



NEW STORIES FOR THE YOUNG.

THE FIVE BLUE EGGS.

No. 4.

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AND SONS,
London
and
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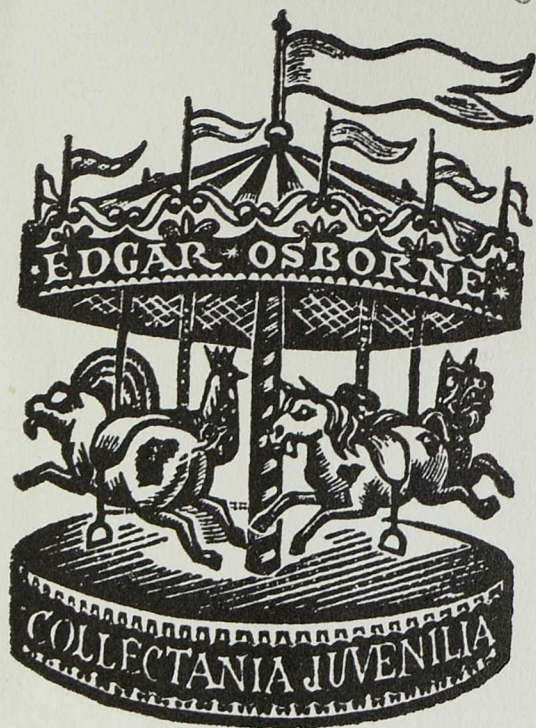
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CHAPTER I.

BOBBIE had chosen his mate and built for her a beautiful nest. Such a pleasant place as he had found for Jenny's home! No wonder she said "Yes" when he asked her to live in it.

The spot was very quiet. There was a wide, green, sloping meadow, and through the middle of it there was running water, where the thick shrubbery sprang up luxuriantly on either side, so that the stream was like a silver band with emerald borders.

Perhaps the meadow had once been an orchard; for there was an old apple-tree close

by the brookside. But possibly some bird had brought the seed from a distance and dropped it there many years before, and it had grown from that small beginning and spread its branches out over the running waters. However it had come, there it was, and the pink and white blossoms made the air very fragrant in the bright spring time ; and, as the tiny apples formed, the delicate petals dropped gently down and floated away upon the bosom of the stream.

There was one very low branch upon this tree, and the leaves were thick upon it, and tufts of hazel and alder grew so close about it that it was quite a hidden nook ; and hither Bobbie brought his mate. They had not been together very long, but they seemed as happy as if they had known each other since they were little unfledged birds. Jenny was sitting upon the nest as quiet and comfortable as could be, and Bobbie stood near, upon the branch, singing his sweetest notes and looking with great pride upon his gentle mate.

By-and-by he flew away and soon returned, bringing her something by way of refreshment, and then he sang again ; and this went on from day to day until she hopped gaily

from the nest and they both looked in upon five beautiful blue eggs.

It seemed as if she only got off to show him the treasure, for she took her old station soon, and he went to get another offering for his diligent little housewife.

At a good distance from the sloping meadow there was a neat school-house, where the boys and girls of the village gathered daily. It had a fine, large yard, fenced around, and the scholars were not allowed to go outside during school hours ; but at noon, or at night, they went where they pleased ; and often, instead of going home through the village streets, they chose the way across the meadow, which led to a road at the end of the town, and thus lengthened their walk and their pleasure.

Henry Macy was a dear little boy,—one of the very best boys in the whole school, so the teacher said. Not that he never did wrong things ; there was only one Child born into this world free from sin, and that was the “Child Jesus.” All others have sometimes committed sins, and so did Henry Macy ; but he really tried to be good, and was always so sorry when he had done wrong that his

friends had generally a smile of approval for him.

Henry was born in the city ; but his parents sent him early away where he could have the pure country air and be free from the evil influence of such idle, wicked boys as loiter about the streets of large towns.

He had grown very much in love with his rural home, and was as happy as could be with his teacher and his young companions, and everything went smoothly and peacefully with him so long as he was watchful over himself and endeavoured to be like the holy Child Jesus.

I wish I could say that this was always the case, and that he kept his conscience undisturbed ; but I must tell you truthfully all that happened, though it should bring Henry Macy into trouble and disgrace.

CHAPTER II.

LUCY COLE was one of the scholars at Henry Macy's school,—a gentle, quiet child, whose heart was full of love towards every living thing.

She had always under her care some pet creature that had met with a misfortune and for whom nobody else would care.

Mary Holmes's cat had lost its right ear in a fight with another cat, and Mary persuaded somebody to put it in a bag and take it away off to drop it in the woods so far from her home that it could not find its way back again ; but Lucy met the person who was carrying it, and took the poor cat for her own, and had the wound dressed ; and now it followed her gratefully wherever she went, not caring to seek its former cruel mistress.

Frank Sands gave her his puppy because there was a wound on its side from a sharp stone which a bad boy threw at him ; and every little while she came home from a visit to Farmer Hunt with a lame chicken or gosling in her apron, which she would nurse and doctor until it strutted or waddled proudly about again in renewed health.

Lucy knew about Bobbie and Jenny ; for she was always the first to search out the haunts of the spring birds, and she would sit for hours, afar off, so as not to frighten them, and watch them as they kept house together so merrily.

I believe they came to know what a dear little girl she was who sat so still listening to them ; for they always seemed to sing louder and sweeter when she was by, or else it was the glad music in her soul mingling with their melody that made it so much more pleasant.

Once she had ventured near enough to see how many eggs there were in the nest. This was the very day Jenny showed them to Bobbie with such pride ; but when she saw that it terrified the birds she crept softly away, and would on no account go so close to them again.

“How happy they will be,” said she to herself, “when five tiny heads peep up from beneath the mother’s downy wings for food ! And what joy for me to see the old birds drop the food into their little red bills ! And how grand for the little things when they get strength to hop upon the branches of the apple-tree and twitter, and then fly about their home, and by-and-by stretch their wings and soar away and away through the clear heavens with the parent birds !”

Lucy brought crumbs sometimes from the dinner-table, when she stayed all day at

school, and scattered them where the birds could get them ; for she said they might now and then be tired, as she was sometimes, and not care to fly far for their food.

All these things she did and said when nobody was near to see and hear ; for she very well knew that if some of the boys and girls should find the nest, woe to her beautiful robins ! She thought “ she should not fear to tell Sarah Booth, for she was tender towards all God’s creatures, and would not even hurt a fly. And she would not mind letting Henry Macy know it, because he was not at all like the other boys, and surely would never rob birds’ nests, as she had heard that some of them had done.”

Still, she kept her own secret, and went every day to watch her pets until they filled a happy space in her child life and made all the hours brighter and more cheerful by their influence.

CHAPTER III.

ONE beautiful day, when the morning school was dismissed and nearly all the scholars had gone home, Henry Macy went sauntering along the meadow-path alone, when suddenly he was attracted by the sweet tones of Bobbie as he sat singing to his mate ; and following the sound, he soon came to the spot where the robins had their cozy home.

Eager to see the bird that made such rich melody, he pushed his way through the bushes, startling Bobbie from the branch and the timid Jenny from the nest, near which she fluttered in an agony of terror, while the male bird flew round and round with a shrill, wild note of alarm.

Henry did not seem to care for the music at all now that he had caught sight of the nest ; and pulling the low branch that hung over the stream towards him, he discovered its contents ; and—can it be possible that he did it thoughtlessly ?—he tore away the nest, tied it up in his handkerchief, and went softly away !

What would Lucy Cole have said if she had seen Henry Macy stealing away from the tree with Bobbie's and Jenny's house, while the distressed birds flew screaming around their ruined home?

He had not gone many steps before something within his bosom made him uneasy. It whispered to him that he had done wrong; but he did not turn again to replace the nest. He went whistling away, and seeking a shady place under a tree, he sat down to look at his prize.

I have heard it said that boys often whistle when they are doing wrong. Perhaps they hope to drown the voice of conscience; but it *will* tell them of their sin, whether they like to hear it or not.

Henry Macy whistled all the time he was looking at the beautiful blue eggs that were still warm from the pressure of Jenny's soft breast; but above his notes came the piercing cry of the unhappy birds as they looked in vain for their lost treasure.

He could not help hearing it, and it really made him very uncomfortable, for he had never done so wicked a thing before. But the eggs were too pretty to lose. He meant

to blow out the inside and make a necklace of the shells for his sister. He remembered the string of gulls' eggs that Tom the sailor-boy brought home from sea ; and these were much more delicate and beautiful.

Tom was his rough, hearty cousin, who had chosen the sea as his home ; and whenever he came from his long voyages he had something curious for Henry's little sister Bell ; but Henry thought that Bell would like these tiny blue eggs better than all of Cousin Tom's gifts, especially if her own brother presented them to her.

With the image of Bell came memories of his far-off home, and of his gentle, loving mother ; and suddenly there flashed upon his mind the parting words of this dear mother, making the bird's nest a great weight that seemed as if it would crush him to the ground. He could almost see his mother's soft blue eyes fixed upon him as she bade him good-bye, and he seemed to hear again her low, sweet tones as she said :—

“I shall hear only pleasant things of my boy. You will have some temptations in the country that you do not meet here. Rude playmates will try to draw you into mischief ;

but you must not follow them when they plunder the farmers' orchards, and stone the poor inoffensive creatures, and rob the gentle birds' nests. These inferior creatures are helpless in our hands, and we must take care never to abuse the power that a wise God has given us over them. It is a terrible sin to trample upon or injure anything that is beneath us, and that has not strength to protect itself; but I am sure my Henry will be merciful and kind to these harmless creatures that are sent us for our comfort and good, and not do them any harm."

As Henry remembered all these words his heart was sadder than it had ever been in all his life, and he really cried,—

"Oh that I had never touched the nest! Why didn't I think before! I cannot take the eggs home! What shall I do? What shall I do?" The stolen treasure lay upon his lap unnoticed for the moment, and Henry felt himself unworthy to think of his good, kind mother. How could he write to her, and how could he go to her in the coming vacation, when he had forgotten her last lesson and done exactly one of the things that she cautioned him against?

For a while he was very wretched indeed, and then he bethought him that he might put the nest back in its place and all would be well again.

As he arose to do so his foot caught in a creeping plant, and he fell to the ground, crushing the eggs under his hand. As he looked to see if there were any whole ones, his eye rested on such queer, worm-like creatures, with long spindling legs and big heads, that he turned away with a sick and shuddering feeling; for he saw at once that he had been guilty of the death of these nearly-hatched little birdlings.

Ah, what would he not have given to have the nest once more safe in the old apple-tree, and Bobbie and Jenny singing contentedly over it, while his own heart could be glad with its innocent joy! It was too late to mend the matter now; and, with a heavy sigh, he gathered up the broken eggs, and, carrying all to the brook, threw them in, and, turning sorrowfully away, went towards home.

CHAPTER IV.

As he was about to cross the little foot-bridge, he heard a merry voice saying,—

“O Henry, I’m so glad to see you! Are you quite alone? because I’ve got something beautiful to show you. I’ve kept it to myself for ever so many days; but I’m so happy that I must share it with somebody. I wouldn’t show it to any boy in all the school but you.”

Henry’s trouble vanished in a moment; and he looked much pleased to have Lucy for a companion, for he liked her better than any girl in the village; and, as he held her hand while she went chatting cheerily along, he forgot the birds altogether.

“Not that way,” said Lucy, as he took the path towards the school-house. “Come with me; you’ll never be sorry! You can’t guess what I have to show you;” and before he had time to answer she pulled him along till they came to the apple-tree and stopped short to listen.

In a minute the smile had gone from her

face, and her heart fluttered fearfully as she saw the robins flying frantically about and heard their shrill, sad notes.

Dropping Henry's hand, she crept softly to the water's edge, and, looking upon the branch of the tree, she missed the nest, which in a few moments after came floating down the stream with the pieces of egg-shell sticking to it, and was caught on the end of a log.

"Oh, my beautiful robins!" said she, piteously. "Some wicked boy has robbed them! Who could be so cruel? They were so happy together, and I had such delight in watching them! I suppose they would have come out to-morrow, and there would have been five dear little birds;" and, sitting down upon the grass, Lucy covered her face with her apron and began to cry; but she could not bear to be so near the suffering birds, and so she soon got up and went sadly enough to the school-house, where many of the boys and girls were already playing in the yard.

They all gathered around Lucy to see what had happened; for her downcast look and tearful face betrayed her sorrow.

Every one denied all knowledge of the cruel deed, even to Pat Murphy, who was

known to pilfer all the nests he could find. Some of the boys and girls said "they knew he did it," although he stoutly denied it; and Henry Macy was not brave enough to stand boldly up and confess the truth, but added sin to sin by allowing the blame to fall upon Pat, who, although bad enough generally, was this time free from the guilt both of theft and falsehood.

After school Lucy sought Sarah Booth and Henry Macy to walk home with her; and all the way Sarah talked about "how wicked it was for Pat Murphy to deny taking the eggs when all the scholars knew he must have done it;" and Lucy said "she was very sorry she had not told Henry Macy, for he would have helped her to watch over and protect them."

This made the little boy very miserable; but he could not get courage to say, "I did it," and so went home to supper and to bed with the great burden of his wicked acts resting upon his conscience.

He did not like to say his prayers that night. There seemed some thick cloud hanging between him and his heavenly Father, so that he could not see his gracious smile as he had sometimes.

How beautiful and desirable a possession the stolen nest had seemed when he snatched it thoughtlessly from its green nook ! But how black and hideous was it now that it was shutting him out from the love and blessing of his heavenly Father !

Henry dreamed that he was clinging to the branch of the old apple-tree, over a deep and swollen stream, and that, while he grasped in his hand the coveted nest, the birds flew angrily at him, pecking at his eyes until they tore his flesh, and sticking their sharp bills into his heart, giving him such anguish that he loosed his hold of the nest and the limb, and dropped into the waters, which seemed to be very deep and very cold.

CHAPTER V.

SHIVERING, he awoke, and lay still in the darkness and silence of his chamber, thinking what he should do when the morning dawned, —whether he should go all the long day skulking about with a cowardly soul in his bosom,—that had been bold enough to do a

mean thing, but was afraid to stand up bravely and manfully and do right.

He did not like to think of himself at all. He was very much ashamed of his want of spirit, and felt degraded and contemptible in view of his secret fault. It was too dreadful to know himself to be full of evil when Lucy kept putting him before the other boys as an example of goodness ; but yet, if he should acknowledge his sin, his school-fellows would see him as he saw himself ; and how could he bear their scorn ?

Upon the whole, he thought he had better say nothing about it. The thing was done now and could not be helped. He would be more watchful over himself in future. He was sure it would never happen again, and it would do no good to let the whole school know what a cowardly, mean boy he was. So he turned over and dozed and dreamed again. I do not know what he dreamed now, but it would not surprise me to be told that this time he thought he was sitting under the tree in the meadow with the nest upon his lap, and, as he looked upon it, it changed into an image of his mother's face. There was her soft, brown hair, parted on her fore-

head, and her blue eyes gazing reproachfully and tearfully at him ; and he seemed to hear her say,—

“ What ! my little son Henry robbing the beautiful birds’ nest ! No, no, it cannot be ! I must hear only good of my dear boy ! ”

Two or three times he awoke suddenly, and then turned over again, and then saw his sin rise up before him in some other shape ; and by-and-bye when the bright morning peeped in at the windows, it found no beaming, glad countenance to answer its genial smile, but only a sad, unhappy little boy who had darkened his own sky with his own naughty deeds.

He tried again to look up to God, but the thick cloud had not passed away, and his little prayer could not get beyond it, but seemed to come back heavily upon his soul. So long as he was deceiving his school-fellows and letting poor Pat Murphy bear the blame of his fault, of course God would not look mercifully upon him.

“ If we regard iniquity in our hearts the Lord will not hear us.” This is in the Bible.

At breakfast his aunt said, “ Will you have an *egg*, Henry ? ”

How he blushed ! He was thinking so constantly of the five blue eggs in the pilfered nest, that he had not noticed the dish of eggs upon the table, and for the moment he believed that his aunt had discovered his fault.

Rallying, he took one of the nice boiled eggs and broke the shell ; but he could not eat it, the worm-like things he had seen in the broken eggs came so vividly before him.

Oh, there is not any chance for comfort while keeping sin in one's soul ! You are sure to meet it wherever you turn ! How can it be otherwise when you carry it about with you ? Better out with it at once, and begin anew with a good, clear conscience. That alone will give you real peace and joy.

Henry began to feel thus, and he almost resolved to make a clean breast of it so soon as he should reach the school ; but, as he walked along, Lucy Cole came running up and walked by his side, as if she was glad to be by so good a boy as he was thought to be, and Henry could not quite consent to let himself down in her opinion ; and, when the last bell rung and all were assembled at their studies, the secret was still his own.

The scholars avoided Pat Murphy that morning. Some called him "*bird-thief*," and some, I am sorry to say, went so far as to call him "*liar*;" and at the play-hour none of them would play with him, but they made more of Henry Macy. They made him their leader in all their games. He thought he could never bear to have it known that he was really what they unjustly called Pat. Then he would be thrust aside as too mean to join in their sports, and be shunned by the very boys that now petted and flattered him.

Pat didn't care that day for their scorn, because he was innocent; and he took a seat upon a high post of the fence and ate his biscuit alone, and watched the boys and girls at their play with a cheerful face and a happy heart, while Henry bore his undeserved honours sorrowfully, laughing very faintly, to keep up a show of joy, and running with such laggard feet that he was soon the last in the game.

Wearily enough the morning passed, and the long noonday, and now the afternoon school was nearly over. The spelling-class was called upon the floor, and the teacher gave the word *nest* to Henry Macy.

What a strange thing it is that when we have done a wrong act everything seems to conspire to bring it to the light!

God's purpose is in it all. There is no use in trying to hide our misdeeds. He will surely uncover them when we least expect it, and we shall be overwhelmed with shame and confusion of face.

Henry Macy's cheek was crimsoned as he heard the word, and, stammering, he spelt it with a double s, as if it were *ness*, and had to take the foot of the class, while Pat Murphy was right and took the head.

Henry knew that he deserved this defeat; but his schoolmates were sorry for him, and, when the teacher turned away for a minute to attend to a word in James Wright's lesson, they pointed their finger mockingly at Pat, and softly hissed him.

CHAPTER VI.

MR. COLBURN heard the hiss, and caught two or three of the scholars with their fingers still extended, and he asked the cause of it.

There were ready voices enough to call out, "Pat Murphy isn't fit for the head. He stole Lucy Cole's robin's nest, and then told a lie about it."

The teacher looked very grave and laid down his book upon the desk, as if he must do something in the matter, though he could not exactly tell what.

The class stood still, watching him anxiously; for they well knew that he never suffered such a serious fault to go unpunished.

He was a kind, good man, and they loved him dearly; but he was strict in his reproof of all wrong-doing, and would treat with severity any cruelty to the dumb and helpless.

He had often corrected Pat Murphy for his propensity to this sin, and now that he was again charged as an offender he scarcely knew what penalty to inflict.

The next day was to be a grand holiday in the school, and there was to be a pic-nic in the woods, to which pleasure the scholars had been looking forward for many weeks, many of them scarcely talking of anything else since it was first proposed.

As Mr. Colburn remembered this excursion he decided what to do, and called Pat up before him. He did not stop to ask him any questions, but took it for granted that the accusation, coming as it did from the whole school, must be true. He therefore said, looking sorrowfully upon the boy, "Pat, I had hoped to have all my scholars around me to-morrow at the pic-nic, for we promise ourselves an uncommonly happy day ; but I am obliged to cut you off from this amusement. You will therefore stay at home in the morning when the rest of the school meet me at nine o'clock with their baskets of refreshments. You may take your place at the foot of the class, and, Henry Macy, you may take the head again. I will overlook that slight mistake this time."

Pat was too much hurt to deny the charge, or to say one word in excuse ; but his lip quivered as he turned away from his teacher and went sadly down to the place where Henry stood.

"Take your place at the head, Henry, and let us go on with the lesson," said Mr. Colburn ; but Henry did not move.

His face grew very white, and he trembled

violently ; but the struggle was soon over, and he spoke at last.

" *I took the bird's nest, Mr. Colburn. Pat Murphy must go to the pic-nic. I took the nest with the five blue eggs.*"

The teacher and scholars were so surprised that for the moment they stared silently at Henry ; but when Lucy Cole realized that her good little friend had robbed the beautiful birds of their nest she burst into tears and would hardly be pacified.

They were all so very much ashamed of their conduct to Pat that they could scarcely do enough to compensate for their unjust suspicions.

The teacher said that " Henry Macy must stay at home from the pic-nic ;" and he was so bowed down with the sense of all the harm he had done by his fault that he hardly cared to mingle with his schoolfellows, for he felt as if they must despise him.

He made a great mistake here, however, for when a boy frankly acknowledges a sin it always raises him in the esteem of his worthy companions ; whereas if he goes on, like a coward, to conceal it, he is looked upon with the scorn which he merits.

The moment Henry was brave enough to say, "I took the nest," and showed a real penitence for the act, the scholars all pressed around him to manifest their good-will; and they begged so hard that he might not be punished that Mr. Colburn was beginning to waver, when Pat Murphy decided the case in Henry's favour by saying that "if Henry Macy could not go to the pic-nic *he* should stay at home also."

And Mr. Colburn said, "Since we have all done wrong, my children,—Henry in taking the nest, and you and I in unjustly accusing the innocent,—we will forgive each other and grant Pat's request, and all try to be happy together to-morrow."

Henry wanted to steal away slyly from school, but Lucy Cole was awaiting him at the door, and was kinder than ever to him; and Sarah Booth walked just before them with Pat, who was in high spirits now that he was put right with the scholars. But Henry could not be happy until he had sought forgiveness of his heavenly Father. He was almost afraid to look up, lest the thick cloud should meet him; but, as he kneeled down in his quiet chamber and raised his eyes and

heart towards the heavens, the cloud had vanished, and God's smiling face seemed beaming in love upon him.

And when the morrow came, what a pleasant day they had in the cool, green woods ! All hearts were light and merry, and Henry was in favour wth everybody, Pat and he being the very best of friends, and even exchanging knives—Pat's old bone-handle for Henry's pearl and silver—"to aid each other to remember never to be cruel again to God's innocent and helpless creatures."

JESSIE AND HER PLAYMATES.

“‘PERFECT love casteth out fear ;’ that is my verse for to-day,” said Charlie, after his rosy lips had pressed the good-morning kiss upon his mother’s cheek ; “but I do not understand it.”

“Do you remember, my son,” asked his mother, “how terrified the dear baby was when papa returned from his eastern journey, muffled in a fur coat, and with a cap tied over his ears ? But the moment she saw the dear face she forgot the dislike she always has for fur, and flew to his arms, laying her cheek lovingly upon his shoulder. Now, papa looked just the same as when she screamed with fright, but her love for him cast out all fear. Do you understand that ?”

“Certainly I do, mamma,” replied Charlie ; “but I wish you would tell me some other instance.”

“Well, my dear, let us take the little birds. They look on man as their direst foe ; and

it is no wonder, when so many find pleasure in robbing their nests and taking away their innocent lives. Yet even these silly creatures may be taught to love and to trust in those whom they now fear."

"How can they be taught, mamma?" asked Charlie, with beaming eyes. "I wish the birds would love me as I love them; but they fly from me just as they do from sporting Sam, with his shot-bag and rifle."

"Here, Charlie," said his kind mother, "is a picture from a little book I once read. The little girl's name was Jessie. Her father was a shepherd, and his humble cot nestled among craggy rocks far up among the Scottish hills. Not another human habitation was near, and the lonely child never saw anybody but her parents, save on the Sabbath, when the little family walked down the burn to the 'auld kirk.' So she was forced to seek her companions among the weaker children of God's hand. Not a blue-bell nor a heather blossom but was a delight to her. She would gaze earnestly into their little hearts, and thank the great God for scattering such beautiful things over the ground for *her sake*. But her chief joy was in the birds—those sweet chil-

dren of song, not one of whom can fall to the ground without our Father, and who share with us, his wiser but less trusting creatures, his care and love.

“From the time that little Jessie could walk alone, she used to save all the crumbs of coarse oaten cake which fell from the table, for the birds ; and soon her good father taught her to woo the squirrels by cracking nuts, and laying them on a flat stone near the cottage door. Every morning the lonely child was aroused from her slumbers by the call of the linnet, the lark, and the throstle. Then she would hasten out with her crumbs, not waiting to change her snowy night-dress, nor to cover her feet. She was not afraid of the cold nor the pebbles, but only that her dear little playmates might weary of waiting for their breakfast, and seek it elsewhere before she could hear their morning song.

“As Jessie grew older and could gather food for her pets, she drew the fawn and the wild hare also into her company. It was a beautiful sight, this mountain child surrounded by such a strange group of playmates. It made one think of the day when all enmity shall cease between the creatures God has made, ‘when

none shall hurt or destroy in all my holy mountain, saith the Lord ;' when 'the lion and the lamb shall lie down together, and a little child shall lead them.' Now, my dear Charlie, let us learn a lesson from these birds and animals. The love of little Jessie cast out their fear. Surely we who are so much wiser should learn to love and trust in our heavenly Friend, who gives us all our blessings here, and who has sent his beloved Son to give us life in the land where perfect love shall cast out fear for evermore."

