

All day long Sinda fished upon the lake, and his wife Lisette sat at her door spinning wool, and watching his small boat glide quietly over the



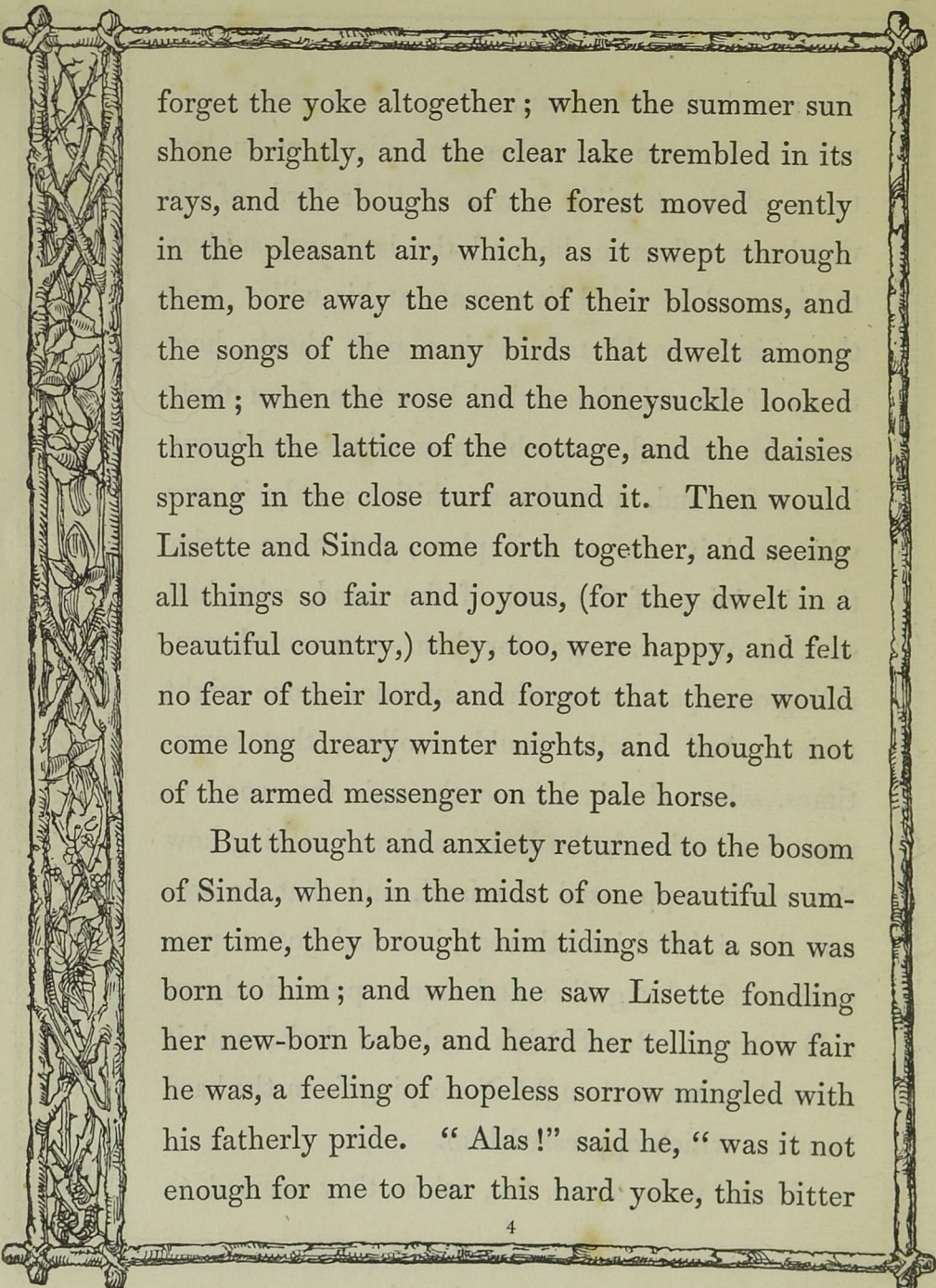
waters. But sometimes Sinda would draw his boat ashore, and prepare his panniers to carry the fish for sale to the distant villages, and to bring home thence such things of household use as Lisette had need of; and Sinda loved not these expeditions, for the mountains on the other side of the lake were impassable, and the thick dark wood had an evil report. It was said to harbour fierce beasts, who roamed through it night and day; and there were enchanted spots therein, luring the unwary traveller with strange witchcraft. Moreover, the fisher was vassal to one who dwelt in the wood; and Sinda dreaded his lord, for he was a harsh master, and stern in his requirements, though he spake fairly, and made many good promises. Therefore Sinda loved not the path through the forest.

Oftentimes, too, in the long winter nights, when Lisette had piled the fire, and sat with her husband mending his nets by the red light, when the wind swept strongly from the wood, strange voices came upon the blast; voices, it seemed, sometimes of riotous joy, sometimes of horror and



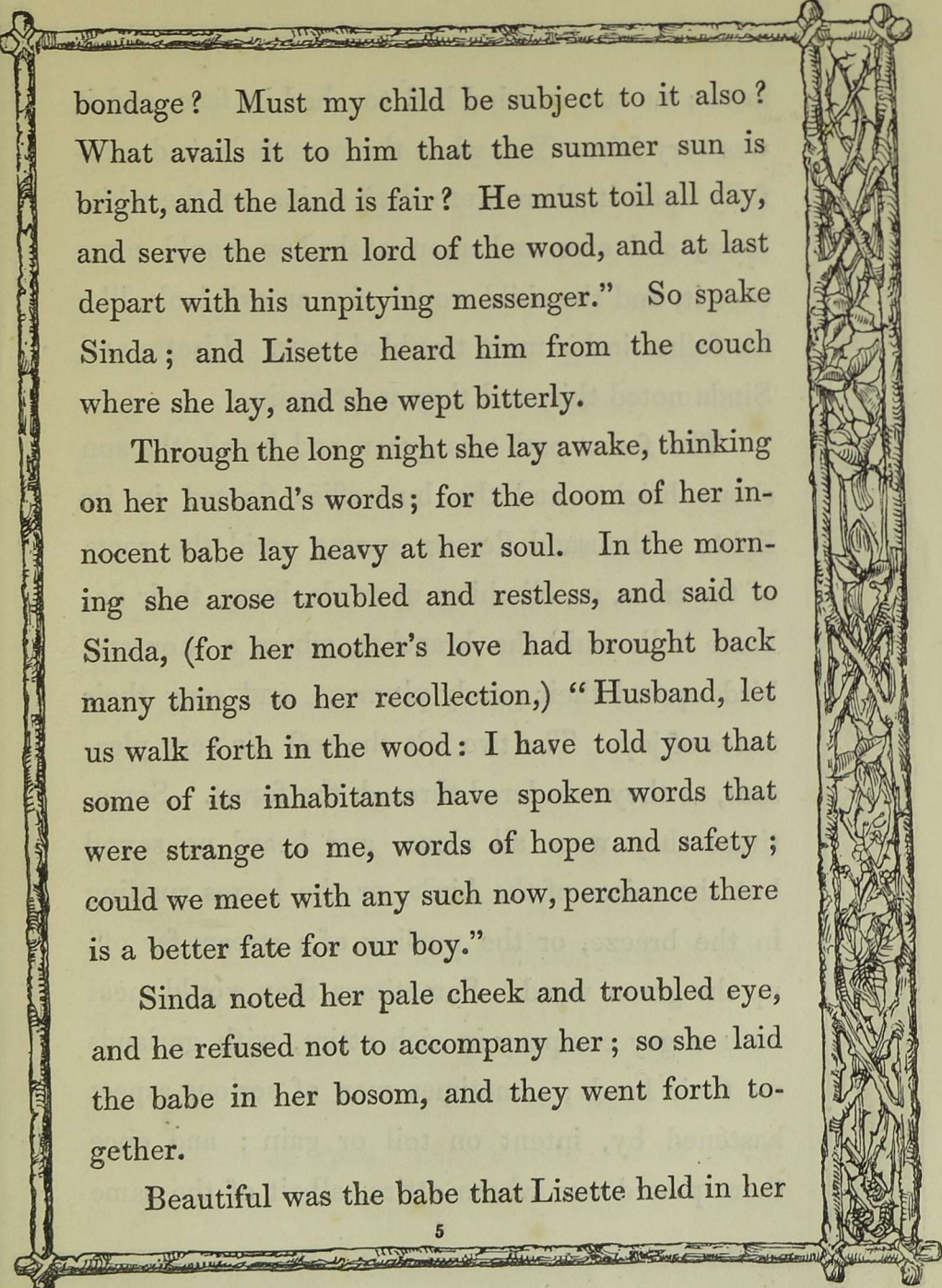
fear; and the two would drop their work, and press close to one another, and discourse in low tones of the terrible power of their lord, of his wondrous influence, how all the land was subject to him, and he ruled its tenants at his will. And then Sinda would tell, with a pale cheek, how many of his neighbours had been torn from their quiet homes and peaceable possessions, and borne into a far land, none knew whither; only it was whispered it was an evil place, yet more under the dominion of the lord of the wood, who had sent his own messenger for them—an armed man, riding on a pale horse, whose summons none might resist. And Lisette would recollect, that sometimes, when she had gone through the wood to meet her husband, she had heard men talking how the master oppressed the land, and that he was not the rightful lord thereof, but had gotten possession of it by guile: and some spoke dimly of a Deliverer. But Sinda's soul was dark; and it seemed he never thought of escaping from the hard bondage which oppressed him.

There were times, too, when they seemed to



forget the yoke altogether ; when the summer sun shone brightly, and the clear lake trembled in its rays, and the boughs of the forest moved gently in the pleasant air, which, as it swept through them, bore away the scent of their blossoms, and the songs of the many birds that dwelt among them ; when the rose and the honeysuckle looked through the lattice of the cottage, and the daisies sprang in the close turf around it. Then would Lisette and Sinda come forth together, and seeing all things so fair and joyous, (for they dwelt in a beautiful country,) they, too, were happy, and felt no fear of their lord, and forgot that there would come long dreary winter nights, and thought not of the armed messenger on the pale horse.

But thought and anxiety returned to the bosom of Sinda, when, in the midst of one beautiful summer time, they brought him tidings that a son was born to him ; and when he saw Lisette fondling her new-born babe, and heard her telling how fair he was, a feeling of hopeless sorrow mingled with his fatherly pride. “ Alas ! ” said he, “ was it not enough for me to bear this hard yoke, this bitter

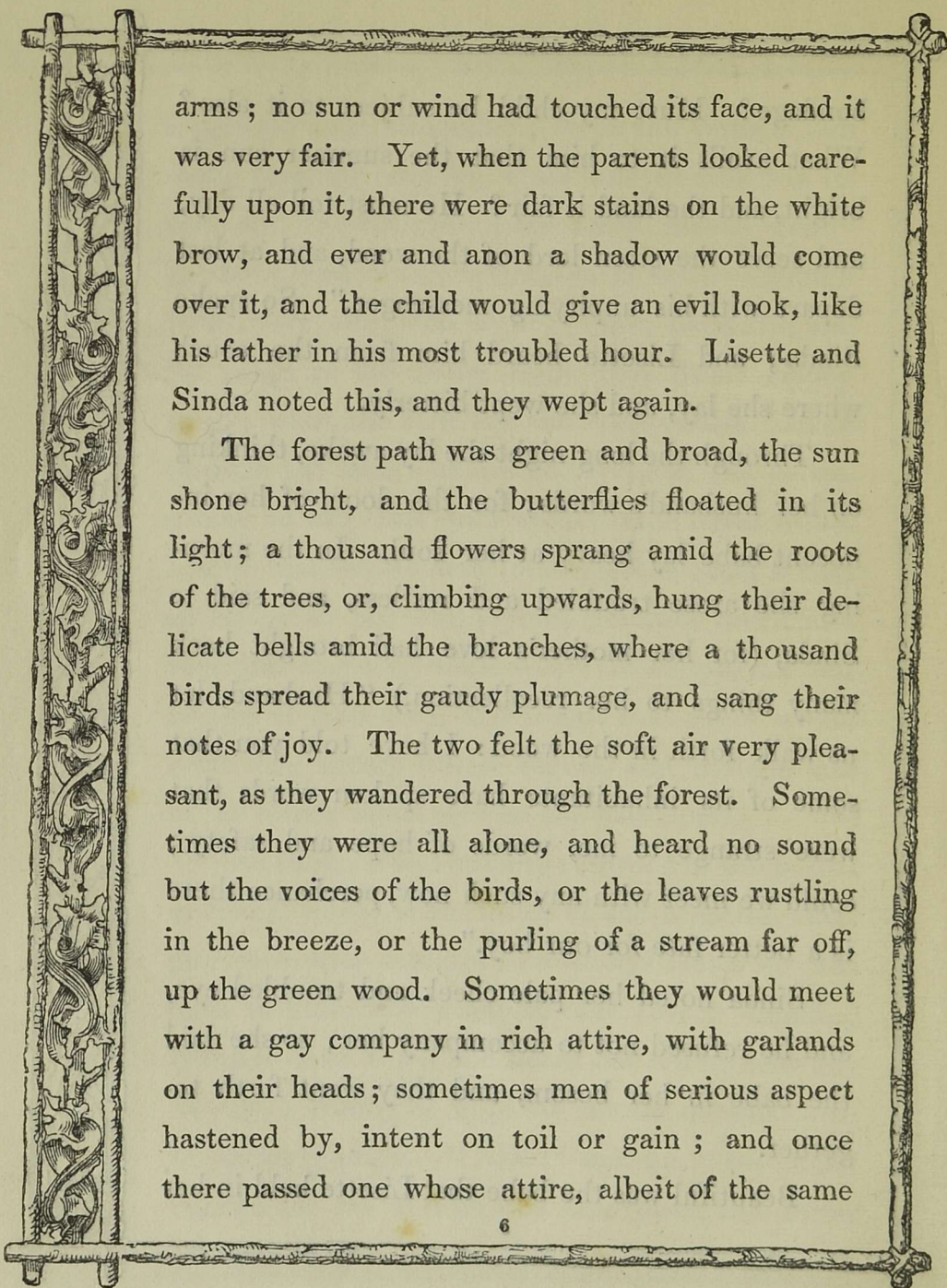


bondage? Must my child be subject to it also? What avails it to him that the summer sun is bright, and the land is fair? He must toil all day, and serve the stern lord of the wood, and at last depart with his un pitying messenger." So spake Sinda; and Lisette heard him from the couch where she lay, and she wept bitterly.

Through the long night she lay awake, thinking on her husband's words; for the doom of her innocent babe lay heavy at her soul. In the morning she arose troubled and restless, and said to Sinda, (for her mother's love had brought back many things to her recollection,) "Husband, let us walk forth in the wood: I have told you that some of its inhabitants have spoken words that were strange to me, words of hope and safety; could we meet with any such now, perchance there is a better fate for our boy."

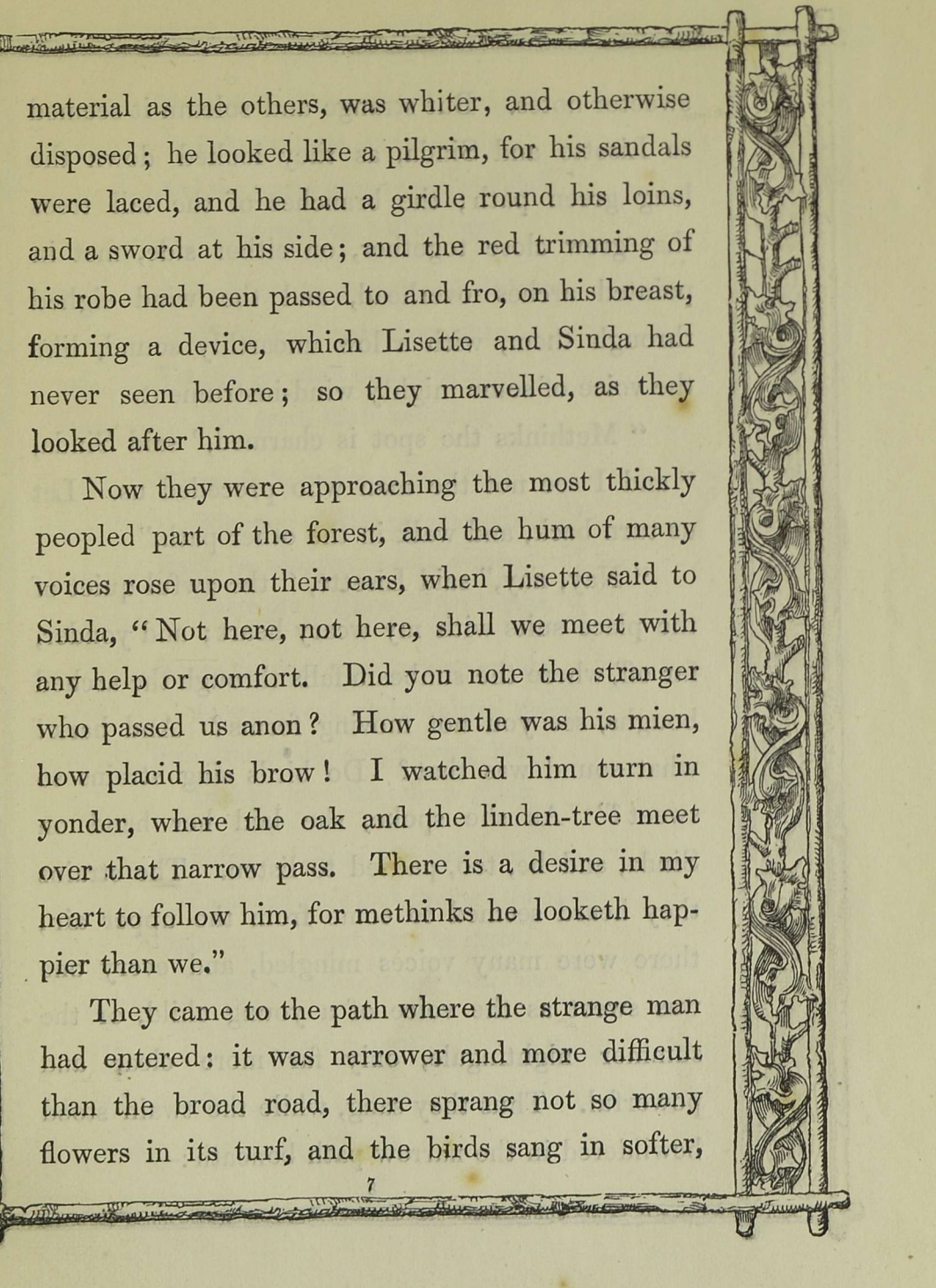
Sinda noted her pale cheek and troubled eye, and he refused not to accompany her; so she laid the babe in her bosom, and they went forth together.

Beautiful was the babe that Lisette held in her



arms ; no sun or wind had touched its face, and it was very fair. Yet, when the parents looked carefully upon it, there were dark stains on the white brow, and ever and anon a shadow would come over it, and the child would give an evil look, like his father in his most troubled hour. Lisette and Sinda noted this, and they wept again.

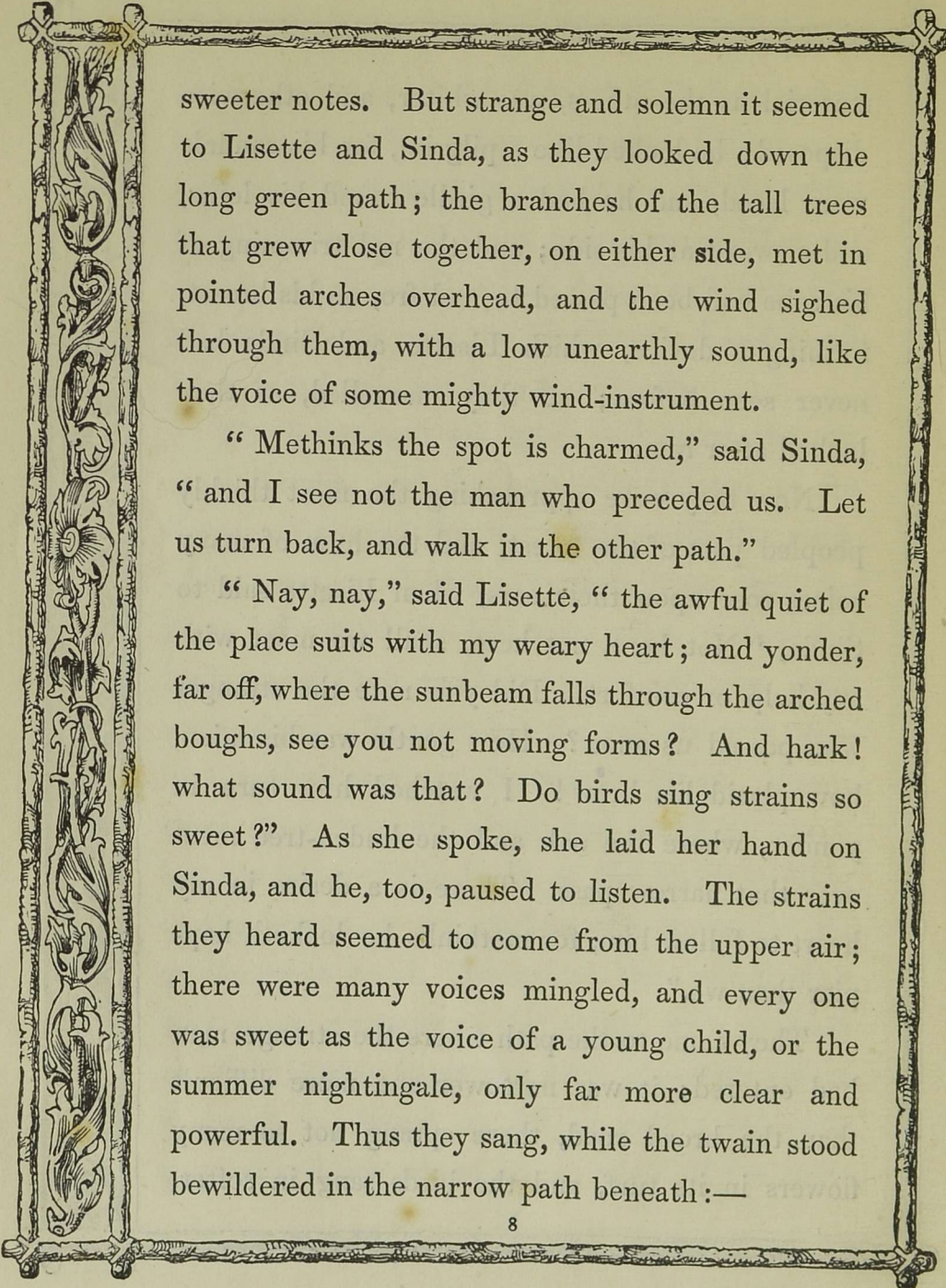
The forest path was green and broad, the sun shone bright, and the butterflies floated in its light; a thousand flowers sprang amid the roots of the trees, or, climbing upwards, hung their delicate bells amid the branches, where a thousand birds spread their gaudy plumage, and sang their notes of joy. The two felt the soft air very pleasant, as they wandered through the forest. Sometimes they were all alone, and heard no sound but the voices of the birds, or the leaves rustling in the breeze, or the purling of a stream far off, up the green wood. Sometimes they would meet with a gay company in rich attire, with garlands on their heads; sometimes men of serious aspect hastened by, intent on toil or gain; and once there passed one whose attire, albeit of the same



material as the others, was whiter, and otherwise disposed; he looked like a pilgrim, for his sandals were laced, and he had a girdle round his loins, and a sword at his side; and the red trimming of his robe had been passed to and fro, on his breast, forming a device, which Lisette and Sinda had never seen before; so they marvelled, as they looked after him.

Now they were approaching the most thickly peopled part of the forest, and the hum of many voices rose upon their ears, when Lisette said to Sinda, "Not here, not here, shall we meet with any help or comfort. Did you note the stranger who passed us anon? How gentle was his mien, how placid his brow! I watched him turn in yonder, where the oak and the linden-tree meet over that narrow pass. There is a desire in my heart to follow him, for methinks he looketh happier than we."

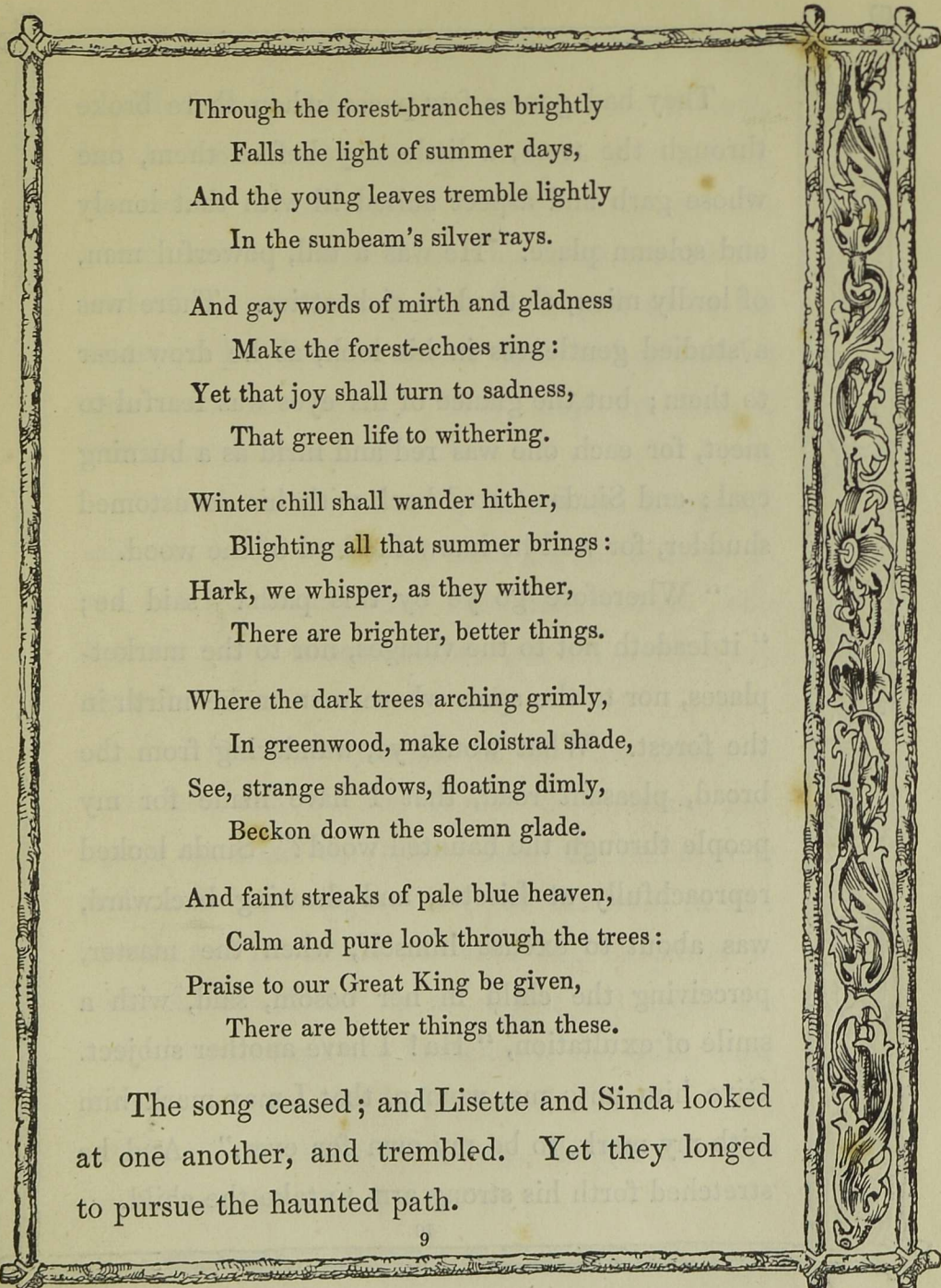
They came to the path where the strange man had entered: it was narrower and more difficult than the broad road, there sprang not so many flowers in its turf, and the birds sang in softer,



sweeter notes. But strange and solemn it seemed to Lisette and Sinda, as they looked down the long green path; the branches of the tall trees that grew close together, on either side, met in pointed arches overhead, and the wind sighed through them, with a low unearthly sound, like the voice of some mighty wind-instrument.

“Methinks the spot is charmed,” said Sinda, “and I see not the man who preceded us. Let us turn back, and walk in the other path.”

“Nay, nay,” said Lisette, “the awful quiet of the place suits with my weary heart; and yonder, far off, where the sunbeam falls through the arched boughs, see you not moving forms? And hark! what sound was that? Do birds sing strains so sweet?” As she spoke, she laid her hand on Sinda, and he, too, paused to listen. The strains they heard seemed to come from the upper air; there were many voices mingled, and every one was sweet as the voice of a young child, or the summer nightingale, only far more clear and powerful. Thus they sang, while the twain stood bewildered in the narrow path beneath:—



Through the forest-branches brightly
Falls the light of summer days,
And the young leaves tremble lightly
In the sunbeam's silver rays.

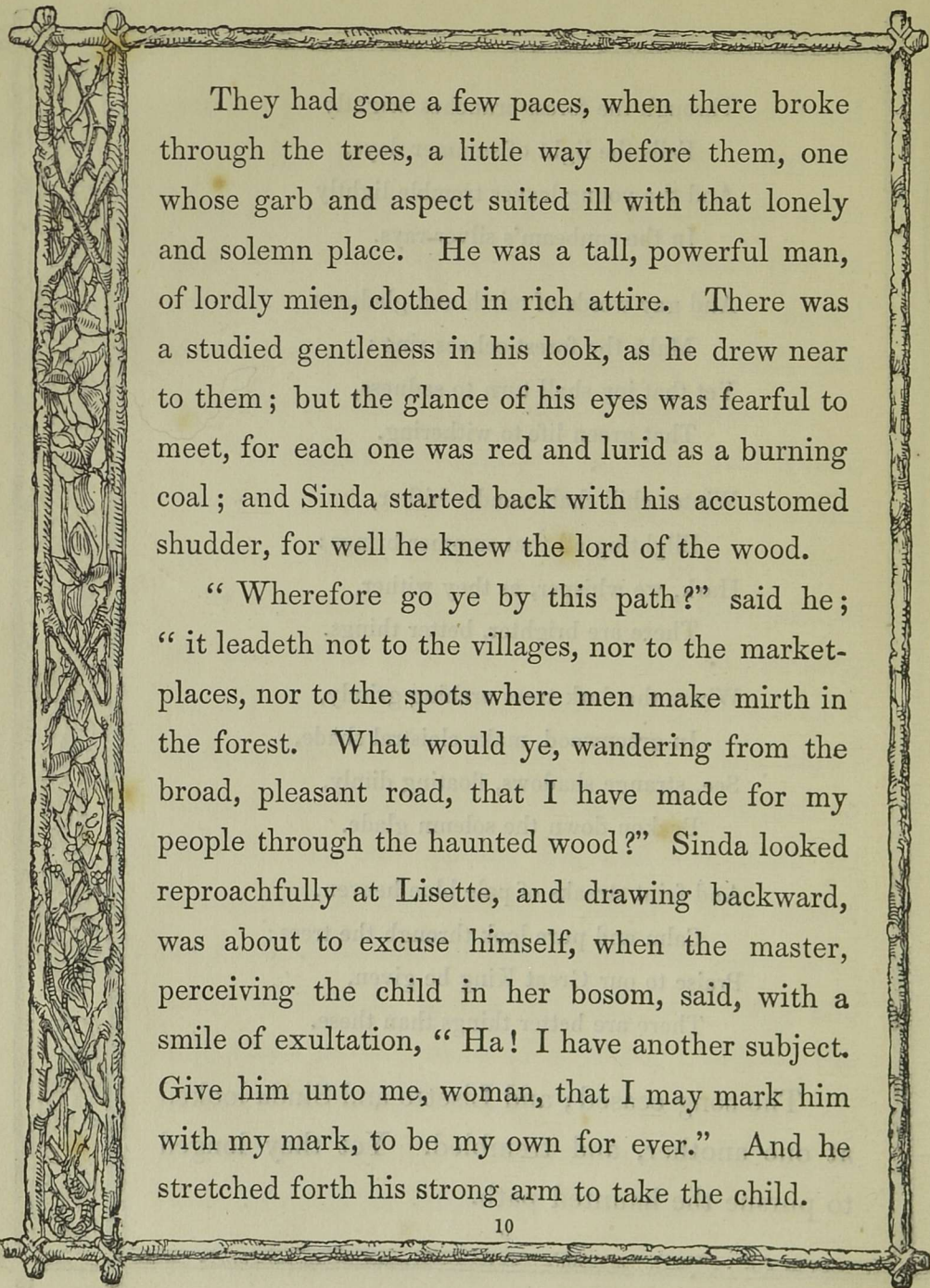
And gay words of mirth and gladness
Make the forest-echoes ring :
Yet that joy shall turn to sadness,
That green life to withering.

Winter chill shall wander hither,
Blighting all that summer brings :
Hark, we whisper, as they wither,
There are brighter, better things.

Where the dark trees arching grimly,
In greenwood, make cloistral shade,
See, strange shadows, floating dimly,
Beckon down the solemn glade.

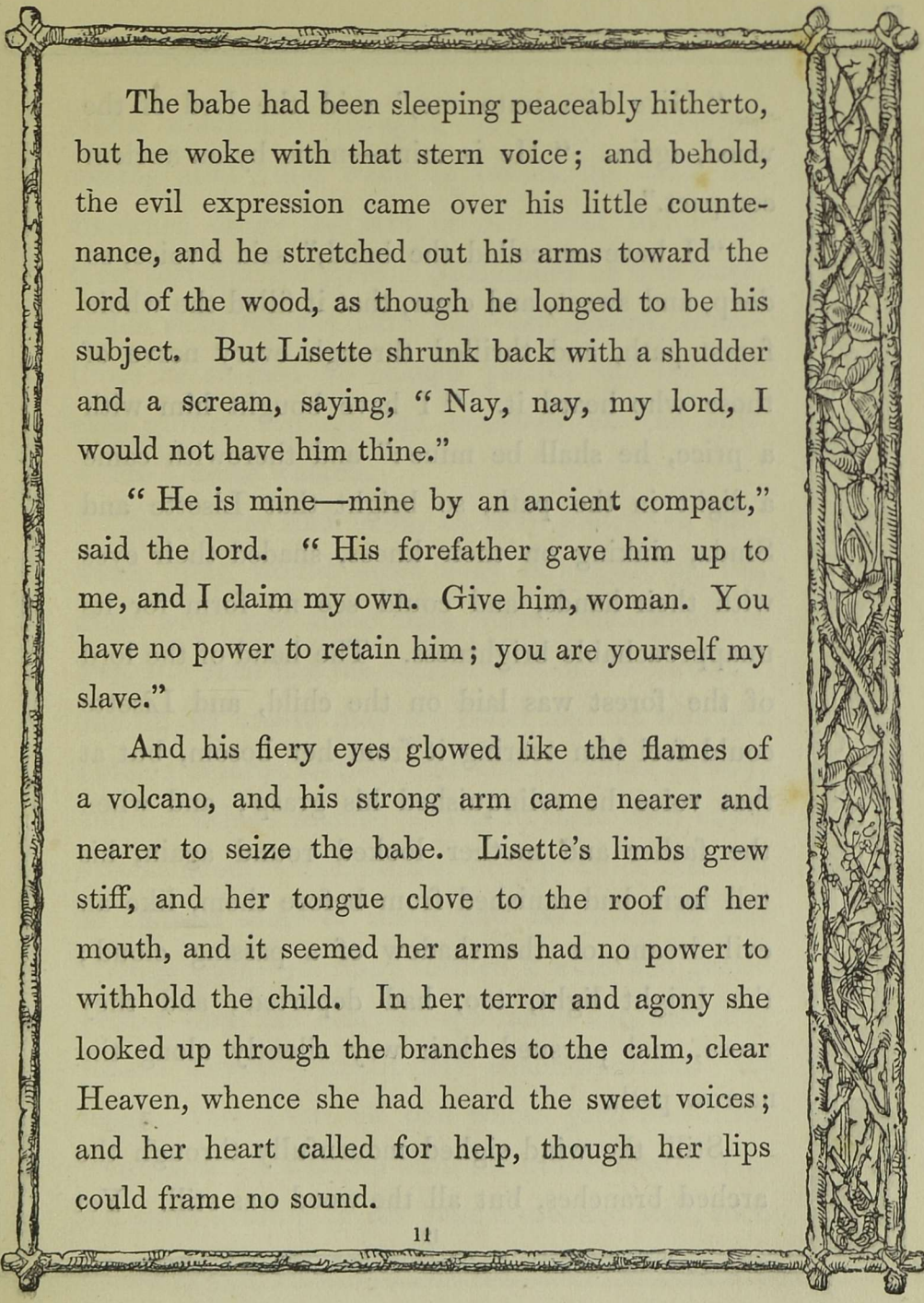
And faint streaks of pale blue heaven,
Calm and pure look through the trees :
Praise to our Great King be given,
There are better things than these.

The song ceased ; and Lisette and Sinda looked
at one another, and trembled. Yet they longed
to pursue the haunted path.



They had gone a few paces, when there broke through the trees, a little way before them, one whose garb and aspect suited ill with that lonely and solemn place. He was a tall, powerful man, of lordly mien, clothed in rich attire. There was a studied gentleness in his look, as he drew near to them; but the glance of his eyes was fearful to meet, for each one was red and lurid as a burning coal; and Sinda started back with his accustomed shudder, for well he knew the lord of the wood.

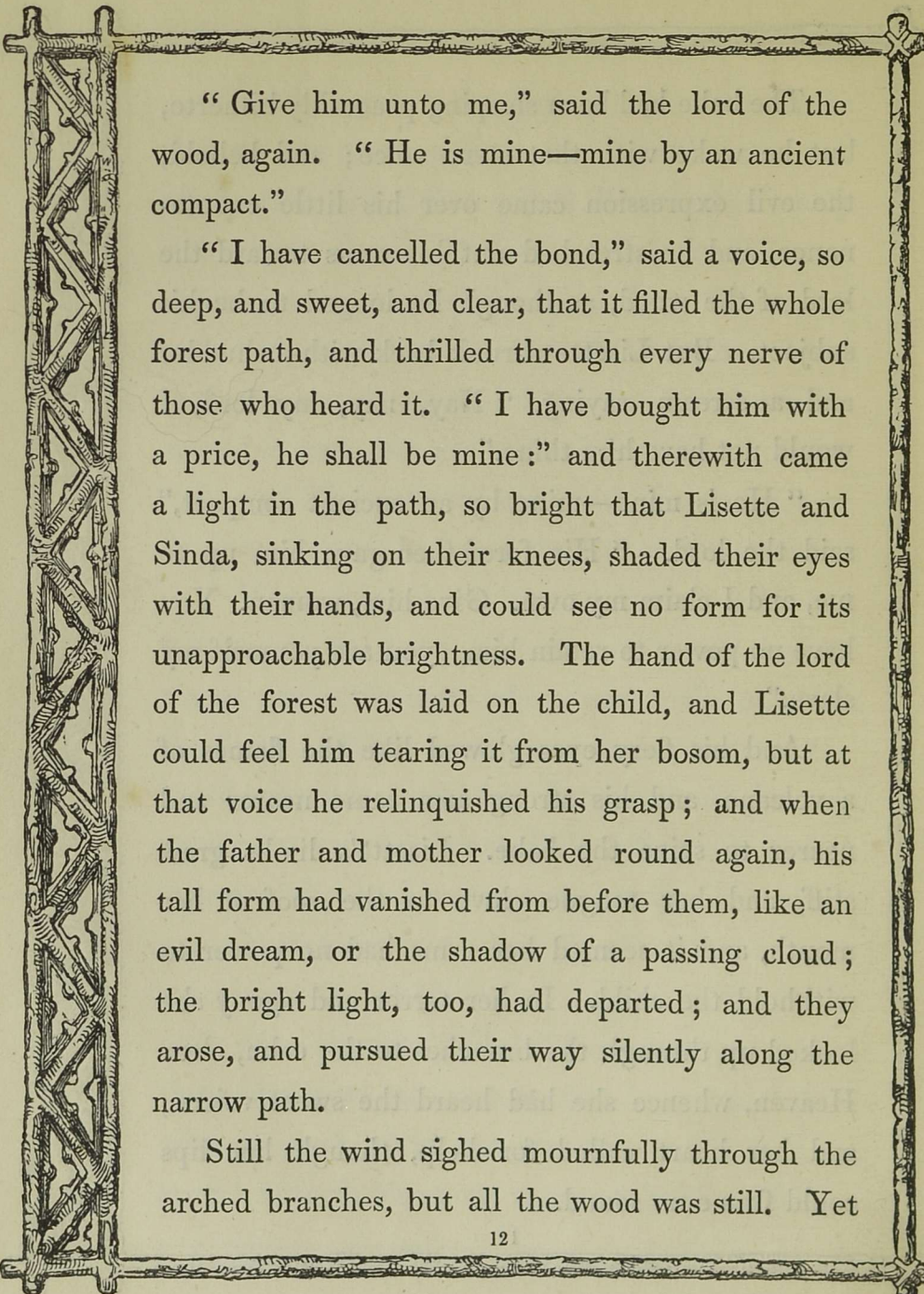
“Wherefore go ye by this path?” said he; “it leadeth not to the villages, nor to the market-places, nor to the spots where men make mirth in the forest. What would ye, wandering from the broad, pleasant road, that I have made for my people through the haunted wood?” Sinda looked reproachfully at Lisette, and drawing backward, was about to excuse himself, when the master, perceiving the child in her bosom, said, with a smile of exultation, “Ha! I have another subject. Give him unto me, woman, that I may mark him with my mark, to be my own for ever.” And he stretched forth his strong arm to take the child.



The babe had been sleeping peaceably hitherto, but he woke with that stern voice; and behold, the evil expression came over his little countenance, and he stretched out his arms toward the lord of the wood, as though he longed to be his subject. But Lisette shrunk back with a shudder and a scream, saying, "Nay, nay, my lord, I would not have him thine."

"He is mine—mine by an ancient compact," said the lord. "His forefather gave him up to me, and I claim my own. Give him, woman. You have no power to retain him; you are yourself my slave."

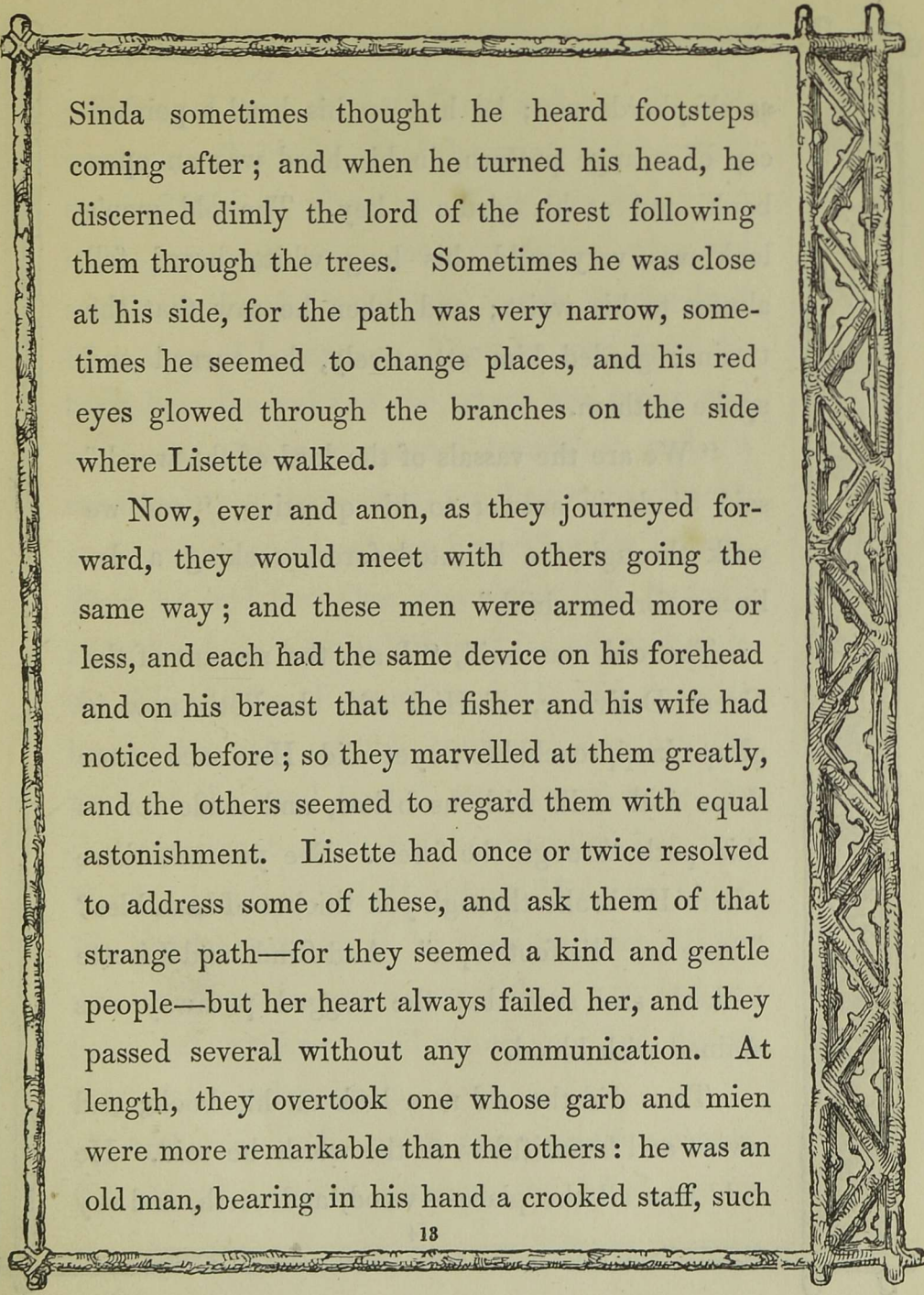
And his fiery eyes glowed like the flames of a volcano, and his strong arm came nearer and nearer to seize the babe. Lisette's limbs grew stiff, and her tongue clove to the roof of her mouth, and it seemed her arms had no power to withhold the child. In her terror and agony she looked up through the branches to the calm, clear Heaven, whence she had heard the sweet voices; and her heart called for help, though her lips could frame no sound.



“ Give him unto me,” said the lord of the wood, again. “ He is mine—mine by an ancient compact.”

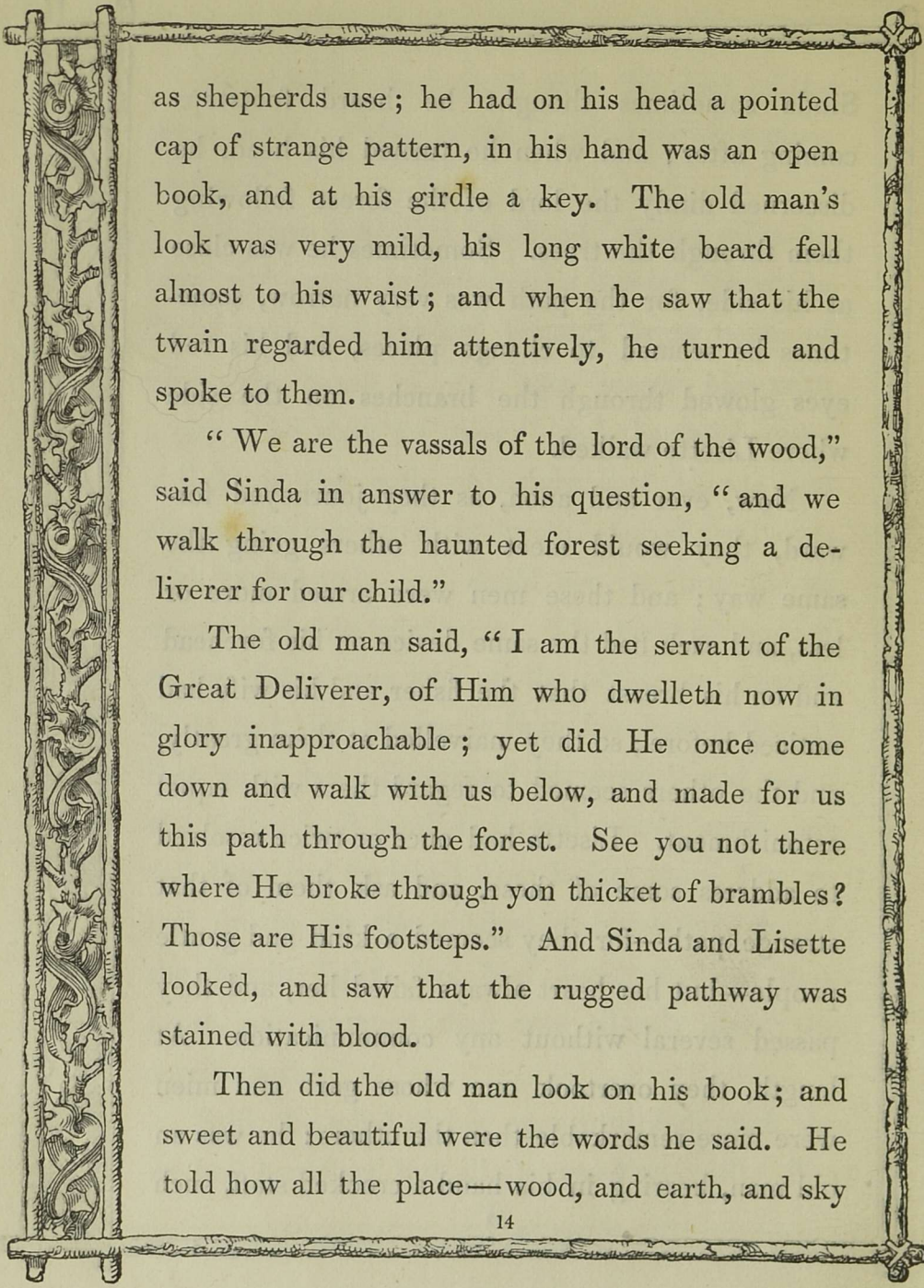
“ I have cancelled the bond,” said a voice, so deep, and sweet, and clear, that it filled the whole forest path, and thrilled through every nerve of those who heard it. “ I have bought him with a price, he shall be mine :” and therewith came a light in the path, so bright that Lisette and Sinda, sinking on their knees, shaded their eyes with their hands, and could see no form for its unapproachable brightness. The hand of the lord of the forest was laid on the child, and Lisette could feel him tearing it from her bosom, but at that voice he relinquished his grasp ; and when the father and mother looked round again, his tall form had vanished from before them, like an evil dream, or the shadow of a passing cloud ; the bright light, too, had departed ; and they arose, and pursued their way silently along the narrow path.

Still the wind sighed mournfully through the arched branches, but all the wood was still. Yet



Sinda sometimes thought he heard footsteps coming after ; and when he turned his head, he discerned dimly the lord of the forest following them through the trees. Sometimes he was close at his side, for the path was very narrow, sometimes he seemed to change places, and his red eyes glowed through the branches on the side where Lisette walked.

Now, ever and anon, as they journeyed forward, they would meet with others going the same way ; and these men were armed more or less, and each had the same device on his forehead and on his breast that the fisher and his wife had noticed before ; so they marvelled at them greatly, and the others seemed to regard them with equal astonishment. Lisette had once or twice resolved to address some of these, and ask them of that strange path—for they seemed a kind and gentle people—but her heart always failed her, and they passed several without any communication. At length, they overtook one whose garb and mien were more remarkable than the others : he was an old man, bearing in his hand a crooked staff, such

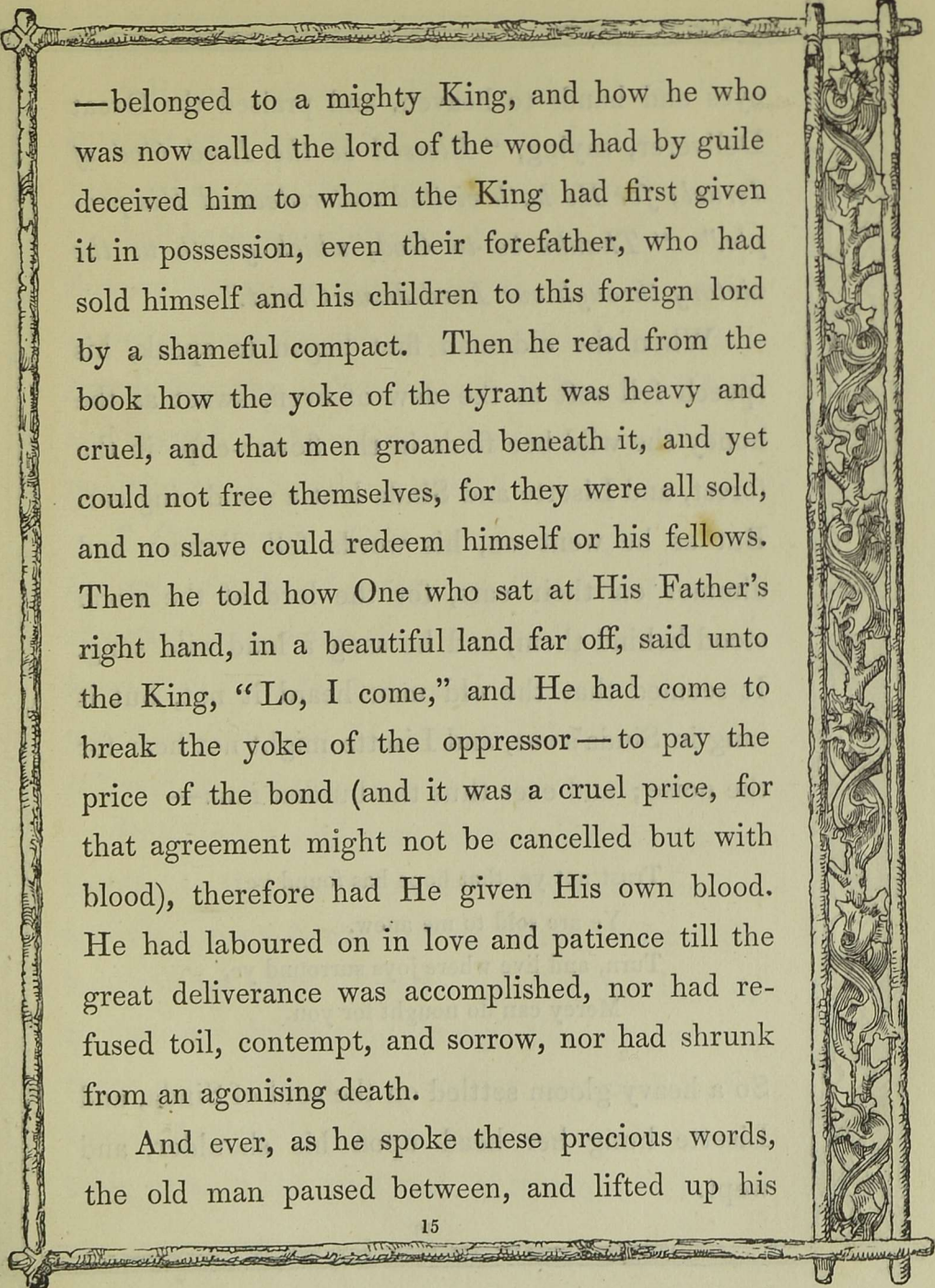


as shepherds use; he had on his head a pointed cap of strange pattern, in his hand was an open book, and at his girdle a key. The old man's look was very mild, his long white beard fell almost to his waist; and when he saw that the twain regarded him attentively, he turned and spoke to them.

“We are the vassals of the lord of the wood,” said Sinda in answer to his question, “and we walk through the haunted forest seeking a deliverer for our child.”

The old man said, “I am the servant of the Great Deliverer, of Him who dwelleth now in glory inapproachable; yet did He once come down and walk with us below, and made for us this path through the forest. See you not there where He broke through yon thicket of brambles? Those are His footsteps.” And Sinda and Lisette looked, and saw that the rugged pathway was stained with blood.

Then did the old man look on his book; and sweet and beautiful were the words he said. He told how all the place—wood, and earth, and sky



—belonged to a mighty King, and how he who was now called the lord of the wood had by guile deceived him to whom the King had first given it in possession, even their forefather, who had sold himself and his children to this foreign lord by a shameful compact. Then he read from the book how the yoke of the tyrant was heavy and cruel, and that men groaned beneath it, and yet could not free themselves, for they were all sold, and no slave could redeem himself or his fellows. Then he told how One who sat at His Father's right hand, in a beautiful land far off, said unto the King, "Lo, I come," and He had come to break the yoke of the oppressor—to pay the price of the bond (and it was a cruel price, for that agreement might not be cancelled but with blood), therefore had He given His own blood. He had laboured on in love and patience till the great deliverance was accomplished, nor had refused toil, contempt, and sorrow, nor had shrunk from an agonising death.

And ever, as he spoke these precious words, the old man paused between, and lifted up his

eyes and hands to heaven, and praised the Great Deliverer, saying, "*Blessed be the Lord God of Israel; for He hath visited and redeemed His people.*" "*Thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.*"

When the old man first began to speak, his speech fell soft as the dew of even, sweet as the honey the wild bee finds in the flower-cups in the forest, and Lisette and Sinda lent a wondering ear. But as he went on, his words fell dimmer and dimmer on their ears, for the lord of the wood stood behind them, and he sang a loud wild song. It seemed that the old man heard it not, but it rang in Sinda's ear, and Lisette might not hear for the noise; and ever thus the burden ran:—

Trust not ye, that hope has found ye;

Ye are sold to me anew.

Turn, and live where joys surround ye,

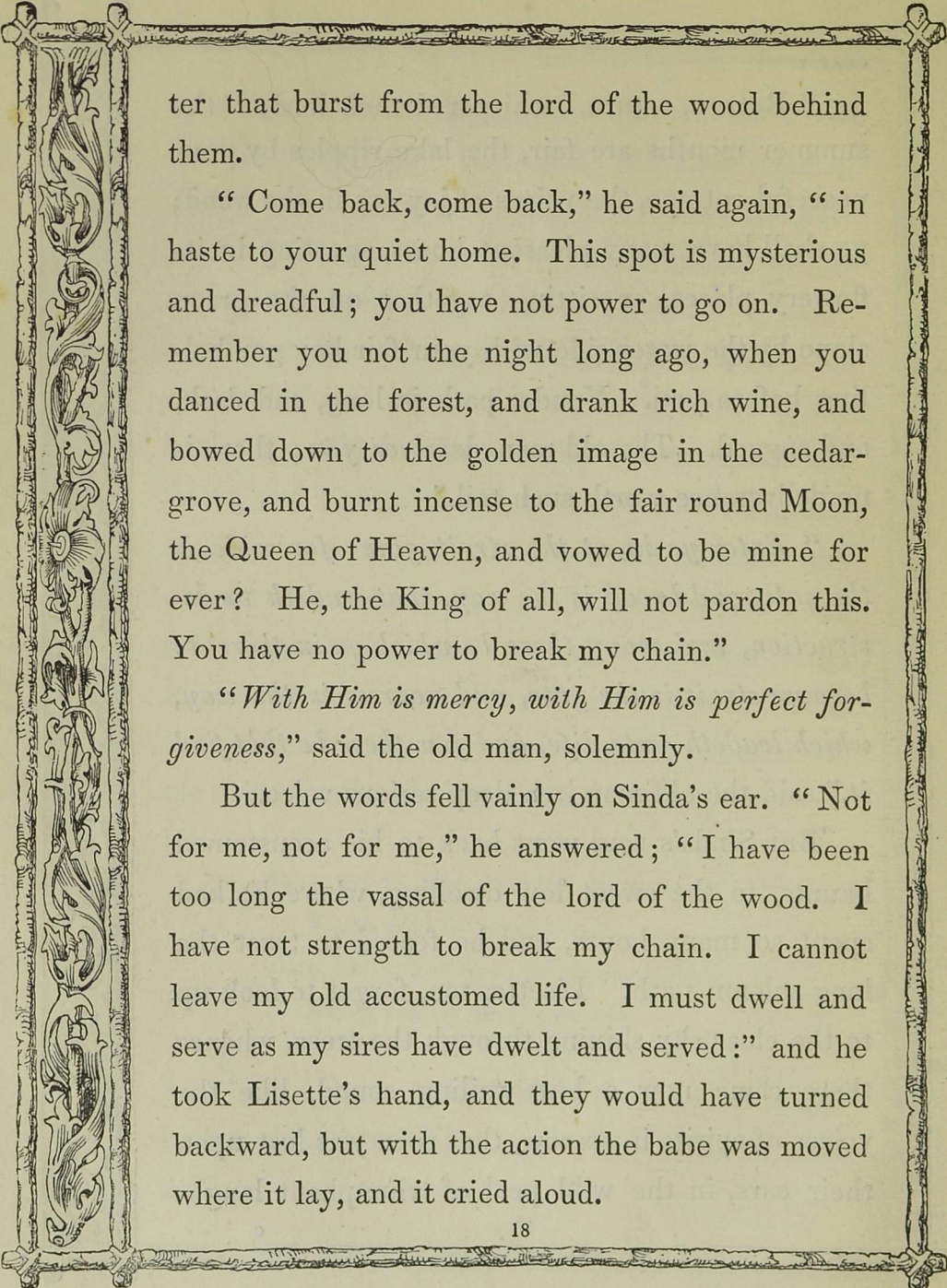
Mercy can do nought for you.

So a heavy gloom settled on the soul of Sinda, and Lisette hung her head upon his shoulder, and wept.

“Return, return,” whispered their lord; “the summer months are fair, the lake ripples by your peaceful cottage, the voices of joy are in the wood; ye shall have many pleasant hours, sporting in its flowery places, or sitting together on the green slope by the water-side with your fair boy gambolling before you. Yonder path is long, and dark, and rugged. The old man deceives you; there is no deliverance worth such toil.”

“*Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it,*” said the old man in a deep serious voice.

But Sinda's soul went back to his accustomed haunts, to the sweet low dwelling, where he had spent so many hours, and he feared to trust the long solemn path. Lisette, too, forgot to look up to the clear sky shining through the trees, whence there came now a low wailing sound, like the voices of spirits in sorrow, that soon was lost upon their ears, in the wild peal of triumphant laugh-



ter that burst from the lord of the wood behind them.

“Come back, come back,” he said again, “in haste to your quiet home. This spot is mysterious and dreadful; you have not power to go on. Remember you not the night long ago, when you danced in the forest, and drank rich wine, and bowed down to the golden image in the cedar-grove, and burnt incense to the fair round Moon, the Queen of Heaven, and vowed to be mine for ever? He, the King of all, will not pardon this. You have no power to break my chain.”

“With Him is mercy, with Him is perfect forgiveness,” said the old man, solemnly.

But the words fell vainly on Sinda’s ear. “Not for me, not for me,” he answered; “I have been too long the vassal of the lord of the wood. I have not strength to break my chain. I cannot leave my old accustomed life. I must dwell and serve as my sires have dwelt and served:” and he took Lisette’s hand, and they would have turned backward, but with the action the babe was moved where it lay, and it cried aloud.

“ Yet for this child,” said Sinda, for he met the mother’s look of agony, “ he is not yet enslaved, save for our sake. I would give him to the Great Deliverer, if, indeed, he will receive such.”

“ *Suffer little children to come unto me, and forbid them not: for of such is the kingdom of heaven,*” said the grey-haired man, and a smile of heavenly joy played about his lips.

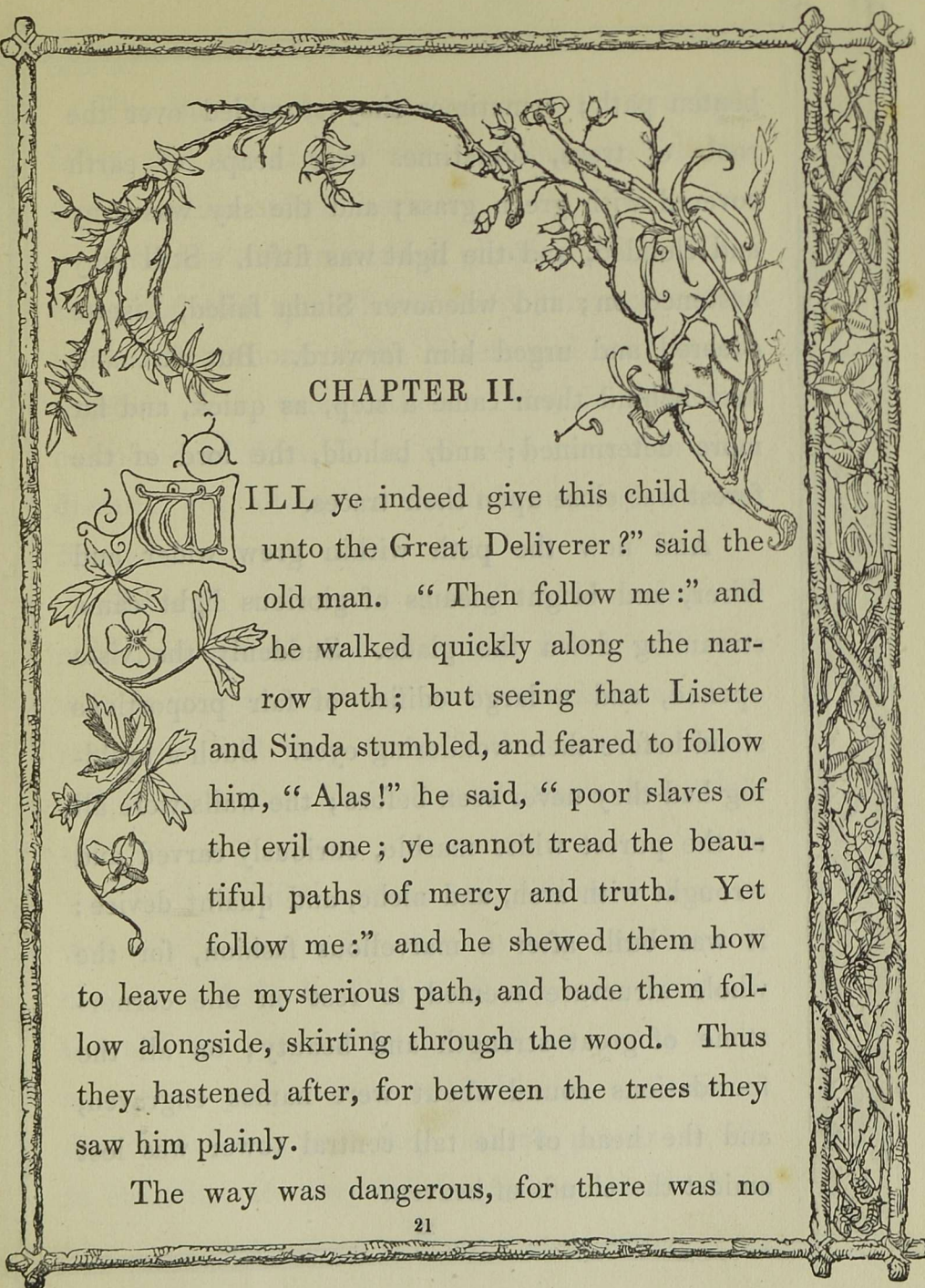
“ He is too young yet,” whispered the lord of the wood. “ Suffer him, at least, to choose for himself; he cannot yet discern good and evil. Bear him home with you, even as he is, for a little while longer;” and he stretched his long arm through the trees, and his hand crept stealthily over the shoulder of Sinda to take the babe, as Lisette held it close prest to her and to him.

But now the aged man stood forth, and his eye was bright and stern; he took from his girdle the mysterious symbol, that Lisette and Sinda had observed before: it was formed of two pieces of wood laid across one another.

“ In the name of Him who said unto me, ‘ *Feed my lambs,*’ I bid thee depart,” he said, and

touched the grasping hand. Instantly it was withdrawn; and with a yell of terror and defiance, the lord of the forest was gone.

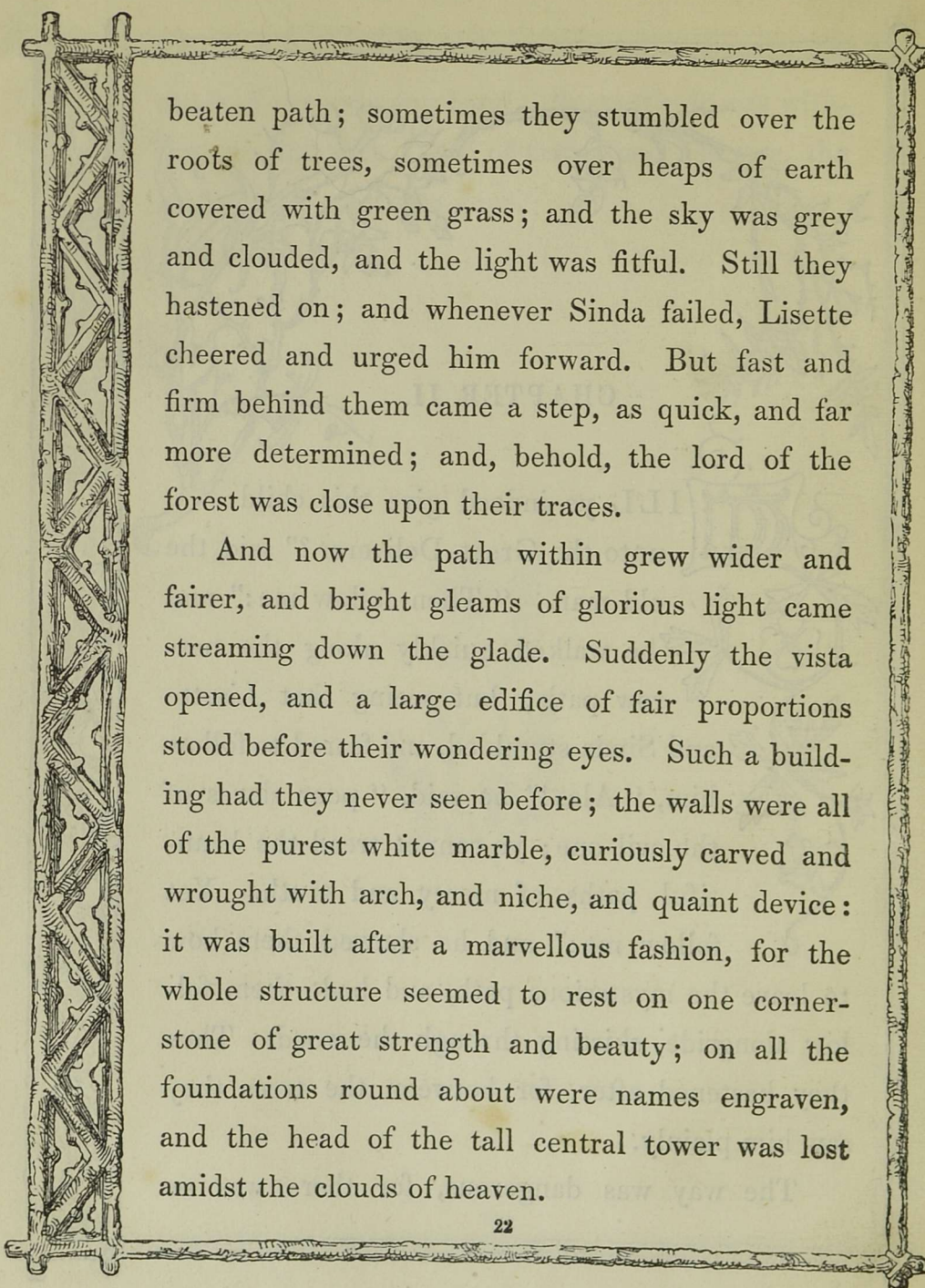




CHAPTER II.

WILL ye indeed give this child unto the Great Deliverer?" said the old man. "Then follow me:" and he walked quickly along the narrow path; but seeing that Lisette and Sinda stumbled, and feared to follow him, "Alas!" he said, "poor slaves of the evil one; ye cannot tread the beautiful paths of mercy and truth. Yet follow me:" and he shewed them how to leave the mysterious path, and bade them follow alongside, skirting through the wood. Thus they hastened after, for between the trees they saw him plainly.

The way was dangerous, for there was no



beaten path; sometimes they stumbled over the roots of trees, sometimes over heaps of earth covered with green grass; and the sky was grey and clouded, and the light was fitful. Still they hastened on; and whenever Sinda failed, Lisette cheered and urged him forward. But fast and firm behind them came a step, as quick, and far more determined; and, behold, the lord of the forest was close upon their traces.

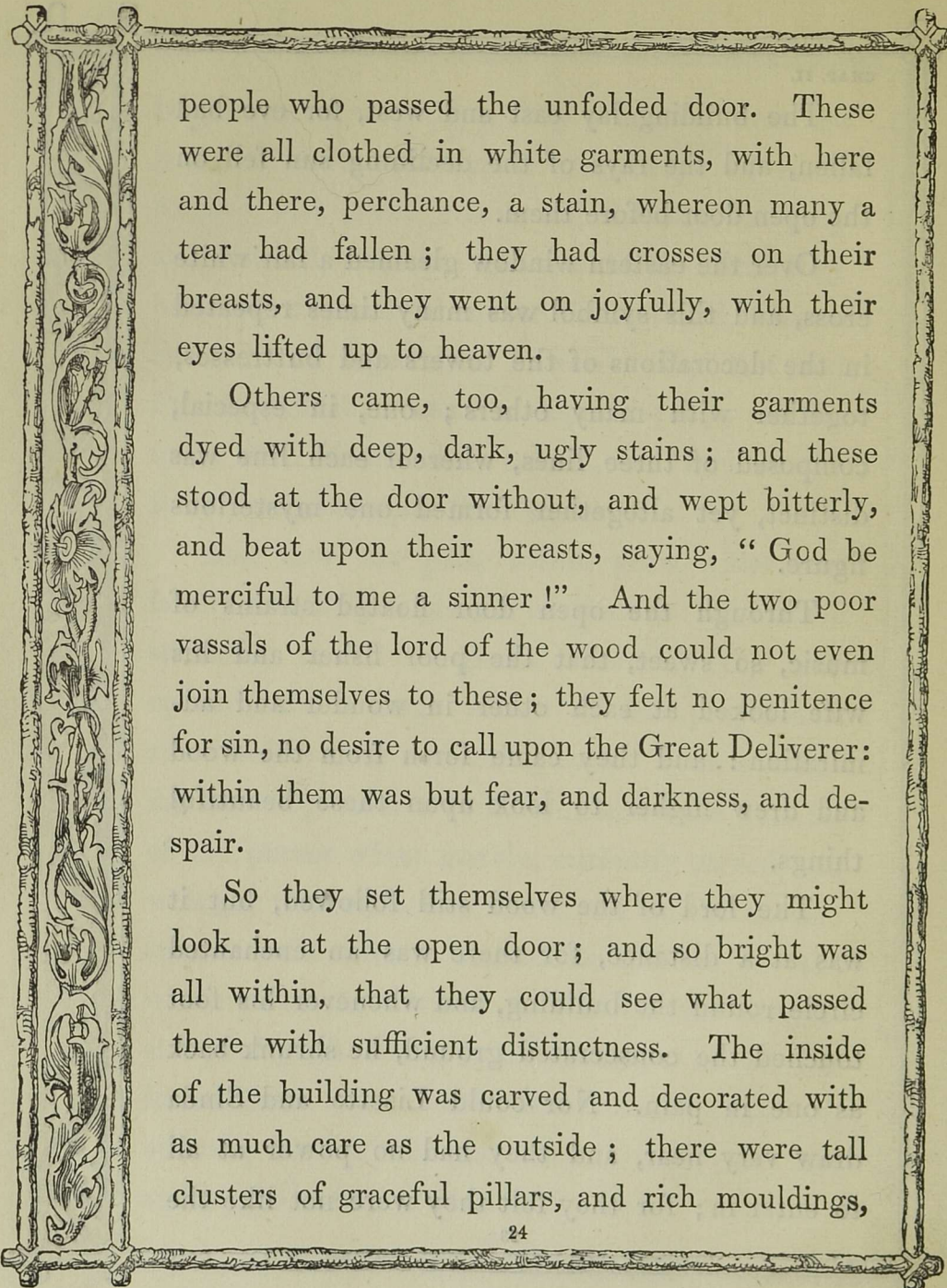
And now the path within grew wider and fairer, and bright gleams of glorious light came streaming down the glade. Suddenly the vista opened, and a large edifice of fair proportions stood before their wondering eyes. Such a building had they never seen before; the walls were all of the purest white marble, curiously carved and wrought with arch, and niche, and quaint device: it was built after a marvellous fashion, for the whole structure seemed to rest on one cornerstone of great strength and beauty; on all the foundations round about were names engraven, and the head of the tall central tower was lost amidst the clouds of heaven.

The building lay east and west, for eve had fallen, and the rays of the declining sun fell on the open door before them.

Over the eastern window gleamed a fair white cross, and this symbol was many times repeated in the decorations of the towers and buttresses, together with many others; one, in especial, composed of three lines, whereof each line was distinct, yet altogether formed one mysterious figure.

Through the open door floated strains of music, so sweet, that the poor fisher and his wife looked at each other in wonder and admiration: and they came forth from the wood and drew nigher to look upon these beautiful things.

The lord of the wood still followed, but it was at a distance, for there was an enchanted circle round the building, and whenever his foot touched the consecrated ground, he shrunk back as one in pain. Nor could Lisette and Sinda draw very near, and they had no power at all to enter in; for they felt they were not like the



people who passed the unfolded door. These were all clothed in white garments, with here and there, perchance, a stain, whereon many a tear had fallen; they had crosses on their breasts, and they went on joyfully, with their eyes lifted up to heaven.

Others came, too, having their garments dyed with deep, dark, ugly stains; and these stood at the door without, and wept bitterly, and beat upon their breasts, saying, "God be merciful to me a sinner!" And the two poor vassals of the lord of the wood could not even join themselves to these; they felt no penitence for sin, no desire to call upon the Great Deliverer: within them was but fear, and darkness, and despair.

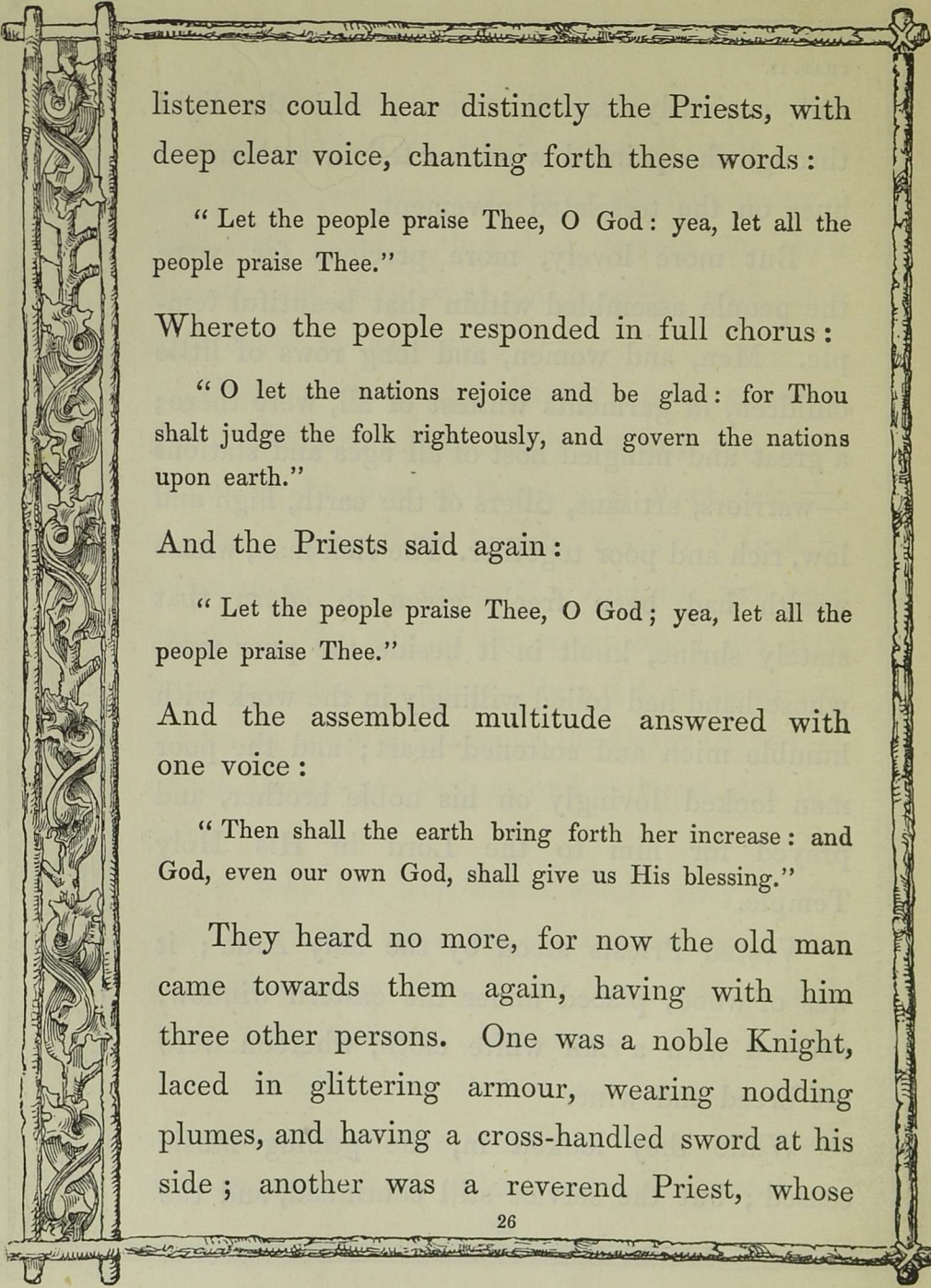
So they set themselves where they might look in at the open door; and so bright was all within, that they could see what passed there with sufficient distinctness. The inside of the building was carved and decorated with as much care as the outside; there were tall clusters of graceful pillars, and rich mouldings,

and curiously carved screens, and the light through the painted windows fell in a thousand hues on the tessellated pavement.

But more lovely, more precious far, were the people assembled within that beautiful temple. Men, and women, and long rows of little children, in garments whitest of all, were there; a great and mingled host of all ages and stations—warriors, artisans, tillers of the earth, high and low, rich and poor together. The rich man, whose wealth had been freely given to adorn that stately shrine, knelt in it beside the poor man, whose hand had toiled willingly in the work with humble mien and softened heart; and the poor man looked lovingly on his noble brother, and prayed for him to the Lord in His Holy Temple.

Vested Priests stood by the holy Altar; it was of wood, placed under the eastern window, covered with a fair white cloth, whereon were set bread and wine.

While they looked in, the pealing music ceased; but the service still continued, and the



listeners could hear distinctly the Priests, with deep clear voice, chanting forth these words :

“ Let the people praise Thee, O God : yea, let all the people praise Thee.”

Whereto the people responded in full chorus :

“ O let the nations rejoice and be glad : for Thou shalt judge the folk righteously, and govern the nations upon earth.”

And the Priests said again :

“ Let the people praise Thee, O God ; yea, let all the people praise Thee.”

And the assembled multitude answered with one voice :

“ Then shall the earth bring forth her increase : and God, even our own God, shall give us His blessing.”

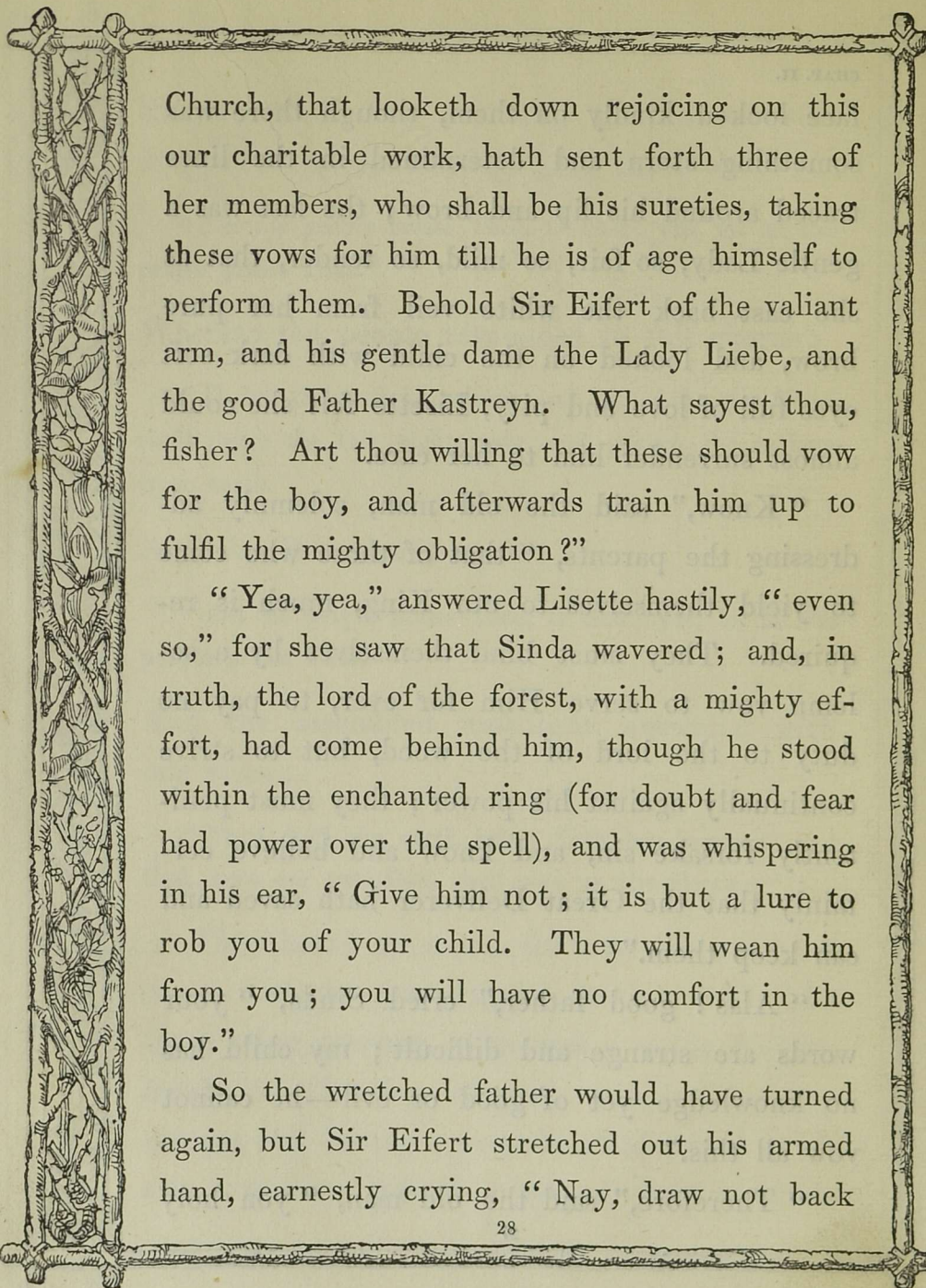
They heard no more, for now the old man came towards them again, having with him three other persons. One was a noble Knight, laced in glittering armour, wearing nodding plumes, and having a cross-handled sword at his side ; another was a reverend Priest, whose

face looked kindly on them, though there was something stern and determined in the lines traced around his lip and brow; the last was a gentle Lady, so fair, so mild, so tender, that as she cast back the white veil from her pure brow, and looked on the child with dark soft eyes full of love and pity, Lisette felt she could almost surrender him to her care.

“ Know,” said the old man, solemnly addressing the parents, “ that of those who come to yield themselves to our King, much is required. They must bind themselves by a solemn vow to serve Him for ever, to pay no duty to the lord of the wood, but to strive continually against his power; they must penitently forsake sin, and know and believe certainly that the Great Deliverer hath saved and can keep them.”

“ Alas! good father,” cried Sinda, “ your words are strange and difficult; my child has no knowledge yet of good or evil—he cannot vow all this.”

“ Therefore,” said the old man, “ yon holy



Church, that looketh down rejoicing on this our charitable work, hath sent forth three of her members, who shall be his sureties, taking these vows for him till he is of age himself to perform them. Behold Sir Eifert of the valiant arm, and his gentle dame the Lady Liebe, and the good Father Kastreyn. What sayest thou, fisher? Art thou willing that these should vow for the boy, and afterwards train him up to fulfil the mighty obligation?"

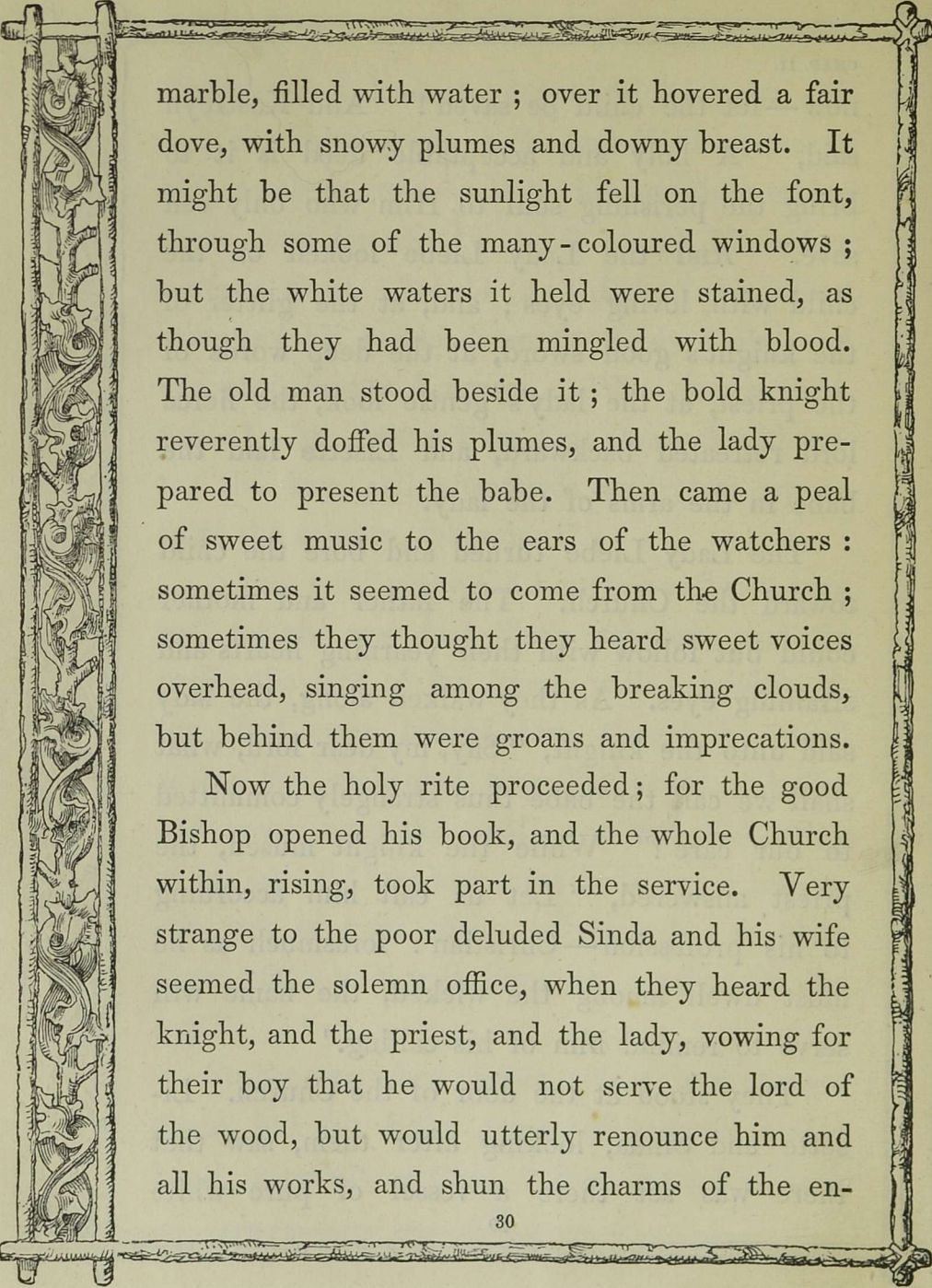
"Yea, yea," answered Lisette hastily, "even so," for she saw that Sinda wavered; and, in truth, the lord of the forest, with a mighty effort, had come behind him, though he stood within the enchanted ring (for doubt and fear had power over the spell), and was whispering in his ear, "Give him not; it is but a lure to rob you of your child. They will wean him from you; you will have no comfort in the boy."

So the wretched father would have turned again, but Sir Eifert stretched out his armed hand, earnestly crying, "Nay, draw not back

now—let the child be saved!" And Kastreyn said, "A holy and acceptable deed is it to bring the perishing soul to Him who only can save." And the Lady Liebe looked on the child with loving eyes; and, at the glitter of the knight's good sword, at the deep words of the priest, at the lady's gentle look, the fierce lord retreated backward, and Lisette laid the babe in the arms of the lady.

The Lady Liebe turned and bore the child toward the Church. The father and mother could but follow with their yearning hearts and straining eyes. As they walked along, the lady said unto the knight, "Say, my dear lord, what shall we call the babe thus strangely committed to our care?" While the knight mused, the priest answered, "Let us call him according to his profession—Christian: forasmuch as he must dwell among the wicked, the name will serve to remind him of his calling."

They stood at the door of the Church. Lisette and Sinda, looking after them, saw that there was set there a vessel of pure white

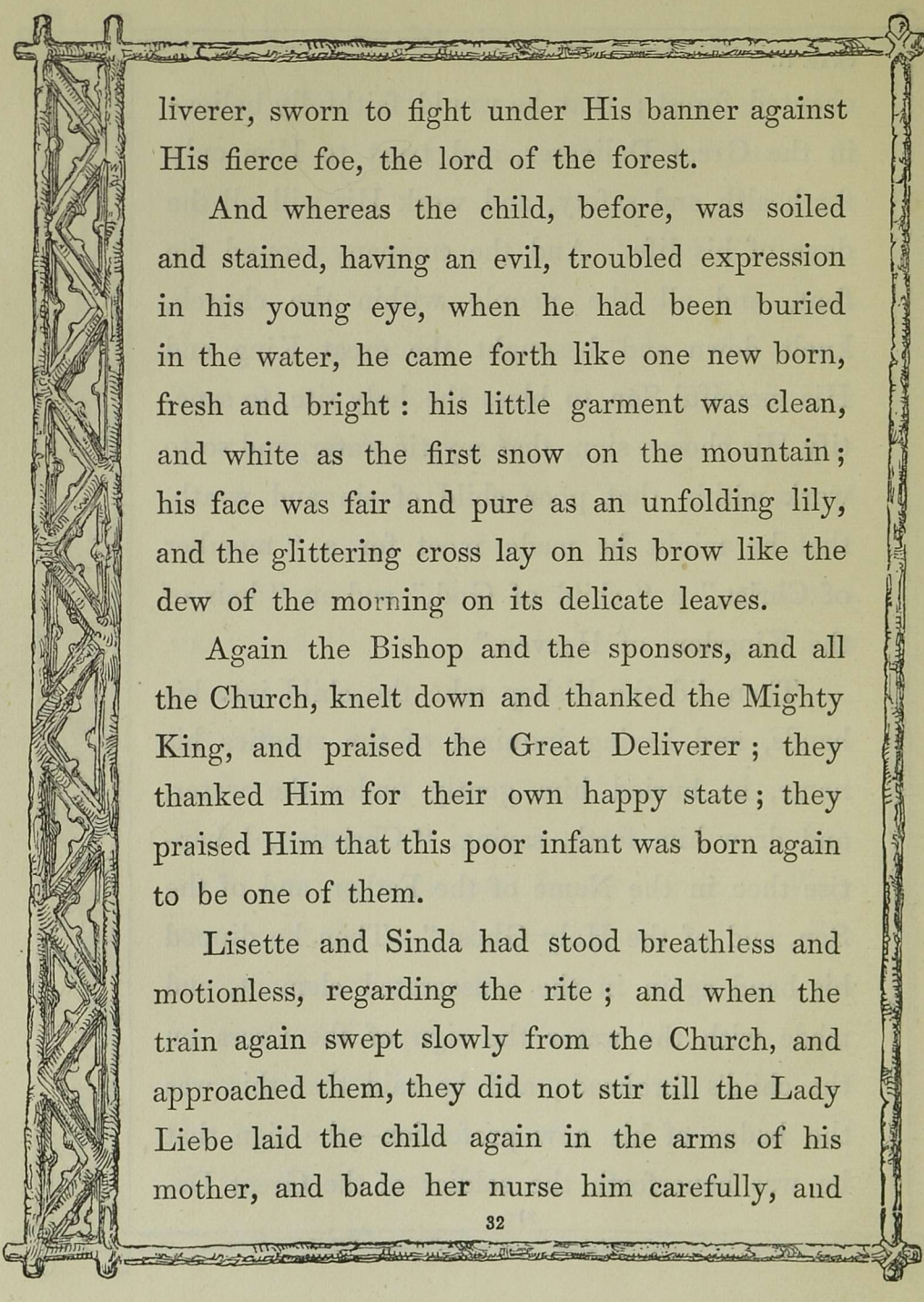


marble, filled with water ; over it hovered a fair dove, with snowy plumes and downy breast. It might be that the sunlight fell on the font, through some of the many-coloured windows ; but the white waters it held were stained, as though they had been mingled with blood. The old man stood beside it ; the bold knight reverently doffed his plumes, and the lady prepared to present the babe. Then came a peal of sweet music to the ears of the watchers : sometimes it seemed to come from the Church ; sometimes they thought they heard sweet voices overhead, singing among the breaking clouds, but behind them were groans and imprecations.

Now the holy rite proceeded ; for the good Bishop opened his book, and the whole Church within, rising, took part in the service. Very strange to the poor deluded Sinda and his wife seemed the solemn office, when they heard the knight, and the priest, and the lady, vowing for their boy that he would not serve the lord of the wood, but would utterly renounce him and all his works, and shun the charms of the en-

chanted forest ; that he would faithfully believe in the Great Deliverer, and trust to Him only for health and safety, and work His will all the days of his life. And the company around the font, and all the people within the church, knelt down and besought the great King and His merciful Son to bless the holy rite, to sanctify His chosen sign, that mystic water, and so to work within that poor child of sin and wrath, that he might be made meet for a “ member of Christ,” a “ child of God,” and an “ heir of the Kingdom of Heaven.”

Then did the Bishop take the child into his hands, and having inquired of the sureties his name, he buried him gently under the water, and drew him forth, saying, “ Christian, I baptise thee in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.” Then he dipped his hand again in the consecrated element, and made with the water the sign of the Cross on the child’s forehead ; and he said that this was the badge of his new profession—the sign that he was henceforth the soldier of the Great De-



liverer, sworn to fight under His banner against His fierce foe, the lord of the forest.

And whereas the child, before, was soiled and stained, having an evil, troubled expression in his young eye, when he had been buried in the water, he came forth like one new born, fresh and bright : his little garment was clean, and white as the first snow on the mountain ; his face was fair and pure as an unfolding lily, and the glittering cross lay on his brow like the dew of the morning on its delicate leaves.

Again the Bishop and the sponsors, and all the Church, knelt down and thanked the Mighty King, and praised the Great Deliverer ; they thanked Him for their own happy state ; they praised Him that this poor infant was born again to be one of them.

Lisette and Sinda had stood breathless and motionless, regarding the rite ; and when the train again swept slowly from the Church, and approached them, they did not stir till the Lady Liebe laid the child again in the arms of his mother, and bade her nurse him carefully, and

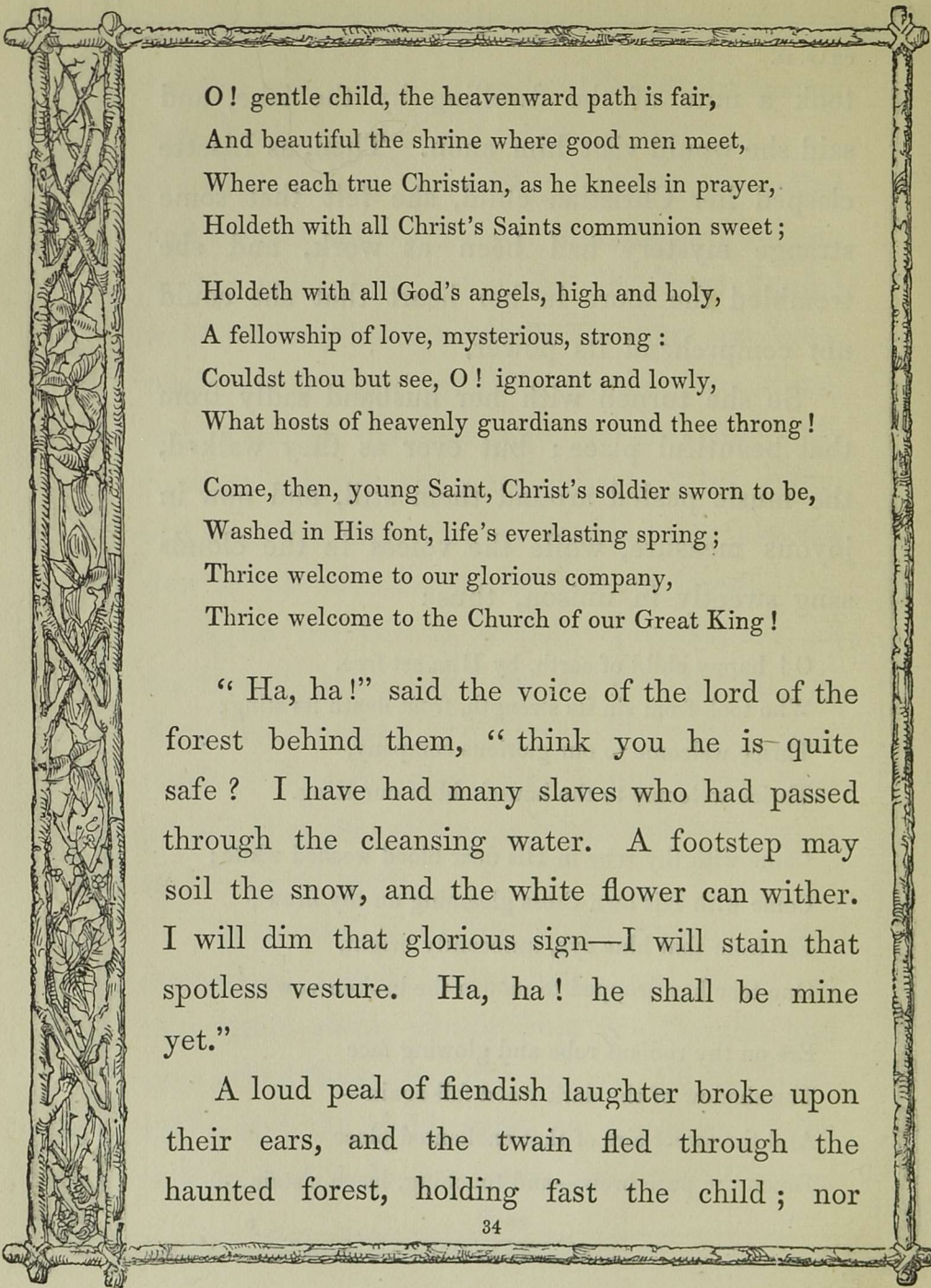
took a note of the dwelling by the lake, and said she would visit him anon. Then, as Lisette clasped her Christian child, she felt that some strange mystery had been at work, and she trembled the more in her heart that she could not comprehend its power.

So she turned with her husband sadly from that beautiful place; but ever as they walked, the music pealed around them still, and now in joyous measure, while the voices in the clouds sang sweetly in unison, thus:

O! happy child of earth, by Him set free,
 Who took from sin its strength, from death its sting;
 Thrice welcome to our glorious company,—
 Thrice welcome to the household of our King.

Come with thy robe in His dear blood washed white;
 Come with His own Cross gleaming on thy brow;
 Ere from that blue eye, innocently bright,
 One tear has dropped to mourn the broken vow;

Ere on thy radiant robe and glowing face
 The shadow of the dark wood fall again—
 And the sweet airs of that enchanted place
 Touch the pure brow—and touching, leave a stain.



O! gentle child, the heavenward path is fair,
And beautiful the shrine where good men meet,
Where each true Christian, as he kneels in prayer,
Holdeth with all Christ's Saints communion sweet;

Holdeth with all God's angels, high and holy,
A fellowship of love, mysterious, strong :
Couldst thou but see, O! ignorant and lowly,
What hosts of heavenly guardians round thee throng!

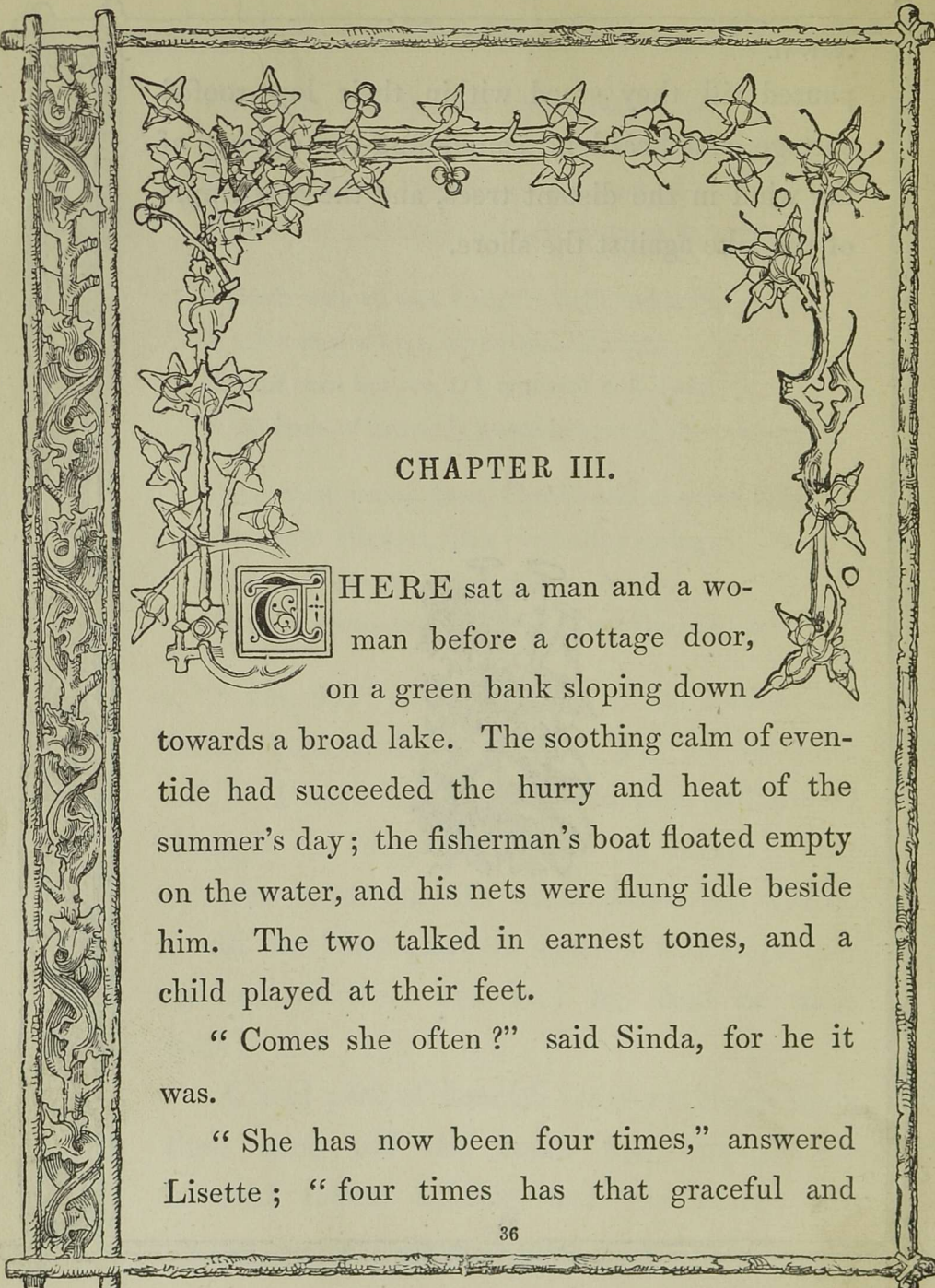
Come, then, young Saint, Christ's soldier sworn to be,
Washed in His font, life's everlasting spring ;
Thrice welcome to our glorious company,
Thrice welcome to the Church of our Great King!

“Ha, ha!” said the voice of the lord of the forest behind them, “think you he is quite safe? I have had many slaves who had passed through the cleansing water. A footstep may soil the snow, and the white flower can wither. I will dim that glorious sign—I will stain that spotless vesture. Ha, ha! he shall be mine yet.”

A loud peal of fiendish laughter broke upon their ears, and the twain fled through the haunted forest, holding fast the child; nor

paused till they stood within their low-roofed cottage, and heard no sound but the sighing of the wind in the distant trees, and the soft ripple of the lake against the shore.





CHAPTER III.

HERE sat a man and a woman before a cottage door, on a green bank sloping down towards a broad lake. The soothing calm of evening had succeeded the hurry and heat of the summer's day; the fisherman's boat floated empty on the water, and his nets were flung idle beside him. The two talked in earnest tones, and a child played at their feet.

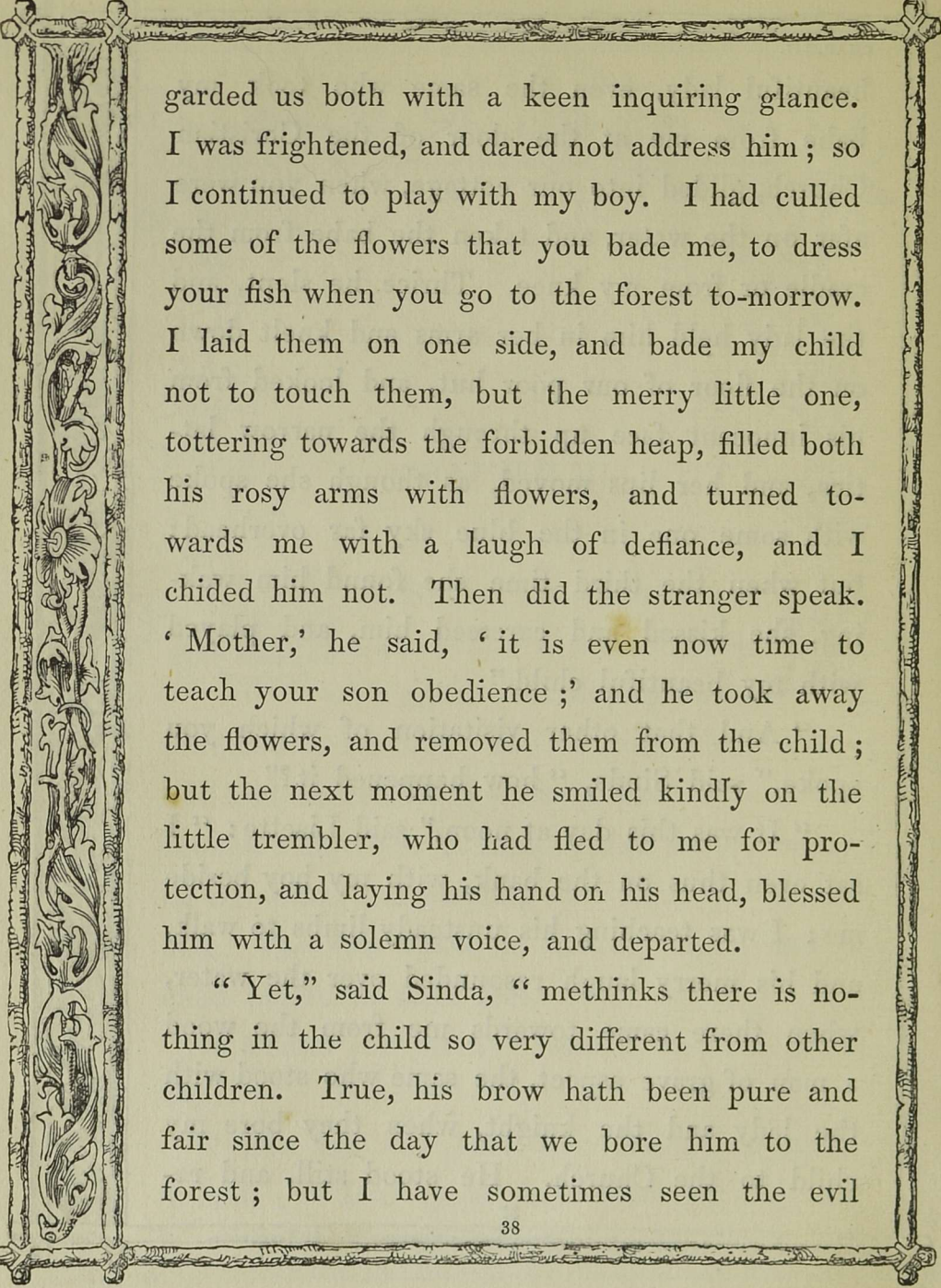
"Comes she often?" said Sinda, for he it was.

"She has now been four times," answered Lisette; "four times has that graceful and

beautiful lady, even the same who took my babe from me at the door of the Christian Church, glided into our cottage, when you were afar on the water, and taken the babe from the cradle or from my knee. Thrice he slept, and the lady held him in her arms and knelt down on the floor of our poor hut, and looked from his innocent face up through the narrow lattice, and her lips moved, as though she spoke with some one in the blue sky far overhead: but when the third time she found him waking, she kissed and caressed him, and played with my beautiful child."

"And that other visitation of which you spoke," said Sinda, "how happened it?"

"It was this day at noon," said Lisette: "I sat even thus on the bank, with my boy beside me; I was teaching his unsteady limbs to walk, and his merry laugh resounded over the water, when there came towards me from the wood a man of grave aspect, the same who stood with the lady and the knight, when they bore my child to the Church. He stood still, and re-



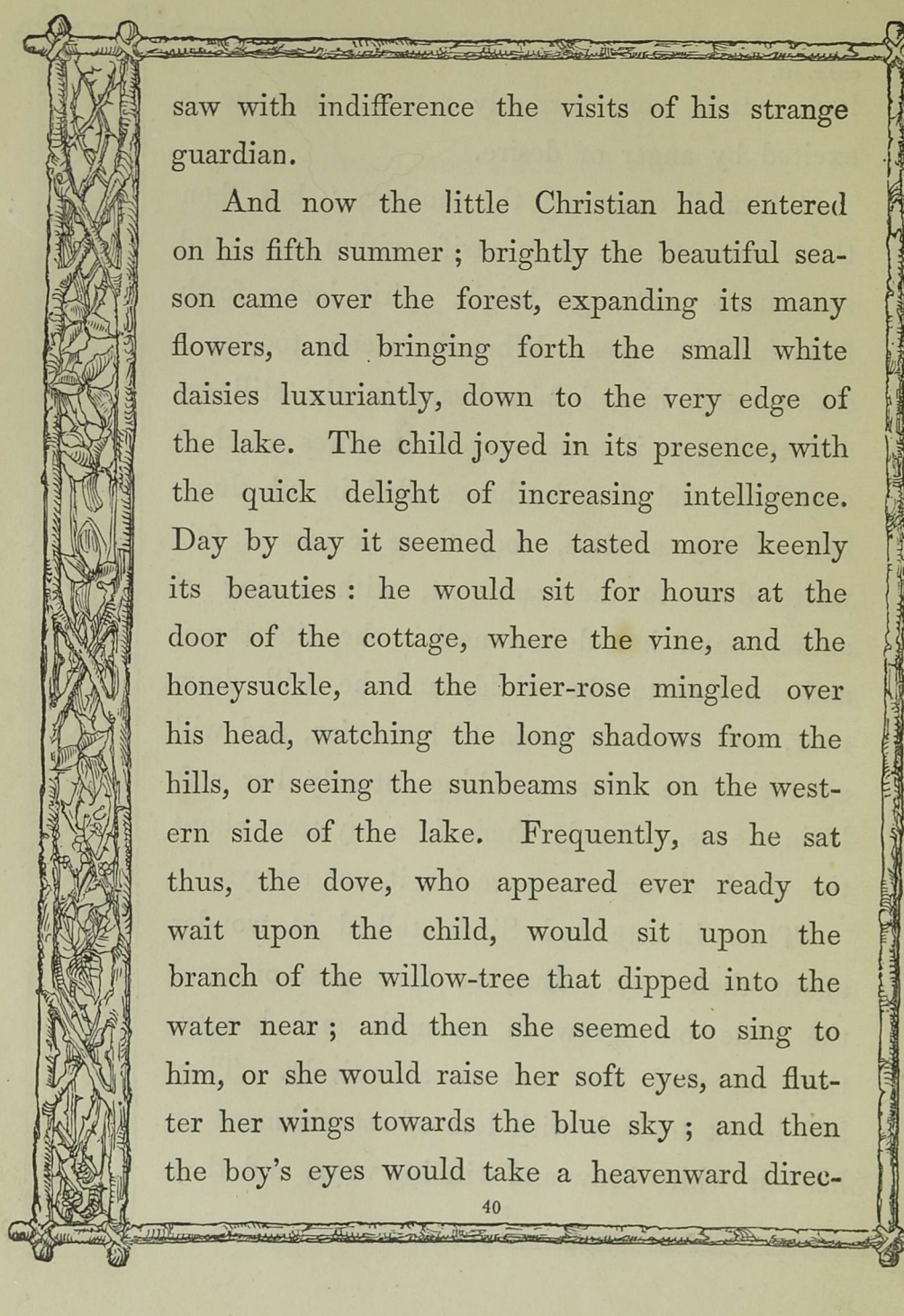
garded us both with a keen inquiring glance. I was frightened, and dared not address him ; so I continued to play with my boy. I had culled some of the flowers that you bade me, to dress your fish when you go to the forest to-morrow. I laid them on one side, and bade my child not to touch them, but the merry little one, tottering towards the forbidden heap, filled both his rosy arms with flowers, and turned towards me with a laugh of defiance, and I chided him not. Then did the stranger speak. ‘ Mother,’ he said, ‘ it is even now time to teach your son obedience ;’ and he took away the flowers, and removed them from the child ; but the next moment he smiled kindly on the little trembler, who had fled to me for protection, and laying his hand on his head, blessed him with a solemn voice, and departed.

“ Yet,” said Sinda, “ methinks there is nothing in the child so very different from other children. True, his brow hath been pure and fair since the day that we bore him to the forest ; but I have sometimes seen the evil

look that it wore formerly return, when he is excited by anger or desire.

“ True,” answered the mother, “ but then there seemeth to be a strife within him, and sometimes a strange bright spirit looks forth from his blue eyes. When he sleeps too, as I sit to watch him, I have heard in the stillness a fluttering as if some winged creatures watched over him, and then he has smiled in his slumber. Many a time, too, there comes a fair white dove to the casement, with a ring of azure round her downy neck : she sits there, and warbles to the child, and he will draw near, and seem to listen to her voice, and will sit for whole hours watching intently her soft loving eyes. Surely there is a mystery about the child, though we perceive it not always.”

Thus Lisette and Sinda talked in wonder about their boy. But, as time past on, and the little one grew in strength and beauty, they regarded him not so attentively. They had learnt to look with less of astonishment on his fair white brow and winning ways, and they



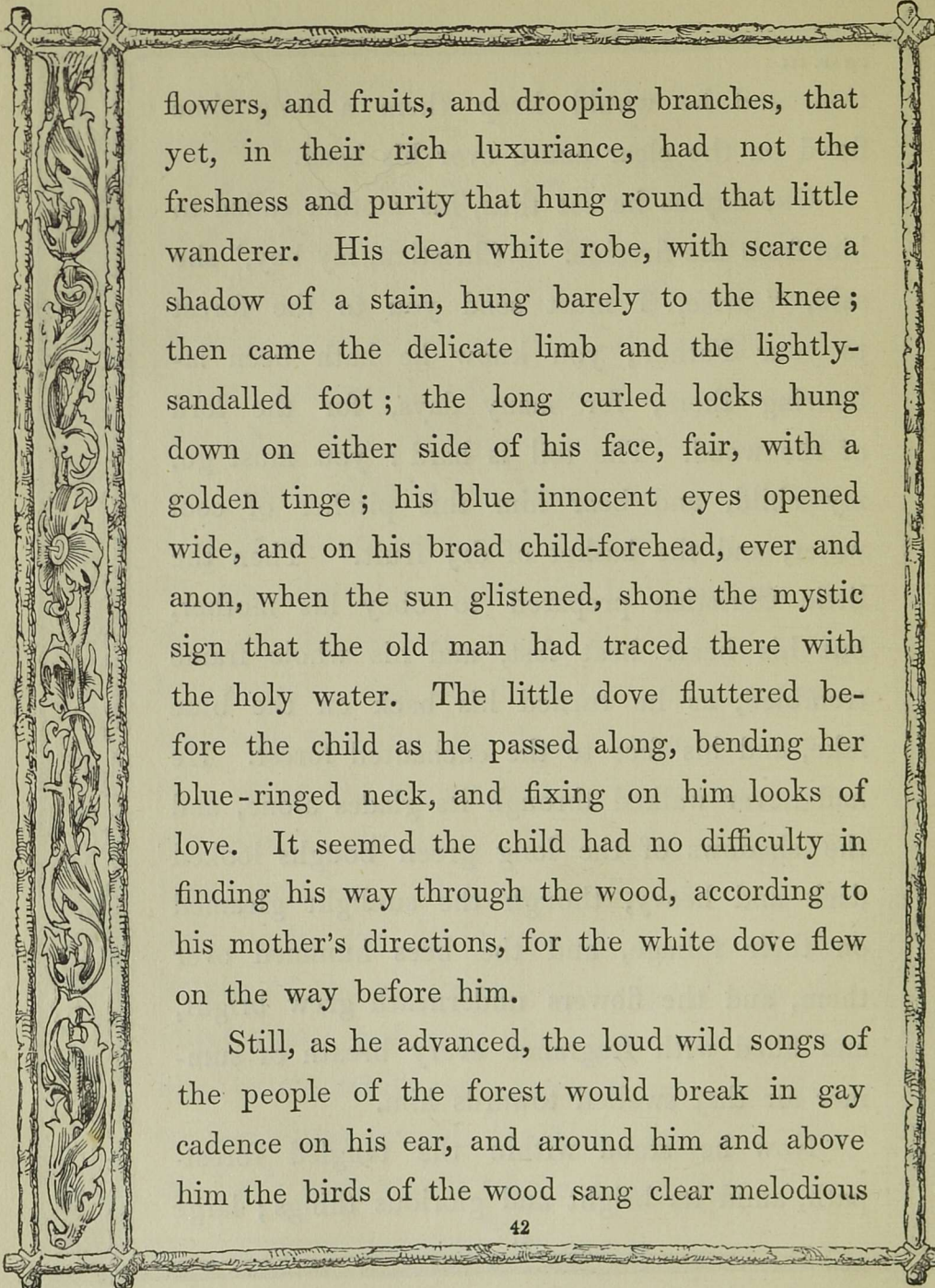
saw with indifference the visits of his strange guardian.

And now the little Christian had entered on his fifth summer ; brightly the beautiful season came over the forest, expanding its many flowers, and bringing forth the small white daisies luxuriantly, down to the very edge of the lake. The child joyed in its presence, with the quick delight of increasing intelligence. Day by day it seemed he tasted more keenly its beauties : he would sit for hours at the door of the cottage, where the vine, and the honeysuckle, and the brier-rose mingled over his head, watching the long shadows from the hills, or seeing the sunbeams sink on the western side of the lake. Frequently, as he sat thus, the dove, who appeared ever ready to wait upon the child, would sit upon the branch of the willow-tree that dipped into the water near ; and then she seemed to sing to him, or she would raise her soft eyes, and flutter her wings towards the blue sky ; and then the boy's eyes would take a heavenward direc-

tion, and he would keep them a long time fixed on the clear azure over his head.

One day as he sat thus, his mother called to him from the fireside. "Christian, my boy," she said, "arise, I must send you to the forest to your Father; you know he hath been labouring there, for many days, for the lord of the wood. The toil is hard: you must go, my child, and bear him this pitcher of cool water, and the basket of dry fruit." Then the little Christian prepared to obey his mother, but his heart beat fast, and his whole frame trembled, as he turned his back on the blue lake, and his face to the enchanted forest. He had never walked through its glades alone, and the shadows of the long green boughs looked dark and heavy, though the sunlight gleamed on their foliage, and the bees hummed over them, and the flowers underneath grew bright, and filled with fragrance every breath of summer air that swelled towards him.

Now he stood within the tangled forest-path, amid its bright and glorious things; large



flowers, and fruits, and drooping branches, that yet, in their rich luxuriance, had not the freshness and purity that hung round that little wanderer. His clean white robe, with scarce a shadow of a stain, hung barely to the knee; then came the delicate limb and the lightly-sandalled foot; the long curled locks hung down on either side of his face, fair, with a golden tinge; his blue innocent eyes opened wide, and on his broad child-forehead, ever and anon, when the sun glistened, shone the mystic sign that the old man had traced there with the holy water. The little dove fluttered before the child as he passed along, bending her blue-ringed neck, and fixing on him looks of love. It seemed the child had no difficulty in finding his way through the wood, according to his mother's directions, for the white dove flew on the way before him.

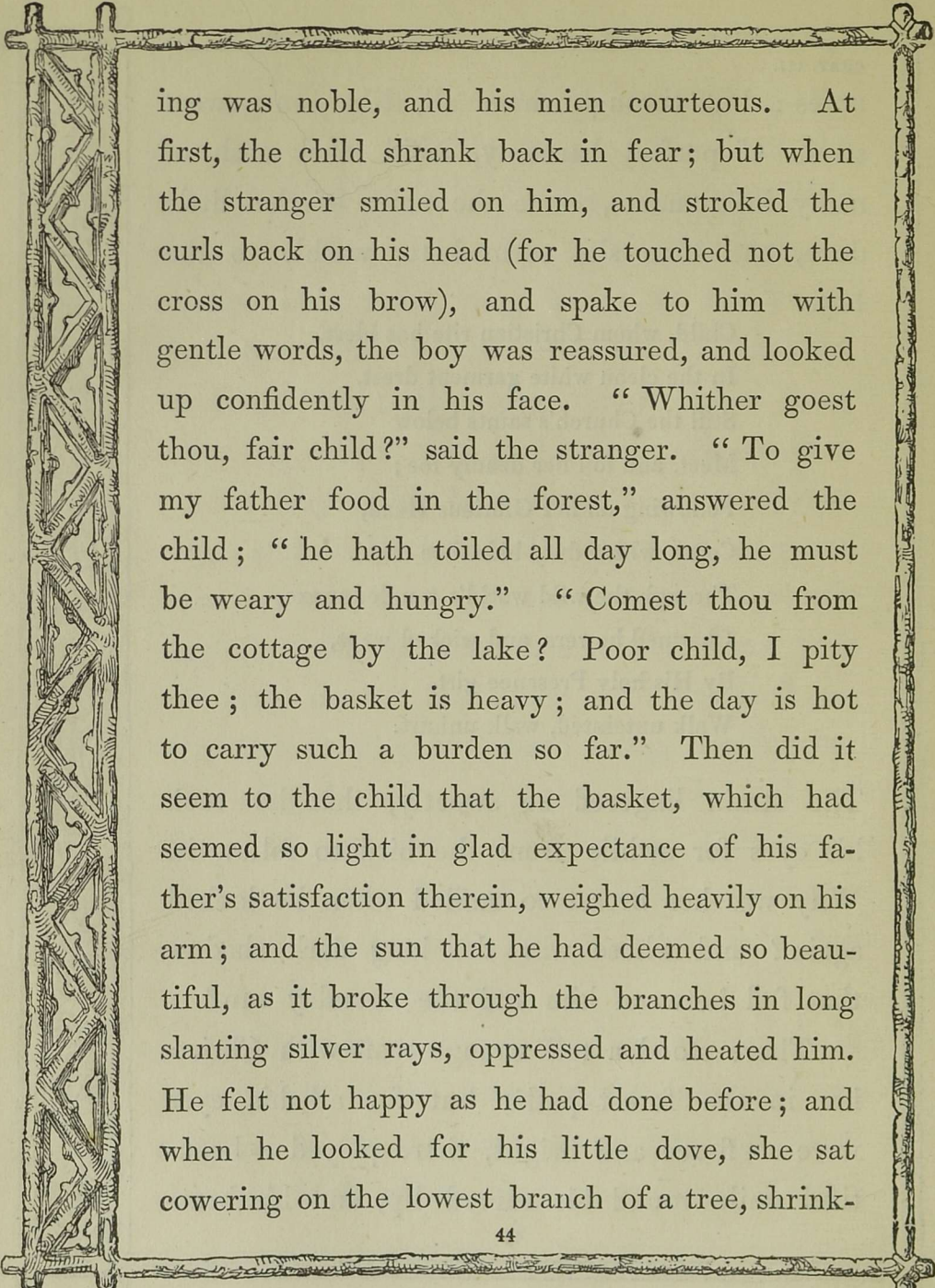
Still, as he advanced, the loud wild songs of the people of the forest would break in gay cadence on his ear, and around him and above him the birds of the wood sang clear melodious

notes : but through them all, like one sweet strain of perfect harmony, amid the crash of many instruments, came the voice of the little dove, and thus she seemed to warble to the boy :

Child, whom Christian rite has blest,
In the clean white garment drest,
Still the Church's saints below
Meet, and foil her deadly foe ;
Following on her Glorious Head,
Come, where duty bids thee tread.
Through the wild world's tangled maze,
Charmed bowers, and wicked ways,
By His holy Presence girt,
Walk untainted, walk unhurt.

The strain lingered so sweetly, that he took his eyes for awhile from the bird to follow it. Why was her breast so ruffled when he looked again? and whose was the long dark shadow that fell between him and the noonday sun?

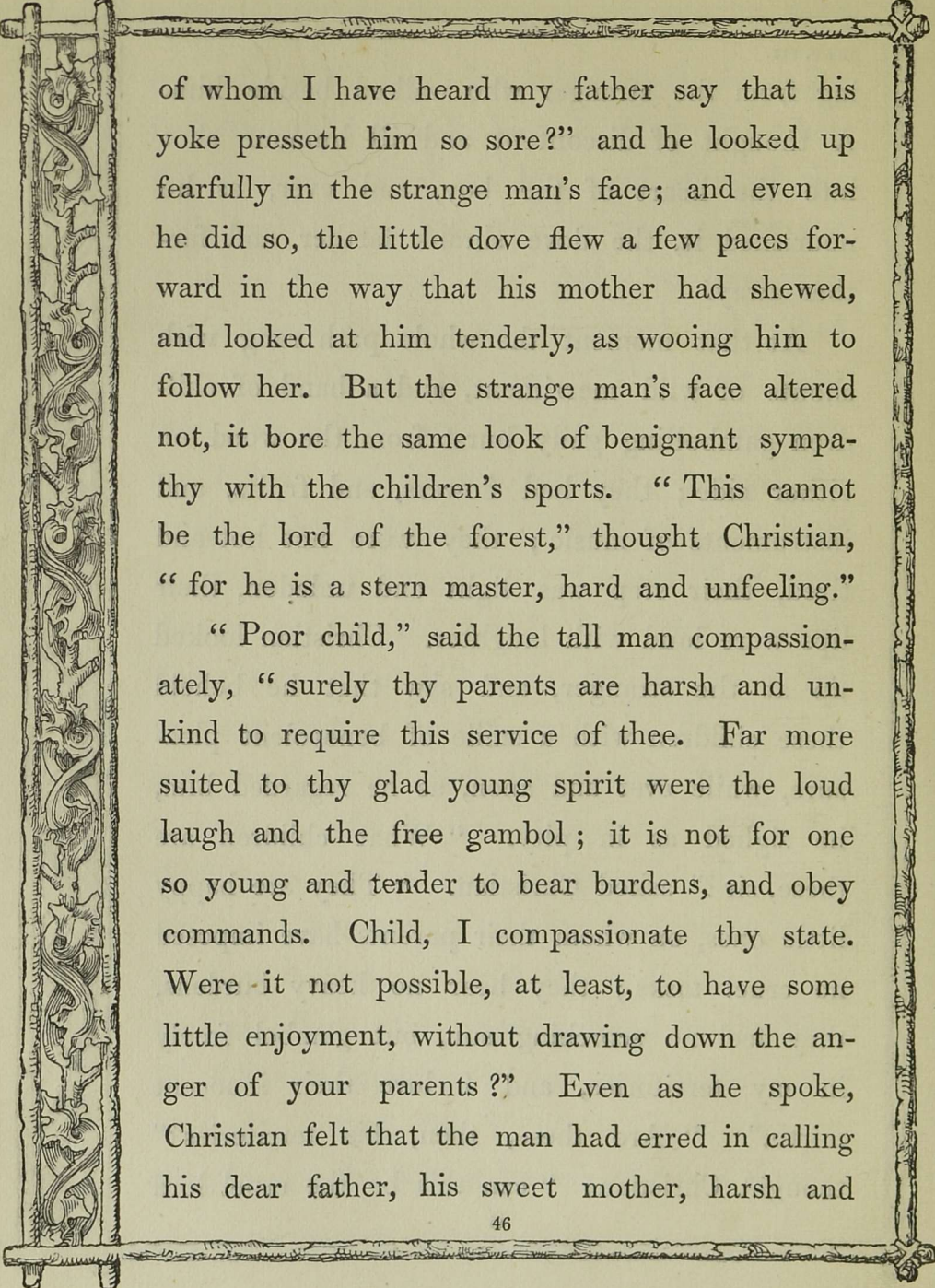
There stood a tall strange man with Christian in the forest-path; but for all his eyes were so fierce and bright, there played a beautiful smile round his curved lip, and his bear-



ing was noble, and his mien courteous. At first, the child shrank back in fear; but when the stranger smiled on him, and stroked the curls back on his head (for he touched not the cross on his brow), and spake to him with gentle words, the boy was reassured, and looked up confidently in his face. "Whither goest thou, fair child?" said the stranger. "To give my father food in the forest," answered the child; "he hath toiled all day long, he must be weary and hungry." "Comest thou from the cottage by the lake? Poor child, I pity thee; the basket is heavy; and the day is hot to carry such a burden so far." Then did it seem to the child that the basket, which had seemed so light in glad expectance of his father's satisfaction therein, weighed heavily on his arm; and the sun that he had deemed so beautiful, as it broke through the branches in long slanting silver rays, oppressed and heated him. He felt not happy as he had done before; and when he looked for his little dove, she sat cowering on the lowest branch of a tree, shrink-

ing from the stranger who walked beside him. A thought of discontent and ill humour shot into the heart of the boy, and ever, as he nourished it, the dove shrank farther and farther away.

At that moment the whole path rang with shouts of wild merriment, and a band of children gambolling gaily burst from the wood on either side; they had flowers, and fruits, and instruments of music; they were not hot and tired, their step was light and unladen, their lips were loud with laughter. Christian looked up at the stranger, and saw that he beheld these children with a smile of benevolent pleasure, while ever and anon, as he regarded him, he sighed as in pity. "What children are these, sir?" asked Christian. "They are happy little ones, on whom their parents have imposed no cruel tasks; they bear no heavy burdens, they feel no scorching sun, but gambol freely in my territories, and I love their innocent mirth." "Are these, then, his territories?" thought Christian: "can this be the cruel lord



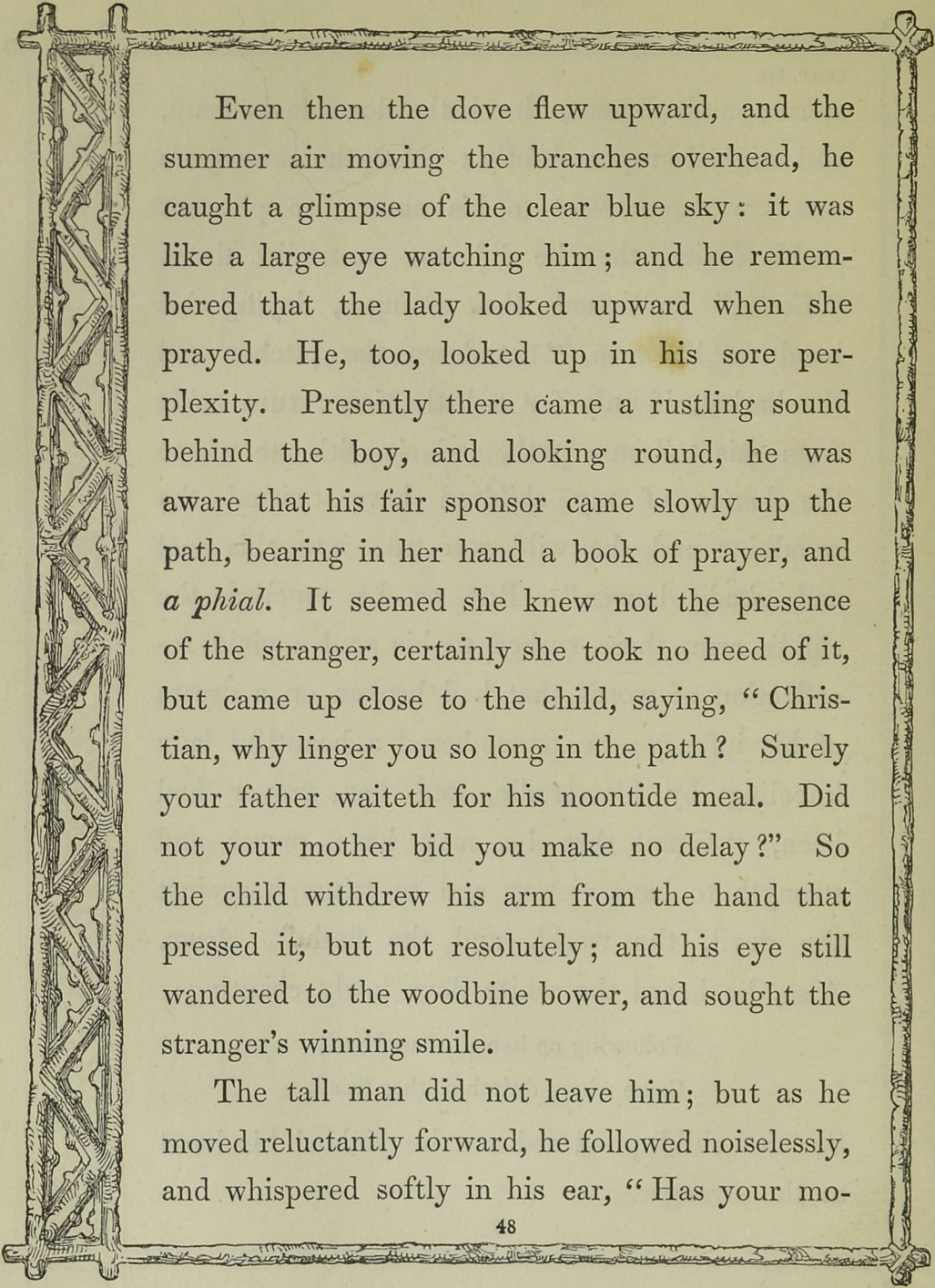
of whom I have heard my father say that his yoke presseth him so sore?" and he looked up fearfully in the strange man's face; and even as he did so, the little dove flew a few paces forward in the way that his mother had shewed, and looked at him tenderly, as wooing him to follow her. But the strange man's face altered not, it bore the same look of benignant sympathy with the children's sports. "This cannot be the lord of the forest," thought Christian, "for he is a stern master, hard and unfeeling."

"Poor child," said the tall man compassionately, "surely thy parents are harsh and unkind to require this service of thee. Far more suited to thy glad young spirit were the loud laugh and the free gambol; it is not for one so young and tender to bear burdens, and obey commands. Child, I compassionate thy state. Were it not possible, at least, to have some little enjoyment, without drawing down the anger of your parents?" Even as he spoke, Christian felt that the man had erred in calling his dear father, his sweet mother, harsh and

stern ; and thereat, the little dove looked up, and sighed reproachfully : but the stranger's words were so sweet to his nature, so pleasant to his desire, that he did not contradict them. "Come," continued the stranger, laying his hand on his arm, "set down the pitcher and the basket, if only for a little time ; turn aside from this toilsome path, and sit with me where the hands of my children have twisted the woodbine and the wild rose-tree into this cool and shady bower." But as he touched the child's arm, there rushed to his soul a vivid recollection of words that had broken on a dream of his infancy ; he remembered a beautiful lady kneeling by his cradle, and her prayer had been, "Grant that he may have power and strength to have victory and to triumph against the devil, the world, and the flesh." *Amen.* Also, he heard the white dove lowly chanting :

Following on her glorious Head,
Come where duty bids thee tread.

So the child pondered ere he yielded his hand to the stranger.



Even then the dove flew upward, and the summer air moving the branches overhead, he caught a glimpse of the clear blue sky: it was like a large eye watching him; and he remembered that the lady looked upward when she prayed. He, too, looked up in his sore perplexity. Presently there came a rustling sound behind the boy, and looking round, he was aware that his fair sponsor came slowly up the path, bearing in her hand a book of prayer, and *a phial*. It seemed she knew not the presence of the stranger, certainly she took no heed of it, but came up close to the child, saying, "Christian, why linger you so long in the path? Surely your father waiteth for his noontide meal. Did not your mother bid you make no delay?" So the child withdrew his arm from the hand that pressed it, but not resolutely; and his eye still wandered to the woodbine bower, and sought the stranger's winning smile.

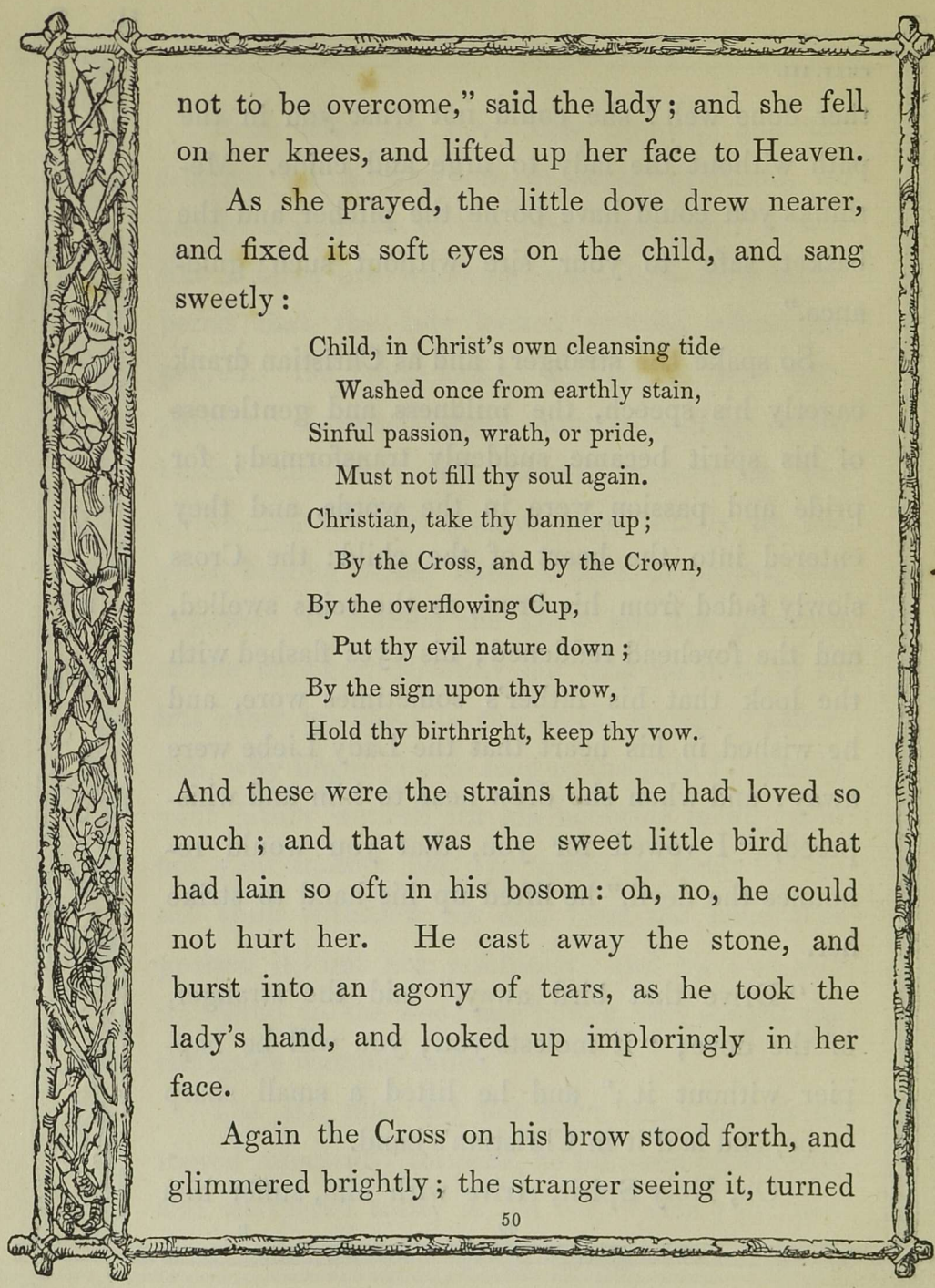
The tall man did not leave him; but as he moved reluctantly forward, he followed noiselessly, and whispered softly in his ear, "Has your mo-

ther done well? she could not trust you in the path without the lady to urge and chide. Methinks you could have borne the pitcher and the basket safe to your sire without such guidance."

So spake the stranger; and as Christian drank eagerly his speech, the mildness and gentleness of his spirit became suddenly transformed; for pride and passion were in the words, and they entered into the heart of the child: the Cross slowly faded from his brow, as the veins swelled, and the forehead reddened; his eyes flashed with the look that his father's sometimes wore, and he wished in his heart that the Lady Liebe were away: and when she drew near to him and whispered, "I vowed for you, that you would renounce the devil," he lifted up his hand to strike her.

"Drive that bird away," said the stranger, of the dove; "it molests you; you will be happier without it;" and he lifted a small sharp stone, and laid it in Christian's hand.

"Oh, Holy Spirit, strive with him, suffer him



not to be overcome," said the lady; and she fell on her knees, and lifted up her face to Heaven.

As she prayed, the little dove drew nearer, and fixed its soft eyes on the child, and sang sweetly:

Child, in Christ's own cleansing tide
Washed once from earthly stain,
Sinful passion, wrath, or pride,
Must not fill thy soul again.
Christian, take thy banner up;
By the Cross, and by the Crown,
By the overflowing Cup,
Put thy evil nature down;
By the sign upon thy brow,
Hold thy birthright, keep thy vow.

And these were the strains that he had loved so much; and that was the sweet little bird that had lain so oft in his bosom: oh, no, he could not hurt her. He cast away the stone, and burst into an agony of tears, as he took the lady's hand, and looked up imploringly in her face.

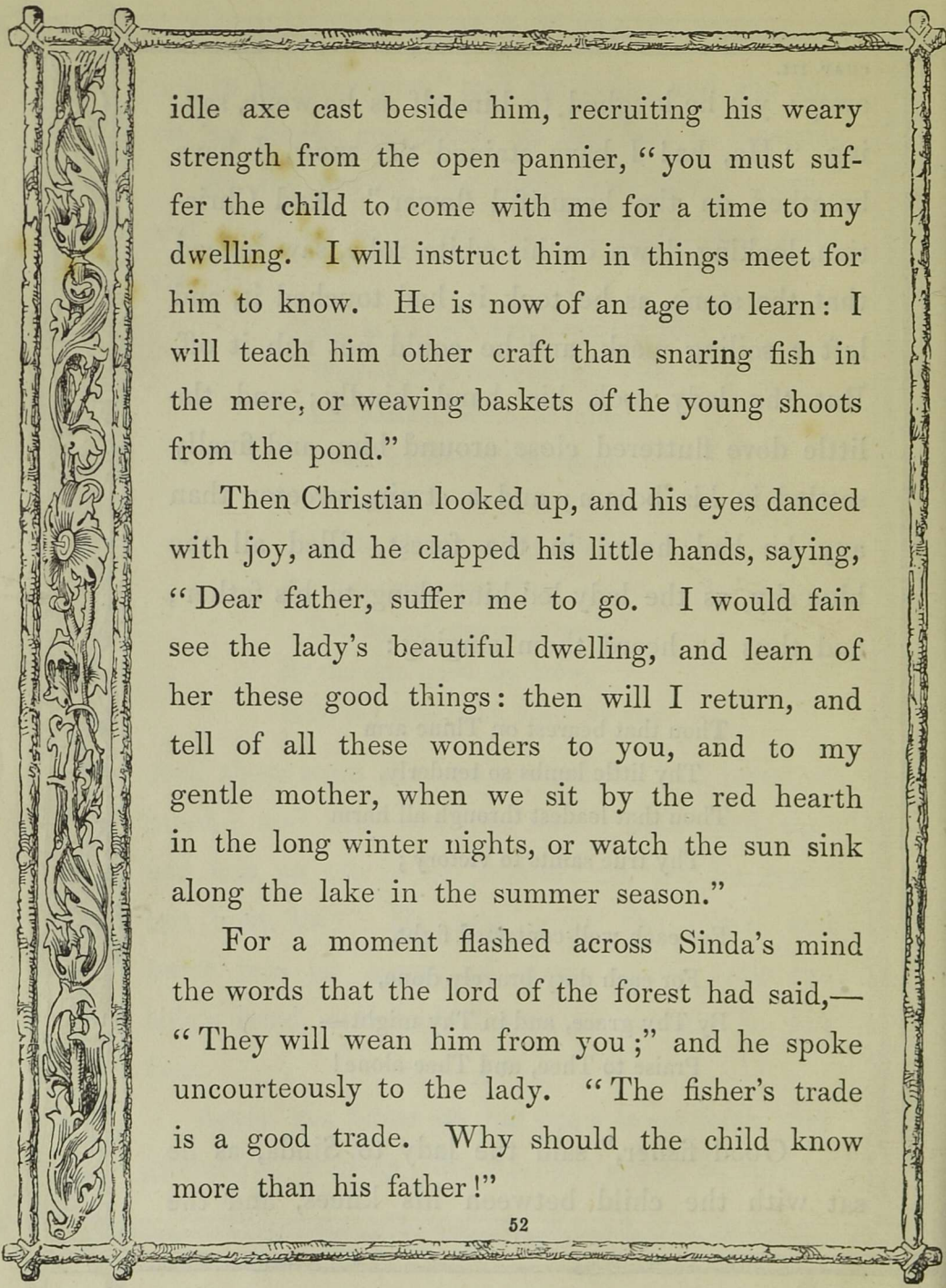
Again the Cross on his brow stood forth, and glimmered brightly; the stranger seeing it, turned

away: yet he laughed to himself as he went, saying, "Ha, ha! I have stained the snow, I have breathed on the beautiful flower." And Christian, looking down on his white robe, saw indeed that the stone, as he took it, had touched it, and left a soiling mark, and he could not rub it off. But the lady took his hand kindly; and the little dove fluttered close around him, and finally settled in his bosom; and a strain, sweeter than any he had heard in the forest, filled all the blue sky, as the lady led him along to his father; and thus he heard them singing:

Thou that bearest on Thine arm
Thy little lambs so tenderly,
Thou that ledest through all harm
Thy true saints to victory;

For each well-contested fight,
For each duty bravely done,
By Thy grace, and in Thy might—
Praise to Thee, and Thee alone!

"Good fisher," said the lady to Sinda, as he sat with the child between his knees, and the



idle axe cast beside him, recruiting his weary strength from the open pannier, "you must suffer the child to come with me for a time to my dwelling. I will instruct him in things meet for him to know. He is now of an age to learn: I will teach him other craft than snaring fish in the mere, or weaving baskets of the young shoots from the pond."

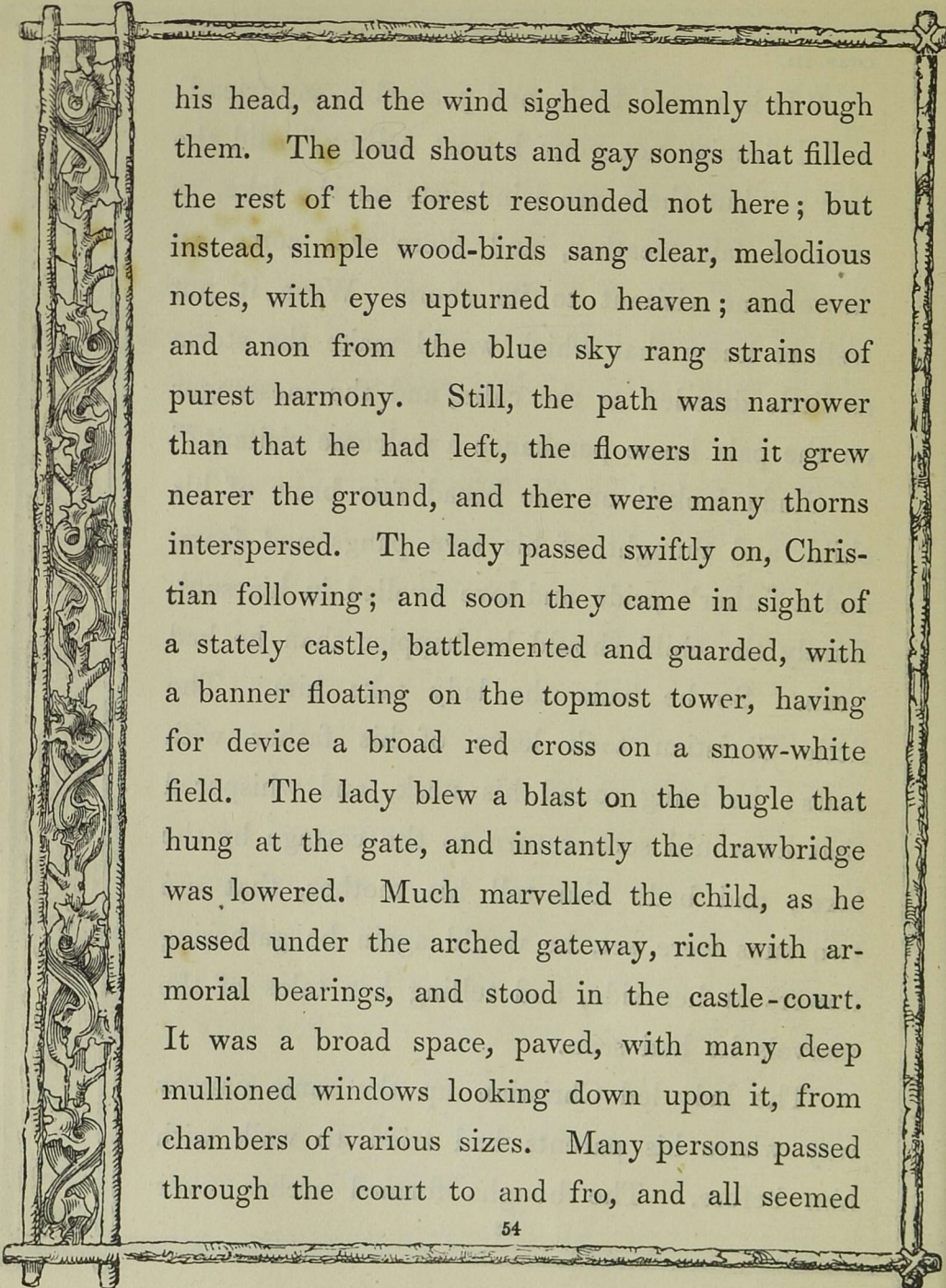
Then Christian looked up, and his eyes danced with joy, and he clapped his little hands, saying, "Dear father, suffer me to go. I would fain see the lady's beautiful dwelling, and learn of her these good things: then will I return, and tell of all these wonders to you, and to my gentle mother, when we sit by the red hearth in the long winter nights, or watch the sun sink along the lake in the summer season."

For a moment flashed across Sinda's mind the words that the lord of the forest had said,— "They will wean him from you;" and he spoke uncourteously to the lady. "The fisher's trade is a good trade. Why should the child know more than his father!"

“It is a good trade, and peaceable, my friend; and I despise not your honest calling,” said the lady; “but there are windgusts on the lake, as well as fair weather, and there will come an unwelcome visitant to its shore. Were it not well to know that which would make the storm as little dreaded as the calm, and the messenger on the pale horse perchance a welcome visitant?”

Sinda looked on the broad fair brow of his child, and thought of his own pangs and fears, and a father's pride and love swelled in his soul. Surely the child should be happier than he had been. So he bade the lady take him. The little Christian took leave of his father with tears; he hung round his neck, and whispered that he would soon return to the cottage by the lake; and bade him tell his mother, that ere two suns were set, he would again be gathering flowers at her side, and telling her tales of the marvels he had seen.

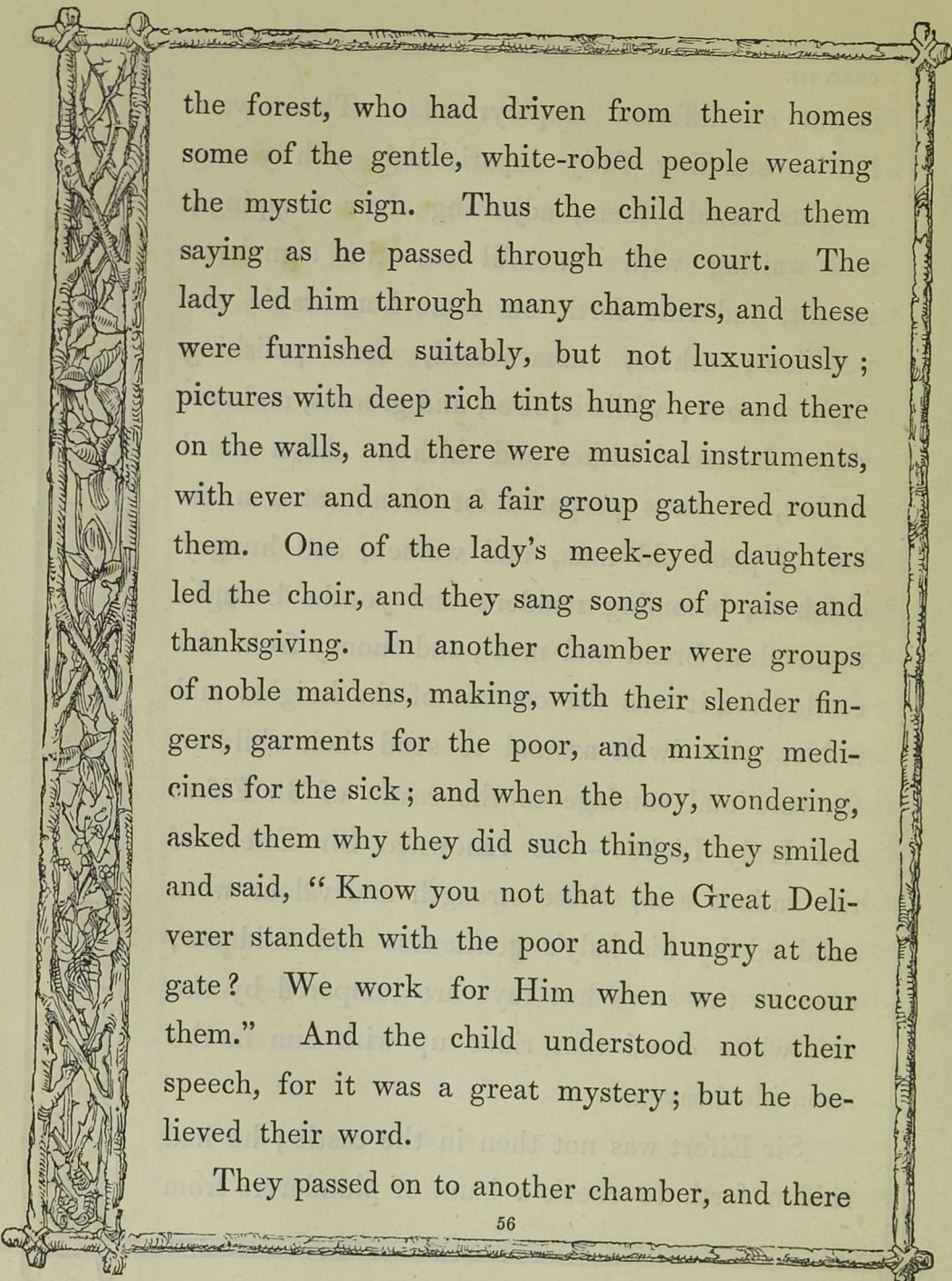
The lady led Christian up the same narrow way where his parents had tried to walk with him before. The boughs formed arches over



his head, and the wind sighed solemnly through them. The loud shouts and gay songs that filled the rest of the forest resounded not here; but instead, simple wood-birds sang clear, melodious notes, with eyes upturned to heaven; and ever and anon from the blue sky rang strains of purest harmony. Still, the path was narrower than that he had left, the flowers in it grew nearer the ground, and there were many thorns interspersed. The lady passed swiftly on, Christian following; and soon they came in sight of a stately castle, battlemented and guarded, with a banner floating on the topmost tower, having for device a broad red cross on a snow-white field. The lady blew a blast on the bugle that hung at the gate, and instantly the drawbridge was lowered. Much marvelled the child, as he passed under the arched gateway, rich with armorial bearings, and stood in the castle-court. It was a broad space, paved, with many deep mullioned windows looking down upon it, from chambers of various sizes. Many persons passed through the court to and fro, and all seemed

intent on different employments. There were horses standing fully caparisoned, with young knights beside them, adjusting their trappings, and waiting with watchful ear the signal to mount, and ride forth on some honourable expedition; others, unharnessed, were polishing their armour; while squires, and grooms, and servants, hastened hither and thither. At a small wicket, on seats prepared for them, sat a number of poor old men, and women, and hungry children; blooming maidens and youths brought them alms, bread and meat, and money from the castle; for it was the custom of the knights and nobles who dwelt around to send their children for care and tutelage to the castle of Sir Eifert and Lady Liebe:—the renowned Sir Eifert of the valiant arm, whose strength and valour were subdued by his lady's gentleness and mildness; even as the sun's hot rays are tempered by the soft white cloud that rides up with him in the noontide heaven.

Sir Eifert was not then in the castle; he had ridden forth to check a band of plunderers from

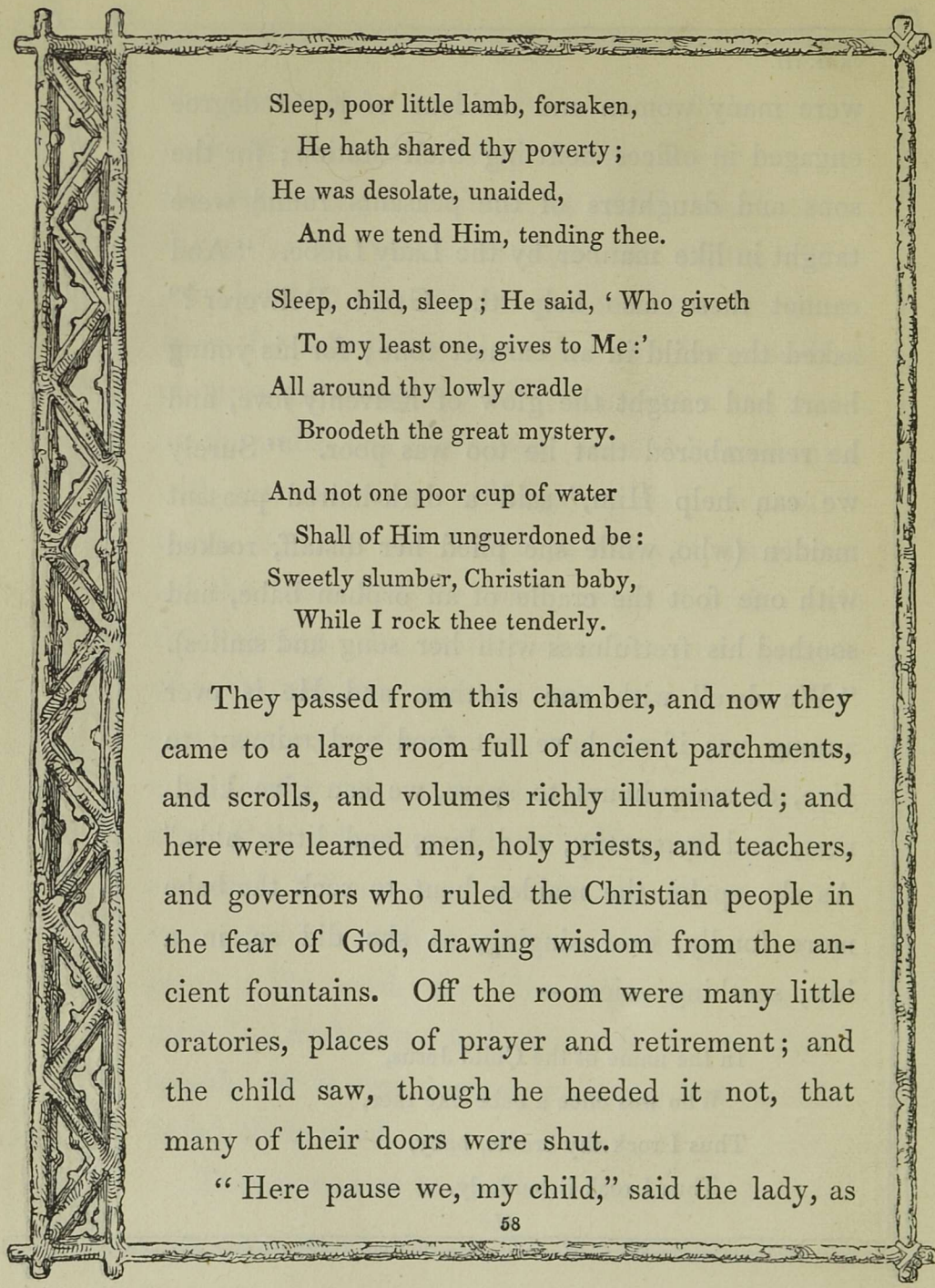


the forest, who had driven from their homes some of the gentle, white-robed people wearing the mystic sign. Thus the child heard them saying as he passed through the court. The lady led him through many chambers, and these were furnished suitably, but not luxuriously; pictures with deep rich tints hung here and there on the walls, and there were musical instruments, with ever and anon a fair group gathered round them. One of the lady's meek-eyed daughters led the choir, and they sang songs of praise and thanksgiving. In another chamber were groups of noble maidens, making, with their slender fingers, garments for the poor, and mixing medicines for the sick; and when the boy, wondering, asked them why they did such things, they smiled and said, "Know you not that the Great Deliverer standeth with the poor and hungry at the gate? We work for Him when we succour them." And the child understood not their speech, for it was a great mystery; but he believed their word.

They passed on to another chamber, and there

were many women and maidens of lower degree engaged in offices befitting their station; for the sons and daughters of the peasants round were taught in like manner by the Lady Liebe. "And cannot these also help the Great Deliverer?" asked the child in an earnest tone; for his young heart had caught the glow of heavenly love, and he remembered that he too was poor. "Surely we can help Him," said a dark-haired peasant maiden (who, while she plied her distaff, rocked with one foot the cradle of an orphan babe, and soothed his fretfulness with her song and smiles). "We dwell with one another, and He is ever among us; if we have not food and raiment to give, or many hours to spare, we can give kindness, and sympathy, and love, and little aids." As she spake, the maiden bent to rock the babe more fondly, ever singing, as she did so, in a low, soothing voice:—

In the name of the Child Jesus,
Who was once a babe like thee,
Thus I rock thy cradle, baby,
Thus I rock it tenderly.



Sleep, poor little lamb, forsaken,
He hath shared thy poverty ;
He was desolate, unaided,
And we tend Him, tending thee.

Sleep, child, sleep ; He said, ‘ Who giveth
To my least one, gives to Me :’
All around thy lowly cradle
Broodeth the great mystery.

And not one poor cup of water
Shall of Him unguerdoned be :
Sweetly slumber, Christian baby,
While I rock thee tenderly.

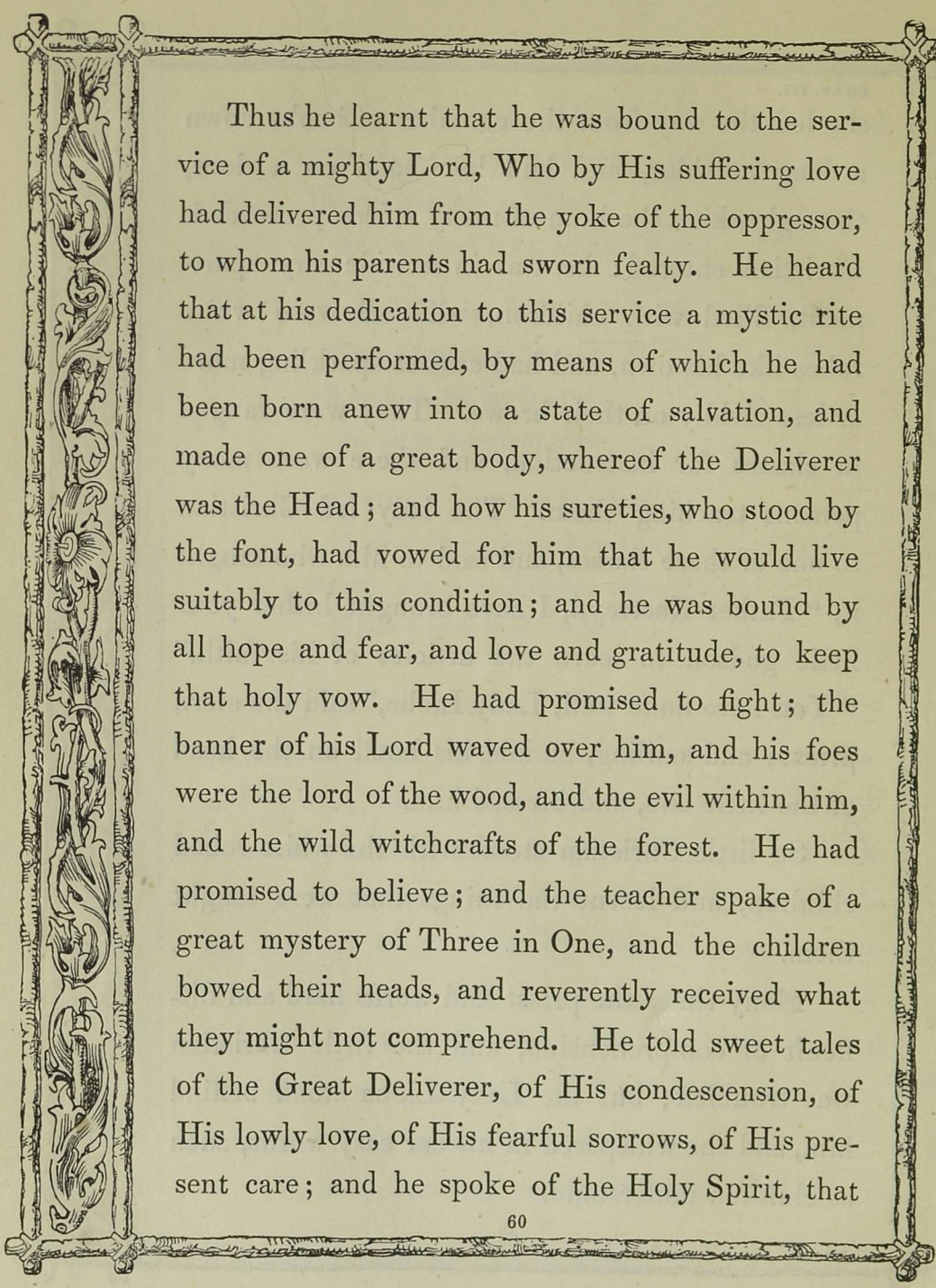
They passed from this chamber, and now they came to a large room full of ancient parchments, and scrolls, and volumes richly illuminated ; and here were learned men, holy priests, and teachers, and governors who ruled the Christian people in the fear of God, drawing wisdom from the ancient fountains. Off the room were many little oratories, places of prayer and retirement ; and the child saw, though he heeded it not, that many of their doors were shut.

“ Here pause we, my child,” said the lady, as

she led the way from the chamber of books down a long corridor, and laid her hand on a door, through which the hum of many voices proceeded. Christian entered: he was in a wide airy apartment, filled with children, who all wore white robes like his own, and had crosses sparkling more or less vividly on their brows. They were ranged in classes for instruction, and there were many persons teaching them. The lady led Christian to one of these classes, and said to him who taught it, "Father Kastreyn, I have brought hither your little godson to learn the articles of his faith." "You have done well, Lady Liebe," said the stern priest; and smiling, he laid his hand on the head of the little one, and blessed him.

So little Christian stood with the white-robed children, and learnt the things that were taught them.

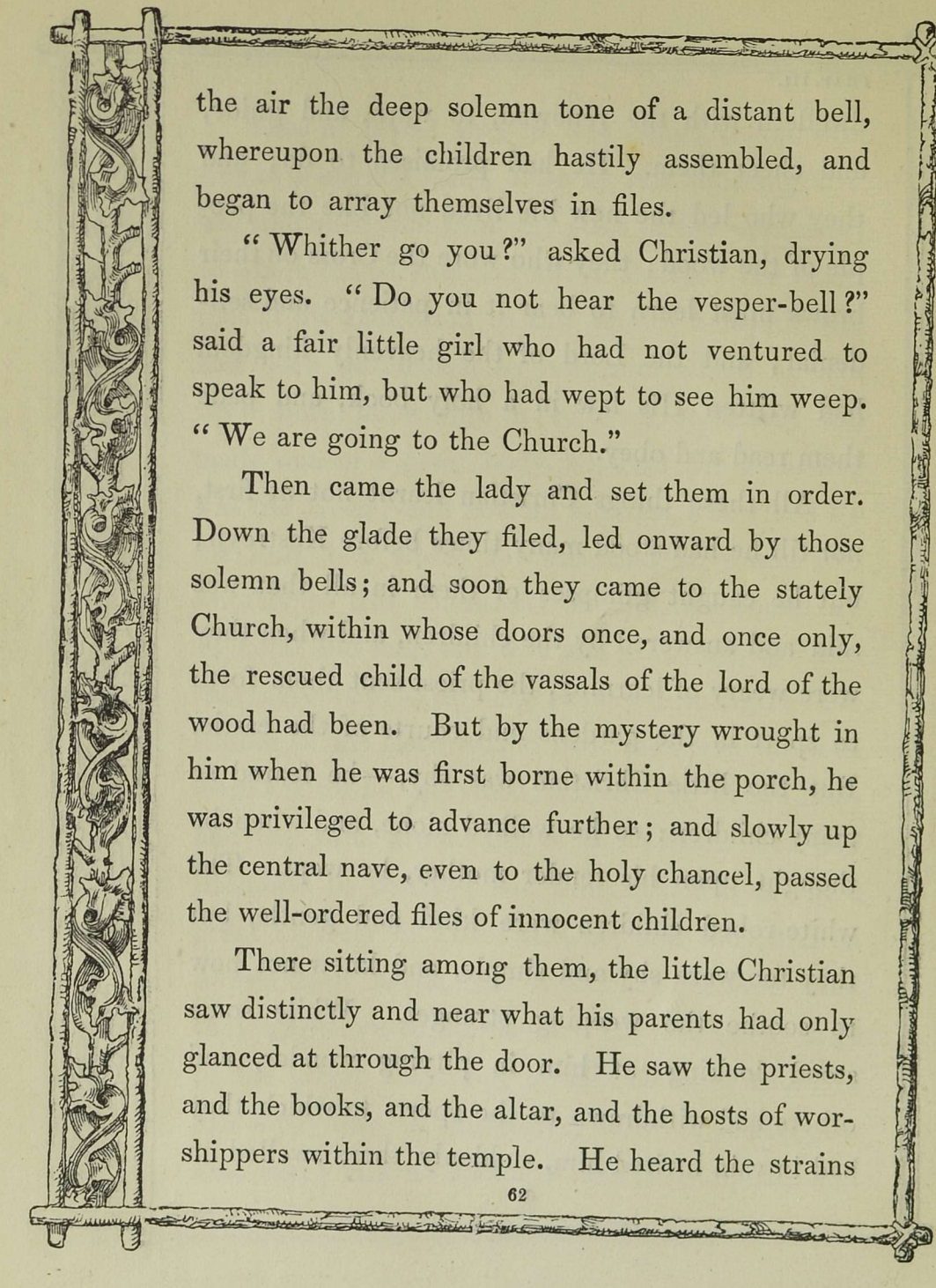
Many times the priest said words hard and difficult of comprehension, and the little Christian was troubled; but the Lady Liebe stood behind him, and she whispered in his ear easy words, such as children understand.



Thus he learnt that he was bound to the service of a mighty Lord, Who by His suffering love had delivered him from the yoke of the oppressor, to whom his parents had sworn fealty. He heard that at his dedication to this service a mystic rite had been performed, by means of which he had been born anew into a state of salvation, and made one of a great body, whereof the Deliverer was the Head; and how his sureties, who stood by the font, had vowed for him that he would live suitably to this condition; and he was bound by all hope and fear, and love and gratitude, to keep that holy vow. He had promised to fight; the banner of his Lord waved over him, and his foes were the lord of the wood, and the evil within him, and the wild witchcrafts of the forest. He had promised to believe; and the teacher spake of a great mystery of Three in One, and the children bowed their heads, and reverently received what they might not comprehend. He told sweet tales of the Great Deliverer, of His condescension, of His lowly love, of His fearful sorrows, of His present care; and he spoke of the Holy Spirit, that

dwelleth with the renewed, to warn, and guide, and cheer them. He had promised to do; and they who led the new life lived not like the people of the wood; they who wore the Cross on their brows must learn to bear it in patience and self-denial; and the Lord of the heavenly kingdom had written His law in a holy book, and bade them read and obey.

All these things Christian learnt not at first, nor till he had stood many times before Kastreyn; but he caught glimpses of them in all that was said and answered by the children, and when they were weary of learning, the priest sent them forth to sport in the gardens and courts of the castle. But the little Christian was shy,—he feared so many children: so he walked alone, and when he thought upon his tender mother, he wept. The white-robed children were kind and gentle, but they too were shy and simple, and knew not how to soothe the weeping stranger. While some stood looking at him in pitying wonder, and others had withdrawn to the sports to which they had in vain invited him, suddenly there swelled on



the air the deep solemn tone of a distant bell, whereupon the children hastily assembled, and began to array themselves in files.

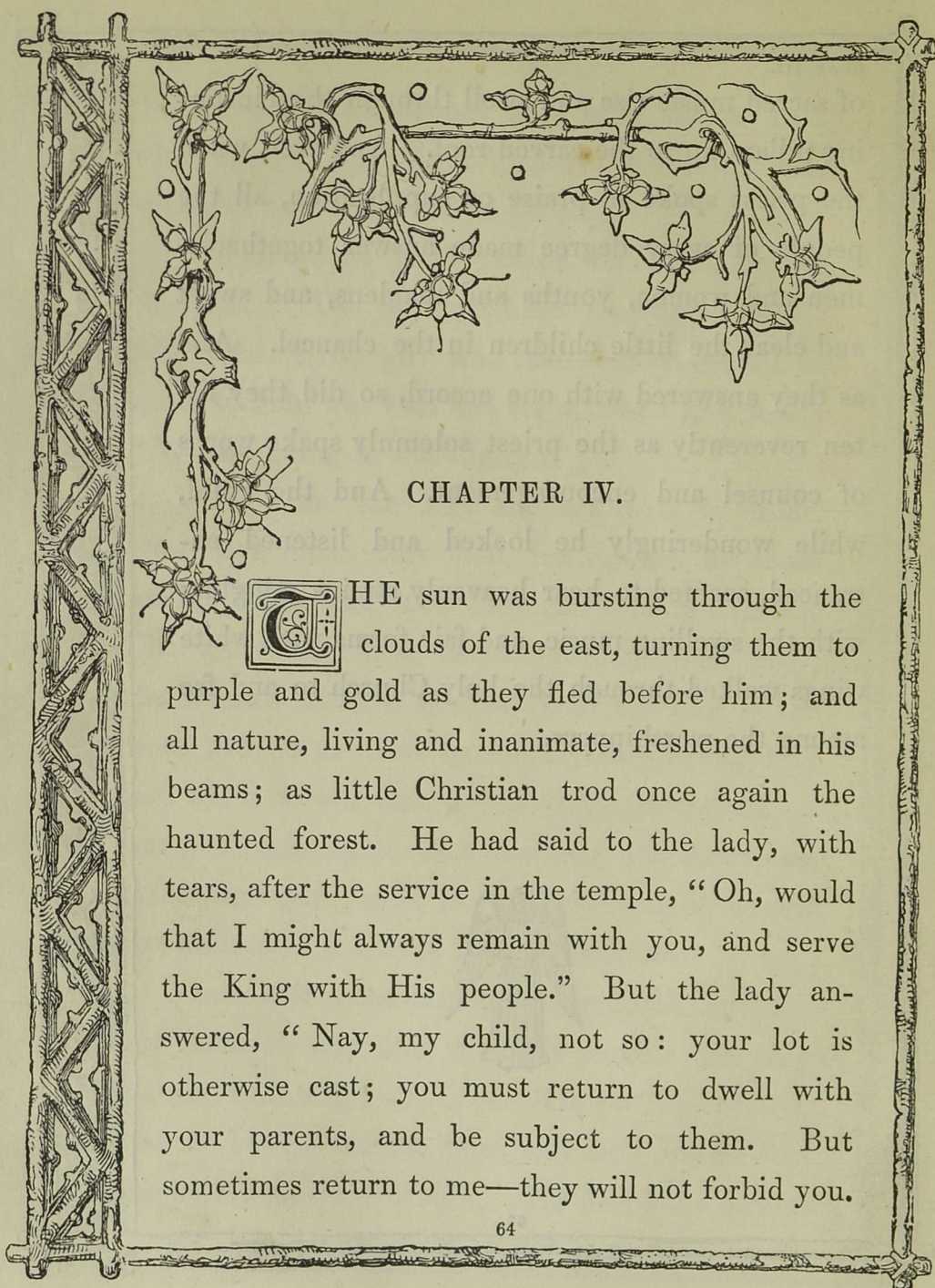
“Whither go you?” asked Christian, drying his eyes. “Do you not hear the vesper-bell?” said a fair little girl who had not ventured to speak to him, but who had wept to see him weep. “We are going to the Church.”

Then came the lady and set them in order. Down the glade they filed, led onward by those solemn bells; and soon they came to the stately Church, within whose doors once, and once only, the rescued child of the vassals of the lord of the wood had been. But by the mystery wrought in him when he was first borne within the porch, he was privileged to advance further; and slowly up the central nave, even to the holy chancel, passed the well-ordered files of innocent children.

There sitting among them, the little Christian saw distinctly and near what his parents had only glanced at through the door. He saw the priests, and the books, and the altar, and the hosts of worshippers within the temple. He heard the strains

of sacred music rise and swell through the clustering pillars up to the carved roof. And ever, when the priest spoke in praise or supplication, all the people of every degree made answer together—men and women, youths and maidens, and sweet and clear the little children in the chancel. And as they answered with one accord, so did they listen reverently as the priest solemnly spake words of counsel and encouragement. And the child, while wonderingly he looked and listened entranced, seemed to hear heavenly strains mingling with the swelling music, and fair forms with white wings walked through the holy Church to and fro among the worshippers.





CHAPTER IV.

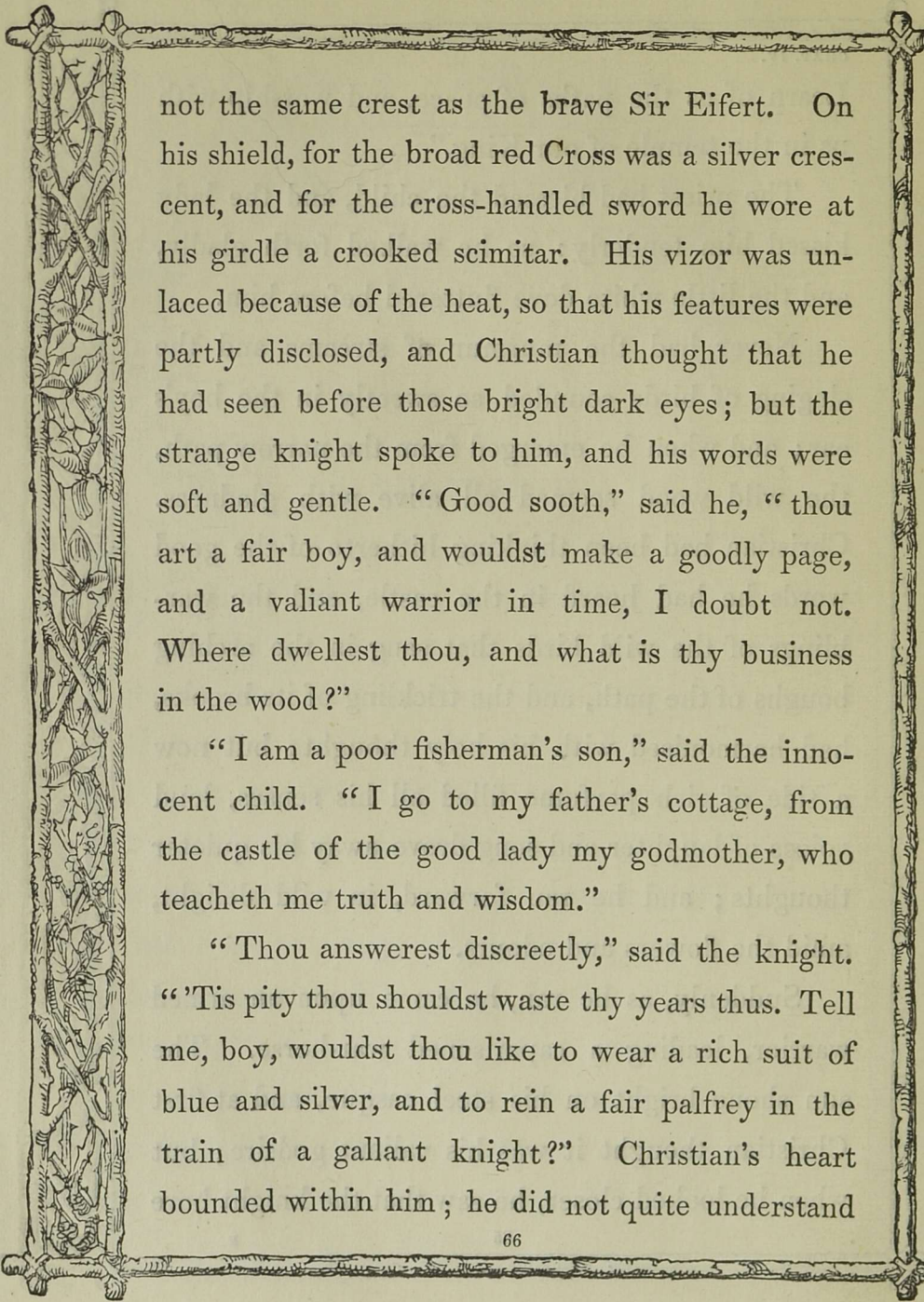
THE sun was bursting through the clouds of the east, turning them to purple and gold as they fled before him; and all nature, living and inanimate, freshened in his beams; as little Christian trod once again the haunted forest. He had said to the lady, with tears, after the service in the temple, "Oh, would that I might always remain with you, and serve the King with His people." But the lady answered, "Nay, my child, not so: your lot is otherwise cast; you must return to dwell with your parents, and be subject to them. But sometimes return to me—they will not forbid you.

Learn of us the paths of peace, and worship with us in the temple of our King.”

The priest had blessed the child, and the lady kissed him tenderly: so he walked forth gladly, and the little white dove fluttered before him.

Never had the murmur of streams and the singing of birds sounded so sweetly in the boy's ear; and when he emerged from the narrow path, the wild wood seemed all alive with gladness. Christian had been thinking hitherto of the good words he had heard in the castle, and the warblings of the wild birds that sang in the arching boughs of the path, and the trickling of its brooks, had harmonised with his holy thought; but now a tide of rich perfume filled all his senses, loud voices of laughter and song drove away his quieter thoughts; and he ran forward, in wild delight, amid the flowers and odours.

Suddenly, as he ran, he came upon an armed warrior, leading a caparisoned war-horse. The sun shone bright on his steel casque, and at first Christian thought it was his valiant godsire; but when he looked closer, he saw that the knight bore



not the same crest as the brave Sir Eifert. On his shield, for the broad red Cross was a silver crescent, and for the cross-handled sword he wore at his girdle a crooked scimitar. His vizor was unlaced because of the heat, so that his features were partly disclosed, and Christian thought that he had seen before those bright dark eyes; but the strange knight spoke to him, and his words were soft and gentle. "Good sooth," said he, "thou art a fair boy, and wouldst make a goodly page, and a valiant warrior in time, I doubt not. Where dwellest thou, and what is thy business in the wood?"

"I am a poor fisherman's son," said the innocent child. "I go to my father's cottage, from the castle of the good lady my godmother, who teacheth me truth and wisdom."

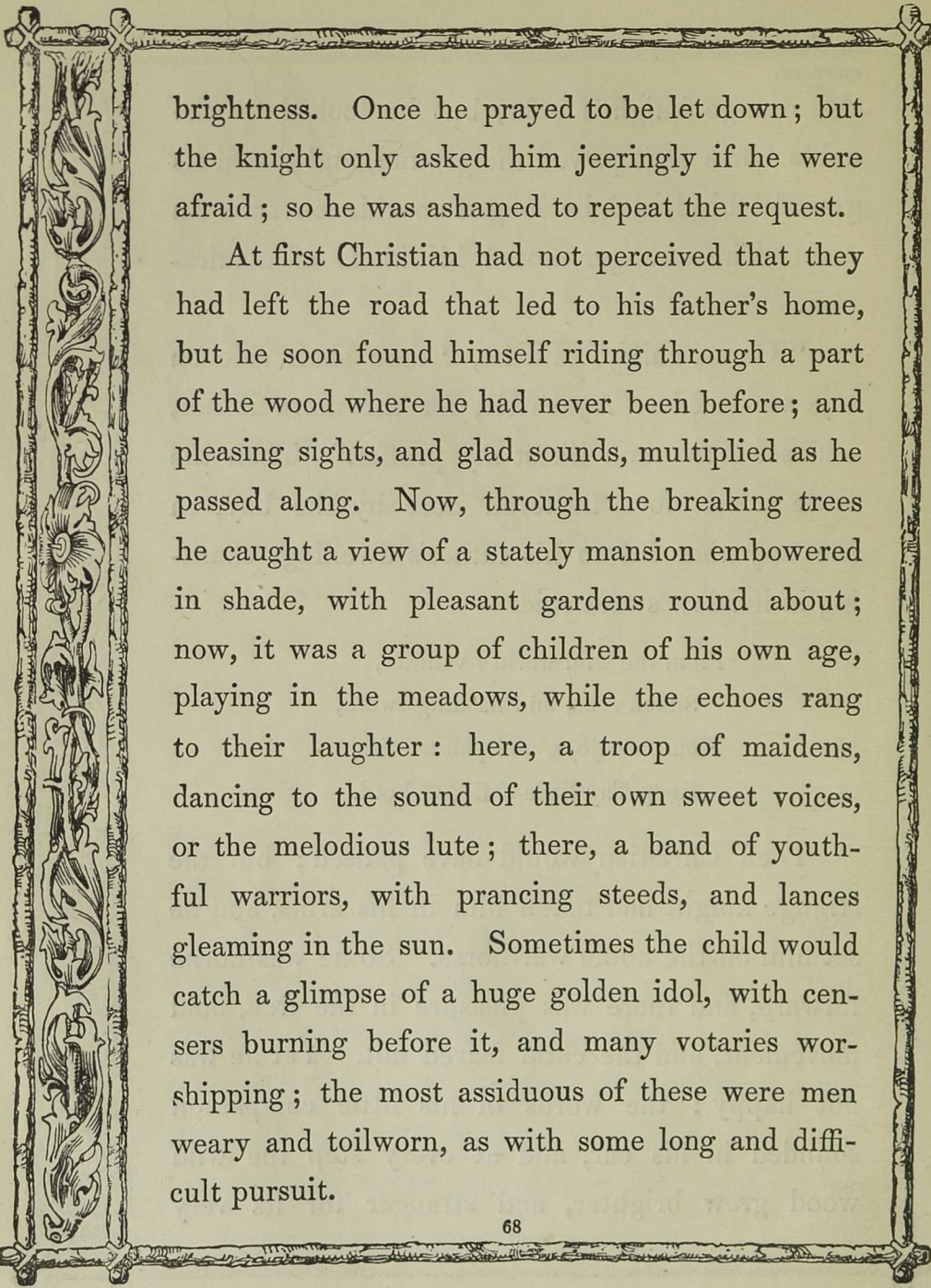
"Thou answerest discreetly," said the knight. "'Tis pity thou shouldst waste thy years thus. Tell me, boy, wouldst thou like to wear a rich suit of blue and silver, and to rein a fair palfrey in the train of a gallant knight?" Christian's heart bounded within him; he did not quite understand

the strange knight's offer, but he looked on the noble horse as it pawed the ground, and tossed its graceful head, and he longed to ride on such an one. The stranger noted his looks of admiration.

“Come, child,” said he, “thou shalt ride on my war-steed to my castle, for the morn is hot, and see how thou likest my proffer.” Then the little white dove fluttered close by the boy, in the way that led to his father's dwelling, chanting in her low sweet voice—

From the wild world's vanities,
Silken robe, and flashing sword,
From false joys, and painted lies,
Keep Thy little child, O Lord.

Then Christian would have paused; but the strange knight had taken him in his arms, and he set him on the noble war-horse. So he was borne forward, and there was pleasure in the free, bold movement, and the child feared not. Yet he was not happy: the words of his little companion sounded in his ear, and at every step the wild wood grew brighter, and stranger for its very

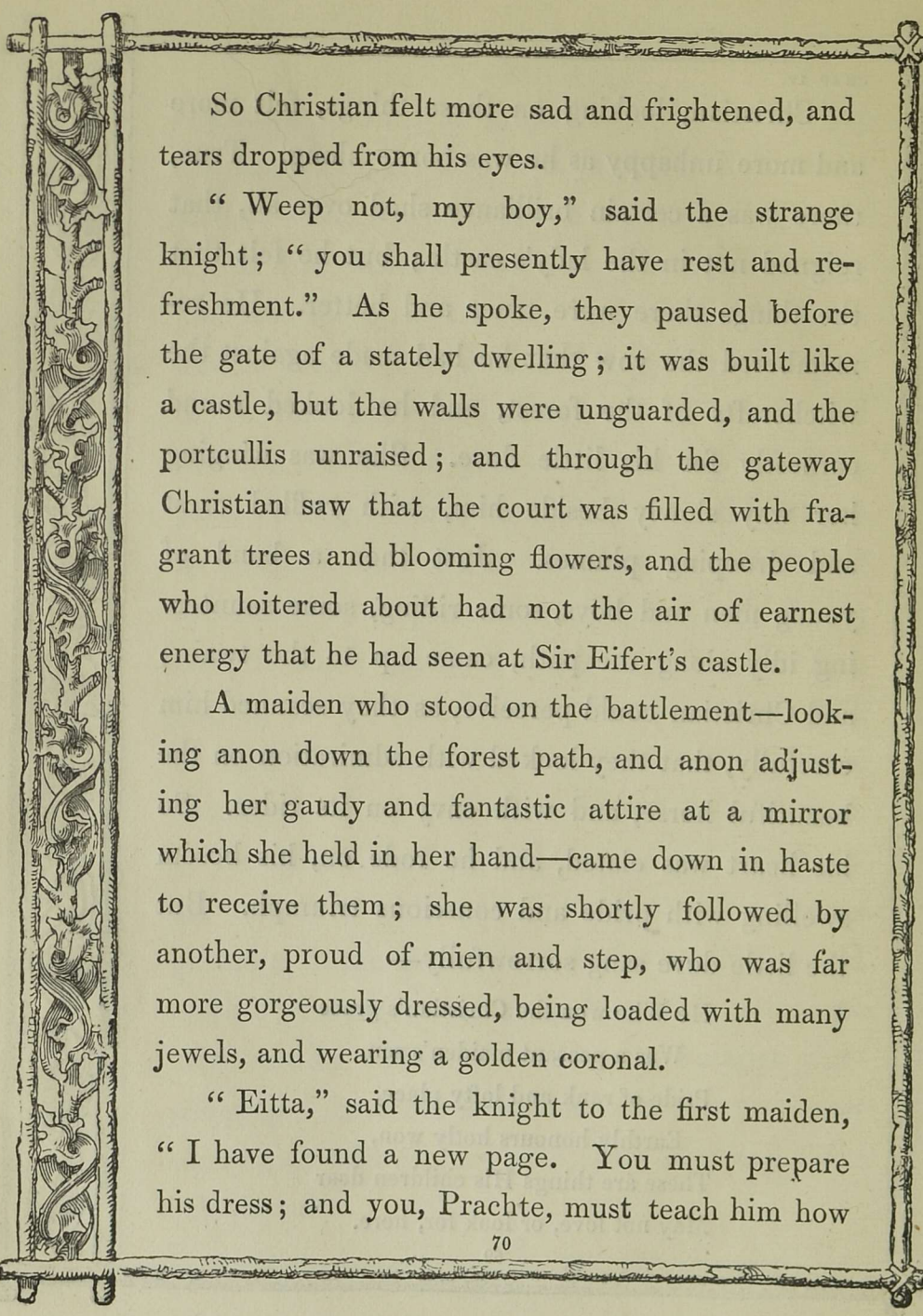


brightness. Once he prayed to be let down ; but the knight only asked him jeeringly if he were afraid ; so he was ashamed to repeat the request.

At first Christian had not perceived that they had left the road that led to his father's home, but he soon found himself riding through a part of the wood where he had never been before ; and pleasing sights, and glad sounds, multiplied as he passed along. Now, through the breaking trees he caught a view of a stately mansion embowered in shade, with pleasant gardens round about ; now, it was a group of children of his own age, playing in the meadows, while the echoes rang to their laughter : here, a troop of maidens, dancing to the sound of their own sweet voices, or the melodious lute ; there, a band of youthful warriors, with prancing steeds, and lances gleaming in the sun. Sometimes the child would catch a glimpse of a huge golden idol, with censers burning before it, and many votaries worshipping ; the most assiduous of these were men weary and toilworn, as with some long and difficult pursuit.

Christian, looking on these things, felt more and more unhappy as he was borne along. True, there was a certain brilliance shed over all, that reigned not in the lady's castle; but he felt that the things there were truer and better. He remembered the vow that he had made against the witchcrafts of the forest, and he looked round earnestly for his little dove. She was winging her way slowly beside him, with ruffled crest and drooping plumes. Just then a band of young men and boys, some riding, some sauntering idly along the path, came up to the twain; and Christian could perceive, as they scanned him carefully, that they looked with admiration on the beautiful horse, and with envy on its rider. So his heart was elated, and he rode on, his bosom swelling with pride and conscious triumph. But the little dove sang sorrowfully—

He Who won the Christian's grace
Was a peasant maiden's son.
Pride of rank and lofty place,
Earthly honours hotly won,
These are things His children dear
May not love, or look for, here.



So Christian felt more sad and frightened, and tears dropped from his eyes.

“Weep not, my boy,” said the strange knight; “you shall presently have rest and refreshment.” As he spoke, they paused before the gate of a stately dwelling; it was built like a castle, but the walls were unguarded, and the portcullis unraised; and through the gateway Christian saw that the court was filled with fragrant trees and blooming flowers, and the people who loitered about had not the air of earnest energy that he had seen at Sir Eifert’s castle.

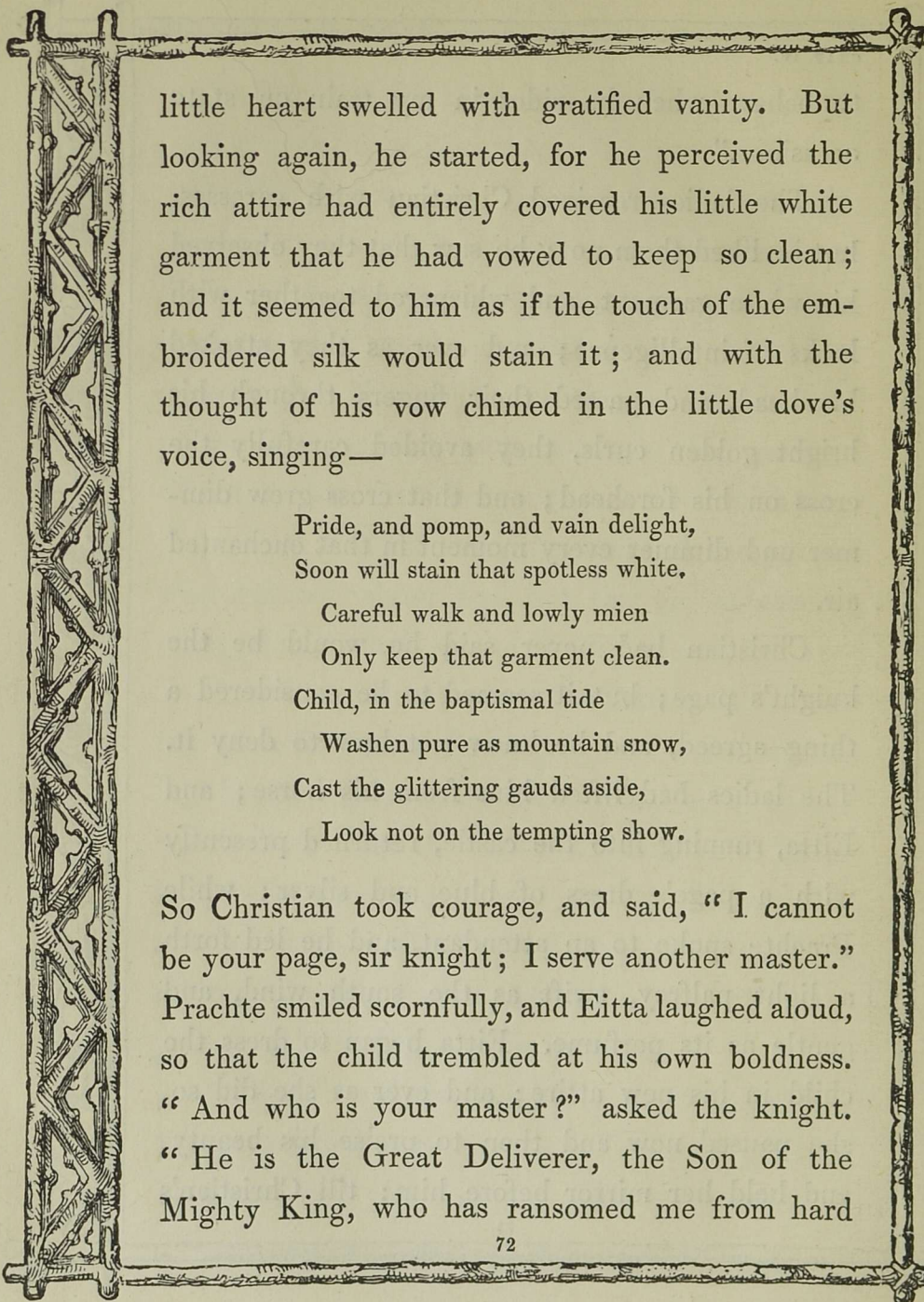
A maiden who stood on the battlement—looking anon down the forest path, and anon adjusting her gaudy and fantastic attire at a mirror which she held in her hand—came down in haste to receive them; she was shortly followed by another, proud of mien and step, who was far more gorgeously dressed, being loaded with many jewels, and wearing a golden coronal.

“Eitta,” said the knight to the first maiden, “I have found a new page. You must prepare his dress; and you, Prachte, must teach him how

to behave when he rides in my train on state occasions."

The ladies received Christian with caresses, but he liked them not; he saw that they observed his white garment, and whispered together with looks of intelligence; and ever as they stroked his head, and passed their fingers through his bright golden curls, they avoided carefully the cross on his forehead; and that cross grew dimmer and dimmer every moment in that enchanted air.

Christian had never said he would be the knight's page; but it seemed to be considered a thing agreed, and he knew not how to deny it. The ladies had lifted him from his horse; and Eitta, running into the castle, returned presently with a page's dress of blue and silver; while Prachte spoke to an attendant, and he led forth a light palfrey, swift as the south wind, and gentle as its perfume. Eitta began to dress the child in his new attire; and ever as she did so, she paused now and then to praise his beauty, and held her mirror before him; till Christian's

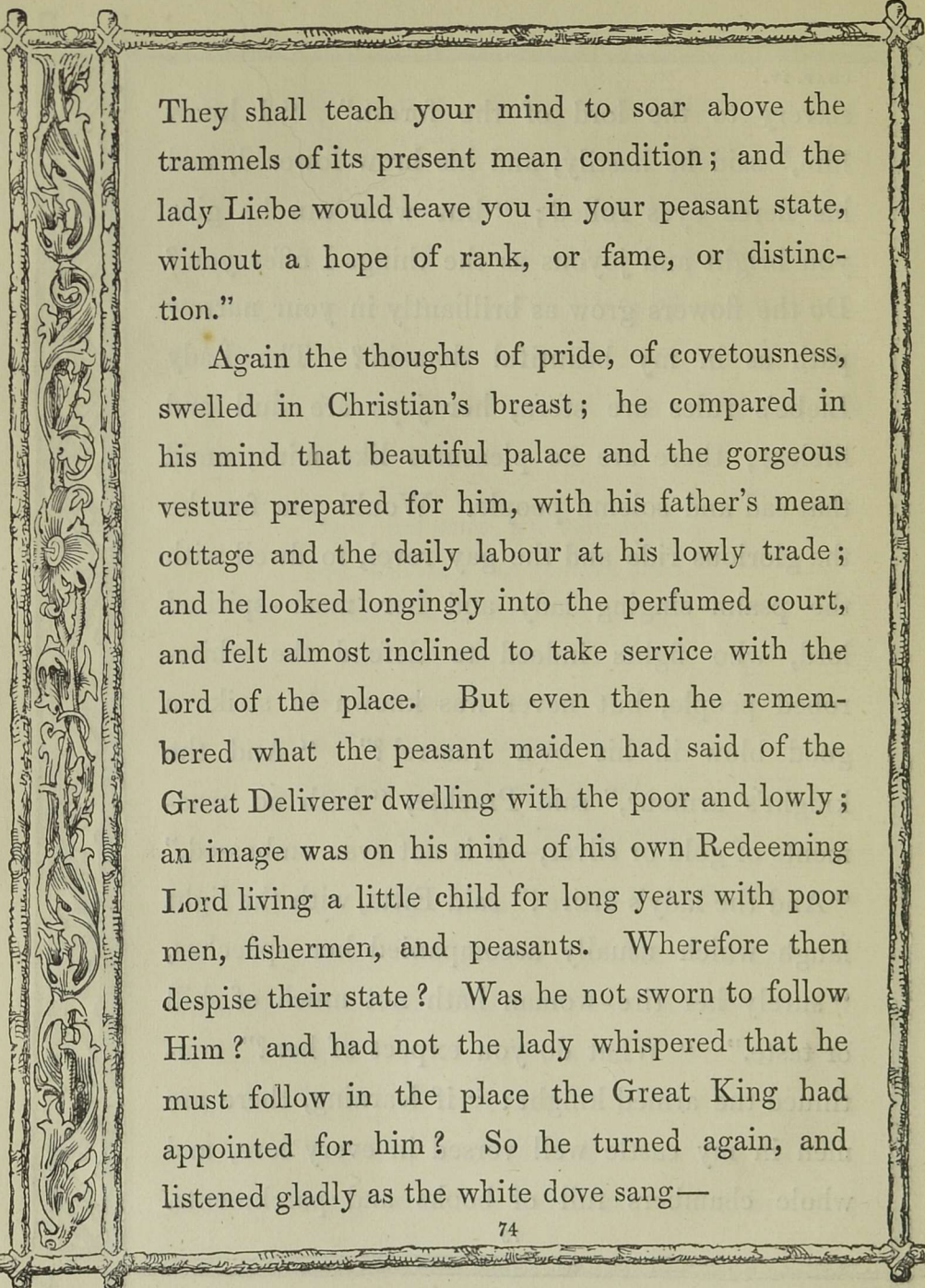


little heart swelled with gratified vanity. But looking again, he started, for he perceived the rich attire had entirely covered his little white garment that he had vowed to keep so clean; and it seemed to him as if the touch of the embroidered silk would stain it; and with the thought of his vow chimed in the little dove's voice, singing—

Pride, and pomp, and vain delight,
Soon will stain that spotless white.
Careful walk and lowly mien
Only keep that garment clean.
Child, in the baptismal tide
Washen pure as mountain snow,
Cast the glittering gauds aside,
Look not on the tempting show.

So Christian took courage, and said, "I cannot be your page, sir knight; I serve another master." Prachte smiled scornfully, and Eitta laughed aloud, so that the child trembled at his own boldness. "And who is your master?" asked the knight. "He is the Great Deliverer, the Son of the Mighty King, who has ransomed me from hard

slavery to the lord of the forest." "I know him," said he hastily, and his brow lowered, and his fierce eyes rolled; "but what can he give you bright and joyous as the things I offer you? Do the flowers grow as brilliantly in your narrow path as in my beautiful domain? The Lady Liebe's rules are stern, her joys are dull and lifeless; there are no pleasures like mine, amid that sad and solemn people. Would you forsake the glorious ride and the gay revel, to dwell with the psalm-singing lady and her mean-spirited lord, who fights indeed to defend the white-robed people, but never was known to strike a good blow in his own quarrel?" "And the knight's armour," said Prachte, "hath no ornaments of gold or silver,—it is not even embossed." "And the lady's attire!" said Eitta, with the light laugh which usually accompanied her speeches, "surely her tire-woman hath not much of skill or taste." "What do you expect of her?" continued the armed knight: "if learning, there are men in my castle well versed in every lore, and whole chambers full of books and parchments.



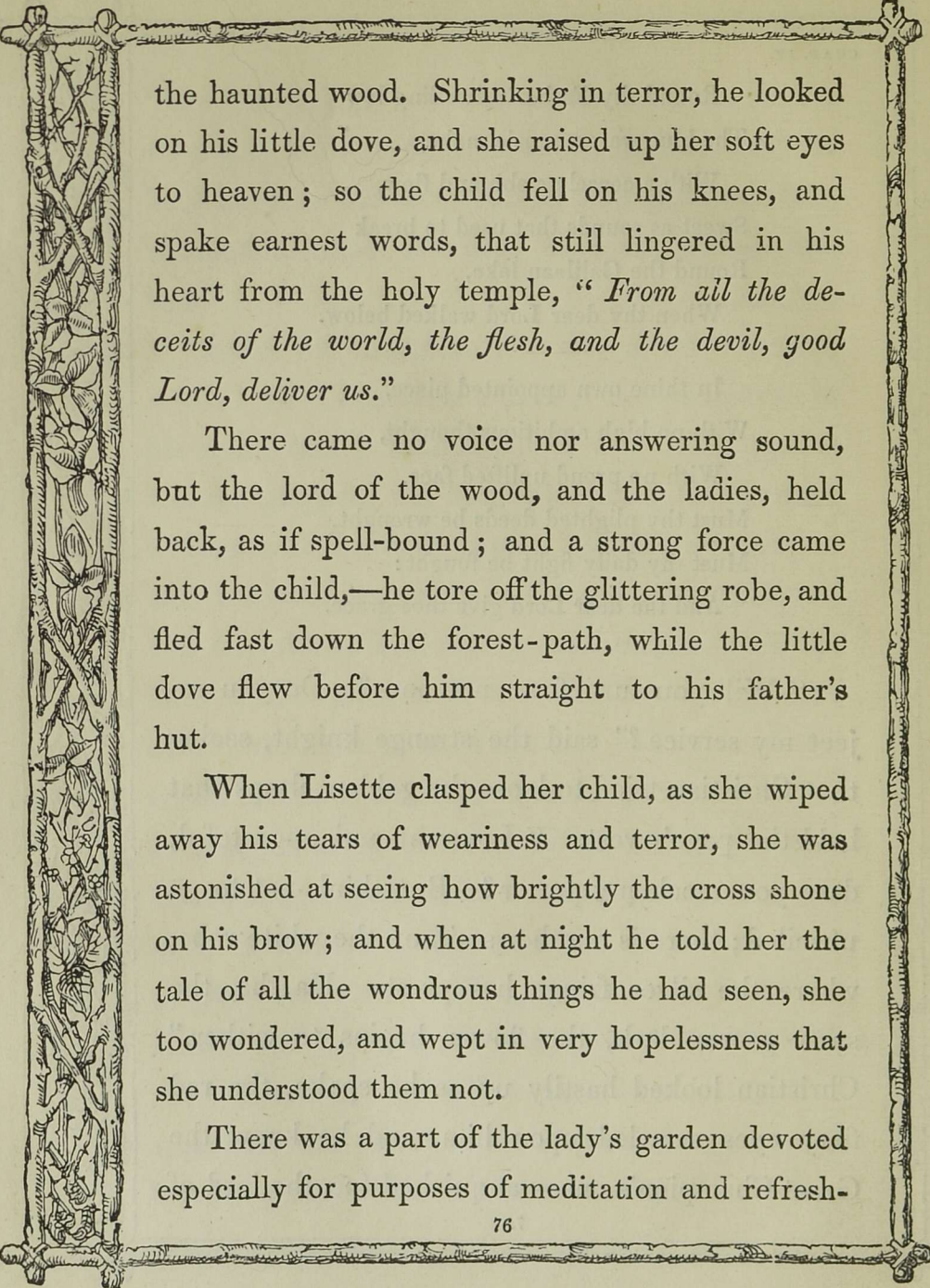
They shall teach your mind to soar above the trammels of its present mean condition; and the lady Liebe would leave you in your peasant state, without a hope of rank, or fame, or distinction."

Again the thoughts of pride, of covetousness, swelled in Christian's breast; he compared in his mind that beautiful palace and the gorgeous vesture prepared for him, with his father's mean cottage and the daily labour at his lowly trade; and he looked longingly into the perfumed court, and felt almost inclined to take service with the lord of the place. But even then he remembered what the peasant maiden had said of the Great Deliverer dwelling with the poor and lowly; an image was on his mind of his own Redeeming Lord living a little child for long years with poor men, fishermen, and peasants. Wherefore then despise their state? Was he not sworn to follow Him? and had not the lady whispered that he must follow in the place the Great King had appointed for him? So he turned again, and listened gladly as the white dove sang—

Round thy Father's dwelling low
The blue waters music make,
With a ceaseless ebb and flow,
Sweet as sounds that used to break
Round the Galilean lake,
When thy dear Lord walked below.

In thine own appointed place,
With no high ambitious thought,
With no proud uplifted face,
Must thy plighted deeds be wrought,
Must thy daily fight be fought:
And the dear Lord give thee grace.

“ Will you turn from me now? Do you reject my service?” said the strange knight, seeing that Christian tried to loose the golden clasps that held the page's vest. “ Ignorant and ungrateful, dare you mock my power? But think not to go unsoiled; there is another stain on the white robe, where the silver fringe has prest. Ha, ha, the snow grows dark, the flower begins to wither.” Christian looked hastily up as he spake, the red fiery eyes scowled upon him, and he knew the Great Champion's once-vanquished foe, the lord of



the haunted wood. Shrinking in terror, he looked on his little dove, and she raised up her soft eyes to heaven; so the child fell on his knees, and spake earnest words, that still lingered in his heart from the holy temple, "*From all the deceits of the world, the flesh, and the devil, good Lord, deliver us.*"

There came no voice nor answering sound, but the lord of the wood, and the ladies, held back, as if spell-bound; and a strong force came into the child,—he tore off the glittering robe, and fled fast down the forest-path, while the little dove flew before him straight to his father's hut.

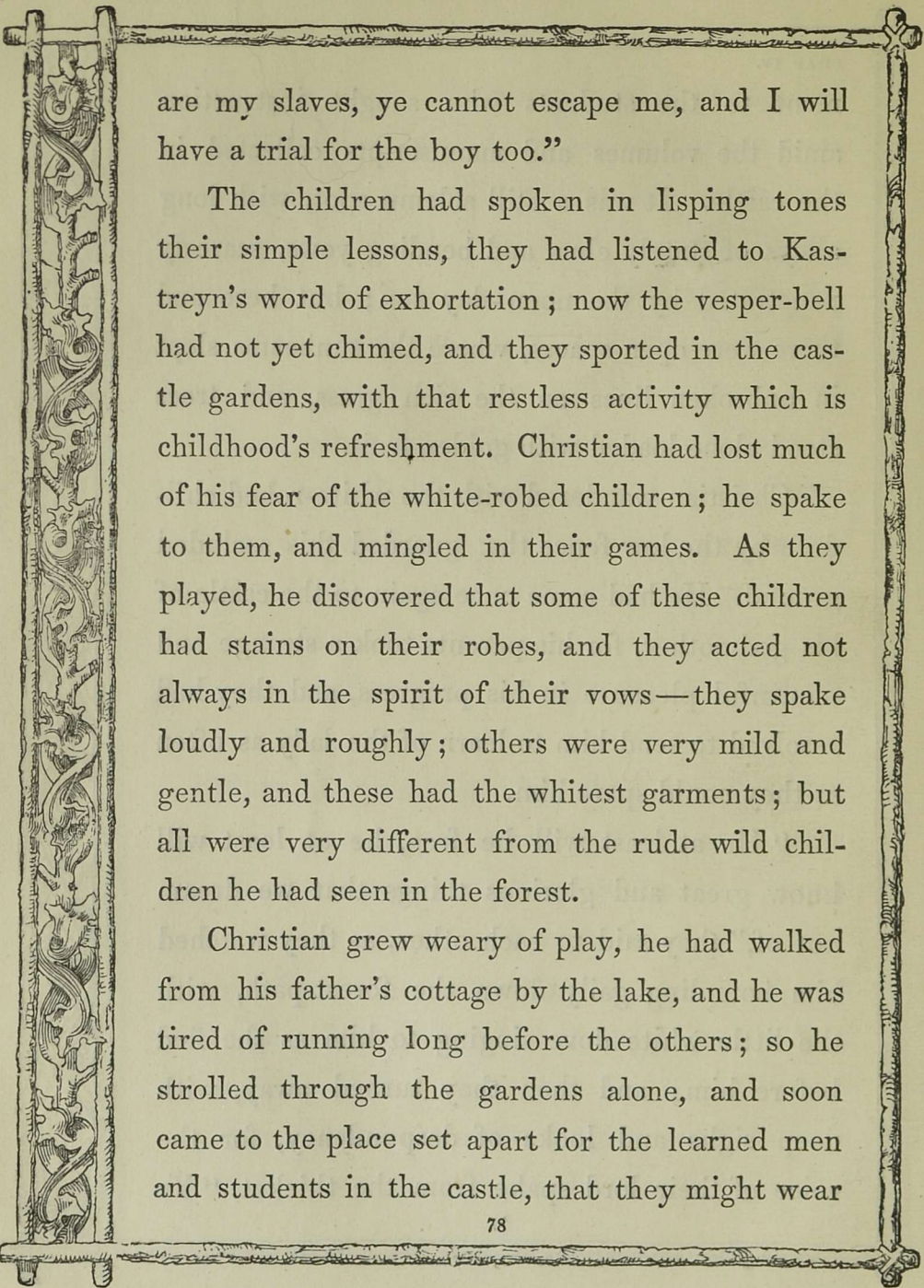
When Lisette clasped her child, as she wiped away his tears of weariness and terror, she was astonished at seeing how brightly the cross shone on his brow; and when at night he told her the tale of all the wondrous things he had seen, she too wondered, and wept in very hopelessness that she understood them not.

There was a part of the lady's garden devoted especially for purposes of meditation and refresh-

ment to the students who sought instruction amid the volumes and manuscripts collected in the castle. It was a still solemn spot, with long alleys of stately elms and bending yews, scarcely penetrated by the noon-day sun; but here and there were open spaces, where the sunbeams slept in unbroken lines on the rich grass, and trees stood alone loaded with golden fruit.

Christian wandered with the white-robed children by the low fence that guarded this secluded ground. He had come once again to the castle of his godmother, for his parents took a strange and mournful pleasure in his progress, and they had resolved to send him to learn of the lady as often as they could spare him.

“He at least will be free, he at least will know great and glorious things that we dream not of,” they said to each other, as they watched him bounding gaily down the forest-path, with the little white dove singing to him as she fled before him; and then they turned away, with deep sighs and looks of despondency, for the voice of their lord spake from the thicket, “Ye



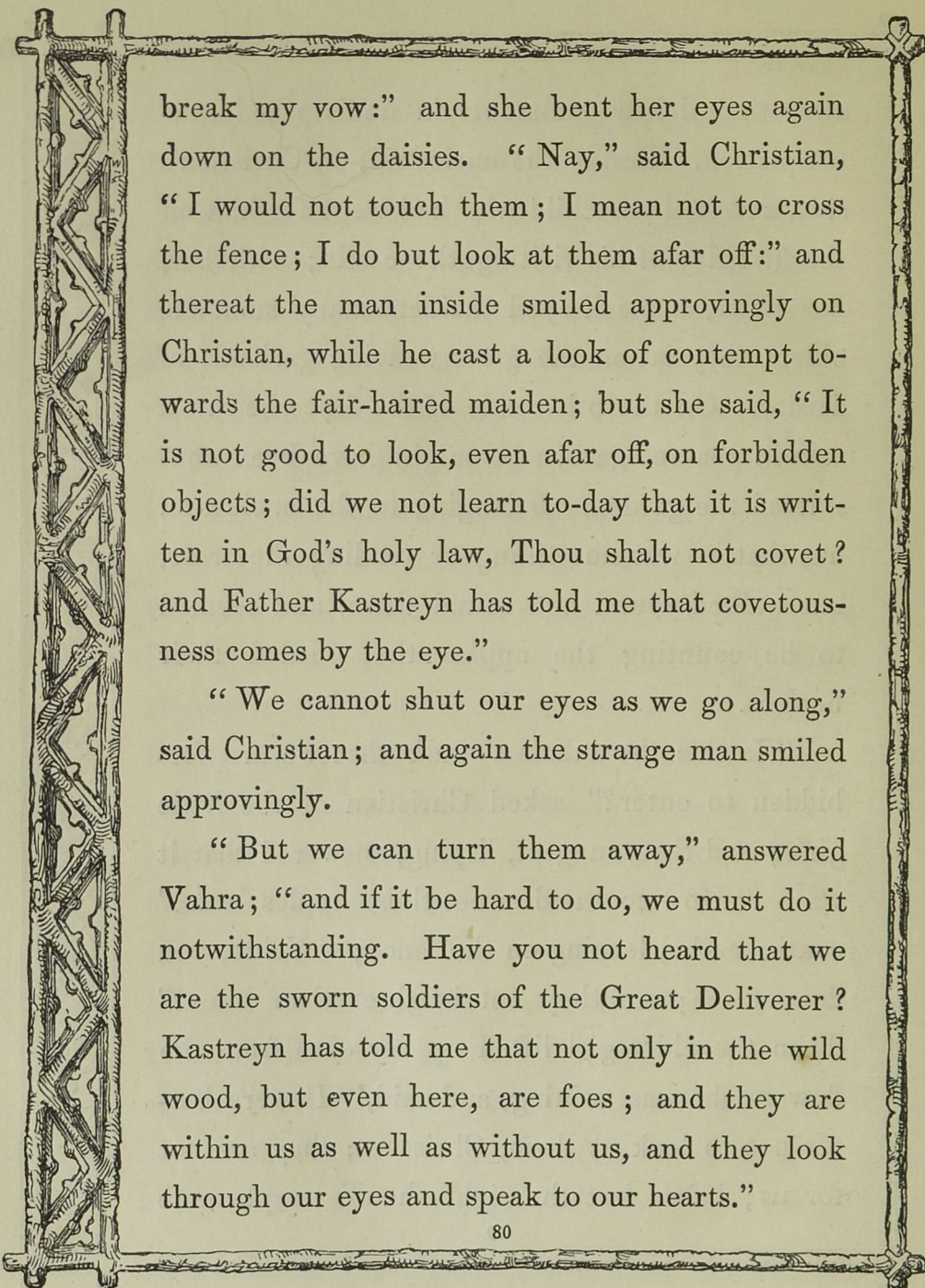
are my slaves, ye cannot escape me, and I will have a trial for the boy too.”

The children had spoken in lisping tones their simple lessons, they had listened to Kas-treyn’s word of exhortation ; now the vesper-bell had not yet chimed, and they sported in the castle gardens, with that restless activity which is childhood’s refreshment. Christian had lost much of his fear of the white-robed children ; he spake to them, and mingled in their games. As they played, he discovered that some of these children had stains on their robes, and they acted not always in the spirit of their vows—they spake loudly and roughly ; others were very mild and gentle, and these had the whitest garments ; but all were very different from the rude wild children he had seen in the forest.

Christian grew weary of play, he had walked from his father’s cottage by the lake, and he was tired of running long before the others ; so he strolled through the gardens alone, and soon came to the place set apart for the learned men and students in the castle, that they might wear

away their leisure moments in undisturbed contemplation. Beside the enclosure, on Christian's side, sat the little child who had wept for him on the first day of his visiting the castle; with her, her sister, a meek-eyed maiden many summers older; they sat on the grass weaving garlands of daisies. On the other side of the fence he saw a man in peasant garb, who might have been considered the gardener belonging to the enclosure, but that he was not tilling or tending the trees, but walked round and round them, and seemed to be counting the apples that loaded their boughs.

“Is this the scholars' walk that we are forbidden to enter?” asked Christian of the little girls; and the youngest, lisping, answered that it was. “How cool and sweet those apples look!” continued he, leaning on the fence; “Vahra, you do not see; are they not brighter than roses?” Then the elder girl lifted up her eyes from the flowers she was twining, and said, “It were better not to look at them, Christian; they are not for us; I fear lest the sight should tempt me to



break my vow:" and she bent her eyes again down on the daisies. "Nay," said Christian, "I would not touch them; I mean not to cross the fence; I do but look at them afar off:" and thereat the man inside smiled approvingly on Christian, while he cast a look of contempt towards the fair-haired maiden; but she said, "It is not good to look, even afar off, on forbidden objects; did we not learn to-day that it is written in God's holy law, Thou shalt not covet? and Father Kastreyn has told me that covetousness comes by the eye."

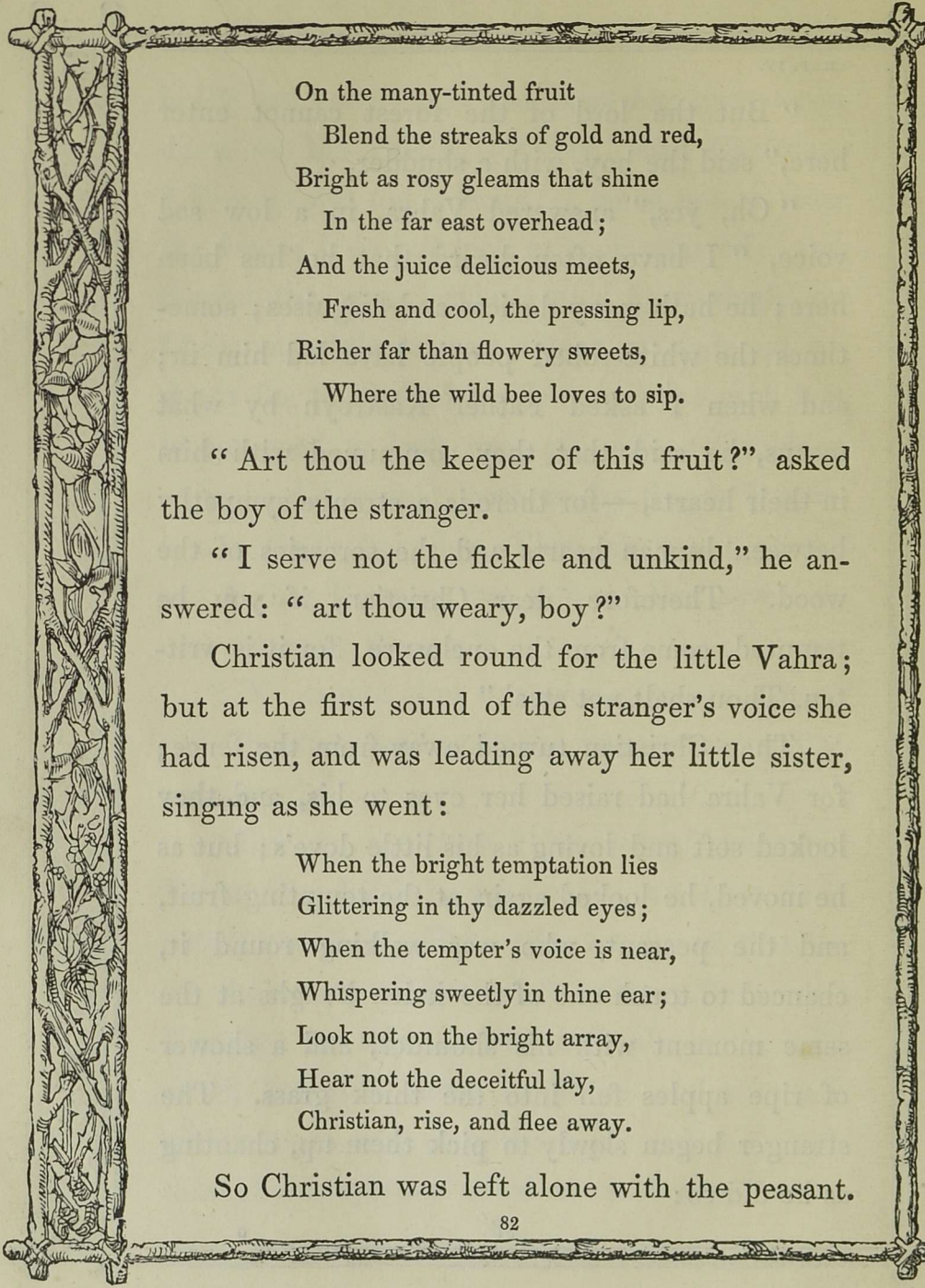
"We cannot shut our eyes as we go along," said Christian; and again the strange man smiled approvingly.

"But we can turn them away," answered Vahra; "and if it be hard to do, we must do it notwithstanding. Have you not heard that we are the sworn soldiers of the Great Deliverer? Kastreyn has told me that not only in the wild wood, but even here, are foes; and they are within us as well as without us, and they look through our eyes and speak to our hearts."

“But the lord of the forest cannot enter here,” said the boy, with a shudder.

“Oh, yes,” answered Vahra, in a low sad voice, “I have often heard that he has been here; he hath many devices and disguises; sometimes the white-robed people have led him in; and when I asked Father Kastreyn by what means, he said that they communed with him in their hearts,—for there is a strange sympathy between human hearts and the sorceries of the wood. Therefore, dear Christian, if you be tempted, come from the enclosure; for it is written, Thou shalt not steal.”

Then Christian turned away from the fence; for Vahra had raised her eyes to his, and they looked soft and loving as his little dove's; but as he moved, he looked again at the tempting fruit, and the peasant, who was walking round it, chanced to touch one of the laden boughs at the same moment with his shoulder, and a shower of ripe apples fell into the thick grass. The stranger began slowly to pick them up, chanting as he did so:



On the many-tinted fruit
Blend the streaks of gold and red,
Bright as rosy gleams that shine
In the far east overhead ;
And the juice delicious meets,
Fresh and cool, the pressing lip,
Richer far than flowery sweets,
Where the wild bee loves to sip.

“ Art thou the keeper of this fruit ? ” asked
the boy of the stranger.

“ I serve not the fickle and unkind, ” he an-
swered : “ art thou weary, boy ? ”

Christian looked round for the little Vahra ;
but at the first sound of the stranger’s voice she
had risen, and was leading away her little sister,
singing as she went :

When the bright temptation lies
Glittering in thy dazzled eyes ;
When the tempter’s voice is near,
Whispering sweetly in thine ear ;
Look not on the bright array,
Hear not the deceitful lay,
Christian, rise, and flee away.

So Christian was left alone with the peasant.

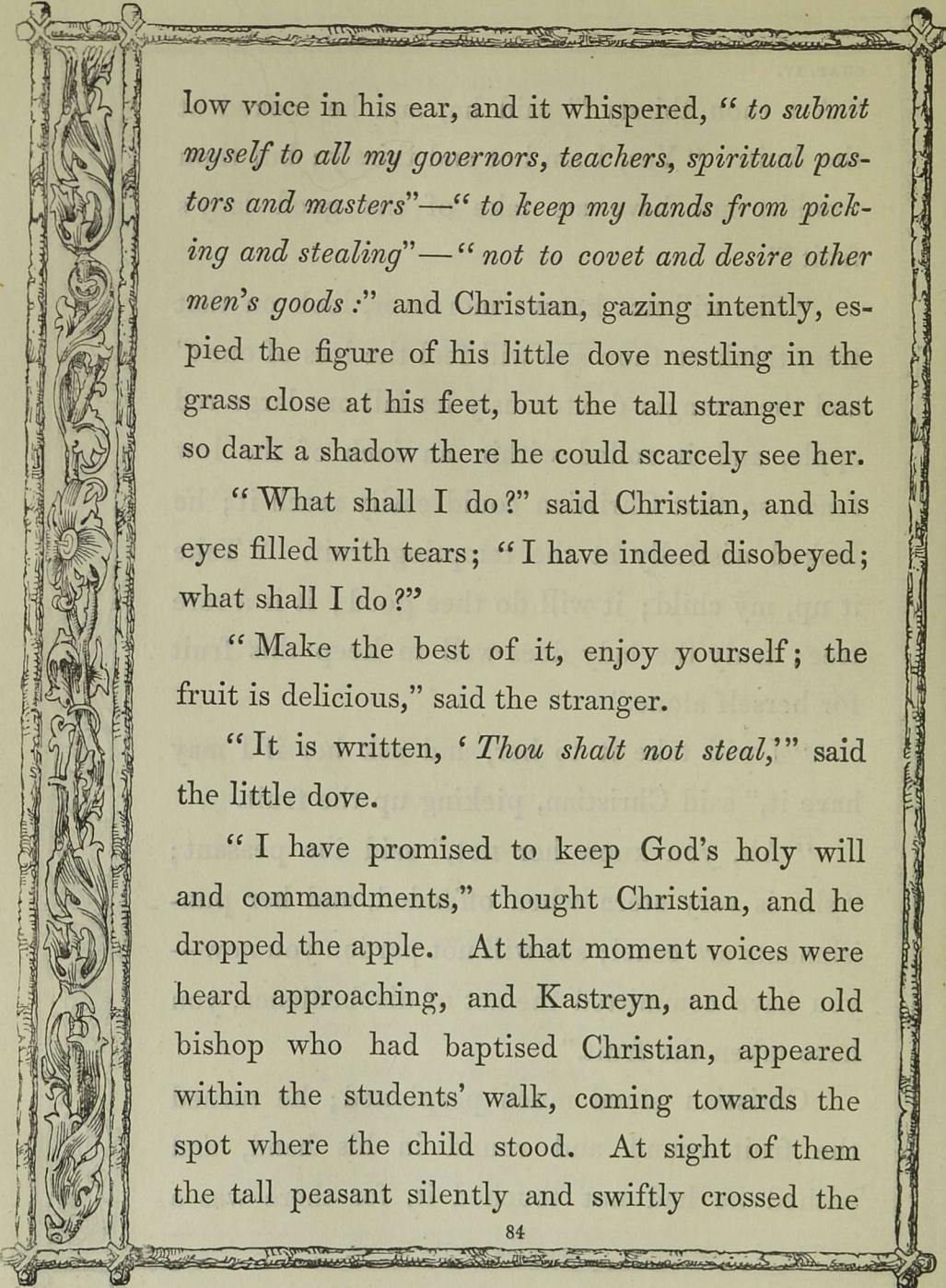
“Art thou thirsty?” said he, and he looked at the fruit. “Yes, I am hot and thirsty; but thou wouldst not have me take of the good lady’s fruit?”

“She will not know: moreover, look on that tree, thinkest thou she will feel the loss of one?” and the stranger dexterously let fall one large red apple, and it rolled within an inch of the low fence, so that Christian could easily reach it; he looked wistfully at the tempting fruit. “Take it up, my child; it will do thee good; it is a rare tree; truly the lady does well to keep this fruit for herself alone.”

“I will take it to her, and ask her if I may have it,” said Christian, picking up the fruit.

“Ah, you know her not,” said the peasant; “she is very stern when offended, and her punishments are cruel; she will not pardon you now—you have committed the act of disobedience, you have taken the fruit.”

Christian stood much perplexed; he turned the fruit round and round in his hand, and wished he had not touched it, for there was a



low voice in his ear, and it whispered, “*to submit myself to all my governors, teachers, spiritual pastors and masters*”—“*to keep my hands from picking and stealing*”—“*not to covet and desire other men’s goods :*” and Christian, gazing intently, espied the figure of his little dove nestling in the grass close at his feet, but the tall stranger cast so dark a shadow there he could scarcely see her.

“What shall I do?” said Christian, and his eyes filled with tears; “I have indeed disobeyed; what shall I do?”

“Make the best of it, enjoy yourself; the fruit is delicious,” said the stranger.

“It is written, ‘*Thou shalt not steal,*’” said the little dove.

“I have promised to keep God’s holy will and commandments,” thought Christian, and he dropped the apple. At that moment voices were heard approaching, and Kastreyn, and the old bishop who had baptised Christian, appeared within the students’ walk, coming towards the spot where the child stood. At sight of them the tall peasant silently and swiftly crossed the

fence, and came up close to Christian, whispering, "His punishments are severe, he is the sternest of the band."

So the child trembled, and his white forehead crimsoned all over with shame and fear.

"What are you doing here, my child?" said Kastreyn; "have you touched the lady's apples?" Christian trembled.

"Say no," whispered the peasant; "he did not see you."

"Hear him not," sighed the little dove, "for he is a liar, and the father of lies."

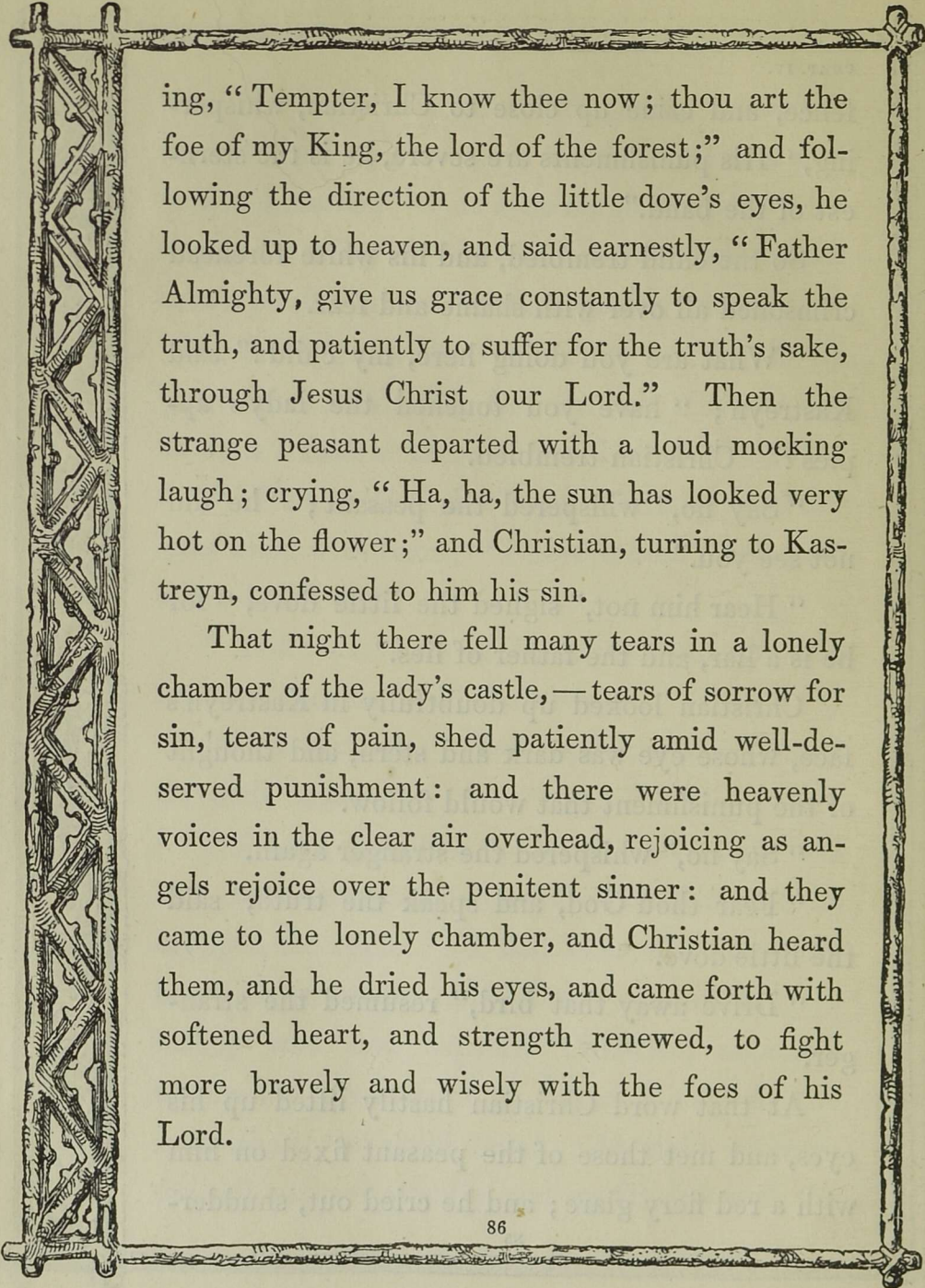
Christian looked up doubtfully in Kastreyn's face, whose eye was dark and stern, and thought of the punishment that would follow.

"Say no," whispered the stranger again.

"Fear thou God, and speak the truth," said the little dove.

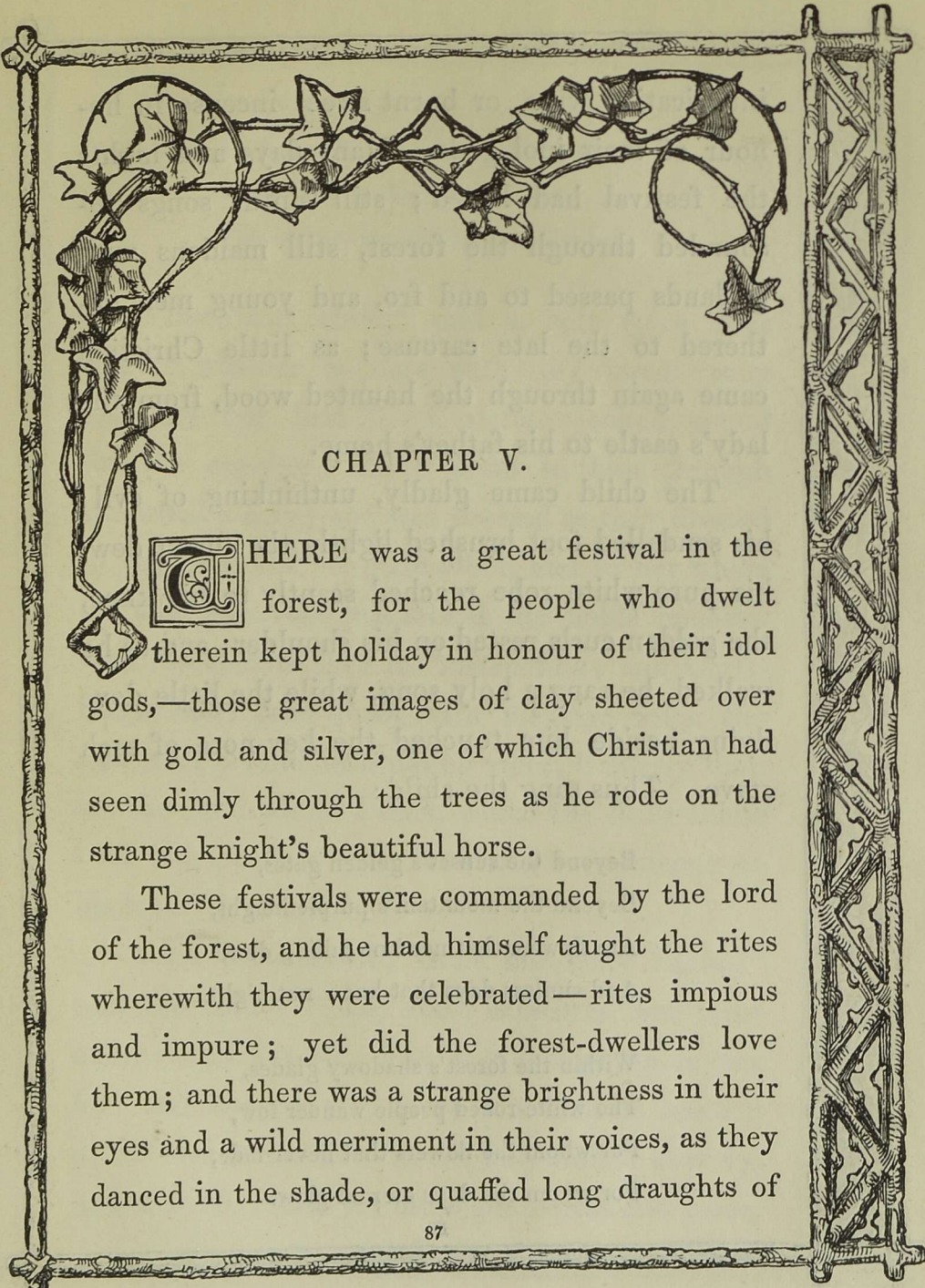
"Drive away that bird," resumed the stranger.

At that word Christian hastily lifted up his eyes, and met those of the peasant fixed on him with a red fiery glare; and he cried out, shudder-



ing, " Tempter, I know thee now; thou art the foe of my King, the lord of the forest;" and following the direction of the little dove's eyes, he looked up to heaven, and said earnestly, " Father Almighty, give us grace constantly to speak the truth, and patiently to suffer for the truth's sake, through Jesus Christ our Lord." Then the strange peasant departed with a loud mocking laugh; crying, " Ha, ha, the sun has looked very hot on the flower;" and Christian, turning to Kastreyn, confessed to him his sin.

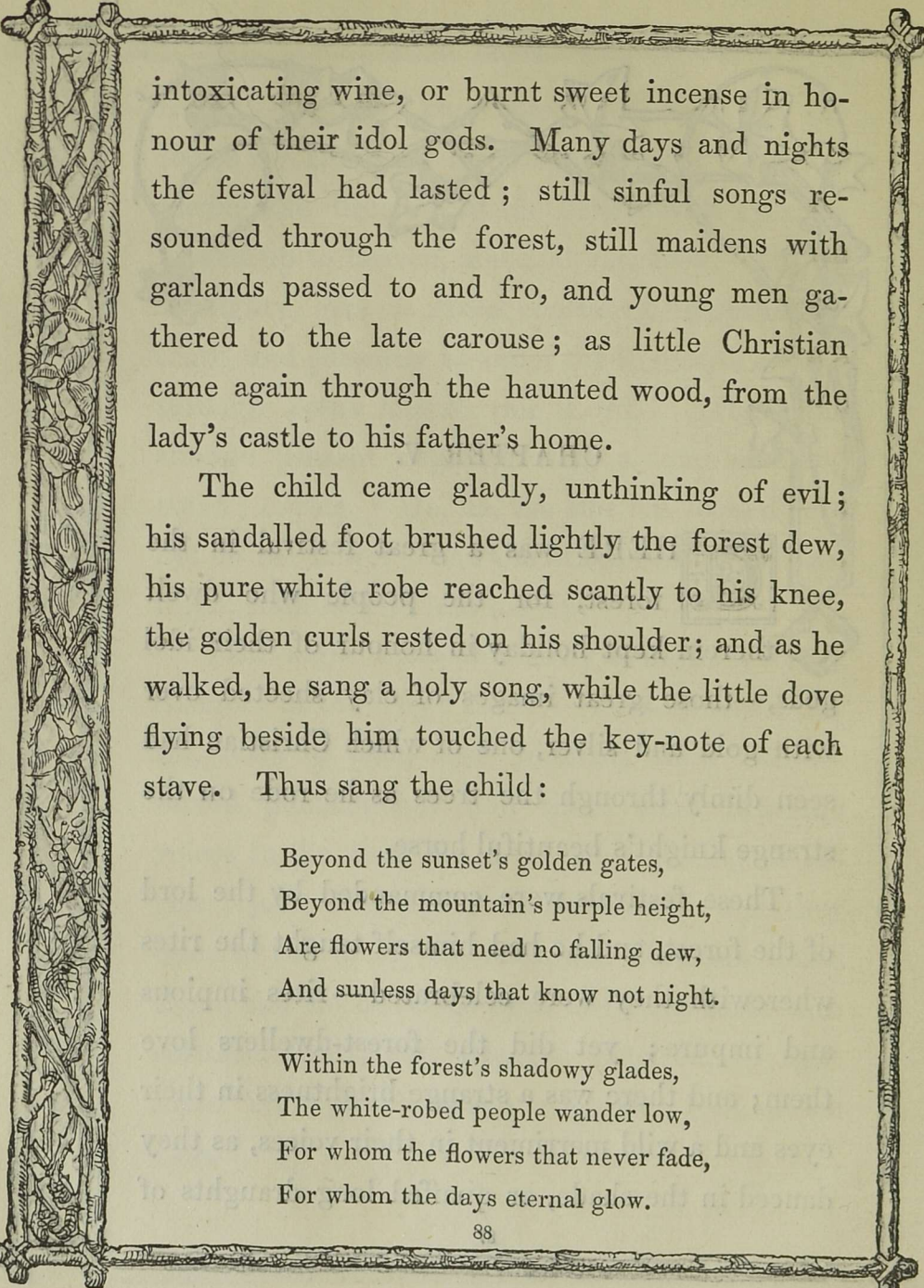
That night there fell many tears in a lonely chamber of the lady's castle, — tears of sorrow for sin, tears of pain, shed patiently amid well-deserved punishment: and there were heavenly voices in the clear air overhead, rejoicing as angels rejoice over the penitent sinner: and they came to the lonely chamber, and Christian heard them, and he dried his eyes, and came forth with softened heart, and strength renewed, to fight more bravely and wisely with the foes of his Lord.



CHAPTER V.

THERE was a great festival in the forest, for the people who dwelt therein kept holiday in honour of their idol gods,—those great images of clay sheeted over with gold and silver, one of which Christian had seen dimly through the trees as he rode on the strange knight's beautiful horse.

These festivals were commanded by the lord of the forest, and he had himself taught the rites wherewith they were celebrated—rites impious and impure; yet did the forest-dwellers love them; and there was a strange brightness in their eyes and a wild merriment in their voices, as they danced in the shade, or quaffed long draughts of



intoxicating wine, or burnt sweet incense in honour of their idol gods. Many days and nights the festival had lasted; still sinful songs resounded through the forest, still maidens with garlands passed to and fro, and young men gathered to the late carouse; as little Christian came again through the haunted wood, from the lady's castle to his father's home.

The child came gladly, unthinking of evil; his sandalled foot brushed lightly the forest dew, his pure white robe reached scantily to his knee, the golden curls rested on his shoulder; and as he walked, he sang a holy song, while the little dove flying beside him touched the key-note of each stave. Thus sang the child:

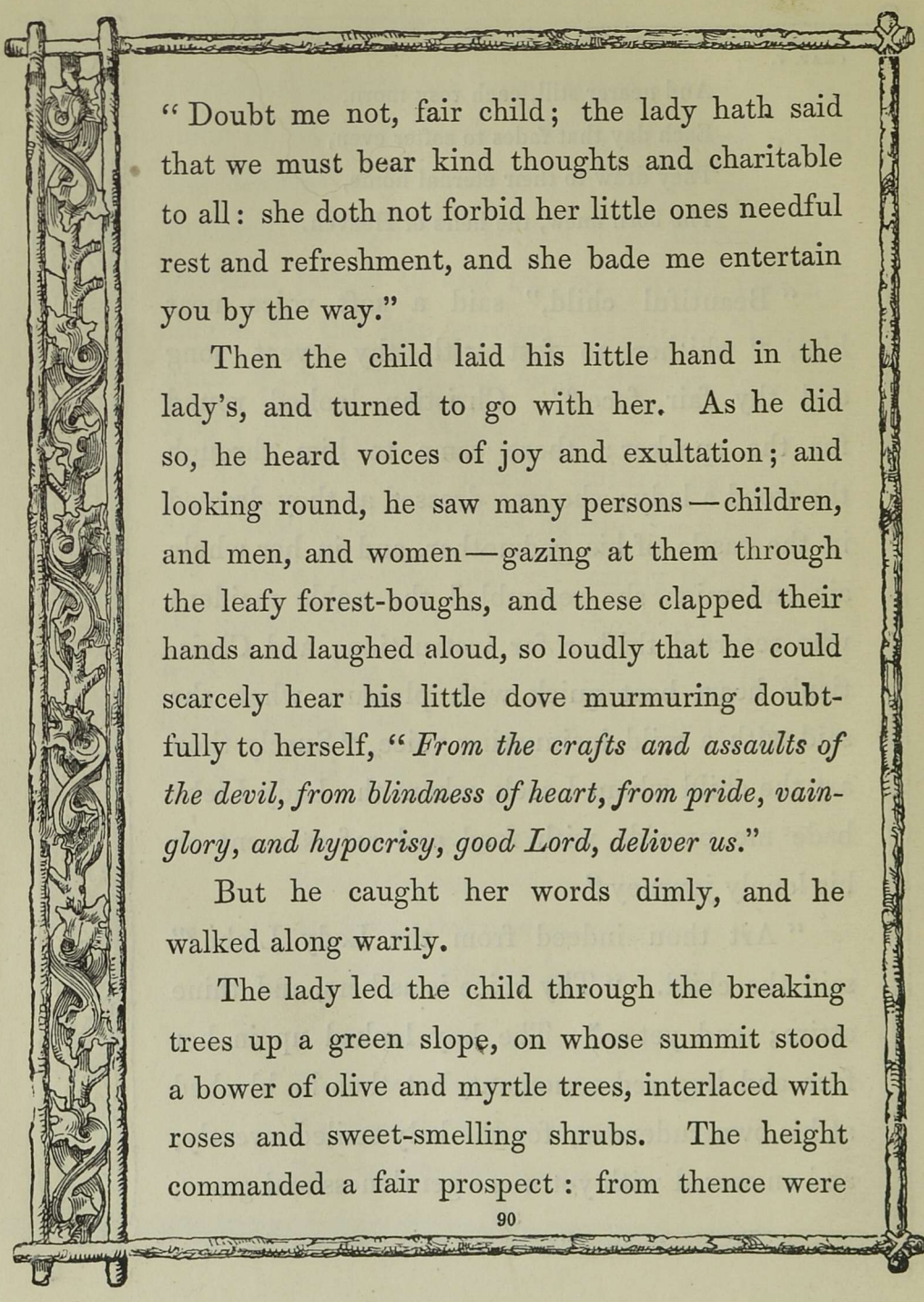
Beyond the sunset's golden gates,
Beyond the mountain's purple height,
Are flowers that need no falling dew,
And sunless days that know not night.

Within the forest's shadowy glades,
The white-robed people wander low,
For whom the flowers that never fade,
For whom the days eternal glow.

And nearer still, each rosy morn,
Each day that fades to softer even,
They draw to their eternal home,
The born anew, the heirs of Heaven.

“Beautiful child,” said a soft voice near him, “whither so fast with thy sweet song and thy fair face?” Christian looked round for the speaker: there came to him through the wood a lady; she was dressed as they dressed in the castle of his godmother, and in her whole air and mien she resembled the noble maidens who resorted thither for instruction; and Christian’s heart beat quick with pleasure when she said with a mild insinuating voice, “Surely thou art the child whom I seek, whom the Lady Liebe bade me provide with food and refreshment on his lonely journey.”

“Art thou indeed from the Lady Liebe?” said the child. “Thy voice is as hers, and thine attire; and yet—” The boy looked up in her face and lingered a moment, but then he blushed at his own rudeness; for the lady smiled sweetly, and answered with yet more gentleness and grace,



“Doubt me not, fair child; the lady hath said that we must bear kind thoughts and charitable to all: she doth not forbid her little ones needful rest and refreshment, and she bade me entertain you by the way.”

Then the child laid his little hand in the lady's, and turned to go with her. As he did so, he heard voices of joy and exultation; and looking round, he saw many persons—children, and men, and women—gazing at them through the leafy forest-boughs, and these clapped their hands and laughed aloud, so loudly that he could scarcely hear his little dove murmuring doubtfully to herself, “*From the crafts and assaults of the devil, from blindness of heart, from pride, vain-glory, and hypocrisy, good Lord, deliver us.*”

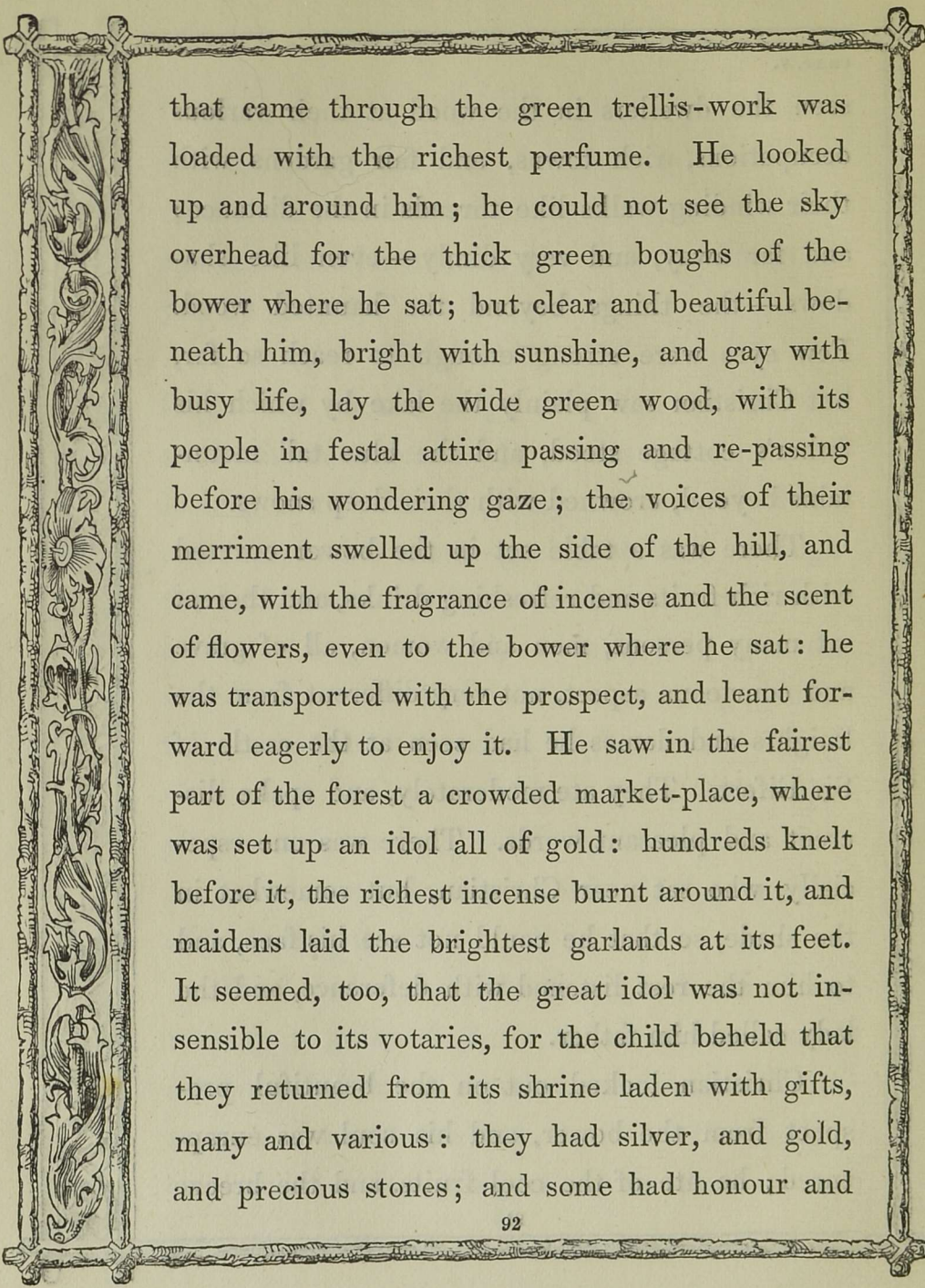
But he caught her words dimly, and he walked along warily.

The lady led the child through the breaking trees up a green slope, on whose summit stood a bower of olive and myrtle trees, interlaced with roses and sweet-smelling shrubs. The height commanded a fair prospect: from thence were

seen the dwellers in the wood at their various occupations, rich towns, and fair gardens with their winding walks like threads in the distance; and far away, and very dimly—even like shadows—the things beyond the haunted wood. Few eyes were strong enough to reach so far, but Christian saw plainly the lake by which his father's cottage stood, and the blue tall mountains beyond, crowned with their deep snows.

There was a table set in the bower covered with rich fruits and refreshing drinks, and thereat sat many persons, men and women, all of grave and courteous aspect, not very different from the knights and dames he had seen at the castle of Sir Eifert. They ate moderately, and spake discreet and pleasant words. There was one especially, who sat near Christian, but somewhat in the shade, so that he could not see his face, and to him the rest listened with deference, and the lady called him father.

Christian looked out on the beautiful prospect from the bower, and his soul was enraptured; he ate of the cool fruits, and the breeze



that came through the green trellis-work was loaded with the richest perfume. He looked up and around him; he could not see the sky overhead for the thick green boughs of the bower where he sat; but clear and beautiful beneath him, bright with sunshine, and gay with busy life, lay the wide green wood, with its people in festal attire passing and re-passing before his wondering gaze; the voices of their merriment swelled up the side of the hill, and came, with the fragrance of incense and the scent of flowers, even to the bower where he sat: he was transported with the prospect, and leant forward eagerly to enjoy it. He saw in the fairest part of the forest a crowded market-place, where was set up an idol all of gold: hundreds knelt before it, the richest incense burnt around it, and maidens laid the brightest garlands at its feet. It seemed, too, that the great idol was not insensible to its votaries, for the child beheld that they returned from its shrine laden with gifts, many and various: they had silver, and gold, and precious stones; and some had honour and

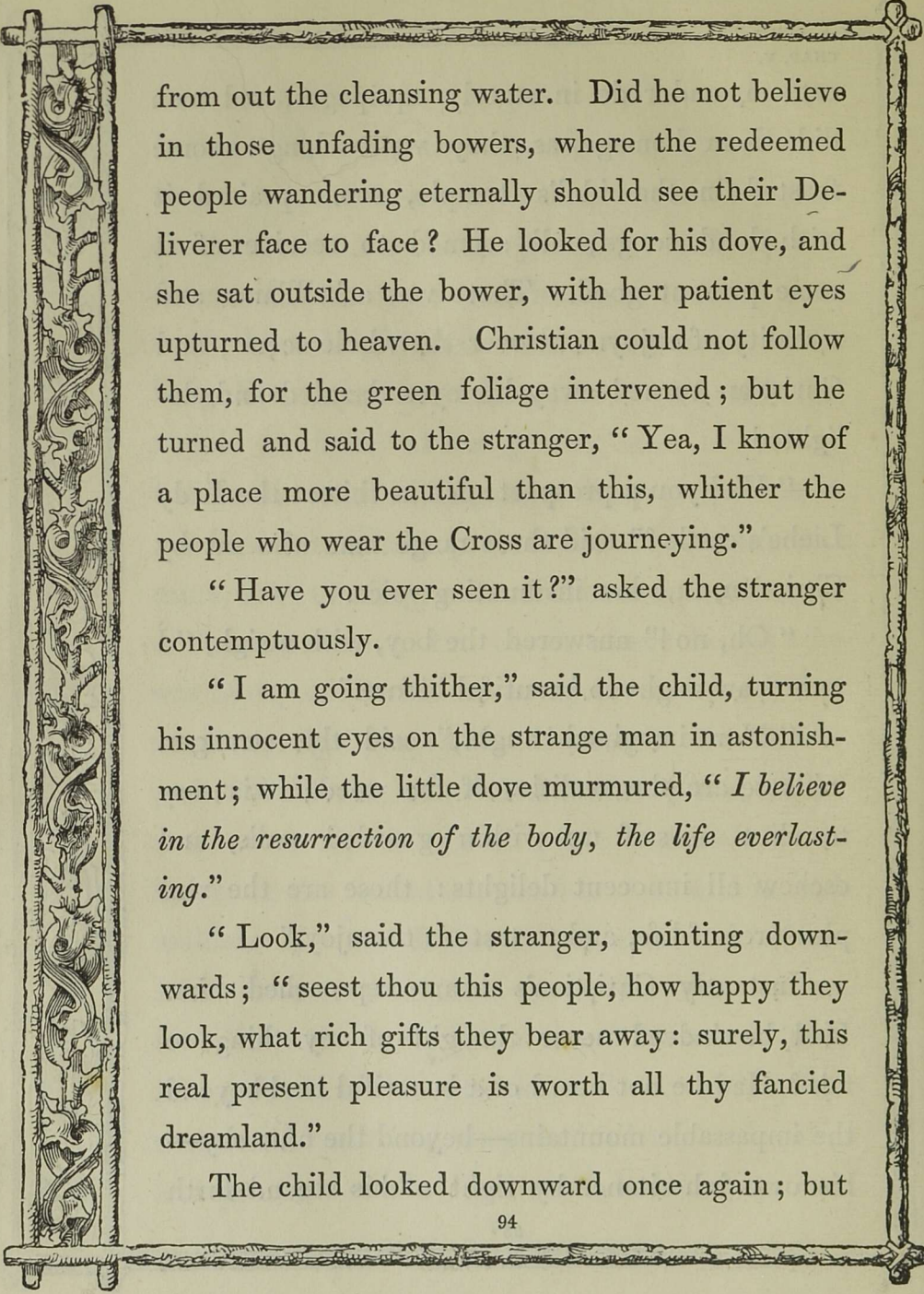
esteem, and rode in stately equipages, and men did them homage as they went along: some feasted in the idol's temple, some praised it with loud songs; all seemed to receive of it some present good. There was a brilliance and a reality of enjoyment over the whole scene; and Christian turned away his eyes dazzled and delighted.

“Had you a prospect such as this at the Lady Liebe's castle?” said the strange man who sat by Christian, in a low insinuating voice.

“Oh, no!” answered the boy, with a sigh, “I never saw aught so beautiful before.”

“Nor imagined aught,” said the stranger. “These are the realities of the wood; it is easy to shut oneself up within guarded walls, and eschew all innocent delights: these are the real pleasures of life, and to taste is to enjoy.”

Instantly Christian's heart reproached him. Had he indeed never thought of any thing so fair? Had he not heard of a beautiful land beyond the impassable mountains—beyond the blue sky—his own inheritance by right of his second birth



from out the cleansing water. Did he not believe in those unfading bowers, where the redeemed people wandering eternally should see their Deliverer face to face? He looked for his dove, and she sat outside the bower, with her patient eyes upturned to heaven. Christian could not follow them, for the green foliage intervened; but he turned and said to the stranger, "Yea, I know of a place more beautiful than this, whither the people who wear the Cross are journeying."

"Have you ever seen it?" asked the stranger contemptuously.

"I am going thither," said the child, turning his innocent eyes on the strange man in astonishment; while the little dove murmured, "*I believe in the resurrection of the body, the life everlasting.*"

"Look," said the stranger, pointing downwards; "seest thou this people, how happy they look, what rich gifts they bear away: surely, this real present pleasure is worth all thy fancied dreamland."

The child looked downward once again; but

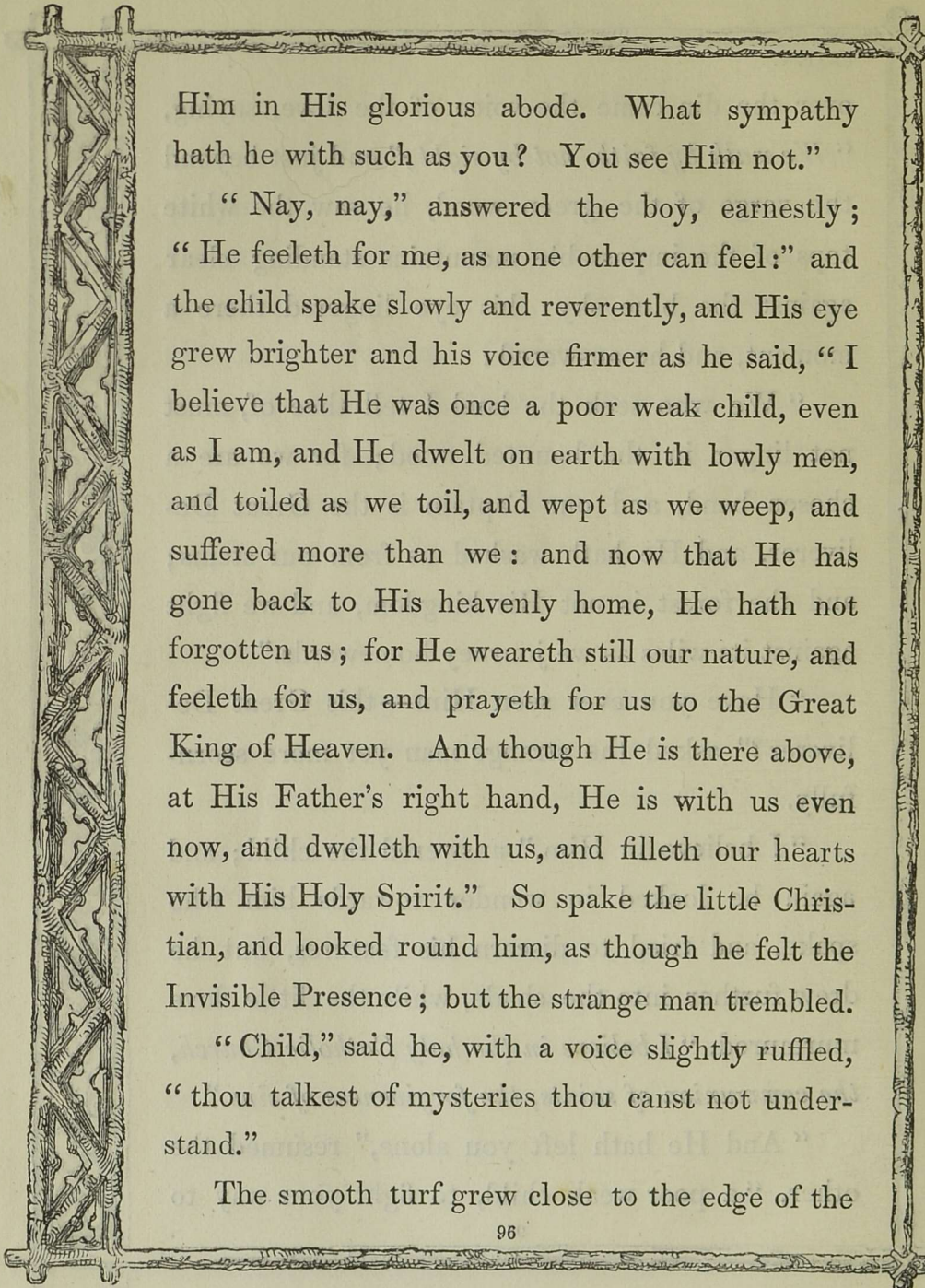
over the din came the voice of the dove, saying, "*We walk by faith, not by sight;*" and just beyond the verge of the green wood, he saw the white tops of the impassable mountains standing clear against the blue sky: his eye lingered there a moment, and he answered:

"We who seek the land I tell thee of, must not linger in the haunted wood; for we are a chosen band, and our Captain is the Great Deliverer, and He hath washed us from our stains; and the forest is not His kingdom, and we fight against its wiles as we journey homewards."

"Have you ever seen Him—this Great Deliverer?" asked the strange man yet more scornfully.

"I believe in Him," answered the child; and again he looked in wonder towards him who spake, and tried to discern his features, but he drew further into the shade, while the little dove murmured, "*I believe in the holy Catholic Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins.*"

"And He hath left you alone," resumed the other, "a poor weak child, to fight your way to



Him in His glorious abode. What sympathy hath he with such as you? You see Him not."

"Nay, nay," answered the boy, earnestly; "He feeleth for me, as none other can feel:" and the child spake slowly and reverently, and His eye grew brighter and his voice firmer as he said, "I believe that He was once a poor weak child, even as I am, and He dwelt on earth with lowly men, and toiled as we toil, and wept as we weep, and suffered more than we: and now that He has gone back to His heavenly home, He hath not forgotten us; for He wareth still our nature, and feeleth for us, and prayeth for us to the Great King of Heaven. And though He is there above, at His Father's right hand, He is with us even now, and dwelleth with us, and filleth our hearts with His Holy Spirit." So spake the little Christian, and looked round him, as though he felt the Invisible Presence; but the strange man trembled.

"Child," said he, with a voice slightly ruffled, "thou talkest of mysteries thou canst not understand."

The smooth turf grew close to the edge of the

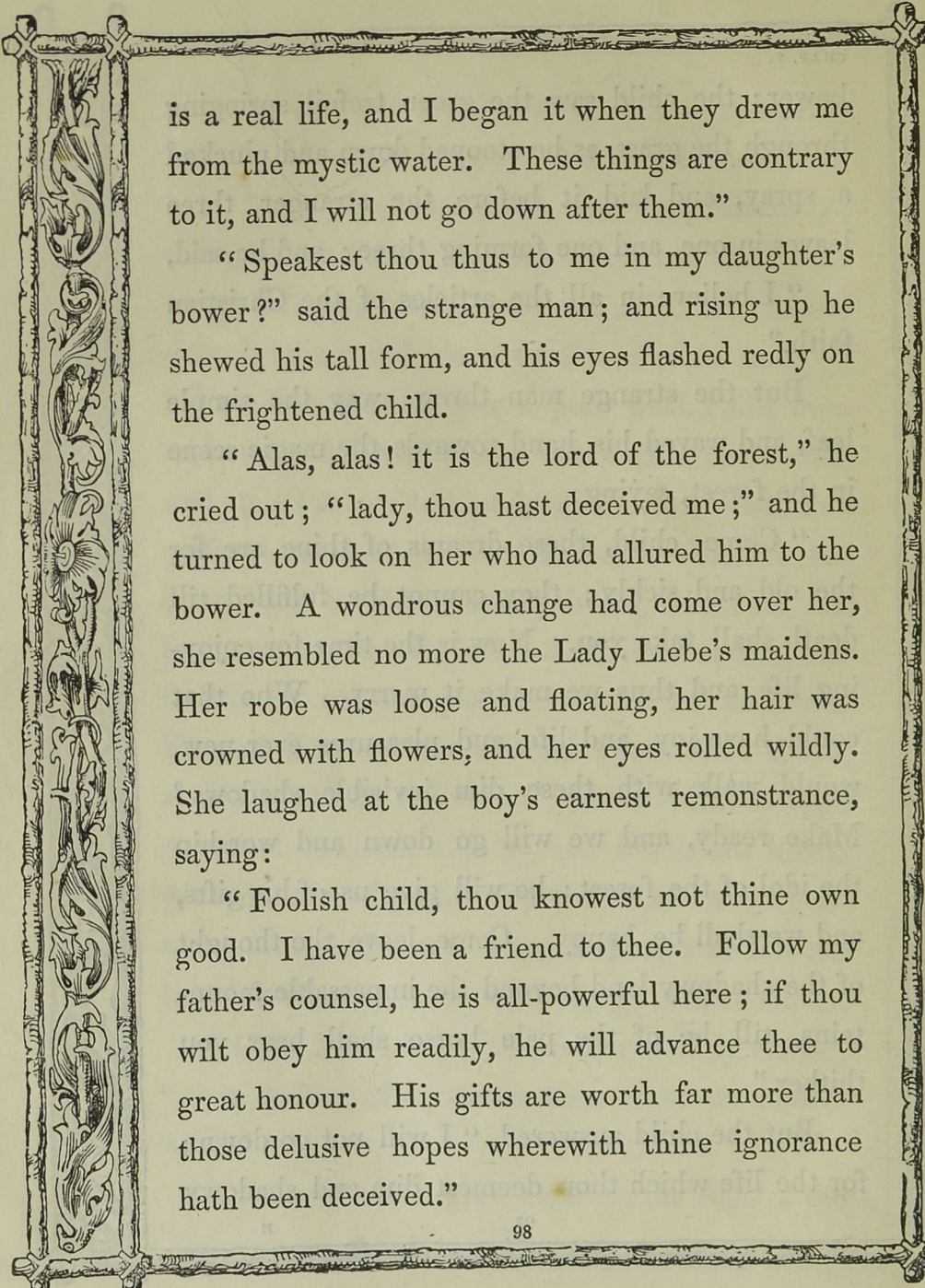
bower; the child saw the green trefoil springing through the grass, as he stooped down and plucked a spray, and laid it before the stranger, three leaves in one, and one forming three; and he said,

“I believe in all the articles of the Christian faith.”

But the strange man threw away the simple leaf, and waved his hand towards the magic scene in the forest, saying:

“Come, child, these dreams of thine are for the old and sickly; they cannot be fulfilled till death shall take you. Now is the time for enjoying life, and thus we make it merry. Who that could have joy, and life, and pleasures ever new, would walk with these dim invisible shadows? Make ready, and we will go down and worship the idol of the forest; he will give us of his gifts, and we shall be happy. Come, leave the thought of the shadowy land beyond the impassable mountains, till he of the pale horse shall bear you thither.”

But the child answered, “I will not go down; for the life which thou deemest dim and shadowy



is a real life, and I began it when they drew me from the mystic water. These things are contrary to it, and I will not go down after them."

"Speakest thou thus to me in my daughter's bower?" said the strange man; and rising up he shewed his tall form, and his eyes flashed redly on the frightened child.

"Alas, alas! it is the lord of the forest," he cried out; "lady, thou hast deceived me;" and he turned to look on her who had allured him to the bower. A wondrous change had come over her, she resembled no more the Lady Liebe's maidens. Her robe was loose and floating, her hair was crowned with flowers, and her eyes rolled wildly. She laughed at the boy's earnest remonstrance, saying:

"Foolish child, thou knowest not thine own good. I have been a friend to thee. Follow my father's counsel, he is all-powerful here; if thou wilt obey him readily, he will advance thee to great honour. His gifts are worth far more than those delusive hopes wherewith thine ignorance hath been deceived."

But the child answered, "He is my Master's foe, and he seeketh my destruction."

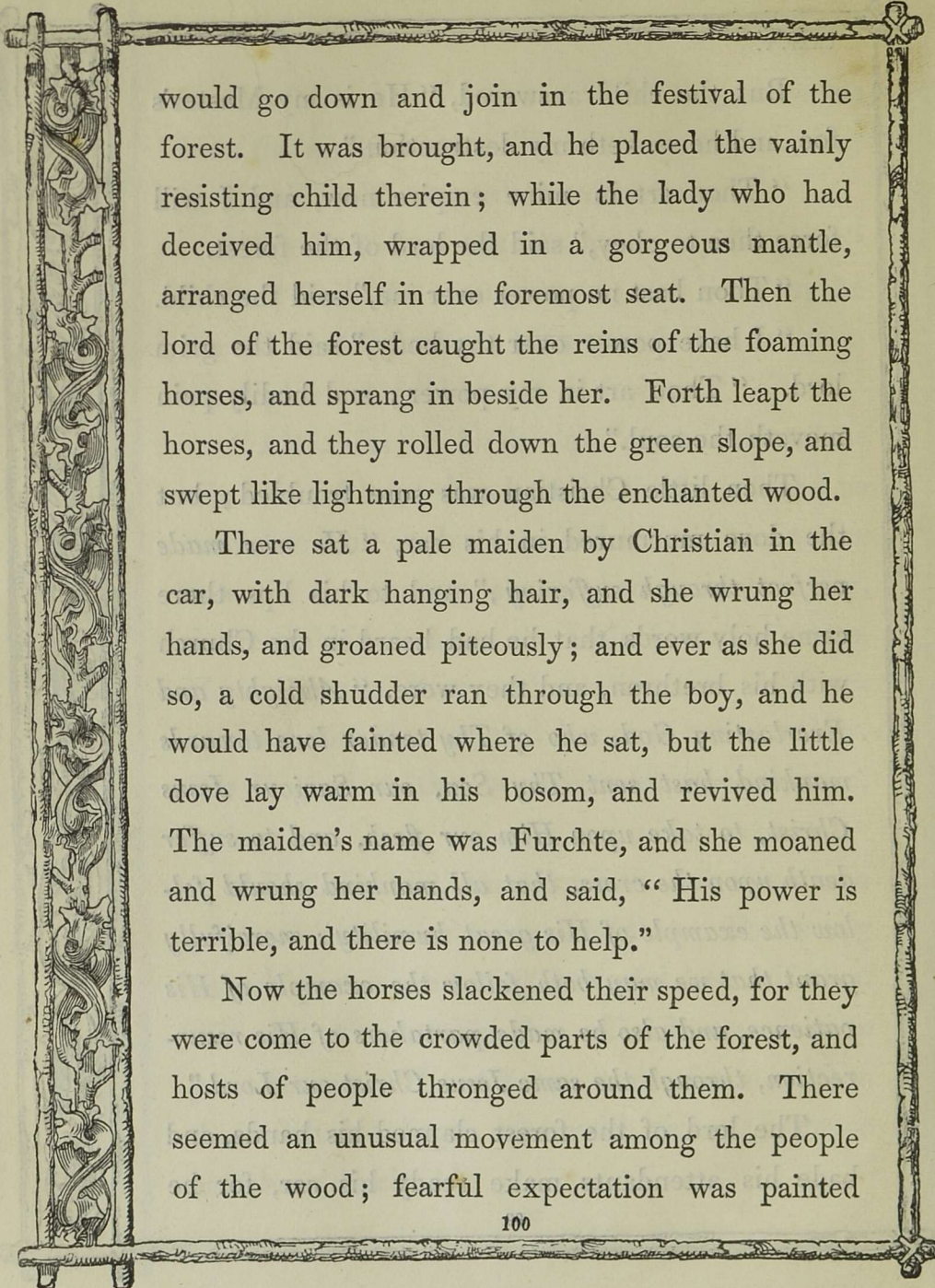
"Thou art in mine empire now, and I will force thee to obey," said the lord of the forest.

"Thou hast no power over me," said the child.

"I have power over thy body," said the grim lord. "Thou art in my power; and bodily pain moveth the soul."

Then little Christian was sore troubled; but the dove murmured in his ear, "*He was made perfect through suffering;*" and to his lips there came holy words that he had heard in the Church with his brethren, and they were, "*Almighty and Everlasting God, who of Thy tender love towards mankind hast sent Thy Son, our Saviour Jesus Christ, to take upon Him our flesh, and to suffer death upon the cross, that all mankind should follow the example of His great humility; mercifully grant that we may both follow the example of His patience, and also be made partakers of His resurrection, through the same Jesus Christ our Lord.*"

The lord of the forest clapped his hands, and bade his attendants make ready his car, for he



would go down and join in the festival of the forest. It was brought, and he placed the vainly resisting child therein; while the lady who had deceived him, wrapped in a gorgeous mantle, arranged herself in the foremost seat. Then the lord of the forest caught the reins of the foaming horses, and sprang in beside her. Forth leapt the horses, and they rolled down the green slope, and swept like lightning through the enchanted wood.

There sat a pale maiden by Christian in the car, with dark hanging hair, and she wrung her hands, and groaned piteously; and ever as she did so, a cold shudder ran through the boy, and he would have fainted where he sat, but the little dove lay warm in his bosom, and revived him. The maiden's name was Furchte, and she moaned and wrung her hands, and said, "His power is terrible, and there is none to help."

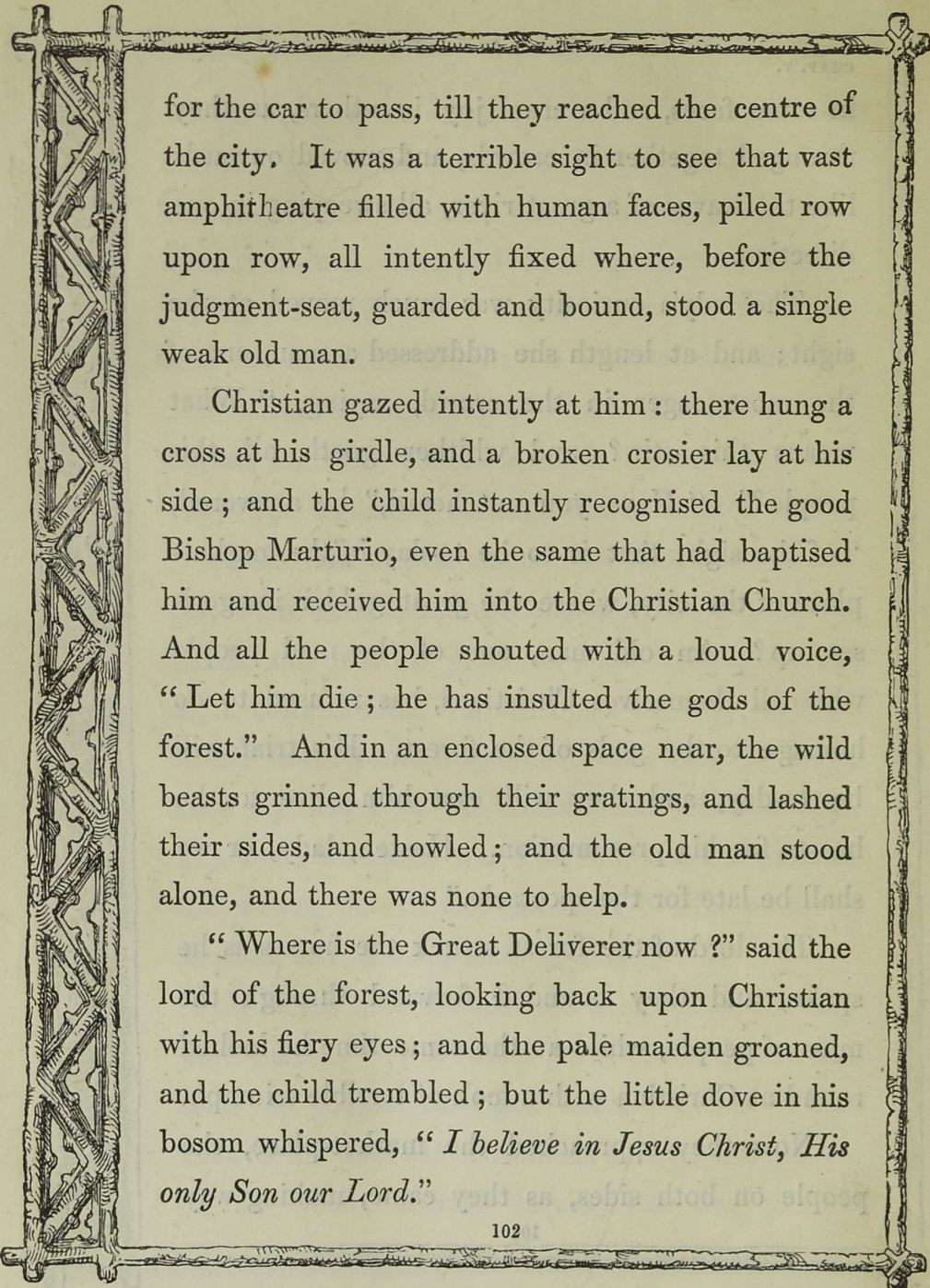
Now the horses slackened their speed, for they were come to the crowded parts of the forest, and hosts of people thronged around them. There seemed an unusual movement among the people of the wood; fearful expectation was painted

in some faces, and a cruel joy in others, as they thronged together in crowds, and moved onwards like the waves of a great river, all sweeping in one direction.

The lady's curiosity was much moved at the sight; and at length she addressed a man, one of the most eager in the crowd, saying, "What means this stir? and whither goeth all this people?" "Have you not heard," he answered, "of the sight that is to be to-day in the market-place of the city, where the great golden image is set up? An old man, one of the mad people who call themselves Christians, has refused to do homage to the gods of the forest. His trial will be to-day, and they will cast him alive to the beasts for his presumption. Hasten, lady, or we shall be late for the spectacle."

The lord of the forest struck the horses as he spake, and they bounded forward through the mass of people, while at the same time he looked round at Christian with a look of terrible triumph.

Now they approached the market-place, the people on both sides, as they came, making way



for the car to pass, till they reached the centre of the city. It was a terrible sight to see that vast amphitheatre filled with human faces, piled row upon row, all intently fixed where, before the judgment-seat, guarded and bound, stood a single weak old man.

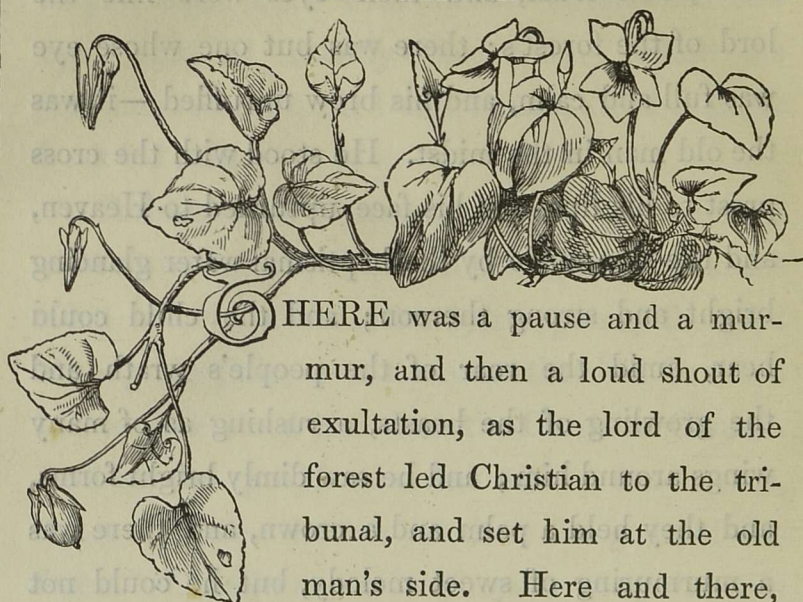
Christian gazed intently at him: there hung a cross at his girdle, and a broken crosier lay at his side; and the child instantly recognised the good Bishop Marturio, even the same that had baptised him and received him into the Christian Church. And all the people shouted with a loud voice, "Let him die; he has insulted the gods of the forest." And in an enclosed space near, the wild beasts grinned through their gratings, and lashed their sides, and howled; and the old man stood alone, and there was none to help.

"Where is the Great Deliverer now?" said the lord of the forest, looking back upon Christian with his fiery eyes; and the pale maiden groaned, and the child trembled; but the little dove in his bosom whispered, "*I believe in Jesus Christ, His only Son our Lord.*"

So Christian looked round about him again, and the looks of all those men were wild, and fierce, and cruel, and their eyes were like the lord of the forest's; there was but one whose eye was full and calm, and his brow unruffled,—it was the old man in the midst. He stood with the cross prest to his lips, and his face upturned to Heaven, and the sign made by the baptismal water glancing bright and strong thereon; and the child could hear, amid the roar of the people's wrath and the growling of the beasts, a rushing as of many wings around him; and he saw dimly bright forms, and they held a palm and a crown, and there was a murmuring of sweet melody, but he could not hear the words: so the little one clasped both his hands, and prayed fervently, "*O God most mighty, O holy and merciful Saviour, Thou most worthy Judge Eternal, suffer us not, at our last hour, for any pains of death, to fall from Thee.*"

Thereat the little dove stirred fondly in his bosom, and the pale maiden glided from his side.

CHAPTER VI.



HERE was a pause and a murmur, and then a loud shout of exultation, as the lord of the forest led Christian to the tribunal, and set him at the old man's side. Here and there, indeed, throughout that great crowd, a mother turned away her head, or a maiden said 'twas a pity; but none pleaded for the fair young child.

And the lord of the forest said to the judge, "Whereof does the old man stand accused?" And he said, "He refuseth to burn incense to the gods of the forest; and moreover, we suspect he hath worshipped in the Christians' temple."

"Have ye any proofs?"

“He denieth not the charge, but refuseth to answer to our accusation.”

“Here, I have brought you a witness,” said the grim lord, smiling malignantly on Christian; “this child hath been often in the Christians’ temple; he has doubtless seen the old man worshipping there.” And he whispered, “Come, child, I have found a way for thee to escape. What is the old man to thee? Nor would thy silence save him.”

“Christian, remember thy vow!” said the little dove softly. “Thou must keep God’s holy will and commandments; thou hast promised to hurt nobody by word or deed.”

“Boy!” said the judge sternly, “declare what thou knowest,—speak boldly and freely; and I swear unto thee that not a hair of thy head shall be hurt; otherwise thy doom shall be as his.”

The old man looked down on the young child with a look of perfect pity and gentleness, and said, “Poor innocent! Christ will give thee strength: thou art fallen into cruel hands.”

And the little dove murmured, “*Fear not*

them that kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do."

"Speak, boy!" said the judge, "hast thou seen this old man in the temple of the godless Christians?" But the child was silent.

"Dost thou refuse to answer me?" resumed the judge. "Nay, we will soon find thee a tongue."

"I can say nought of him," answered the child. "I would not hurt him;" and he lifted up his streaming eyes and quivering lips piteously to the stern judge's face: but he relented not at all.

"Take him to the fire, and force him to declare what he knows!" he cried to the attendants.

They were dragging the child away, when the old man said mildly, "There needs not this cruelty; I deny not that I am a Christian. I glory therein; my chief delight hath ever been to worship in that holy place that ye despise."

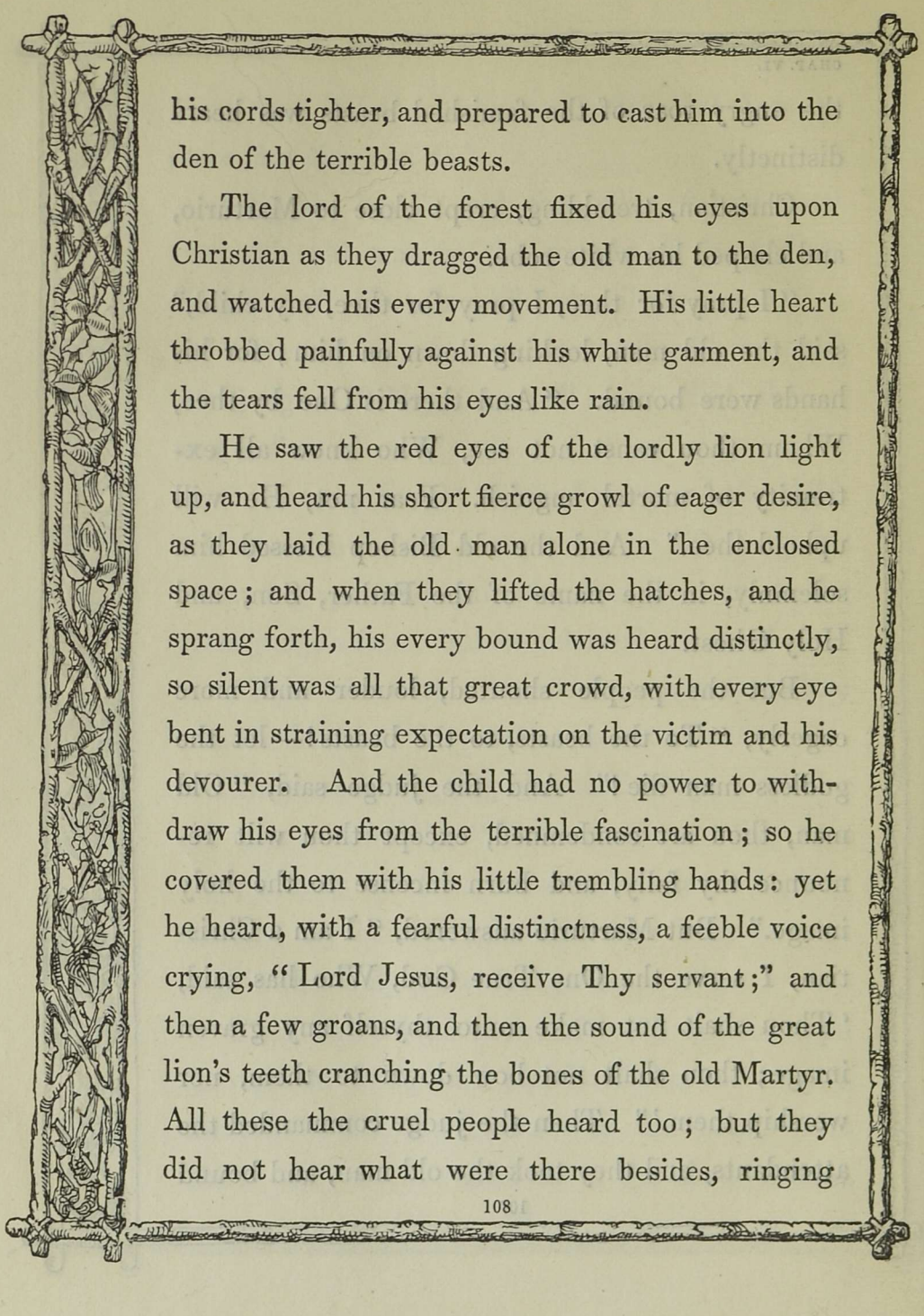
There ran a loud shout of wrath and triumph through the living mass that lined that vast amphitheatre. "To the beasts—to the beasts with him!" they cried. And when the shout ceased,

the angry roar of the famished beasts was heard distinctly.

Christian, trembling, crept close to Marturio, and clasped his white robe.

“I pray for thee, I pray for thee, my child,” said the old man, looking down on him; for his hands were bound. “And there is One by thee, Whom thou canst not see, Who knew all extremity of mortal anguish. Fear not, He will uphold thee.” And the old Bishop blessed him solemnly, in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.

But the people shouted, louder and more eagerly, “To the beasts, to the beasts!—let the godless man die!” And the judge said, “Old man, thou art condemned, except thou wilt renounce thy folly, and burn incense to the holy image.” But Marturio answered, “I am a Christian, I serve the One True God, Who has said, ‘Thou shalt not make unto thyself any graven image; thou shalt not bow down to them, nor worship them.’” Then the judge commanded the attendants, and they took the old man, and bound



his cords tighter, and prepared to cast him into the den of the terrible beasts.

The lord of the forest fixed his eyes upon Christian as they dragged the old man to the den, and watched his every movement. His little heart throbbed painfully against his white garment, and the tears fell from his eyes like rain.

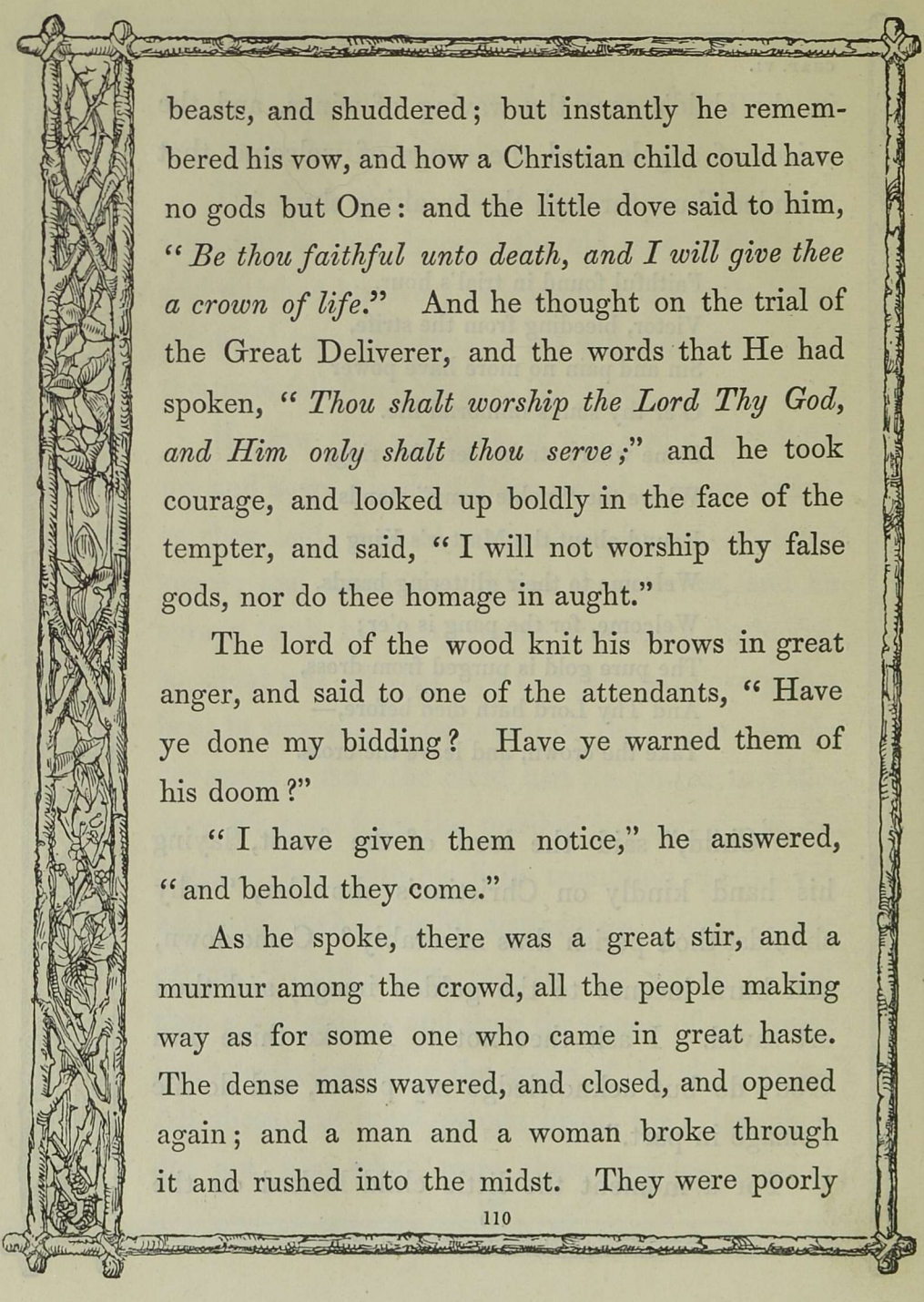
He saw the red eyes of the lordly lion light up, and heard his short fierce growl of eager desire, as they laid the old man alone in the enclosed space; and when they lifted the hatches, and he sprang forth, his every bound was heard distinctly, so silent was all that great crowd, with every eye bent in straining expectation on the victim and his devourer. And the child had no power to withdraw his eyes from the terrible fascination; so he covered them with his little trembling hands: yet he heard, with a fearful distinctness, a feeble voice crying, "Lord Jesus, receive Thy servant;" and then a few groans, and then the sound of the great lion's teeth cranching the bones of the old Martyr. All these the cruel people heard too; but they did not hear what were there besides, ringing

in the child's ear: the waving of wings, and the voices of angels, and the songs of welcome that sounded thus, through the breaking sky:

Faithful found in trial's hour,
 Victor, bleeding from the strife,
 Sin and pain no more have power
 O'er thy soul's immortal life.
 Come where strains seraphic ring,
 Where the "noble army" stands
 Round about the Martyr's King;
 Welcome to their glittering bands,
 Welcome, for the pang is o'er;
 The pure gold is purged from dross,
 And Thy Lord hath died before,—
 Take the crown, and leave the cross.

"Child," said the lord of the forest, laying his hand kindly on Christian's shoulder, "why shouldst thou perish thus miserably? Come down, and burn incense to the golden image, and thou art saved. I ask thee not to forsake thine own God; do but acknowledge my power, and do me homage in part."

For a moment the little child looked on the



beasts, and shuddered; but instantly he remembered his vow, and how a Christian child could have no gods but One: and the little dove said to him, "*Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life.*" And he thought on the trial of the Great Deliverer, and the words that He had spoken, "*Thou shalt worship the Lord Thy God, and Him only shalt thou serve;*" and he took courage, and looked up boldly in the face of the tempter, and said, "I will not worship thy false gods, nor do thee homage in aught."

The lord of the wood knit his brows in great anger, and said to one of the attendants, "Have ye done my bidding? Have ye warned them of his doom?"

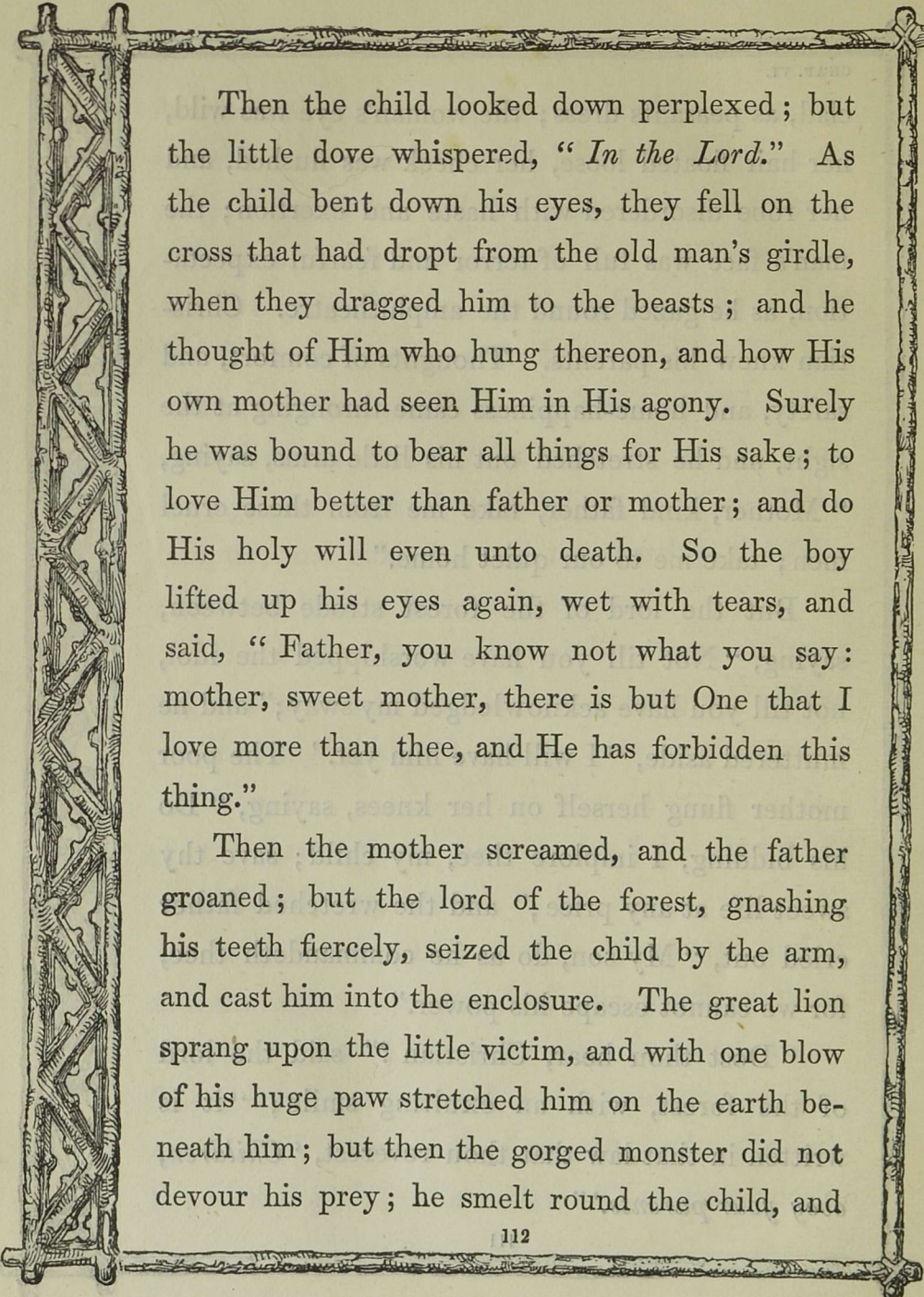
"I have given them notice," he answered, "and behold they come."

As he spoke, there was a great stir, and a murmur among the crowd, all the people making way as for some one who came in great haste. The dense mass wavered, and closed, and opened again; and a man and a woman broke through it and rushed into the midst. They were poorly

clad, as peasants dress; the woman's eye was wild, her hair floated loose, her cheek was flushed, and her robe disordered with haste and exertion; the man's face was full of terror and fearful expectation, as he gazed round the amphitheatre. Christian knew his parents. Thoughts of comfort, and safety, and home-happiness came thronging at the sight, and he stretched out his little arms, saying, "Mother, kind father, take me from these cruel men; take me to our quiet home."

But the lord of the forest strode between, saying, "Not till you have worshipped the idol, not till you have acknowledged my sway;" and he muttered aside, "I will have him yet." The poor mother flung herself on her knees, saying, "Do his bidding, I implore thee, my child; save thy sweet life at any price;" and the wretched father cried out, "My son, do as he commandeth thee, for we cannot escape his power."

"Dost thou hear, Christian?" said the lord of the forest, with an exulting smile; "it is written in that law that thou reverest, '*Children, obey your parents.*'"



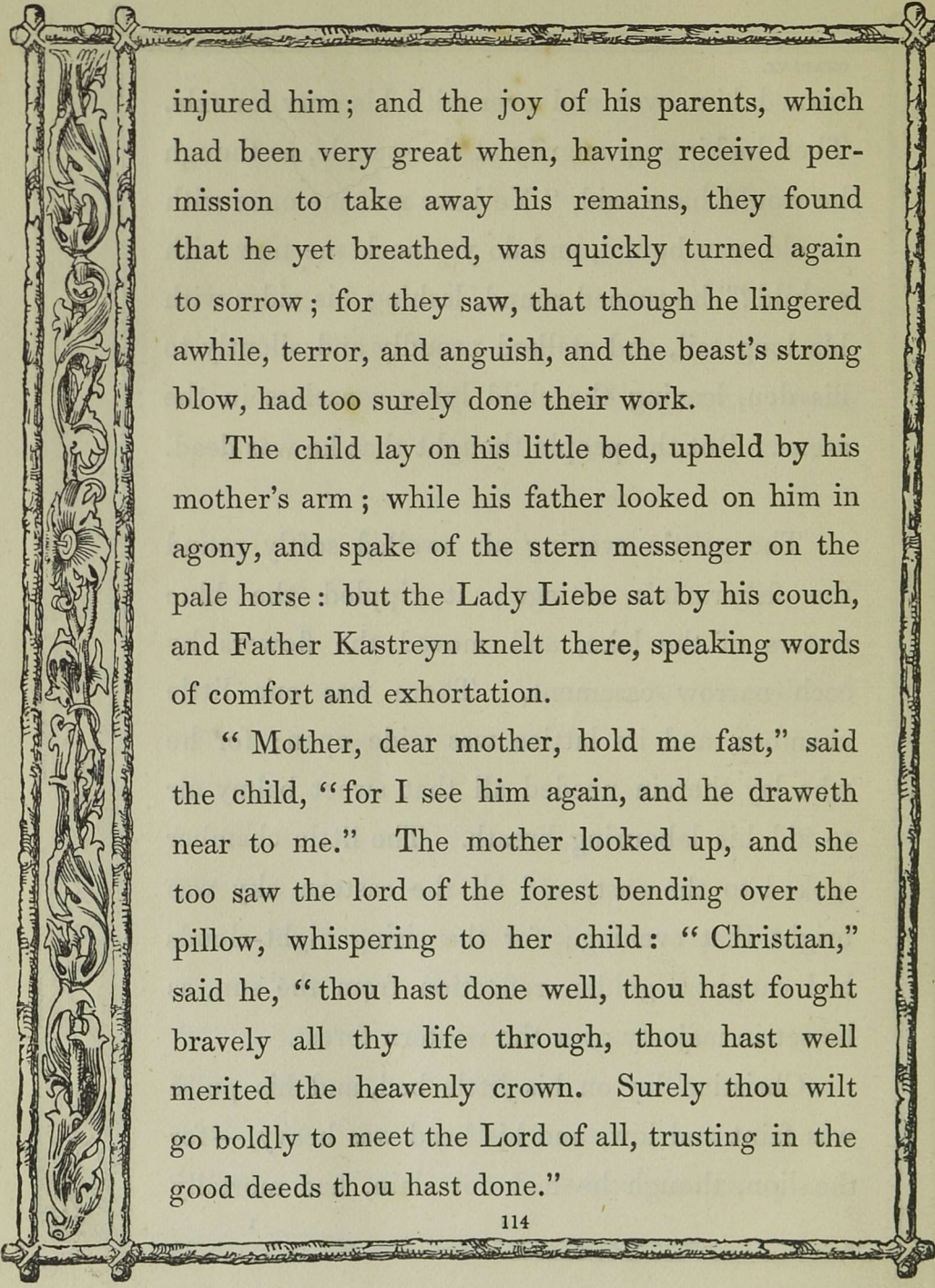
Then the child looked down perplexed; but the little dove whispered, "*In the Lord.*" As the child bent down his eyes, they fell on the cross that had dropt from the old man's girdle, when they dragged him to the beasts; and he thought of Him who hung thereon, and how His own mother had seen Him in His agony. Surely he was bound to bear all things for His sake; to love Him better than father or mother; and do His holy will even unto death. So the boy lifted up his eyes again, wet with tears, and said, "Father, you know not what you say: mother, sweet mother, there is but One that I love more than thee, and He has forbidden this thing."

Then the mother screamed, and the father groaned; but the lord of the forest, gnashing his teeth fiercely, seized the child by the arm, and cast him into the enclosure. The great lion sprang upon the little victim, and with one blow of his huge paw stretched him on the earth beneath him; but then the gorged monster did not devour his prey; he smelt round the child, and

turned him over and over with his gory muzzle. Then looking up angrily at the people, as though he would have said, "Ye have met me once with an old man bound, and do ye mock me now with a child?" he turned round, lashing his sides with his long tail, and stalked proudly and silently to his den, leaving the child lying senseless in the arena. But the people thought that he was dead.

The gentle evening air swelled softly round the fisherman's cottage; it rippled the blue waters of the lake, and moved the flowers by each narrow casement. There was one little chamber, and its lattice was wide open; for he who lay therein needed all that sweet balmy air to aid his labouring breath. The little chamber looked to the east, and all the eastern sky was bright that evening; for the rising night-clouds had caught a golden reflection from the sun, as he set in majesty over the western forest.

Christian lay on his little bed, and his pulse was faint and low, and his head was heavy,—for the lion, though he had not slain, had mortally



injured him; and the joy of his parents, which had been very great when, having received permission to take away his remains, they found that he yet breathed, was quickly turned again to sorrow; for they saw, that though he lingered awhile, terror, and anguish, and the beast's strong blow, had too surely done their work.

The child lay on his little bed, upheld by his mother's arm; while his father looked on him in agony, and spake of the stern messenger on the pale horse: but the Lady Liebe sat by his couch, and Father Kastreyn knelt there, speaking words of comfort and exhortation.

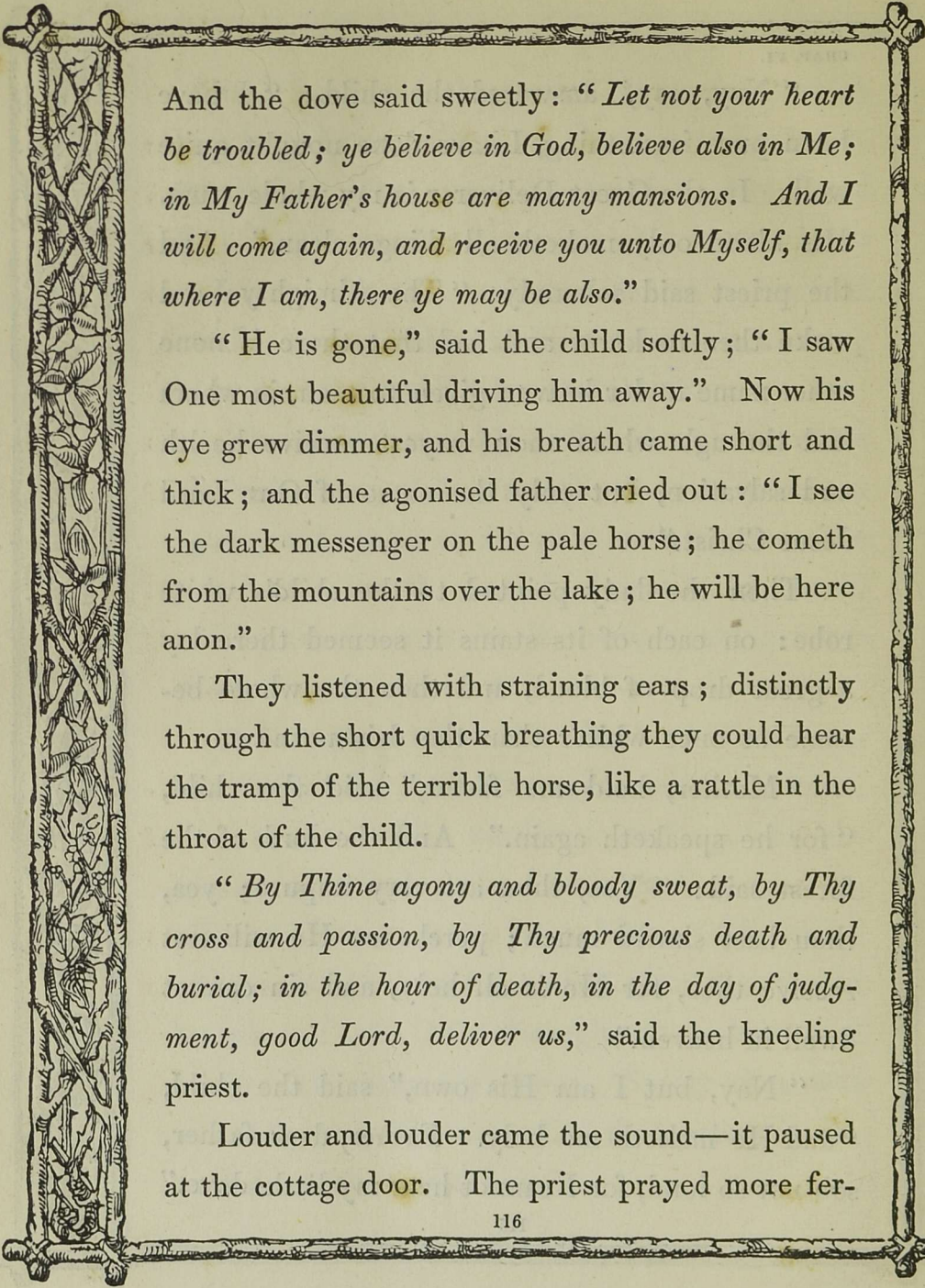
“Mother, dear mother, hold me fast,” said the child, “for I see him again, and he draweth near to me.” The mother looked up, and she too saw the lord of the forest bending over the pillow, whispering to her child: “Christian,” said he, “thou hast done well, thou hast fought bravely all thy life through, thou hast well merited the heavenly crown. Surely thou wilt go boldly to meet the Lord of all, trusting in the good deeds thou hast done.”

“Nay, nay,” answered the child; “I have been pure in nothing, I have done nought quite well. In the Great Deliverer is my whole trust. His blood only maketh all things clean.” And the priest said solemnly: “The Almighty Lord make thee to know and feel that there is none other name under heaven given to man, in whom and through whom thou mayest receive health and salvation, but only the name of Our Lord Jesus Christ.”

Then the lady pointed to the child's white robe: on each of its stains it seemed there lay a great drop of blood, and then the whole became at once whiter than the driven snow.

“Mother, hold me faster,” said the child, “for he speaketh again.” And the lord of the forest said: “Yea, thou art very impure; yea, thou hast sinned much; perchance He will not receive thee, for He is all holy, and sin cannot dwell in heaven.”

“Nay, but I am His own,” said the child, “and He maketh me holy. Father, dear father, sob not so loud, for I cannot hear my little dove.”



And the dove said sweetly: "*Let not your heart be troubled; ye believe in God, believe also in Me; in My Father's house are many mansions. And I will come again, and receive you unto Myself, that where I am, there ye may be also.*"

"He is gone," said the child softly; "I saw One most beautiful driving him away." Now his eye grew dimmer, and his breath came short and thick; and the agonised father cried out: "I see the dark messenger on the pale horse; he cometh from the mountains over the lake; he will be here anon."

They listened with straining ears; distinctly through the short quick breathing they could hear the tramp of the terrible horse, like a rattle in the throat of the child.

"*By Thine agony and bloody sweat, by Thy cross and passion, by Thy precious death and burial; in the hour of death, in the day of judgment, good Lord, deliver us,*" said the kneeling priest.

Louder and louder came the sound—it paused at the cottage door. The priest prayed more fer-

vently, and the child's lips moved. Lo, there entered an angel of light, bearing in one lifted hand a sparkling crown, while the other leant upon a cross. A strange light came to the boy's eye.

"Mother, dear mother, will you not come with me?" he said, and pointed to the cross; but the angel bent forward, and held the crown before his eyes; and the child stretching his arms as though to reach it, sprang upward, and sank again on his mother's bosom.

Lisette looked at him; there were the rayless eyes through which his soul had so often spoken to hers, and the lips still parted with their last words of love, and the golden locks, and the white garment, and the beautiful form; but her Christian had departed with the angel of death.

There were two catechumens who went day by day to be taught of Kastreyn; there were two penitents who stood long time at the door of the Christian Church weeping bitterly for their sins; there are two graves in the hallowed ground beside the church, and on each there is a cross

engraven,—they are the graves of Sinda and Lisette ; and there is a shorter grave at their feet, where the white-robed children often come, to dress the turf with flowers, and talk, with tears and smiles, of the happy little Christian.



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