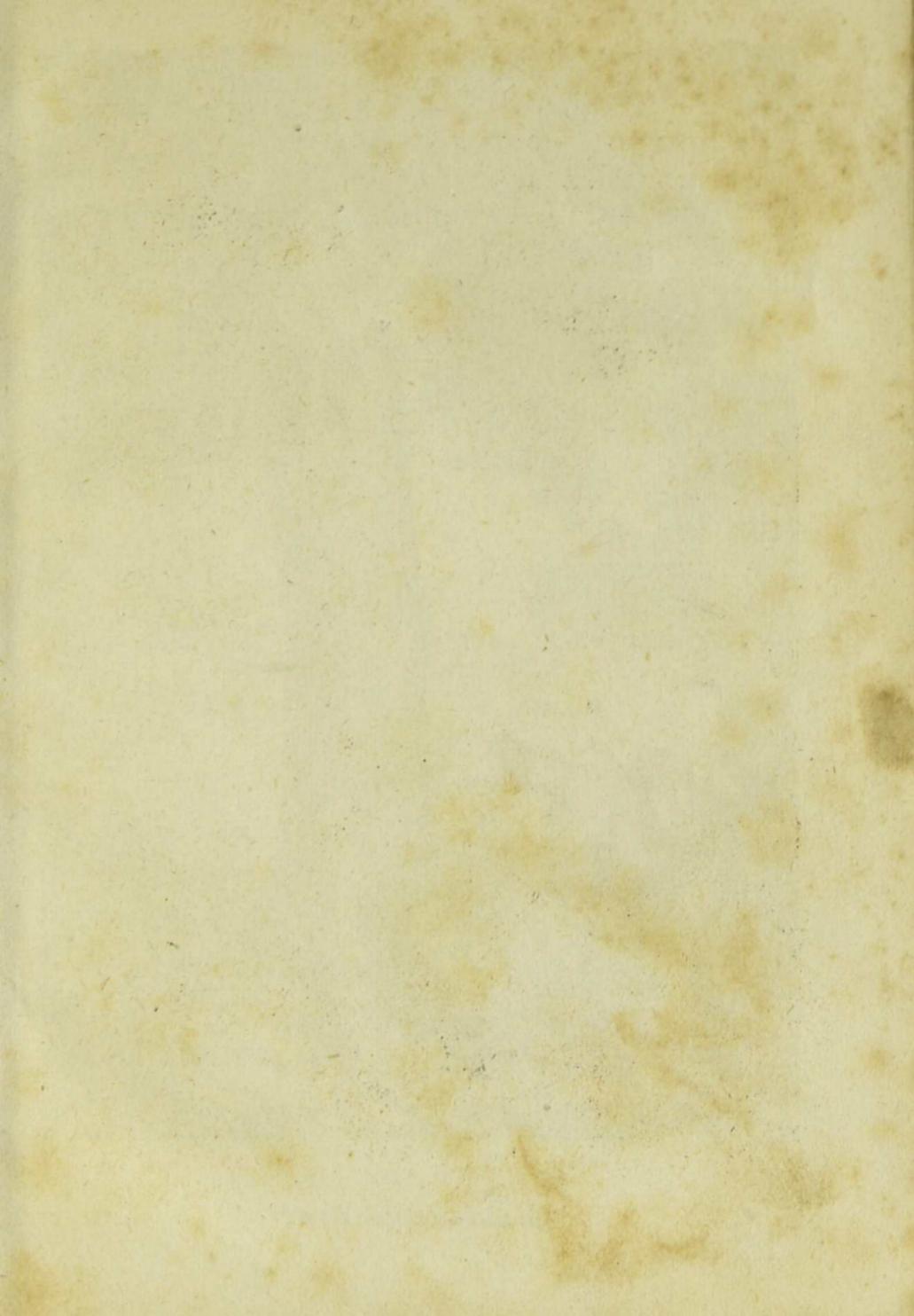
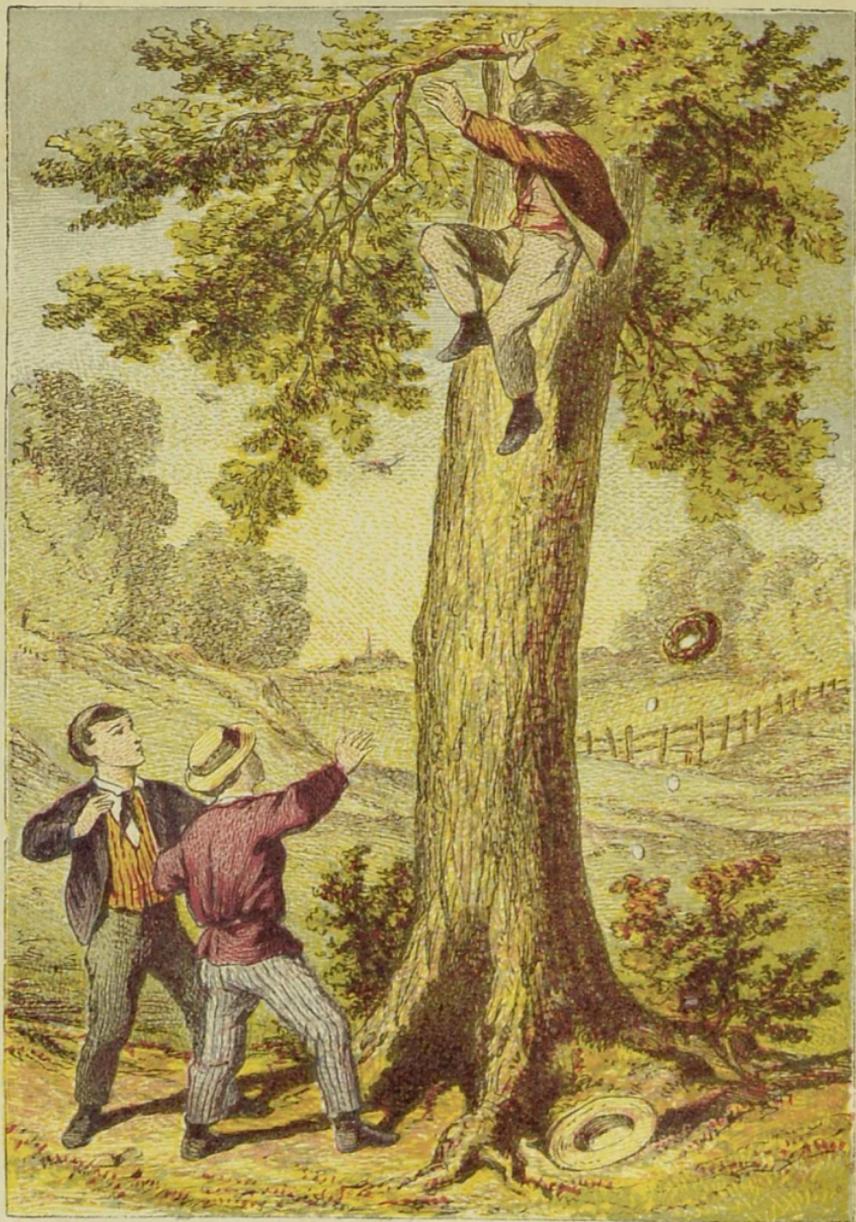


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CHAFFINCH'S NEST.

THE
CHAFFINCH'S NEST;

OR,

BE KIND TO THE BIRDS;

AND OTHER STORIES.



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THE CHAFFINCH'S NEST;

OR,

BE KIND TO THE BIRDS.

CHAPTER I.

THE CHAFFINCH'S NEST.

IT was Sunday—a beautiful Sunday in April—and the country looked gay and smiling after the gloom of winter. Morning service was just over in the village of T——, and the people were returning to their homes. Many groups were formed, as the neighbours drew together to ask after each other's welfare, to rejoice in the return of the fine weather, or to say a few words about the sermon they had just heard. It was on the

observance of the Lord's-day. "Remember, my brethren, that this day is the Sabbath of the Lord our God," were the pastor's closing words.

If some of the congregation had heard and profited by the sermon, there were others who had very little idea of putting it in practice, as our story will show.

A few boys, about twelve or thirteen years old, met in the road, and at once began to talk with great animation.

"I know where there is a nest," said one.

"And so do I; I know three nests, but they are so well hidden, that I defy you all to find them."

"Come along; let's go and look for them," said a third.

"Come along, come along!" cried several boys, growing quite excited on the subject.

"But it is nearly time to go to the Sun-

day-school," said a voice that was gentler than the others.

"That's true; I had forgotten it. But never mind, we may give it up for once."

"Yes, we must miss it. As for me, I should think it a shame to stay in-doors such a beautiful day. Won't you come too?"

"My mother wishes me always to attend the Sunday-school."

"Tell her you were there. She will never know where you have been."

"Tell a falsehood!"

"Well, it wouldn't be the first, I dare say. Come along with us."

"Well, I believe I will."

"As for me," said another, "I dare not omit to go, for my father always asks me in the evening about what we have learned."

"I could not miss it either."

"Nor I."

"Well, well, stay all three of you. Go to

school, and joy go with you. As for us, we will go bird-nesting. It is too bad if we may not have a holiday this fine day."

And so the boys separated. The five truants ran off, laughing and talking, into the country, where they soon met Frank Drayton, a boy of twelve, who lived about half a mile from the village. He was coming along with his Bible in his hand, repeating the verses which he would have to repeat in the Sunday-school.

"Ah, there you are, Frank. Will you come with us?"

"I am going to the Sunday-school, and I must make haste, for it is just time."

"Oh, don't go! Come along with us instead," said Andrew, the tallest of the group. "We are going to look for nests."

"And will you rob the nests?" said Frank. "No, I will not go. My grandfather has forbidden me."

And Frank ran off towards the village,

whilst the truants went on their way, and soon arrived at a place which seemed made expressly to invite birds of every kind to find a home there. On one side, a clear stream ran murmuring beneath the shrubs on its banks, and wound through a little clump of young oaks and underwood. There, assuredly, would be a nest of blackbirds, with the young ones already hatched and fledged, ready to avail themselves of the abundance of insects with which their vicinity to the stream supplied them. Then, on the other side, a bank of turf reached to the skirt of a wood, where some hollow trees would afford a delightful shelter to the families of the tom-tit and the robin-redbreast. Here the fields were surrounded with hedges of hawthorn, those thick, closely interwoven hedges which offer an asylum and a secret resort to the wren and other small birds; and here and there stood an apple or pear-tree, with knotted branches, covered with moss and

lichen, where the chaffinch loves to build, careless of hiding her nest beneath the young foliage, and only seeking to conceal it by making it look like the bark on which it is built.

“ I mean to take all the eggs I find, and put them in my hat,” cried Henry, a strong, hardy lad ; “ so look out, boys.”

“ You have not found them yet,” said Julius, laughing merrily. He was a fair-haired boy, the youngest of the party.

“ There’s one !” cried Peter, the boy who had consented to deceive his mother, and pretend he had been at the Sunday-school. “ There’s one ! High up in the pear-tree.”

“ Yes, it is a chaffinch’s nest,” said Andrew ; “ come, boys, help me up ; I will climb the tree.”

“ No,” said Peter, eagerly, “ it was I that saw it, and it is only fair I should have it. Come, give me a lift.”

No sooner said than done. Peter climbs,

creeps from branch to branch, and at last, when within reach, seizes the nest, from which the chaffinch flies, leaving her eggs to the delighted group.

“Have you got it? What’s in it?” cried those below.

“Eggs! three, four, five!”

“Very good. We may find enough to make a pancake. Now, come down quick.”

Peter tried to slip from branch to branch, holding on by one hand, and with the other holding the fragile little nest, which he feared either to break or to drop. The tree was high. It was one of those fine old trees, with knotted and mossy branches, which in spring are covered with blossoms. Now, these blossoms opening to the sun this lovely morning, had attracted the notice of some industrious bees, which were buzzing merrily as they flew from flower to flower. It happened that while foraging for his hive, one of these busy little labourers

had alighted on a beautiful snow-white bunch of blossoms, which rested on a lower branch. The next moment Peter seized the branch, and in his grasp crushed the flowers and the bee.

“Oh, I am stung!” he cried; and, in the sudden pain, he let go his hold, and losing his balance, would have fallen head foremost to the ground, had not the end of a broken branch caught his dress, and held him hanging in the air.

His terrified companions saw him slip, and expected the next moment to see him dead, or with his limbs broken. When they beheld him stopped on the way, they thought Peter was safe, but he was not yet on the ground. They must get him down, and that was not so easy.

“Get your coat free from the branch,” cried little Julius.

“Nonsense! don't you see that he would be killed if he fell from such a height,”

interposed Andrew. "Don't stir, Peter. You will be killed if you fall."

"I will climb up to him," said Henry, resolutely, "and get him free."

"Then you would both fall together. Look at the branch where he is hanging; it is old, rotten wood, and the utmost it can do is to support the weight of one. It would certainly break under two."

"We must get a ladder."

"But where? It is too far to go to the village."

"Never mind. Let's run for one."

"No, it is too far," said Andrew. Drayton's house is nearer, and I saw a small ladder there this morning, under the shed. Go, quick, and fetch it, and I will stay with Peter."

They ran off, and Andrew remained; for he preferred not running the chance of meeting Farmer Drayton, if he came to ask why they were meddling with his ladder.

He had his own reasons for avoiding him. The preceding autumn he had been hired as herd-boy at the farm, but had been so careless of his work, and so cruel to the cattle, that Farmer Drayton dismissed him from his service, after having more than once given him a severe lecture.

When he was alone with Peter, Andrew tried to cheer him as well as he could, but without succeeding; for the poor boy was in pain from the sting, and besides felt in great danger of falling.

“Have patience, Peter; don't cry,” said Andrew; “they will soon be here with the ladder. Then we will have you down in a minute, and nobody shall know anything about it.”

“But this rent in my coat. My mother will soon see that I do not come from the Sunday-school, and I shall be scolded, beaten, perhaps——”

“Oh! tell her——; let's see, what shall

you tell her? Oh! say that you had a fall, and tore it."

"She would not believe me. It would be all very well if it were in the knee, but in the back of my coat——"

"Well, say that big James began to fight with you coming out of school, and that you tore it in trying to defend yourself."

"Another falsehood," said Peter, sighing. "But it must be so now. Oh! how my hand hurts me. Are they coming with the ladder?"

"Yes, here they are! But there is some one with them. I declare it is Farmer Drayton. I shall be off. I don't want to meet him."

"Oh, don't leave me! Stay, Andrew, I beg of you. I think I am falling."

"No, no, I cannot stay, and you have nothing to fear," cried Andrew, making his escape into the wood.

Peter, in his terror, turned his head abruptly to call after Andrew, and in the sud-

den movement gave a pull, which finished the rent in his coat. He fell with violence to the ground at the very moment that Farmer Drayton arrived with the ladder.

“Oh, poor boy!” he cried, hastening towards him.

Peter, stunned by the fall, neither moved nor spoke. The boys gathered round, and looked at him with terror, crying, “He cannot speak! He is quite pale! He is dead! Oh, Mr. Drayton, what shall we do?”

Farmer Drayton raised him up, and Peter soon opened his eyes, and began to weep. The kind-hearted farmer tried to re-assure him by a few comforting words, and was about to lead him home, but the moment Peter put his foot to the ground, he uttered a cry of pain, and fell back upon the grass.

“Oh, my foot, my leg! it is so painful!”

Farmer Drayton, who was something of a veterinary surgeon, carefully examined the leg, and finding that there was no fracture,

insisted upon Peter's again trying to walk. But it was of no use. He only fell back again on the grass, crying with pain.

“You have broken no bone, certainly,” said the farmer; “for I have felt the whole limb. You must have sprained your foot, my boy, and you will have to practise patience for a few weeks; for any injury to the foot is very tedious of recovery. You will not be able to come bird-nesting again this season. Well, as you cannot walk, I must carry you.”

The good old man raised Peter in his arms; but the burden was too heavy for him, and he tottered as he tried to walk on.

“It won't do, it won't do,” said he, stopping. “I am not so strong as I used to be, and I should soon let you fall again, my boy. We must try another plan. James, Julius, all of you, instead of doing nothing, you must come and help. Bring that little ladder. We will lay Peter on it. You

shall take one end, and I the other, and so we will carry him home."

The plan was a good one, and the party soon reached the house of Farmer Drayton. They arrived just as Frank returned from the Sunday-school. As soon as he saw the group advancing with slow steps, his grandfather at their head, he ran to meet them, and exclaimed—

"What, is it you, Peter? What has happened? Your mother is searching all the village for you, because your godmother is come. What is the matter?"

"Oh, nothing," said Peter, in great confusion.

"Nothing but a sprained foot," said Farmer Drayton, gently laying the ladder on the grass, to rest for a few minutes.

The boys did the same, and while all stood still, the farmer went on in a serious tone—

"Yes, a sprained foot, and Peter may be very thankful that it was no worse. It is a

light punishment for Sabbath-breaking and cruelty. It will be some time before Peter can run about again, and he will have leisure to reflect upon the sinfulness of these things. I hope, too, that having to suffer pain himself will make him feel for other creatures, and that he will give up the cruel practice of bird-nesting. It ought to be a useful lesson to you all, boys.

“Now listen to me, all of you. It is a wicked pleasure which you indulge in at the expense of these poor little harmless creatures; and when I see boys delight in robbing nests, when they might find so many better amusements, I think to myself that they are either very thoughtless or very heartless. Don't you know how these birds go and come, and work hard, and take great pains to construct those nests that you throw away after you have played with them a few minutes? And don't you know all the good that would be done to the

country by those young nestlings that you destroy when you break the eggs, or bring the young birds home to die? They are very useful. They eat a quantity of caterpillars, worms, spiders, flies, and all those small insects that are so destructive of our harvests. I read once that in a country where the sparrows had been destroyed, the trees were so devoured by caterpillars, that there was no fruit left. Not an apple, a plum, or a cherry was to be had. Fancy what a loss that must have been! They were actually obliged to send to a distance for young sparrows, and rear them carefully, that they might again multiply in the country."

All the boys listened attentively to Farmer Drayton, for he had the name of being a wise man, and a great reader. Each began to feel that it would be well for him to find another amusement, but no one confessed it aloud.

“Now that we are rested,” said Farmer Drayton, “we will set out again, and carry Peter to his mother’s. Come, Frank, do you take hold of the ladder in the middle; we shall go quicker with your strength added to ours.”

Frank immediately took his place among the bearers, listening to the account of Peter’s accident, of which every particular was related. Then Peter asked, in an anxious tone: “Did you say that Aunt Margaret was come?”

“Yes; your mother was so surprised to find her at the house when she came home. She staid with her for a while, and then came to fetch you from the Sunday-school, for fear you should not hasten home directly it was over.”

“And what did you tell her?”

“That you were not there. And then she told me, if I met you, to send you home directly.”

“Oh, is not this too provoking? To think of my godmother seeing me in this state. She will ask how I came to have such a fall, and what shall I say? She is such a lover of birds, and has so often forbidden me to rob nests. Oh! how unlucky I am! What shall I do?”

“You must tell the truth,” said Frank, firmly; “you will be scolded, no doubt; but to tell a falsehood would make the matter much worse. And, besides, how could you conceal what has passed?”

“Andrew thought I might make out some other story.”

“Ah!” said Farmer Drayton, “was Andrew there? Where is he, then? I did not see him with the others.”

“No, he ran away when he saw you coming, sir.”

“I am not surprised at that,” said the farmer. “He knows I am up to his tricks. He is always after some mischief. You

should not let him lead you astray, Peter. He is a bad companion for you."

As he spoke, they arrived at Peter's home. His mother was busy laying the dinner things on a clean white table-cloth, spread in honour of Aunt Margaret. As soon as she heard the steps and voices at the door, she came out, hoping to find Peter returning with his companions; but what was her surprise and terror to see him borne along upon a ladder!

"Here is your boy, neighbour. He is not much hurt, but he cannot walk just yet, and we must carry him to his bed. Don't be frightened; there are no bones broken."

"Oh, my poor child! what has happened? What have you done? Tell me, where were you while I was searching for you in the village?"

"Mother, I was bird-nesting in the wood, and I fell from a tree, just as I had found a nest. I am very sorry, mother, that I ran

away from the school. Will you forgive me?"

After this confession, which had cost him an effort before it was made, Peter felt greatly relieved, and was touched by the tenderness of his mother, who hastened to attend to and pity him, instead of scolding him as he expected. Perhaps, indeed, he would have found it easier to bear reproaches, or even blows, than to witness his mother's tears. She was weeping for her son's sin, as well as his suffering; and she looked so sad in her widow's dress that Peter was quite melted; and as she laid him in bed he whispered—

"Oh, mother! I am so sorry for what I have done. Pray forgive me, won't you? I promise you to do better for the future, and to try to be a comfort to you,"

"I need comfort, Peter," said his mother, sadly. "But we will speak of this by-and-by. Stay very quiet now, while Farmer Drayton sees to your foot."

Farmer Drayton was skilful in all things of this kind. When any accident happened in the village, he was often sought to dress the wound or bind up the fracture, and practice had given him great expertness. He was busy bandaging Peter's ankle, when Aunt Margaret appeared at the door. She had gone out to see a sick friend, and was absent when Peter arrived. Aunt was an elderly woman, with a pleasant countenance and very benign expression. She had been a widow many years, and had no children. One young servant was all her household, in a pretty cottage where she lived, a few miles from the village. She had a good-sized farm, which was cultivated for her by an experienced man. Her part in it related only to the live stock, and she took great pleasure in surrounding herself with animals, of which she took the greatest care. A fine poultry-yard, where fowls, ducks, and turkeys were to be seen in abundance, while a few peacocks moved

grandly about, rejoicing in their brilliant trains, gave her some employment. She often sold and gave away her fowls, when they became too numerous. But she was too fond of them to have them killed for her own table, so that not even a chicken or a pigeon was ever seen roasting for her dinner.

“I don't mind selling my fowls to others,” she would say, “but I certainly could never have the appetite to eat one of my favourites.”

The kind-hearted woman was also a great lover of singing-birds, but then she liked to see them at liberty, flying from tree to tree, or soaring into the blue sky. She loved to see everything happy around her; and the birds seemed to trust her so well, that they had no fear of approaching her, and often flew into her room, as she sat working near the open window.

Need we say that one so full of kindness to the lower creation had a heart and a hand ready to respond to every call of

friendship or of charity? Her benevolence was so well known, that she was looked on as a sort of universal friend, and among rich and poor was seldom mentioned except by the familiar and affectionate title of Aunt Margaret. There was not a sick person in the neighbourhood who had not been bettered by her prescriptions, or nourished by her nice broths and jellies, or comforted and cheered by her pleasant visits. But if her goodness was widely felt and acknowledged, it was also well known that upon one point she was very severe. She could not bear anything approaching to cruelty to animals, and those who were guilty of it found no favour in her eyes. No one dared to ill use his horse or his dog in her presence; and if she were passing at the time, he knew well that Aunt Margaret would not fail to stop, and reprove him sternly for his cruelty to a poor dumb animal, reproaching him with his cowardly conduct, and speaking to him

of the anger of God if he persisted in it. She really spoke admirably well upon these occasions; because she felt deeply and warmly, and her words flowed out with a freedom and strength that never failed to impress and abash the culprit.

Aunt Margaret had always been very fond of Peter. Having no children of her own, she had been the more disposed to give her affection to her little godson. Peter responded warmly, and was almost as much attached to her as to his own mother. Almost everything he possessed was the gift of Aunt Margaret, and the happiest days of his life had been spent at her house. There he had a feast of fruit from her own garden, and plenty of cakes of her own making, which were far better than any to be had in the shops. Then there were such pleasant walks in the garden, filled with its old-fashioned, sweet-smelling flowers—for Aunt loved the flowers that she had known from

a child ; and then, better than all, there was the poultry-yard, with all its varieties of feathered inhabitants, from the graceful peacock and the stately Cochin-china, down to the gentle little white bantam, and the pigeons that came at a call. Then, after a delightful day, Peter always had a well-packed basket to bring home with him ; sometimes a supply of new clothes ; at others, a basket of eggs, some beautiful rich honey from the box-hive (for Aunt Margaret had a horror of the smothering system), or a delicious store of apples and pears.

It may be easily imagined that Aunt Margaret was a great favourite with Peter ; in fact, he thought there was not such another person in the world, and her arrival was generally hailed with delight. Now, however, as he saw her appear at the door, his feelings were only those of shame and grief.

“ Oh ! that unlucky nest ! What trouble

it has led me into !” thought Peter to himself. He covered his face with his hands ; but in so doing only proclaimed his fault ; for they were stained yellow from the eggs that he had broken.

When the old lady heard the history of the accident, her kind, anxious looks changed to an expression of severity, and she turned to Peter with a seriousness of manner that made him tremble.

“ All that I have heard,” she said, “ has given me great pain. I leave your mother to speak to you of the sin of Sabbath-breaking and deserting your Sunday-school. Surely her tears, the tears of a widowed mother, whose comfort and prop you ought to be, must speak to your heart.”

Peter tried to hide his face in the pillow.

“ And then to torment a poor bird,” she went on. “ Oh, Peter, how often I have told you that robbing nests was a hateful

and cruel amusement! I see you did not deserve the good opinion I had of you."

"Oh, oh!" said Peter, sobbing, "indeed I am very, very sorry——"

"Yes, no doubt you are sorry to have a sprained ankle, and to get into disgrace. But are you sorry for your faults?"

"Indeed I am. I promise you it shall not happen again."

"You have often said that before, Peter; so I cannot trust to your assurances till your conduct shows me that you are really changed for the better. Listen to me, my child; you have done many wrong things to-day, and I wish you to think of them. First of all, you have broken the fourth commandment, of which you had just been solemnly reminded in the sermon; then you deserted your Sunday-school, and in so doing disobeyed your mother, who wishes you to attend it. Perhaps you thought to deceive her by making some false excuse, but this

accident brought your sin to light, and prevented you. You have greatly pained your dear mother, who is already in deep affliction since your father's death; you have made her feel her loss the more keenly, by showing her that her authority cannot restrain you. You know well that if your father were alive you dared not have acted thus. Then you have added to her labours, for I see that your new coat is torn and dirty, and now your sprained foot deprives you of the power of being of use to her, and going on her messages. At your age you ought to be a great help to her; but now, on the contrary, it is she who must wait on you, as if you were a little child.

“See, Peter, how many sad and evil things have resulted from your indulging the cruel taste for bird-nesting! And then for one moment of pleasure, which might have cost you your life, you have destroyed the happiness of two harmless chaffinches, who, even

this very morning, were full of joy with their little nest and their pretty eggs. How merrily they sung, while patiently waiting the time when their young birds should be hatched, and reward them for all their pains and care! They were full of hope; but how bitterly they have been disappointed! Oh, Peter, was it not a selfish, cruel boy, who for his own amusement could thus torment a pair of poor innocent, happy little birds? I can fancy them now, flying round and round that pear-tree, which they had chosen as a safe retreat, looking in vain for their nest, and their tiny eggs, and grieving piteously for their loss."

Here Aunt Margaret stopped, to recover her composure, for the subject was one that excited her warm and generous anger. Peter wept in silence; for he began to feel that he deserved all her reproaches. Farmer Drayton and Frank took leave, warmly thanked for all their kindness by Peter's

mother ; and when the door closed after them Aunt Margaret went on.

“ But that is not all, Peter. Your wrong action this morning reaches farther than you think. Do you know why the birds are given us ? Not alone to give us pleasure, but because of their usefulness. Yes, my child, all these chaffinches and redbreasts, these linnets and tomtits, and all the birds you are so familiar with, are extremely useful to the farmer, and help him in his work by destroying a quantity of insects of which he could not otherwise rid his fields. It has been calculated that a sparrow carries to her nest of young ones forty caterpillars in an hour. Multiply forty by twelve, and you will know how many caterpillars these voracious youngsters will consume in a day.”

“ Forty by twelve. Is it not 480, aunt ? ”

“ Yes. And then if you are curious to know how many caterpillars they may

devour in a week, multiply 480 by 7: that comes to 3,360. Now, don't you think that this busy little sparrow is very useful?"

"Yes, indeed, aunt."

"Well, every sparrow that you see does the same; and if they do eat a few of our cherries on their way, or peck a few grains of our wheat—why, I say, don't grudge it to them. Remember, that but for them our gardens and orchards would be left without a blossom or a leaf. And the sparrow is not the only bird that does us this service. There are others which are even better insect-hunters than he. The little wren, for instance, takes from fifty to sixty insects an hour, which is at the rate of more than 4,000 a week. And the swallow, that flies so fast, and catches the flies on its flight, takes from 700 to 1,000 a day."

"Oh, aunt, is it possible?"

"Quite possible, my dear, and quite true. It is, then, in some measure, owing to these

sweet little birds that we are able to gather in our corn, and vegetables, and fruit. But for them there would be very little left for us. And now, through this fault of yours, the farmer will have to suffer the depredations of many thousands of insects, which will prey upon his harvest-fields.”

“I never thought of doing so much mischief.”

“And then these dear little birds add a great boon to all their other services, by rejoicing us with their songs. Who does not love to hear in spring the song of the chaffinch—that sweet, joyous note, which seems to announce that winter is passed and gone, and that the beautiful days of summer are close at hand. And then when summer comes, how delightful to hear the linnet and the nightingale singing in the early morning, or in the evening, when the heat of the day is over, and thus refreshing the weary labourer after his day’s toil!”

“Oh, yes, aunt! I never thought of all that. How sorry I am for breaking those chaffinch’s eggs! It seems now so wicked.”

“Yes, Peter, it is wicked, selfish, and cruel, to amuse oneself at the price of the misery of any of God’s creatures; and God has suffered your fault to bring a punishment upon you. Try, my child, to finish this holy day better than you began it. Repent of your many faults: ask God to forgive you, and pray to Him to change your heart by His Holy Spirit, and enable you to serve Him better for the time to come.”

“Aunt Margaret, do you think that God will hear me now, when I have just been breaking His Sabbath?”

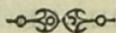
“My child, the Bible says: ‘Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear Him;’ and our Saviour tells us that ‘there is joy in heaven over one sinner that repenteth.’ Come, then, to Him without fear, confessing your fault, and ask-

ing His forgiveness. Remember all that the Lord Jesus Christ has done for us;—how He died upon the Cross for our salvation; and that through His merits and sufferings all who repent and believe in Him should have everlasting life. Surely you need not fear to open your whole heart to so loving and compassionate a Saviour. Tell Him that you are weak, and sinful, and wretched; and that you come to Him, entreating Him to pardon you, and to renew your heart by His Holy Spirit. I trust you will profit by the lesson this day has given you, Peter; and during the long days that your lame foot will keep you a prisoner to the house, that you will think of these things, and try to be a better boy. But remember that you can do nothing good in your own strength. You must pray to God to teach you, to guide you, to keep you, and daily to renew and strengthen you, by the working of His Holy Spirit in your heart. Let your daily

prayer be, 'Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me.'

"Now I must leave you, my child; but if I hear a good account of you when you are better, you shall come and spend a day with me, and I will show you something that will please you. But remember, Peter, I will not show it to a naughty nest-robber; only to a friend—a kind friend of birds."

And Aunt Margaret went into the kitchen to partake of the dinner that had long been waiting for her. Then taking a kind leave of Peter and his mother, she set out to return home. She had come over chiefly to see a sick friend, and comfort her; but her visit had been more useful than she anticipated.



CHAPTER II.

THE GOLDFINCHES.

PETER suffered a long time with his sprained foot. He could not move it at first without pain, and for a full fortnight after the accident it hurt him to put it to the ground, or to attempt to make the least use of it. Kind Farmer Drayton sometimes came to see him, and always insisted on perfect quiet and patience as necessary to recovery. Now, at Peter's age, patience is a very difficult virtue to practise, and the poor boy found the time hang very heavily on his hands. He was really grieved, too, to be the cause of so much additional trouble to his mother, who had to wait on him, and bring him everything he wanted. Sometimes he thought that perhaps the harvest would be over be-

fore he was able to walk, and the fear of not being able to go gleaning distressed him very much. He knew well that his mother was not rich, and that it was only by industry, order, and strict economy that she could manage to maintain herself and him as she did.

“ Ah ! ” he often said to himself, “ see all the trouble that robbing the chaffinch’s nest has brought me ! If I had only left it alone, I should now be able to help my poor mother, bring water, and weed the garden, and go her messages, instead of letting her take so many wearying walks herself, carrying home her work. It was only yesterday she said there was a bed of winter lettuces getting all overgrown with chickweed, and she had not time to weed it out.”

Peter was thinking over all this one evening in the twilight, as he lay alone in the house, when he heard the door open, and some one enter with a cautious step.

The next moment he saw Andrew, who came towards him, hiding something in his hat.

“Ah, Peter! there you are, my boy. Are you alone?”

“Yes, my mother is out washing, and will not be home for an hour.”

“So much the better. Look here! See what I have got!”

“What is it?” said Peter, in surprise.

“Look here into my hat, and you will soon see what it is. I thought you must be very dull here by yourself, and as it was partly my fault that you fell, I thought I would bring you something to amuse you.”

“Oh, Andrew! what have you done?” cried Peter, in a tone of vexation, as he drew from Andrew's hat a nest full of young birds, all opening their beaks, and agitating their half-fledged wings, as if panting to be fed.

Andrew only answered by a burst of laughter.

“Well, are not they fine ones,” he said. “I have had my eye on them this long time, and as soon as they were fledged, I took the nest for you.”

“Better have left them where they were. Where did you find it?” said Peter, eagerly.

“Ho, ho; is that my thanks, after all the trouble I have had? If you don't like them, Peter, I will take them away again.”

“And what would you do with them? Oh, Andrew, if you had only heard all that Aunt Margaret said to me; she cannot bear any one to rob a nest.”

“Oh, nonsense! your aunt knows nothing of what passes here. Just amuse yourself with these funny little goldfinches, and never mind her. See how they open their beaks. Have you any bread here? They seem to be hungry, and yet none of them would eat a caterpillar that I offered them.

They only shut their beaks, and shook their heads, as if to say that was not what they wanted. I don't know what to make of them."

"Poor little creatures ! they are too young to feed themselves, without their mother to put it into their mouths. They will not be able to live without the parent-birds to feed them."

"Oh, yes, people manage to feed them very well. My cousin had some in town, which were taken very young, and which he used to feed with a tea-spoon. Only I don't remember very well what he gave them ; and, to be sure, only two lived out of five young birds."

"And the three others died of hunger. If they had been left with their parents, all five might have lived, and sung merrily in the woods."

"Well, he has two, and he does not want more. Do you try to rear these. I will

bring you an old osier cage that I found in my grandmother's garret. But there is a hole in it, which I must mend with a few twigs."

Peter sighed, as he passed his finger over the downy plumage of the little nestlings, which opened their beaks wide when his hand approached them.

"Poor little things!" he said, "I should like to keep you, you are so pretty. But no, Andrew, we must not let these poor birds perish. Tell me where you found the nest.

"Nearly at the top of our large pear-tree. It was well hidden under the leaves, and I was the only one that found it out."

"Well, now, if you wish to do something to please me, put it back again in the same place."

"Are you mad? Do you think I climbed up there for nothing, or just to have the trouble over again? No, no; if you don't

wish for them, I will take them myself; but not to put them back in the tree, I promise you. In three or four days they will be able to fly alone; look!"

And so saying, he took one of the young birds, perched it on his finger, and held it up in the air. At every stir the little goldfinch half spread its wings, which shook and fluttered, without yet being able to support its weight. Andrew waved it about to make it fly, which its strength was quite unequal to; and at last the poor little thing lost its balance, and fell heavily on the stone floor.

"Oh, Andrew, what have you done? Poor little creature! It is killed! What a pity!" cried Peter, in great indignation.

Andrew picked up the bird, examined it, saw that it was really dead, and, vexed at what had happened, threw it out of the window to a large white cat that he saw outside.

"There, Snowball, there's something for

you," he cried; "you will have a good supper, at all events."

Then, laughing aloud, he came back to Peter, who was carefully holding the nest, while tears were rolling down his cheeks.

"What, crying! What a simpleton! There is only one the less; and you have four left still to amuse you."

"It is not right, Andrew, to amuse ourselves with the sufferings of any poor creature. See how God has punished me for bird-nesting that Sunday."

Andrew answered not a word. If he was thoughtless and cruel towards animals, because he had not been taught better, and was left to idleness and mischief, he still had some affection for his friends; and when he saw Peter's tears and distress, he was really sorry that he had vexed him, and was more disposed to do what he wished.

"Listen to me, Andrew," said Peter.

“We could never rear these poor little goldfinches; neither of us know what to give them to eat. It would be much better to put them back in the tree, and perhaps the parents would come and feed them again. If you will do that, Andrew, I will give you my large new knife. I am fond of that knife, because it is the only one I have, and I was such a long time saving up pence to buy it,—but no matter,—I will give it to you, if you will put the nest back in the pear-tree.”

“I don't want your knife, Peter. Here, give me the nest.” And seizing it quickly, he put it in his hat and rushed out of the kitchen, just as Peter's mother arrived at the door. She entered, threw her wet apron over the back of a chair, and said, as she knelt to light the fire—

“Andrew is just gone out. What was he doing here?”

Peter related what had passed, and added,

“I don’t know whether he will put the birds back in the tree or not. He went out so quick, that I could not tell what he meant to do. If I could run, I would have followed him, and saved the lives of the poor little goldfinches.”

“He is always snaring birds, laying traps, or robbing nests. I only wish your aunt could speak to him, and tell him her mind about these things. I saw Farmer Drayton just now, Peter; he was watering his cattle at the river-side; and he says that if you continue to stay very quiet, he thinks you may be able to walk in another week.”

“Oh, I’m glad to hear it! Then I shall be able to go gleaning. If you only knew, mother, how I long to work, and to help you, as soon as I am on my feet again!”

His mother answered kindly, and Peter ventured to open his heart more freely, and told her how earnestly he had prayed to God to give him His Holy Spirit, to strengthen

him in all good resolutions, and to enable him to think and do what was right. He told her how he had grieved over the past, and how he trusted, with God's blessing, to be a help and comfort to her for the future. His pious mother listened with thankfulness and joy; for she had observed a change in Peter. She saw that he was growing thoughtful, patient, and obedient, and she had hoped that God was graciously answering her prayers for him.

She now knelt beside his little bed, and prayed fervently for him, thanking God that He had put into his mind good desires, and entreating the abundant blessing of His grace. She then kissed her dear boy fondly and repeatedly, and went to seek the repose which she greatly needed.

Early next morning, Peter, who slept in a little room which looked into an orchard at the back of the house, was awakened by some taps at the window. He sat up, and

saw Andrew beckoning to him. The room was so small that Peter was able to reach the window without leaving his bed. He crept to the foot of it without leaning on the sprained ankle, and the next moment the window was open, and the fresh morning air blowing pleasantly on his face.

“Well,” said Andrew, at once, “the parents are come back, and have given them many a mouthful already.”

“To the little goldfinches? Did you put them back in the tree then?”

“Yes, just in the same place, so that the father and mother never found out that they had been taken.”

“Oh, how glad I am! That’s right, Andrew; it was very good of you. Now, jump in through the window—that’s it. Do you see my coat hanging up there behind the door? Look in the pocket of it.”

“Well, what shall I look for?”

My new knife; there, in the right pocket. You know it is yours now."

"Oh, no! thank you. Keep your knife. I have one of my own, and besides, I don't want a reward; I am as glad as you are that the little birds are back with their parents. Only for that, they would all have died miserably, like the one that I killed yesterday."

"Poor little creature!"

"As I was coming along the street, I saw a few of its tiny feathers that Snowball had left, and the great, horrid cat was smelling about to see if there could be a leg or a wing left. I threw a stone at him, and he ran away fast enough."

"Poor Snowball! It is his nature to take what he can find, and there is no better cat for catching mice."

"Perhaps so; but I did not like to see him there. It made me think of the poor little goldfinch killed by my fault."

“Well, Andrew, you will not rob nests any more, will you?”

“Oh! that’s another matter. But I will take no more goldfinches, certainly. And now, good-bye; I am going to work in my father’s field to-day.”

And Andrew went off to his work, while Peter, who would gladly have done the same, comforted himself in his solitude with his books and his happy thoughts.



CHAPTER III.

AUNT MARGARET'S BIRDS.*

SOME time had passed when, one fine summer day, a cheerful, pleasant looking boy might have been seen coming from the village of T——. His dress was simple and neat, but a long, zigzag darn might be observed in the back of his coat. He was walking with a light and rapid step, like one who has some agreeable object in view, and who rejoices at the prospect of attaining it. This boy was our friend Peter, who, under the skilful care of Farmer Drayton, had recovered the use of his injured foot. The first use that he made of his recovery was to help his mother as much

* Every anecdote of birds related in this chapter is perfectly true.

as he could, and to acquit himself of every little duty, without waiting to be reminded of it, which made his mother so happy, that every one noticed her improved spirits.

But where was he walking to, with so brisk a step?

The day before had been Sunday, and Peter had spent it peacefully and happily. Peter and his mother attended the morning service; they listened attentively to the sermon. You might next have seen him at the Sunday-school, repeating the hymn and verses of Scripture he had learned, and replying with great interest to the teacher's questions. He looks so absorbed and so happy, that you might, perhaps, say—"Peter seems to have forgotten all about his accident;" but you little know how deep an impression that occurrence made upon his mind. He looked upon it as a punishment from God for breaking the Sabbath; and profiting by this severe

lesson, he had resolved on a diligent observance of that holy day for the future. He found his reward, and soon discovered that a well-spent Sunday is the happiest day in the week. His teacher had lent him many story books during his long confinement to the house; but on Sundays, especially, the Bible was his favourite book. He delighted in reading, again and again, the wonderful histories in the Old Testament, or the lovely story of the Gospels. And then, as he found how deeply it concerned himself, he felt as if he could never tire of reading every incident in his Saviour's life on earth. Thus he improved rapidly, both in knowledge and in grace; and as his mother listened to his pleasant voice reading to her in the evenings from that blessed book, she felt that God had indeed made her heart to "sing for joy."

As she bade him good-night that evening, she had said, "To-morrow, my child, I think

you may go and see Aunt Margaret. Your foot is quite strong now ; and though I know you do not look for a reward, I am glad to be able to tell her that she may now give you the pleasure that she promised when she should hear that you were a better boy."

Peter was more gladdened by his mother's words and looks than even by the prospect of the promised treat. He went to bed with a light heart, and thought to himself how much happier he had been since he had conscientiously striven to do what was right. As soon as school was over next day, he hastened home to put on his best clothes ; that is to say, a pair of white trousers, and his only coat, which his mother had mended as well as she could, but which still bore obvious traces of the rent made by the branch of the pear-tree. Then taking leave of his mother, and with many charges from her to give her kind love to Aunt Margaret, and

not to stay too late, he set out on his journey, as we have described.

In about two hours he arrived at Aunt Margaret's, and found her in her poultry-yard, surrounded by her pigeons, which she was feeding with crumbs of bread, left after her dinner. As soon as Peter saw her, he ran towards her, holding out his hand, and asking how she was. The old lady turned at the sound of his voice, and was going to take his hand affectionately, when, suddenly drawing back, she said,—

“Is this a friend of animals that has come to see me? You know I do not receive any one else.” And her large black eyes seemed as if they would read Peter through and through.

“Oh, yes, aunt; you may shake hands with me, indeed. I have not robbed a nest since, and I hope I shall never do so again.”

“Well, that's right. And how are the goldfinches?”

“The goldfinches! Do you know about them? Who can have told you?”

“Oh, yes, I know all about them. I am the friend of birds, you know. No matter how I heard, but I was very glad to hear it, and to see that you had profited by the lesson you had received. But now come in with me; you need rest and refreshment, for it is a hot day, and you have had a long walk. A kind neighbour has just sent me a beautiful basket of ripe strawberries, and you shall have some, with plenty of cream and sugar. But, first of all, here is something more solid—home-made bread, and cheese and butter from my own dairy. I hope you are hungry enough to enjoy it.”

Aunt Margaret then placed Peter at the table, supplying him plentifully, and went to attend to a poor woman who was waiting for her.

Peter ate with a good appetite; for Aunt Margaret's provisions were delicious, and he

was hungry after his long walk. He was enjoying his strawberries and cream, after having partaken of the bread and cheese, when a little bird flew in at the window, and hopped along to his feet, to pick up the fallen crumbs. Then, not finding much upon the ground, it flew up on the table, coming close to Peter, and pecking at the piece of bread by his side. Quite astonished at such fearlessness, Peter, without stirring, watched the bird, which, in return, looked at him with its little round, bright eyes. At this moment, Aunt Margaret entered the room, and what was the surprise of Peter, who fully expected that the noise of shutting the door would frighten away the bird, to see it, on the contrary, fly to meet her, and flutter round her, until she had thrown it a morsel of nut or almond, of which she seemed to have a little store in the pocket of her apron. He picked it up directly, and then quietly flew away with it from the window.

“Well, what do you say to that Peter?” said his aunt. “Is not that nicer than having him shut up in a cage? That is my pet chaffinch.”

“Oh, aunt, what a pretty bird it is! And how well he seems to know you!”

“Oh, yes, very well; he recognises me whenever he sees me, and flies to me at once. I have also a sparrow which comes at my call, and even when I go through the village follows me, flying from roof to roof, and tree to tree, until I come home. But it is only here in my own fields that he will come quite near me, because he knows very well that here he is in perfect security,—that neither trap, nor cage, nor gun, are to be feared on my premises. But if you have finished your strawberries, come with me: I have something else to show you.”

She then led Peter into the garden, at the end of which was a wood, composed of large trees, intermingled with the cistus and the

lilac ; while many smaller shrubs wove their branches among them. There a pleasant shade tempered the heat of the summer day ; and there were many rustic seats about, where Aunt Margaret often came to sit for an hour or so, with her knitting or her book.

“ Stand quiet a moment,” she said to Peter, when they were in the midst of the wood. “ Look — there is my robin-red-breast.”

Peter could see nothing ; but Aunt Margaret called, in her gentle voice, “ Robin, Robin, Robin !”

Soon there was a slight rustling in the underwood, and out came a pretty little robin, hopping to Aunt Margaret's feet. Then, perceiving Peter, it made two or three hops back.

“ No, no ; fear nothing, Robin,” said Aunt Margaret ; and, throwing him a morsel of nut, she soon induced him to return. Then,

sitting down on a neighbouring seat, she held her hand, containing some bits of nut, close to the ground, and Robin immediately flew upon her hand, and quietly perched there, while he picked up the nut.

“What a dear little bird!” said Peter, in a low voice, and without daring to move.

“Now that he is busy eating, you may come near him, and speak. I do not think he will be frightened.”

Peter drew nearer, and the redbreast looked at him with its little soft, black eye, while going on with its feast.

“Oh, Aunt Margaret, what do you do to tame these birds? I never saw anything like it. Is it possible this one has never been in a cage?”

“Never; and that is why it is so fearless. He knows very well that I have never tried to catch him, and that he can fly away whenever he likes.”

“But how did you make him so tame?”

“Don't you see? I call him; I offer him something nice to eat, and he comes. I have no other secret.”

“Did it take you long to tame him?”

“From six to eight days. The first time I saw him in the wood, I called him, and threw him some of these morsels of nut. He ventured to pick up one, and I continued to notice him thus every day. Then I often came to sit here with my knitting. By degrees he became accustomed to seeing me, drew nearer to me, and at last came to eat out of my hand, as you see. His principal food consists of earth-worms and insects; but he also eats bread, and he is very fond of cheese, when he can get it.”

Here Aunt Margaret, tired with keeping her hand stretched out so long, drew it back; the bird flew into the underwood, quite close to Peter, and began to clean his beak against the branch of a tree, and to smooth his feathers.

“See, Peter, how I love my birds. Is it not pleasanter to see them thus, surrounding one like friends, than to go and rob their nests, or keep them, wretched prisoners, shut up in a cage?”

“Indeed it is, Aunt Margaret.”

“Now I can show you something that will surprise you even more. Here, take these two nuts, break them small, and follow me.”

So saying, she led Peter into the orchard, and while passing under the trees she called—

“Tit, Tit, Tit,—are you there, my little Tit-mice?”

Then smacking her tongue against her palate, she made a peculiar sound, something like the chirping of birds, and then stood still to listen.

“I hear nothing,” she said, after a minute’s silence. “I am afraid my birds are not here just now. But come, let us go under the large cherry-tree yonder, near

the house, and perhaps we shall find them."

And accordingly, when they reached the cherry-tree, Peter heard some little twittering notes, and a fluttering of wings in the foliage ; and the next moment, two or three pretty little titmice, with yellow breasts, striped with black, came flying around them.

" Ah, there you are, my little Tommys ! Here, here is something for you."

And Aunt Margaret struck two nuts together, and alternately called the birds, and repeated the chirping sound with her tongue, until she reached the walk next the house, where she sat down on a garden-seat. Then telling Peter to keep back a little, she threw a few morsels of nut into the air, which the birds eagerly caught while on the wing. Others soon followed, attracted by their cries, and soon the whole family, eight in all, including the parent birds, began to fly

around Aunt Margaret. She then turned smilingly to Peter, who was standing in silent astonishment, and said—

“It is your turn now. Offer them your nuts, too. Throw a few morsels in the air, and then sit down, and put some, as you see me do, on your shoulder, or on your knee, and, if you keep quiet, they will come to you.”

Peter could hardly believe that a titmouse would ever come to feed off his shoulder; however, he sat down beside his aunt, did as she desired, and then sat very quiet. The tiny birds were now flying around him, coming nearer and nearer every moment, and at last they perched on his hands and knees and shoulders to take the tempting morsel that attracted them. When they had repeated this movement several times, and Peter's store was exhausted, his aunt produced from her pocket a new supply of nuts and hemp-seed; she then held out her

hand, and chirped loudly. Immediately, four titmice, together, flew upon it, and, far from being afraid, they clung to her hand, disputing for the food it held, and striking each other with their beaks and wings, with all the freedom of the forest.

Peter watched them in great surprise; he could not have believed it if he had not witnessed it himself, and at last exclaimed, "Is it possible that they have never been in a cage?"

"Never! never!" said Aunt Margaret, laughing; "and they are quite at home with me, because I trained them young, before they had left the nest."

"You must have taken the nest, then, for they never came to find you themselves."

"I do not even know where their nest is. Their parents did not tell me that secret. But what will surprise you more is, that the father and mother titmice, those two with brighter colours than the others, brought

me their family themselves, as soon as the little ones could fly."

"Brought them to you! But do they know you then?"

"Oh, yes; we have been acquainted for some months," answered Aunt Margaret, laughing heartily at Peter's astonishment. Last autumn, and all through the winter, these two titmice came every day upon my window, to pick up crumbs of bread, or seeds, or nuts, which I threw to them, especially when the ground was covered with snow, and they knew not where else to seek their food. When spring returned, they still came to see me, but not so often, and only as if they wished to show me that they had not forgotten me. Then, at last, when their nestlings were able to fly, they brought them to me, and for several days past, the whole party have been flying frequently round the house, swallowing flies and gnats on the wing, and pecking caterpillars and

maggots from the trees. Do you see that one, clinging to the rolled-up leaf? He is looking for a caterpillar which is hidden inside it. They never go far from my orchard, where they do a great deal of good by destroying insects."

"And are they as tame with every one as they are now, with you and me?"

"Oh, no; they know very well how to judge between the people who come in here. There are some that alarm them, and make them fly at their approach, and others, of whom they are not the least afraid. Yesterday, one of my neighbours came to ask me to lend him a rake. He found me, out here, surrounded with these birds, and he came near to see them better; but directly they saw him they flew back into the trees, and would not return at my call. And yet they never fly away when Jane, my little servant, comes out to me. As soon as he hid behind the garden door, they again came crowding

around me; but as soon as he showed himself, they flew off to the top of the trees."

"Perhaps I am too small to frighten them. Oh, how I should like to stay here always, to see these birds every day, and tame them with you. But it is time already to go home. My mother charged me not to be too late."

"Well, my child, it would not be right to make your mother uneasy;—but there is still time for you to take your tea with me. I dare say Jane has it ready for us; and I will go and fetch some honey, which I fancy you will not object to."

"Oh, thank you, Aunt Margaret,—and thank you for all you have shown me! I have been so delighted with your birds!"

"I am very glad that they please you. I could tell you about a great many other birds; but we have had enough for to-day. Let us go indoors, for tea is waiting for us."

While Peter took his tea, and feasted on

the beautiful home-made bread, fresh butter, and delicious honey, he had a number of questions to ask, and he listened with the greatest interest to all his aunt could tell him of the habits and customs of birds.

“Well,” she said, in conclusion, “do you understand now why it is that I cannot bear people to rob nests?”

“Oh yes, Aunt Margaret; I only wish all my schoolfellows could see what you have shown me; I am sure they would never rob a nest again.”

“I am not so sure of that,” said the old lady, shaking her head.

“If you would allow Andrew to come some day, he would be so delighted!”

“Andrew is a boy who loves to torment poor dumb animals,” said Aunt Margaret, in a severe tone; “and my door is shut against such boys as that.”

“But Andrew took back the goldfinches, you know.”

“Yes, yes, I know; but he would not have done it of his own accord. But we shall see;—perhaps in time, if he really improves, he may come, too, to see my birds.”

“May I tell him so?”

“If you wish; but tell him, also, that I receive none here but friends of animals. Now you must go, my dear Peter; the time seems to have flown very quickly. Give my love to your mother, and take this parcel under your arm. It is some cloth to make you a new suit of clothes.”

“Oh, thank you, Aunt Margaret! You remembered the great rent in my coat. Every time I look at the long darn, I think of you, and all you said to me that Sunday. I have not forgotten a word.”

“And you do not forget to pray, my child, that God will keep you in the right way?”

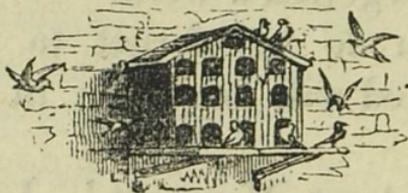
“Oh, no, Aunt Margaret! I pray very often that God will give me a new heart,

and a right spirit;" and Peter coloured with deep feeling as he spoke.

"Then I am full of hope for you, my dear boy; remembering the promise, 'Those that seek me early shall find me.' That is God's own promise, Peter; one that can never fail!"

Aunt Margaret then opened the door, and after an affectionate farewell, Peter set out on his return home, delighted with the happy day he had spent, and filled with gratitude for his aunt's kindness.

Need we say that he has never since been known to rob a bird's nest?



TURNING ASIDE.

—88—

CHRISTMAS was come, and the day for the Sunday-school treat was come, when there was to be tea and cake, and the magic lantern, and when the annual prizes were to be given. "I expect I shall have a prize," said Edwin Groves to Frank Whitmore, as they went along the lane together; "I ought to have one, for I am always in good time, and never stay away if I can help it."

"I think I ought to have one too," said Frank, "but our teacher is so strict—if I am only a minute after prayers, down goes the mark for being late; and these dark mornings it will happen sometimes."

“I mean to leave the school if I don’t get a prize,” said Edwin, in a bold manner.

Frank had much respect for Edwin’s opinion, as he was a “first-class boy,” while Frank himself was much lower in the school; and he cried in wonder, “What! leave the school, and you in the first class.”

“I would, if I did not get a prize,” returned Edwin. “But there is no fear of that; so come along Frank, there’s the flag waving from the roof! Now for a merry afternoon!”

It is Sunday morning, and as the bell rings, the boys are pouring in to school. A quarter of an hour later, and prayer is over, and each class falls into its place. There, in that corner by the desk, sits Edwin Groves’ teacher, with his boys, and entering their attendance in the mark-book. He looks round — there is one missing. “What! Edwin Groves late! A bad beginning of the new year!”

“Please, teacher,” cried two or three voices at once, “Edwin Groves is not coming again. He did not get a prize, so he says he shall leave the school.”

“And Frank Whitmore did not get a prize, either,” said one of the boys, “so he has left too.”

“Edwin could not receive a prize,” said the teacher, gravely, “because, though he was regular and punctual in his attendance, his lesson was seldom learned. No doubt there was some equally good reason why Frank Whitmore should not have one—in-
deed we cannot help seeing how late he comes into school. But I hope you are mistaken, boys. I do not think Edwin would leave the school for such a cause. And now go on with the lessons.”

But the teacher loved his wilful scholar; and his heart was sad. Early in the week he called to see the boy at his own home; and as he took his lonely walk along the

lane he prayed that his fears might prove to be without foundation, or that he might be able to speak such words as should bring back Edwin to the school. Ah ! how little does a thoughtless boy know of the pain he gives, when he turns aside from the path of duty, and takes his first steps in the way of evil !

Edwin was at work in his father's garden ; and looking up, as he heard a footstep, he saw his teacher on the other side of the hedge. If there had been time, he would have dropped his spade, and run away ; but it was too late for that, so he said to himself, " I have made up my mind, and I may as well stay and brave it out." He went on digging, therefore ; and even when his kind friend came and stood beside him, he did not stop from his work.

Yes, he had made up his mind. It was true he never *had* learned his lessons well, and had no right to expect a prize, there-

fore he was ashamed to give the true reason for leaving, and went on hard at work, only saying, sullenly, that he thought himself too old to come to school.

Too old—and only fourteen! Oh! Edwin, think again before you cause such grief to your kind teacher, who has cared for and taught you, Sunday after Sunday; who hoped to see you growing up a lover of your Bible, of God's own holy day, and of all good things! No, he had hardened his heart; not a word would he say in reply, and his teacher at last went away sorrowful, resolved to try again and again, yet with little hope of success, there was such a stubborn look in his face, such a want of grateful feeling even in the very tones of his voice.

And how was it with Frank Whitmore, Edwin's neighbour and frequent companion? He had been absent on the first Sunday of the year, as we have seen; and following Edwin's counsel, he also thought of leaving

the school. But Frank was a warm-hearted boy, who really wished to do right; and though he had erred in yielding to the bad advice of his schoolfellow, the gentle words of his teacher soon led him to see his folly. The next Sunday he was in his place some minutes before the school-bell rang, with his lesson and texts well learned, and a smiling face, that seemed to tell of some newly-formed good resolution.

Five years passed away, and what was the history of those two Sunday-school boys? In Edwin Groves' case, neglect of the school was followed by neglect of the house of God. This led to open Sabbath-breaking, and other sins came in its train. He is not yet twenty, but his good character is gone: if any mischief is done in the village, he is always suspected, and too often with justice, of having had a hand in it. Only the other day he was brought before the magistrate on a charge of poaching; and though he

got off this time, there is much reason to fear that he has entered upon such courses, and with such companions, as must sooner or later end in his hopeless disgrace. His honest old father holds down his head, and his mother, it is said, seldom mentions him for grief and shame. Might not all this have been avoided, if Edwin had listened with a willing ear and obedient heart to the kind counsel of his teacher at the Sunday-school.

Frank Whitmore has turned out an active, steady lad. For three years he has been in the employ of farmer Hodgkins, who gives him a good character and good wages. He does not think himself too old for the evening school; and he is getting on so well, I am told, that he will soon have knowledge enough for a place of another kind. Frank Whitmore promises to grow up a worthy man, and will be, we may hope, the comfort and support of his mother, for she has long been a widow, and he is her only son. If

he were to be asked, I think he would tell us that it was a good day for him when his teacher came and begged of him not to turn from the path of duty by leaving the Sunday-school.

If you are a scholar, my young reader, be warned by this little story. Do not think it is a proof of spirit to be ready to take offence for every cause; but remember that the Bible teaches us to be meek and lowly in heart, "in honour preferring one another." Even as regards this world, you would rather be in the place of Frank Whitmore than of Edwin Groves: but I have not said one word of that world to which we are all going, and for which, in one way or other, we are preparing. Think where it is that you learn how to be happy, both now and for ever; and resolve that, by God's grace, your youthful feet shall not wander from the place in which you hear of Him, and from the house where His "honour dwelleth."

EMMA'S REFORMATION.

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“TO-MORROW is governess’s birthday,” said little Emma, sorrowfully; “and I have not anything to give her. I would buy something pretty for her, but I have spent all my money; and if I were to make her a pincushion, it would be of no use, she has so many.”

“I shall give her this little book of psalms,” said Fanny, holding up a very small square volume. “It cost eightpence; but I have been saving up my money for some time on purpose to buy it.”

“I could never save so much as that,” returned Emma; “the pennies go so very soon.”

Fanny laughed ; but little Emma looked ready to cry, when their eldest sister, Mary, interposed. "I know of something which would please governess better than any present you could buy, if you had saved up your pennies all the year."

"What is it? Do, sister, tell me," cried Emma, eagerly ; and Fanny looked up again from her book of psalms with curiosity in her face.

"If you would learn your lessons well and thoroughly to-night, and repeat them to-morrow without missing a word. And if, to show your love to governess, you were to make a good, strong resolution that this should be the case every day, so that there might be no more crosses in the mark-book, and no more going to bed before the time in punishment, I am quite sure it would please her better than Fanny's book of psalms, or this needle-case which I am making for her work-basket."

A word spoken in season, how good it is! Especially a word of admonition from an elder sister, provided that it is very kindly and affectionately given. The case is otherwise if the reproof is needlessly severe, or uttered in an unbecoming manner, with an air of authority, and a commanding, imperious tone. Then it does harm instead of good, by exciting the evil passions of pride and self-will. So that all elder sisters, who wish to benefit the younger ones, should earnestly pray for a mild and forbearing spirit; that all their advice may be seen to proceed from love, not from a desire to rule.

Mary had acquired much influence over Fanny and Emma by her sisterly hints for their improvement, and above all by the force of a good example. Little Emma, who hitherto had been continually in disgrace through a habit of inattention which she had never tried to conquer, was struck by the counsel thus wisely offered; and, after a

little further conversation with her sisters, came to the determination which Mary advised. She might have been seen, that evening, sitting in a corner with her lesson books on her knee, diligently conning them over, one by one. It was indeed a pleasant surprise, and better than any birthday present to the kind governess, to hear each lesson repeated on the following morning; and time has proved that this was only the beginning of a reformation in which no one has more reason to rejoice than Emma herself. If any young reader is ever blamed for the same fault, let me hope that she will henceforth strive earnestly for the same amendment.



“COSY CORNER.”

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THERE was a little boy, called Jamie, who slept in “Cosy Corner.” He had given this name to the spot in mamma’s dressing-room where his little bed was placed ; for, as he was an only child, he was very much with his papa and mamma.

But his little bed was not the only thing in “Cosy Corner.” Just above it, hanging against the wall, was a nice book-case, made of three boards fastened together with red cord.

There were a great many books on these shelves, and they all belonged to Jamie. On the lowest and largest shelf was “The Pilgrim’s Progress,” full of pictures ; “Bible

Stories," and other big books ; on the next, the "Peep of Day," a pretty hymn-book ; and several volumes of the "Child's Companion," might be seen ; while on the top a great number of missionary papers and little monthly magazines were neatly piled up.

Besides all these, there was one tiny book, called "Dewdrops," which Jamie had in his hand every morning. He liked it very much ; the outside was nice, and the inside nicer still. The pretty blue cover and gilt leaves were very attractive ; but the texts from God's own word which it contained were more precious by far. There was a verse for every day in the year ; and perhaps you may think 365 texts a great many to ask a little boy to learn ; but then, by learning one each morning, he found it very easy, for we all can do difficult things by trying again and again, and taking little by little.

One morning Jamie woke up very early,

sat up in bed, and, as usual, put out his hand to find the "Dewdrops." He wanted to have his text learned, and so surprise mamma when she should come in to dress. The little book was safe enough, with a ribbon marker in the right place; he opened it, and, with a good deal of spelling—for the text was a difficult one—he read, "I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus." After a short time it was committed to memory; but the little boy did not understand it.

When breakfast was over that morning, and papa, after having read a portion of Scripture and prayed with his family, had left for business, mamma drew her chair near the fire, and called Jamie to say his lessons.

"Please, mamma, before we begin, would you explain to me the meaning of my morning verse; it is quite a hard one: 'I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which

also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus ;' that big word, 'apprehend,' I do not know what it means."

"That word just means to take hold of ; but, Jamie, let us talk a little, and by-and-by it may not seem so hard ; you will find that the text is beautiful when understood. Do you remember, my darling, how you went a journey last summer with papa and mamma ?"

"Yes, I do, mamma. How tired I was of the train ! it stopped and went on again so often before it came to the right place ; and then at last I fell asleep in your lap, and when I awoke, Uncle Henry was waiting for us. How late I was up that night ! It took a long time to drive to grandmamma's house. I am very fond of grandmamma, because she is so kind."

"But, Jamie, do you recollect one day that you went with us to the top of a high mountain, where a large stream rushed down its

side, and fell in a great waterfall before it reached the sea?”

“That was a nice day, mamma; the water made a terrible noise, and looked as if it were quite hot from running and jumping; but when some of the spray, which I thought was steam, touched my face, it was really like snow, it was so cold. We climbed up bravely. Uncle Henry helped you, and papa took my hand; but you know I am a strong boy, and boys do not need much help.”

“There was one place, however, Jamie, where you were a little afraid, and could not have got over alone.”

“Oh! mamma, that was where we wanted to cross that roaring stream; we left the nice little path, and came down among the dark rocks and great round stones. How deep and black the water looked! I am sure ever so brave a boy would be frightened there, for if he fell over, the water would

carry him down, down, down, until he would be lost. But papa wished to take me to the top of that mountain where the beautiful view was, so he put his arm round me and grasped me very tightly. He then said, 'Hold fast, my boy,' and I caught his arm; he held me very firmly, and I held on to him as well as I could, so we leaped from rock to rock till we reached the other side."

"And my little son thinks he could not have got safely across if his father had not taken firm hold of him?"

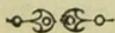
"No, indeed; I must have fallen in, for I was so frightened by the dark, deep water, and the terrible noise.

"Well, Jamie, there is another stream to cross, and another mountain to climb, where we shall need a stronger arm even than papa's to support us. Can you guess what I mean?"

"I think you mean about getting to heaven, mamma."

"Yes, my child; the Lord Jesus Christ invites us to go there; and He takes our hearts, making us trust and love Him. First He apprehends or lays hold of us, that He may carry us safely to the 'happy land, far, far away.' Then he bids us hold fast to Him. And now, perhaps, my little boy understands his beautiful verse better. Let us earnestly implore the blessed Saviour to forgive all our sins, and make us His children. Let us take hold of Him by faith, that we may reach heaven at last, and live for ever with Him there."

And when they rose from their knees, Jamie threw his arms around his mother's neck, whispering, softly, "Dearest mamma, I do not think I shall ever forget the meaning of my sweet text.



THE SAVIOUR'S GUIDANCE.

SAVIOUR, like a shepherd lead us ;
Much we need thy tenderest care ;
In thy pleasant pastures feed us,
For our use thy folds prepare :
Blessed Jesus,
Thou hast bought us, thine we are.

We are thine, do thou befriend us ;
Be the Guardian of our way ;
Keep thy flock, from sin defend us,
Seek us when we go astray :

Blessed Jesus,
Hear us when we praise and pray.

Thou hast promised to receive us,
Poor and sinful though we be ;
Thou hast mercy to relieve us,
Grace to cleanse and make us free.

Blessed Jesus,
Let us early turn to thee.

Early let us seek thy favour ;
Early let us do thy will ;
Gracious Lord, our only Saviour,
With thy love our bosoms fill :

Blessed Jesus,
Thou hast lov'd us,—love us still.

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