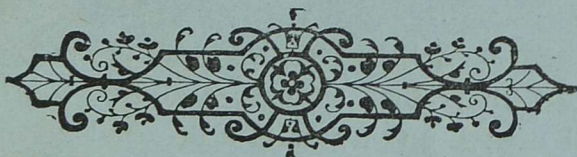


# THE SPARROW'S SERMON.



SPARROW'S NEST.

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## THE SPARROW'S SERMON.

MY LITTLE CHILDREN,

I dare say you know that the sparrow is considered to be a very clever bird; and so he really is—much cleverer than even you clever people give him credit for being. I ought to know what a sparrow is, being a sparrow myself and getting into years, and I am sure I am wise enough to talk to you. My life has been a very rough one, all things considered; but I am very thankful that it has been no worse. I have never been shot, or received any injury from lead or stones; yet I have been fired at twice, and stoned—I might say hundreds of times. I do not mind the stones a bit, for there is not one boy in ten thousand who can throw straight enough to hit me; not

that he is to be excused on that ground—his intention is bad enough, and he *means* to kill me ; but the gun is a dreadful weapon, and many and many a good sparrow has been killed by it.

I lost my first mate by a gun. We were both young, and rather careless ; but he was a good mate to me, and the way he worked to feed our first brood was a credit to him. He lost his life just as they were ready to fly, in an attempt to bring us home a cherry. The man who owned the tree shot him, and seemed to think that he had done rather a good thing ; but I think that if he had known what grief it cost us he would have been very sorry. That was my first great trouble, and I did not get over it for weeks.

Speaking of trouble brings me to the subject I want to talk to you upon, and it is this. I often hear little people say that so-and-so is “such a trouble,” and when I come to look into the matter I find that they

are talking about what is no trouble at all. You children talk very openly when I am hopping about from tree to tree, thinking that I do not understand you; but, bless you, I am not such a stupid—I know what your words mean, *I* can read frowning faces and sulky looks. Why, it was only the other day when I saw a little boy who grumbled about being sent down the garden for a book his mother had left in the arbour. “It was such a trouble,” he said; and yet two months before he was tossing about sick with a fever, from which he was saved by the unremitting watchfulness of that mother, who scarcely left him night and day. Another thought it a trouble to go to school, little thinking, or caring perhaps, what a blessing education would be in after years; and there was a little girl set to watch by her baby brother for half-an-hour while he slept in his cradle, which was put under a tree on a fine summer’s day, and I give you my word that she grumbled about the “trouble” of

sitting there until the half-hour was gone, and when the time was up, what do you think she did? Something useful, you will say. Oh! dear no—she merely sat down upon the grass and pulled daisies to pieces; and she told a companion who came to see her that it was “too much trouble to play.”

And so many of you go on and on, and really at times I feel very angry with you; but as being angry won't help you, let me try a little cool reasoning. What is the good of grumbling at a trouble which you have to bear and must bear? Do you think that you could make a weight which you have to lift or carry any the lighter by growling at it? No—on the contrary, you make matters worse. And more—you make a trouble out of no trouble, and you lay the foundation of a very unhappy life. Those who grumble young soon get into the confirmed habit of doing so, and they go through life grumbling and groaning and railing at everything and everybody,

until they get quite a name for it, and tire out all their friends. I will warrant that every one of my young friends who may come across these words has been guilty of a little more or less unreasonable grumbling, and *known it, too*, afterwards, when they have come to reflect. Would it not, then, have been better if they had kept quiet, or have borne their trouble patiently—if trouble there had been at all? Now I don't want to put myself up as a model of patience, but I should like to tell you of something which happened to me this year, as I think you may learn from it what real trouble is.

We—that is, my mate and I—built our nest this spring, and in a short time there were five eggs in it; and with great pride we counted them over, and talked of the time when the shells would break and give liberty to the little ones within. We settled that I should begin to sit on the morrow, and I went out for a last ramble before beginning that very arduous duty. On my

return I found that there were not *five* eggs, but *six*. I was so surprised that I could scarcely do anything but look at them until my mate came home—and he was astonished too. We were both certain that only five were there when we went away, and yet now there was certainly one more; but how came it there?

“It is no use being troubled,” said my mate; “one more or less won’t matter.”

“The feeding will be a lot of extra trouble,” said I, doubtfully.

“Well,” replied my mate, cheerfully, “then we must do it and not grumble.”

I assented to this, and on the morrow I took to the nest, keeping the eggs from the cold without, while the young grew within; and there I kept, almost without change, until the little ones grew too big for the shells and burst forth, clamorous for something to eat. My mate and I began at once and set out foraging, bringing home a vast amount of food for our family. At first



the little ones all looked alike ; but as early as the second day one appeared to be much larger than the rest. On the third day the difference was so marked that there was no longer the slightest doubt about it.

“ He comes out of the strange egg,” said my mate.

“ Of course he does,” I replied a little tartly ; “ no sparrow could eat as he does.”

I must confess I was a little ruffled, although I ought to have known better ; but the way that bird ate was very trying : the more I gave him the more he wanted.

“ Oh, I am so hungry,” he kept crying.

What with our own and this ravenous stranger we had no time to rest or eat until night came, and then it was too dark for us to get anything for ourselves, and we went to roost supperless—*without a grumble*. This sort of work was our *duty*, you see, and therefore we did not quarrel with it ; but with the extra labour and the want of food we got so thin that we were almost skeletons.

Still that strange bird kept on crying, "Oh, I am so hungry ; more, more ;" and within a week he was more than double the size of those we knew to be our own fledgelings ; in fact, he got so big that he quite cramped the others, and nearly stifled them. They complained to me, but what could I do ? I could not turn so young a bird upon the world, as he would not have been able to live a day alone, and his piteous appeal for "more, more" was too touching to be resisted ; but neither my mate nor I dreamt of what a sore trouble he would bring upon us.

Days passed on—our own young grew, and the stranger grew, until it was but too evident that the nest was too small for them all, and that something must be done. But what was that something to be ? We had no time to build another nest, as every moment we had was required to obtain food ; and if we had built another it would have been beyond our power to transport any of them from one to the other. But if we did not do

something it was plain that mischief would ensue.

“It's a sore trouble,” said I.

“Let us bear it,” replied my mate ; “don't sit down and grumble the time away, but work to the end.”

Sensible and good advice was this, and I returned to my labours. But a great trouble was not far off. There had been many complaints about want of room for some days, and one morning, as I left, my own little ones put up their heads and cried out that they were being smothered by the big bird. *He* said that he could not help it—that he screwed himself up as much as he could, but that it was out of his power to make himself any smaller. I could only tell my chicks to be patient, and went away sorrowfully.

That morning I found food very scarce, and it was some time before I turned back again ; but when I returned I found the big stranger alone.

“Where are my little ones ?” I cried.

“They died shortly after you went away,” he said, “and I put them outside.”

I looked down, and there they lay upon the ground—dead and cold! Oh, what a cry I gave! It reached the ears of my mate, and he came hurrying up to know what was the matter. I could only flutter my wings and cry out, “Oh, my little ones—my poor wee birds.”

He followed the direction of my eyes and saw what had happened, and a new light seemed to break in upon him. “I understand it all now,” he said.

“What do you mean?” I asked.

“We have a young cuckoo there,” he said, and pointed towards the strange bird, which sat looking at us with very sorrowful eyes, murmuring, “I could not help it—indeed I could not.”

My mate then told me—what I dare say you already know, my children—that the cuckoo never builds a nest—most probably because she cannot—but leaves her eggs,

only one in each nest, for other birds to hatch and rear. Why this is so *we* don't know, and I am sure nobody else does ; but the fact remains, and cuckoos' eggs are forms of trouble which occasionally come upon us. Some escape them entirely, but there are instances—so my mate told me—of some birds having to hatch even two or more in the course of a lifetime.

Nor would it have been right to blame that bird for the death of our young. Certainly not—*he* could not help it ; so we looked the trouble in the face and resolved to make the best of it. We dragged the dead wee things under a bush, and went in search for more food for the unfortunate cause of their untimely end. *Duty* again, you see, my dear children. We had not only to bear a trouble, but to make the best of it.

Towards night we saw our undertakers, the burying beetles, hard at work, and before morning our poor chicks were what I must call decently interred, and we tried our best

not to let our grief interfere with our daily work ; but it was hard—very hard to have to bring up one who—unconsciously, I must admit—had killed our little ones.

Nevertheless we did it, and in due time he flew away, following his kind to another country ; and my mate and I reared another brood without any misfortune of this sort, and a great comfort and joy our second family was to us. They have only just left us to begin the world on their own account, and more promising young sparrows never were seen.

Here, then, is the story of my trouble, and I ask you if it was not a very great one. But see how we bore it. When it came upon us we did not waste time by thinking *how* and *why* it came, or by useless repining, but met it—did our duty and got rid of it as soon as possible. That's the way to deal with real troubles, and as for imaginary ones—have nothing to do with them. Above all, don't create them. Do not, if you desire to be

happy, make every light task a burden, and when real trouble does come—as it must and will to all—bear it well, and it will soon become a thing of the past; but if you do not, you may find the burden a little too much for you. That's my little sermon; will you remember it?                   A SPARROW.

P.S.—If you have anything to say to me, come to Hedge Row, Green Lanes, Sussex, where you will be sure to find me, or some other sparrow, who will talk to you as well as I can.

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## THE SPARROW'S NEST.

THE sparrow's nest is not so beautiful as that of the goldfinch or the bullfinch; but it is a very wonderful piece of work, such as neither man nor boy could ever make. A clever artist has taken great pains to give a beautiful picture of a sparrow's nest. It will be found on the next page, and will make a good drawing lesson for our young friends.



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