

THE LOVE-BIRDS.

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PUBLISHED UNDER THE DIRECTION OF THE
COMMITTEE OF GENERAL LITERATURE AND EDUCATION,
APPOINTED BY THE SOCIETY FOR PROMOTING
CHRISTIAN KNOWLEDGE.

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LONDON.

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77, GREAT QUEEN STREET, LINCOLN'S INN FIELDS;

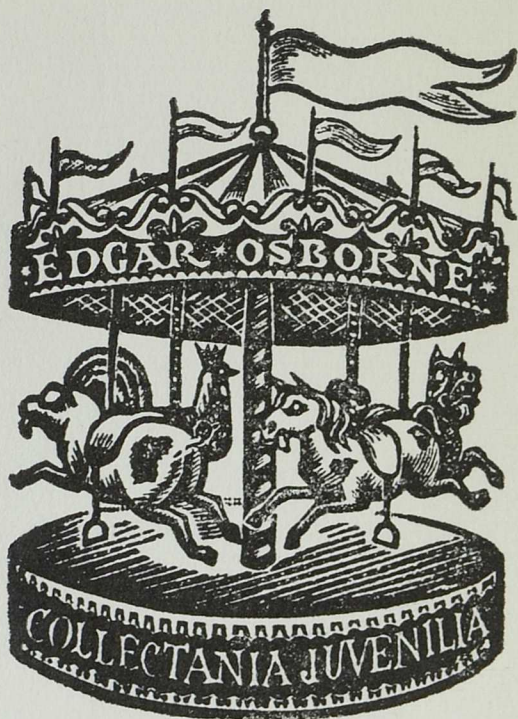
4, ROYAL EXCHANGE;

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THE LOVE-BIRDS.

I KNOW scarcely anything more pleasant than to walk in the fields and woods in fine spring weather, and to see birds of all kinds hopping about on the grass, or flying from tree to tree, and singing as if they enjoyed the warm sunshine, or the shade of the green trees, as much as we ourselves do. Sometimes we may see them picking up feathers and bits of wool or moss, which they carry away in their bills to make the lining of their snug, warm nests. Two sparrows once built their nest in a thorn-hedge in my

garden, and I used very often to go softly and watch the old birds covering their bright green eggs with their wings. At first, whenever I came near, the old bird used to fly away ; but when it found out that I didn't mean to do any harm, it sat quite still, and seemed not to take any notice of me. I think, however, that it was watching me very closely all the while, for its bright sharp eye was always wide open. Perhaps it thought that I did not see it, and it would not fly away lest the fluttering of its wings should make me look round and find its nest. When the young birds were hatched, it was a very pretty sight to watch the old birds bringing home food to their little ones, and putting it into their funny, gaping mouths.

Some birds will sing very sweetly in a cage, and then, although you can come

near enough to them to see the colour of their feathers, yet their song is never so sweet as when they are perched on the branches of trees, or soaring high up in the air. They seem then to be praising God, and thanking Him for making them so happy. I think that it is very wrong to shut up birds in cages, for God gave them wings in order that they might fly about; and it is very cruel, besides, to say to a poor bird, "you shall never fly any more, nor enjoy the fresh air, nor play with your companions," and to coop it up in a prison so small that it has scarcely room to hop about.

If birds could speak, I am sure they would tell you that I am right. But since they cannot speak for themselves, I will tell you a story about two birds which a lady once kept in a smart cage with gilded bars; and when you have

heard it, perhaps you will be able to tell me what *you* think about it.

There was once in a country a long way off, where the weather is always very warm, a great number of parrots of all sizes and colours. They lived in a wood of fruit trees ; and near the wood was a green meadow, through which ran a stream of clear water. Never were birds happier than these were. They used to wake very early in the morning, almost before the sun rose, and fly away to the river, where they chose a place in which the water was not deep. They would then run into the water till their legs were nearly covered, and clap their wings, and dip their heads, till the sparkling drops flew around them like diamonds. When they had had their bath, they would run about on the cool green grass, chasing one another, and

pecking at each other's tails, in play, until they were tired of their sport. Then one would spread his wings and fly back to the wood, and the rest would soon follow him; and there they all breakfasted on the most delicious kinds of fruit, which grew in great plenty on the trees. After breakfast they hopped about on the branches, screaming and chattering to one another in their way, and teaching their young ones to fly, or to pick out the nicest parts of the fruit. Sometimes they took a long flight over the tops of the highest trees, and across the wide fields, until they came to another wood, where lived another flight of parrots as happy as themselves. They generally came home again before the hottest part of the day had begun, and sheltered themselves from the burning sun under the broad leaves, where they

stayed quite still and sometimes had a comfortable doze. When evening came, and the air was cool, they started off for the river again, and had another nice bath and another run in the meadow; and then they went home to supper; after which they went to sleep on the branches without thinking of danger, or dreaming that any one could be so cruel as to wish to harm them.

Now there were among them two small parrots, which, I am sure, you would have liked better than any of the others,—not because they were more beautiful, but on account of their being so loving and kind to one another. They were always together,—they went to the river together,—they played together,—they always divided between them every nice fruit that they found, each wishing the other to have the best part; and

when night came, they perched on the same branch, and went to sleep as close to one another as they could stand. Indeed they were so fond of one another that they were called Love-birds, and they could not have had a better name.

One night when they were fast asleep near the top of a high tree, there came two men with lanterns, and lighted a fire under the tree on which the happy birds were perched, and threw into the fire something which sent up a great smoke. They made very little noise, for fear the birds should awake and fly away; but the smoke soon curled up to the place where the poor birds were perched, and they became so giddy that they fell off from the tree upon the ground as if they had been dead. The men quickly caught them up and put them into a bag, and carried them away. Still, the birds lay

without moving, and did not know what had happened to them : but, by-and-by they awoke and were sadly frightened to find themselves shut up in a dark place, and almost stifled for want of air ; their only comfort being that they were not parted from one another.

In the morning they were taken out of the bag with their smooth green feathers sadly ruffled and soiled, and were sold to a sailor, who placed them in a small dirty cage, and carried them on board his ship. There they were kept for a long time, and had nothing to eat but musty biscuit, and nothing to drink but stale water. O how different from the sweet fruits they used to gather near their homes, and the sparkling river water that flowed through the meadow ! They wondered very much what pleasure the sailor could find in shutting them up in

such a dismal place, and longed to spread their wings once more to the fresh air.

When the ship came to land, they were carried on shore in their cage, and once more sold; but this time they were bought by a lady, who placed them in a large cage with gilded bars. They were now a little better off, for they had room to move about, and could hop on the perches which were placed across the cage. The lady, too, was kinder to them than the sailor had been; for she gave them, in a handsome China saucer, the best food she could get, and clear water in a glass fountain; but the poor birds would rather have lived on sour berries in their own warm, bright, happy woods. They still loved each other as much as ever; so much, indeed, that they were scarcely ever seen on separate perches, but would sit side by side for hours, joining their

little hooked beaks and making a kind of low noise which sounded just as if they were talking. Sometimes their mistress would give one of them a cherry, or a nut, or some other nice thing ; and then the one who took it in his beak held it out to the other, and never tasted a bit until they could eat it together. In fact they were quite as kind to one another as brothers and sisters ought to be, and as I hope you are.

They lived for a long while in this way, but at last one of them became ill ; the joints of her legs grew so stiff, that she could not hop down from the perch to take her food out of the saucer. When the other saw this he used to bring her food in his bill, always choosing for her the pieces which he liked best himself. But in spite of all his care she grew worse, and being put to stand on the

floor of the cage, there she was forced to stay : for though her companion tried a great many times to help her up by taking hold of one of her wings with his beak, it was of no use. When she had grown so ill that she could no longer eat, he took yet greater care of her ; he was always by her side and often brought her the choicest bits of food, and even tried to open her bill to put them into her mouth. It was very sad to see him walking round and round her, watching her most tenderly, sometimes crying out as if he were in great pain himself, and at other times looking at her silently. At last the poor thing died, and very soon afterwards the other died also.

Everybody said that he died of grief ; and I have no doubt that it was so. The lady never kept any more birds in cages, but often wished that the poor

Love-birds had been allowed to live together in their own woods, enjoying the bright sunshine, and feeding on such fruit as they could find on the trees, and flying where they liked.

If I had caught the sparrows who built their nest in my garden, and had put them into a cage with gilded bars, I do not think they would have liked that sort of life half so well as the fresh air of the country, and the green trees, and the happiness of spreading their light wings and flying wherever they liked.

