LIFE IN THE
WALLS.

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THE HEARTH,
AND THE EAVES.

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LIFE IN THE WALLS, THE HEARTH, AND THE EAVES.

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ONCE upon a time, two little creatures made their way into the wall, behind the wainscot of a room in an old country house. They were about two inches long, and had dark grey coats, soft and silky. Their noses were long and pointed, their little eyes bright and twinkling, their little ears stuck up straight and sharp, and they had long tails, and four nimble little feet. We will call them Mr. and Mrs. Mouse. They had come from a neighbouring barn, and were looking for a nice quiet home, in which they might rear and educate a little family.

“Oh, what a nice warm corner !” said Mrs. Mouse, as she ran round and round a little space behind the wainscot, near the old-fashioned fire-place; “how clever of you, dear husband, to find it out.”

“I thought it would do nicely,” said Mr. Mouse, “especially as it’s near the store-closet, and I heard old Mrs. Dosy-cosy say she can’t bear cats, so we’re pretty safe from disturbance in that way.”

“Well ! I’ll set to work at once, if you’ll get me stuff,” said Mrs. Mouse.

“Oh yes, there’s plenty of paper and string in the store-closet ;—I saw it as I came along ; but first I’ll bite off some of these nasty corners for you.” And so saying, Mr. Mouse began to nibble and gnaw, nibble and gnaw at some of the wainscot and wood.

"What in the world is that?" said old Mrs. Dosy-cosy, starting up in her chair, where she had been nodding for an hour, and in her start she knocked her elbow against her work-box, which was on the edge of the table, and threw it down with a loud crash.

"Squ-e-a-ky, squeak! I'm killed, I'm killed!" cried Mrs. Mouse.

"Not just yet, my dear," said Mr. Mouse; "it was only some noise in the room outside! I'll run up and see what it was."

So up scampered Mr. Mouse to the top of the wainscot, where there was a small hole just large enough for his little bright eyes to peep out of, and looking into the room, he saw old Mrs. Dosy-cosy with her candle on the floor, looking for and picking up all the little odds and ends out of her box that

had been scattered in the fall, and it was hard work for her to be stooping over the floor, and it made her pant and grumble very much.

"I do believe," she said, "it was only a nasty mouse behind the wainscot that gave me that start. If I wasn't afraid of the bother of a cat, I would let Meta give me that kitten, just to keep them away. But I'll go down to the Lodge to-morrow, and get her and her mother to come up and stay with me, for I can't stand being alone like this every night."

After Mrs. Dosy-cosy had finished her search and settled her plans, she took up her candle, and trotted off to bed.

"Ah, I see," said Mr. Mouse, as he let himself down again to the warm corner, "I mustn't let that old lady know of our

being here, if I can help it. I'll take care, another night, not to begin work till she's gone to bed; but just now we may do what we like. So now I'll go and get something for our nest," added he to Mrs. Mouse; and off he scampered along the wall, making such a noise with his little feet, you would have thought a canister of shot had been rattled down from the ceiling against it. He was very fortunate in his journeys to the store-closet that night, and many a one did he make before the sound of Mrs. Cosy opening her shutter upstairs warned him to be quiet. First, he found some loose paper, and nibbled at it till he had got off a piece that he could conveniently drag along to his hole, and there he and Mrs. Mouse gnawed and ground it with their little teeth, till it was quite soft

and limp ; then he found some string, and some soft tow, which also they worked and worked at with teeth and claws till it was all formed with the paper into a nice warm nest ; and then, oh, wonder of delights ! did not Mr. Mouse find out that some old feathers had been left forgotten at the back of a shelf, and these he pulled one by one into the hole, and cut them with his little sharp teeth into small pieces, while Mrs. Mouse lined her nice little bed with them till it was so warm and soft and comfortable, that if you had seen it, you would have wished you could creep into it yourself.

“ But now we must have something to eat,” said Mr. Mouse : so off he scampered again to the store-closet. His nose never deceived him, he said, and he was quite sure that

he had smelled some very good biscuits, and also some nice new milk-cheese. There *was* a large bag of biscuits, and he wisely made a hole at the lowest end next the wall, just large enough to get his head in, and gnawed at the last biscuit. It was so good, he said, he must bring Mrs. Mouse to taste it. No sooner said than done; and when they had both taken enough of the biscuit, they looked about for the cheese, and fortunately found it in a very convenient position also, leaning against the wall. It was delicious, they both said. Could it be possible it had been put there expressly for them? But no, that was too good to suppose; they remembered hearing dreadful stories of friends and relations whose lives had been cut short in various ways, owing to their making too free a use of

felt she would sleep better for knowing they were downstairs; so, after her breakfast, she walked down to the Lodge, where they lived, and said,—

“Sarah, I find it very dull work to be up at the house all alone; I wish you would bring the child, and come up and stay with me, and let John come and take his meals, and sleep there at night.”

“Oh yes,” said Sarah, “that’s easily done. Mistress told me, before she went, that I might do it, if you wished, and get the undergardener to keep the Lodge.”

“Come up, then, as soon as you can,” said Mrs. Cosy, “and tell Meta she may bring her kitten; but mind, it must never come up to my room, it must stay down in the kitchen.”

So that evening, by tea-time, Sarah and Meta were settled in Mrs. Dosy-cosy's room, and Meta enjoyed the hot buttered toast and toasted cheese (a bit of the very same cheese Mr. and Mrs. Mouse had regaled on in the morning), with which Mrs. Cosy treated them.

Somebody else enjoyed it too, for the nice smell got in at the hole above the wainscot, and went down into Mr. and Mrs. Mouse's dwelling; and what do you think they had got in that little nest since the morning? No less than six very, very tiny soft pinkish-looking things, that were some day or other to grow into dark-grey hairy little beasts, like Mr. and Mrs. Mouse. Oh, how proud they did feel when they saw these little creatures, and how kind and loving they were to them and to each other!

Mr. Mouse was waiting very impatiently for the moment when he might safely make a visit to the store-closet, to get food for himself and his family, when the savoury smell of the toasted cheese met his little nose, and after thinking a great deal about it, he decided he might venture up to his little window above the wainscot, and see what was going on.

Now, it so fell out that Meta had taken her little bit of toasted cheese and buttered toast to the chimney-corner, and was munching them there very contentedly, while her mother and Mrs. Dosy-cosy were gossiping over their tea.

It was not far from Christmas-time, and the candle was lighted, though it was not five o'clock, and the firelight shone warmly

over the room. Meta's little hand happened to be just above Mr. Mousey's hole, and suddenly a piece of cheese fell from it and dropped on the ledge of the wainscot opposite the hole. The noise it made at first frightened Mr. Mouse very much indeed, and he ran half way down again to the nest, but he was a brave little fellow, and thought to himself,—“Nothing venture, nothing have.” So he came back in a minute and looked again, and seeing all was quiet, he put his little nose out and touched this wonderful white ball, and found it had the same delicious smell that had come down through his staircase. So with that he took hold of it with his little teeth, and gave it a pull, and then another and another, till he got it inside the hole.

Just as Mr. Mouse was pulling the bit of cheese, Meta happened to look down, and as the light shone on the wall, she could clearly see the two little bright eyes and sharp grey nose. She had often seen a mouse before, and thought what funny little things they would be to play with, and now she nearly gave a scream of delight at finding one so near her; but she remembered that any noise might frighten Mr. Mouse away, and besides, she had often heard her mother and Mrs. Cosy say that mice were nasty things, and she feared Mrs. Cosy might stop up the hole if she saw it, and then Mr. Mouse could never come out again; so she sat very quiet, almost holding her breath, while he tugged, and tugged, and tugged at the bit of cheese, till at last it fell down behind

the wainscot, and then, oh, what a supper Mr. and Mrs. Mouse and the six young ones had on it !

This was not the last of the good things that went down behind the wainscot. The next evening Meta did not forget to seat herself beside the hole near the fire-place, and place on the ledge before it a crumb of a nice piece of plum-cake Mrs. Cosy had given her as a great treat. Very soon she had the delight of seeing the little twinkling eyes peering at her, and the bit of cake disappear like the toasted cheese. Next night it was a bit of muffin, for Mrs. Cosy took good care of herself and her friends, and Meta and her mother, and her father when he could join them, were welcome guests with her. Those were bright, merry

evenings for Mr. and Mrs. Mouse, and the six young mice grew apace in their little nest, and often Meta heard games of play going on, as she sat beside the hole in the wainscot, that made her long to look inside and see what they were doing, for "Squ-e-a-ky, squ-e-ak!" the little mice cried as they chased each other round the nest.

Mr. Mouse had an adventure about this time, that very nearly broke up the little family. He came up one evening to look if tea was getting ready, and when he got near his window, instead of little Meta's face, he saw one much smaller,—round, and covered with soft, fluffy white hair, much softer than his own; two hairy ears stood up above the face, and two round and *very* bright eyes, almost as bright as the candle, were staring

in at the hole. Poor Mr. Mouse seemed to lose the power of moving,—his very breath got quick and short, but he at last recovered strength to run back a little way. When he was out of sight of the eyes, he began to think he was a little fool for being so much frightened, and that he should like to go back and see what the eyes were doing. He went back, and there they were still, and there is no saying but he might have been imprudent enough to come a little nearer within reach of a furry white paw, if at that minute Mrs. Dosy-cosy and Meta had not come in.

“Now, Meta,” said Mrs. Cosy, “you know pussy has no business up here: how did she come in?”

“I suppose she followed me up,” said

Meta; "but I'll run down with her to the kitchen."

However, Mrs. Puss did not wait to be taken, for seeing Mrs. Cosy, and knowing she was on forbidden ground, she jumped off her perch on the chair at the hole, and rushed out at the door, followed by Mrs. Cosy with a whi-sh-sh! that made her fly down the back stairs, not stopping to take breath till she got to her own basket, which Meta had given her beside the kitchen hearth; and so Mr. Mouse ate his tea that evening in peace, and Meta, though very fond of pussy, knew her fancies too well to wish to have her upstairs, any more than Mrs. Cosy.

But the little tit-bits that came from Meta, though very delicious, were not enough to

support such a large family as Mr. Mouse's ; so he continued his visits to the store-closet. He did not, however, forget the lesson he learnt the first evening, and took care to watch Mrs. Cosy's movements before he set out on his rounds. So he mounted to his hole, and there he sat till Sarah, having put Meta to bed, came back to wish Mrs. Dosy-cosy good-night, and then she, having finished her nap, usually took up her work, and walked off to bed.

This was the signal for Mr. Mouse to walk off to the store-closet, and many were the good things he found there. There were some packets of grits for making Mrs. Cosy gruel, and the cheese, which, though it was much better toasted, was not to be despised plain. There was generally

a cake and some biscuits, also some tapioca, barley, rice, and sago, and sometimes Mr. Mouse dipped into a pot of jam or jelly, and found it added a relish to other things. But, alas ! alas ! turns of fortune will come to all, and so it proved with poor Mr. Mouse. Clever as he thought himself, in always getting out of sight before Mrs. Cosy could spy him, he could not prevent her finding out that he had been there. The old lady had often grumbled at finding her biscuit and cheese nibbled, and her pots of jam broken into ; but one unlucky night, just before New Year's-day, she had put a first-rate plum-cake, made with her own hands, with the greatest care, to get cool and ready to cut on New Year's evening, when she meant to have a little party of her particular friends.

What should Mr. Mouse know about New Year's-day cakes? He only thought himself more fortunate than usual, and, "making hay while the sun shone," he did not leave the store-closet that morning till he had made a hole in the cake nearly as big as himself. "Oh," said Mrs. Cosy, as she took out the cake at tea-time to put it on the table, "those nasty horrid mice have been in the store-room again. I won't put off setting the trap another night. To think of their spoiling this beautiful cake I have taken such pains with!"

So that night, Mr. Mouse, when he went to the store-closet, smelled a very savoury smell of toasted cheese, and soon found that it came from the inside of a little box, that stood with the door or side open, very

conveniently placed for him to enter. Mr. Mouse stood at the door and considered. He had heard it was dangerous to go into open boxes—he had been told by some old relations that they had known instances in which, when mice did so, they had never come out; so, though the cheese was very inviting, he resolutely turned from it, and made himself contented with rice and biscuit; but the next night, poor little mousy! what did he find? the rice, biscuits, sago, jam,—all was gone, and nothing remained but the open box, and just inside, was not only the toasted cheese, but a bit of the very plum-cake that had so enticed him two nights before. It cost Mr. Mouse several moments of anxious thought what he should do, and he ended in taking two or three rapid scampers round the

room, in the vain hope of finding some safer food ; but no, he came back to the suspicious box, and there he stood. How could he go back empty-mouthed to Mrs. Mouse and the six young ones crying for food ? How could they all wait hungry till Meta's tea-time ? and if they did, her little morsel would not satisfy them all. No ; it *must* be done ; and besides, was not the food *just* inside the door ? and he could snap it away very quick before the box had time to shut. Poor, poor Mr. Mouse ! he *did* run in ; but even before he had seized one bit in his mouth, clap went the door, and he was a fast prisoner inside the box.

Poor Mrs. Mouse and the young ones must now wait a long, long time in vain. Round and round he ran, to try and find a hole for escape ; nibble, nibble went his little teeth,

to try and make one ; but steel wires met him on every side, and so the night passed away, and at last Mrs. Cosy's step was heard at the door. "O, ho ! I have caught you at last, you mischievous thief," said she, as she took up the trap. "Here, John, take this plague of a mouse away, and drown it, or put it out of the way somehow."

"Oh, please, please don't, Mrs. Cosy," cried Meta, who had followed her into the room, for she had heard the threat about the mouse-trap, and had felt uneasy about her little pet ; "oh, don't have the dear pretty little mouse killed."

"What nonsense, child !" said Mrs. Cosy ; "why, what's the matter ?" for Meta began to cry sadly. "The idea of keeping such vermin in the house ! Take it away, John,"

she added to Meta's father, who already had it in his hand.

"Don't you remember how it ate up Mrs. Copsy's nice New Year's cake?" said John.

"Oh! it may have all my cake," said Meta, sobbing, "only let it live. I'm sure it's the same mouse that comes to me to be fed every evening at tea-time at the top of the wainscot;" and as she spoke she looked into the trap, where Mr. Mouse was still whirling round and round, feeling more frightened than ever, and wondering what was going to befall him.

"Well! did you ever hear the like of that?" said Mrs. Copsy. "I would do a great deal to please the child; but really, to leave a creature to go on eating up everything in the store-room, is more than I feel it right to do."

Whether Meta in her grief knocked against her father, or whether he was moved by her tears, or whether it was a pure accident, will never be known, but certain it is, that just at the last minute the mouse-trap fell out of John's hands, the door burst open, and, oh ! joy to Meta and Mr. Mouse, he sprang nimbly out, and, before Mrs. Cosy could cry " Jack Robinson ! " he had whisked his long tail out of sight, and was on his way to the nest behind the wainscot. It mattered little to Mrs. Mouse that he came back without any food. His long absence had taken away her appetite, and now the delight of seeing him safe back again was as good as breakfast to her. Meta ran away and hid her face, for she could not help laughing for joy. She did not know that her father and Mrs. Cosy were laughing

too, not ill pleased, after all, that mousy had escaped. All that morning Mrs. Cosy and Sarah busied themselves with putting everything in the store-closet into boxes and tins, for Mrs. Cosy said, if she did not leave out anything the mice would eat, perhaps they would give up coming, and that would be better than catching them for Meta to cry over.

It was a long, long time that evening before Mr. Mouse felt himself equal to venturing up as usual to his little window, but at last he did so, and found that kind little Meta had put a much larger supply of food ready for him, to show her pleasure at his escape, and also, perhaps, because she knew he would no longer find much in the store-room. There was cake and toast, and even fried potato,

which was quite as delicious to his thinking as the plum-cake and cheese, and from that time Meta continued her support, and had the pleasure of seeing Mr. Mouse's little nose and bright eyes every evening peeping from behind the wainscot, until he and Mrs. Mouse, having brought up all their family, and sent them abroad to seek their fortunes, and finding the supplies of the store-closet shut up from them, left the corner to seek a home elsewhere.

LIFE ON THE HEARTH.

Life on the Hearth.

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You may remember that, when pussy fled from Mrs. Dosy-cosy's angry looks, she took refuge in her basket beside the kitchen hearth, and there she sat, feeling, I am sorry to say, very much out of temper. She had half a mind to go out of the house and leave them altogether, she said; but then "it was very cold and stormy, and she was not sure where she might find a bed," so she stayed on grumbling to herself.

"It was *very* hard," she said, "when mice were made on purpose to catch and eat, that she should be driven away in that manner, as if she had done something naughty. She was sure a mouse would have come out of that hole in another minute, if Mrs. Dosy-cosy hadn't been so cross, and Meta too;"—

but there she stopped. She had never had an unkind thought about Meta before, and her conscience pricked her.

"Well, perhaps Meta could not help her being whisked away, but anyhow it was very disagreeable."

Just at that moment a sound from the other side of the hearth, such as she had often heard before, made her prick up her ears. "Chirrup, chirrup," it said; and then from behind her came another "Chirrup, chirrup!" *Pounce* went pussy this way, and clap went her paws on nothing but the stone floor. *Pounce* she went the other way, and knocked her nose against the fender.

"This won't do," she said, "*I must catch you.*"

"Catch me if you can," said merry Mr. Cricket; and with a hop, skip, and jump he leapt right over pussy's head, and joined his friend behind her.

"Tiresome beast, you're worse than Mrs. Cosy," said pussy to herself.

Now you must know that pussy and the crickets were old friends, or rather enemies, and had had many games of hide-and-seek before this time.

Early in the winter or autumn a new stove had been put into the old kitchen fireplace, and when it was all finished, when nobody was looking, some brave little crickets who smelled the nice new soft plaster, had flown in at the window, and quietly made homes for themselves out of everyone's sight round the warm fireplace.

I never was in a cricket's hole, so I cannot tell you what it is like, but I believe it is nice and round and smooth, just large enough for the cricket to live in, and that they always choose soft plaster or earth to make their holes in, because they can scoop it out more

easily with their little strong legs. Did you ever see a cricket? They are a little larger than grasshoppers. Their bodies are about as long as the Daddy-long-legs, only much fatter and of a grey colour. They have four short legs, and two great big long ones behind them, with which they can take high jumps in the air, dozens of times higher than themselves. They have two little wings that stick up over their backs, and they have a clever way of rubbing these together, by which, it is said, they make the funny chirping noise we hear, as they spring about the hearth. Each little cricket has a house of its own, for they are very independent, and like to have their own way in everything, and the Mrs. Crickets make a great many nurseries for their children, who come out of eggs just as chickens do, only the crickets don't sit on the eggs, like the kind pretty little hens. They leave

their eggs to be hatched by the heat of the fire, and, as they do not choose to stay with them to take care of them, they put some of the eggs in one little room, and some in another, and some in a third, and so on, in order that if any harm happened to one set, the others might be safe.

They keep very quiet all day, and, as soon as everything is still in the evening, they sit each in the door of his little house, and begin to chirp to each other, and I think what they mean to say is, "Chirrup, chirrup, are all the folk gone to bed yet?" "Chirrup, chirrup, is there anything good left for us to eat?" and if the cook is not very careful to clean and put away all her pans, the crickets soon jump into them and make their supper off the grease they may find in them.

Now, as soon as Meta brought pussy up to the house, the crickets found they could

not amuse themselves as comfortably as before. When pussy laid down beside the hearth, sometimes her long whiskers would touch the opening of a cricket's hole, then out rushed the cricket to see who dared to come and disturb him, and often pussy made short work with him and ate him up. So a few crickets disappeared every evening. This did not make the other crickets very unhappy, because, as they did not live together, they did not miss each other, but those that escaped liked to tease pussy for giving them such a fright, and to-night they were very lively indeed, and crowds of crickets came jumping out of their holes when they heard their companions' voices, some to pussy's right, some to the left, some hopped under her nose, some on her back, chirping so loudly that Mrs. Cosy might have heard them in her room upstairs.

Some were bent on fun and teasing pussy, others thought more about what they could get to eat; but it was all one to pussy, and whenever she caught one she gobbled him up and he was seen no more.

Now it happened that a fine large fat cricket had jumped to the side of a saucepan in the fender that had been used to make some gruel for Mrs. Dossy-cosy, who had a cold that evening. Smelling something good, he crept to the top, and was just going to take a spring inside, when pussy spied him, made a dart at him, and caught him by his long left leg. For a moment, what a struggle there was!

Pussy's grip was tight; the cricket tried to jump, when—can you guess? oh! shocking to tell—off came the leg in pussy's mouth, and down dropped the cricket into the saucepan. I hope it did not hurt him quite so much as it would you or me, if we met

with such an accident; at least, I know it did not kill him, for he is alive now, looking rather pale, but fat and well. I believe he refreshed himself with the scrapings of gruel, and crawled back feebly towards his home on the hearth; and what a sight for all the other crickets! They were so frightened at seeing a cricket short of a leg, that they rushed into their holes, and the poor lame cricket crept along as well as he could, and as he went he looked in at his friends and said, "Take warning by me, my friends, and keep indoors till that hairy monster is out of sight. From love of gruel I've lost my leg, and it isn't pleasant to be half eaten, I can tell you. It's my belief she has eaten hundreds of us to-night; but we're sure to disagree with her, that's one comfort."

Next day was washing-day, and Mrs. Cosy and Sarah had engaged a woman from the

village to come and help, and in she came as soon as it was daylight. When she went to the fireplace to light the fire, what should she spy in a corner but the one-legged cricket, who was resting himself, not able to get farther.

“Look here, Meta,” she said, “here’s such a queer cricket, nearly white, and with only one long leg.” Meta stooped down to look, and saw the cricket was alive, but moving very slowly. “Poor thing!” she said, “it must have been hurt. Don’t touch it, Mrs. Giles, please, I’ll get some fresh butter, and see if it will eat.”

“Well, well, to be sure,” said Mrs. Giles, “going to nurse a cricket, are you? that beats all, though indeed I wouldn’t kill one, if I could help it, for it brings great ill luck if you do.”

How it brings ill luck to kill a cricket, Mrs. Giles could not, very likely, have told you, but she had heard it all her life, so she

believed it. *We* know there is no such thing really as good or bad luck ; but I think the secret is, that when people hurt or kill any harmless creatures for no good reason, it shows a nasty unfeeling sort of temper, and people who have such a temper don't find things go on so smoothly and pleasantly all about them, as good, kind people do.

So Meta brought a pin's point of butter on some bread, and left it by the cricket, and in doing so she found some dead bodies of crickets, that pussy had found it too troublesome to swallow, and then she looked at pussy and saw she was very dull, and found she would eat no breakfast, and when she told her father, he said, "I daresay she has been eating crickets all night. She will sicken and die if she goes on with it."

Poor pussy was very sick all day ; even Mrs. Cosy was sorry for her, and gave Meta

some medicine for her. After that she was better, and then John found a nice place in an outhouse near the house, where he made a comfortable nest of straw, and there pussy was taken to sleep every night, and let out in the morning. So she got well and merry again, and the crickets were left to play their pranks in peace. Meta was always on the watch for the poor lame cricket, who could not jump like the others. She knew him directly by his looking so pale, even when she could not see his one leg, and she used to put crumbs of dripping and meal in his way. I am afraid the cricket was not so sensible as to feel grateful for Meta's kindness, but he was of use to her without knowing it, and so made a return to her for it.

One evening Meta's father had given her some spelling to learn, and she sat by the fire with the book in her hand, thinking how

much nicer it would be to play with pussy, and each time she spelt over the words they seemed to go out of her head, and she was very near putting away the book and saying she could not do it, when she observed the lame cricket trying to crawl up the side of the fireplace, and every time he got to a certain place he fell back. Again and again he tried, till Meta counted he had done it six times. Once more he set to work, and this time he got triumphantly to the top.

“Why shouldn’t I try my spelling as often?” said Meta to herself; so she took up her book and set her mind on learning her lesson with all her might; and the happy result was, that when her father came home, she was able to say it quite perfectly, and he was so pleased with her, that he played with her and pussy and told her some delightful stories about dogs and cats till she went to bed.

I cannot tell you what the stories were which Meta's father told her, but perhaps it will be more to the purpose to relate what went on on the hearth, after the time of which we have been talking, between our little friend pussy, and a new inmate of the kitchen.

Mrs. Dosy-cosy was made very nervous one day by reports of housebreaking in the neighbourhood, and John took advantage of her fears to get leave to bring in a favourite dog named Pointer, which he had left at the Lodge. Mrs. Dosy-cosy willingly agreed, on condition that he should stay, like pussy, in the kitchen; so Pointer was admitted to the kitchen-hearth, and about the same time pussy presented to Meta two dear little kittens, and was therefore more constantly than before in her basket on the hearth, where she seemed never tired of nursing and purring over them. It was a pretty sight,

of taking him on her lap, and he should enjoy the same favour as pussy. So, without more ado, he proceeded to get in. Now Pointer was, as you may guess from his name, three or four times as large as pussy, and though the basket was a roomy one for her, it was no easy matter for him to get in. First, he got all four legs in, and turned round and round several times to find out the easiest way of sitting down; then down went his hind legs, then his right shoulder; but oh, what a squeeze! the basket stretched to its fullest extent, and he had never felt so uneasy in his life.

Still he *was in*, that was some comfort, all except his left paw up to the elbow, and do what he would he could not twist it down. Oh! if he could only get it in before anyone saw him; they surely would think he had grown as little as pussy; he should hear Meta say so, and propose to take him on her

lap; that would more than make up to him for all he was now suffering, and certainly pride was never more pinched. But that tiresome left paw was still stuck out when a step was heard at the door, and Sarah entered the kitchen. She took a quick look at the basket, then another, and then came and stood opposite and stared at him in silence.

Now for his triumph. Surely she was convinced, but—could it be? What did she mean by laughing right out in his face? Was it wonder at the change? or was it his foolish paw, that showed her how dreadfully he was squeezed? He did not like it, but he would wait, he thought. She ran to the door and called aloud,—“Meta, Meta, where are you? Oh, Mrs. Dosy-cosy, do come for a minute.”

“Yes, yes. She was going to tell them of the great change in him.” In they both

came; but, alas! it was now too plain, only to laugh; he thought they would never stop, and he heard the word "jealousy" more than once. "Jealousy of the cat!" *He* jealous of that little minx! that was all he got for his pains, though it was love for Meta that had made him endure so much; but he could bear it no longer, he must get out, his plan had quite failed. But the getting out was almost as hard as the getting in. His feet were all asleep and his back ached, but when Meta saw him struggling, she knelt down beside him, and helped him, and petted him more than she had ever done, and when he was fairly out she sat down on the hearth and took his head on her lap and stroked it, and though she had laughed at first, seemed to understand his feelings better than anyone else. So he was comforted, and at supper she saved a nice morsel for him and brought

it to him when pussy had her milk, and thus, on the whole, he bore better than he could have expected, seeing pussy come in and sniff her basket over and over, as if she found out by the smell that he had been in it, and was turning up her nose at it.

But Pointer was a sensible dog in the main, though he had his failings, and finding there was no help for it but that he and pussy *must* put up with each other, he resolved to make advances to her, and be on a more friendly footing. Accordingly, the next evening when they were sitting together, and the young people were asleep in the basket, he said to her, "Pussy, I've been thinking there's no earthly use in our scowling at each other as we do. Here we are, and here we must stay, unless one of us were to leave a mistress whom we both dearly love. Now would it not be much

more pleasant if we lived together as friends instead of enemies?"

Pussy took a long time to think over anything, but when she did come to a conclusion it was usually just and generous; so she ended after a few minutes in a gush of low gentle purring. This was very pleasing to Pointer, and he drew a little nearer, wagged his tail, and laying his head between his paws, looked up winningly in her face. Pussy responded by stretching out her graceful little neck without changing her position, till her nose touched Pointer's nose. Her good-will was unmistakeable, and their friendship was sealed.

"Now tell me, pussy," said Pointer, "is there anything I can do for you, to prove the sincerity of my friendship? I know it was silly of me the other evening to fancy that by getting into your basket I could get treated

the same as you, still I think there may be some things in which we may act together."

"Well, to tell the truth," said pussy, and hesitated:—

"Bring it out," said Pointer encouragingly; "I see you have something on your mind by the way you look into the fire."

"I have one anxiety," said she, and glanced at the basket.

"You mean about your kittens; you surely don't suspect me at this time of day?"

"Not for a moment, from any bad intention; but, my good friend, you know, now that they are getting older, I feel it good for my health to take a walk now and then."

"Yes, and pretty long ones," said Pointer; "I heard Meta calling you till she was tired the other night."

"Well, as I was saying," continued pussy, "it would be a great relief to my mind, for

you know I'm very nervous, to be quite sure that,—that you wouldn't lie down on them by accident, quite by accident, of course, while I'm out, and if you would sometimes let them lean against you when they are cold, and so on."

"Well," said Pointer, "that last is a good deal to ask; the first I would promise to remember to the best of my power, and there's not much chance of my overlooking them, for they're almost always playing about like 'a corn o' sma' fules,' as the old Scotch miller would say, but I'll do my best to put up with them. You may trust me, indeed"—and Pointer was better than his word, for he found the kittens so engaging, once he began to look kindly at them, and they were not afraid of him, that at last he even allowed them to play with his tail, and one might often be seen lying asleep on his

back, and the other between his paws. Pussy and he became even affectionate friends, so that if Pointer was at any time uncomfortable, pussy could not be at ease. One day Pointer had been tempted to follow pussy's example and take a long ramble by himself, and this was not allowed, as there were some woods near, and he might have got into mischief. When he returned, therefore, he was severely found fault with, and sent to lie under the kitchen-table; but pussy was in sore distress, and when everything was quiet she went up to him, touched noses with him, and licked his ears and forehead as she did to her kittens,—a token of sympathy and kindness which he accepted gratefully.

One evening, after they had been dozing awhile by the fire, Pointer pricked up his ears at a footstep he thought he heard outside, and ran to the window and barked. After listening for a minute he found it was

a false alarm, and returned to his seat at the fire, asking pussy to forgive the unusual noise which had startled her out of a sound sleep; "but," he said, "you know it is my duty to be on the watch against intruders, and that is a duty which with all your good qualities you could not fulfil."

"Certainly it is more in your way than mine," said she, "but as we are both awake, I could tell you a tale showing that cats may sometimes display faithful vigilance over their master's property."

"I should be delighted to hear it," said Pointer.

"What I am about to tell you happened to my grandmother," said pussy. "Her home was with a kind family a long way from this place. She was very much valued, for she had a sweet, gentle temper, so quiet that she used to be called Serena. She always slept in the kitchen; there were no

crickets in that house," added pussy with a sigh, "to make it bad for her to do so. The house was in a town, a very quiet one, so that they were not particular about securing the doors and windows. One summer's night she was dozing by the fire, when she distinctly heard a back window which was not far from the ground slowly lifted; this roused her attention, though it was evidently not a mouse. Then the door into the kitchen was opened, and she saw enter a woman, whom she knew to be a beggar of the lowest description."

"Didn't she fly at her throat?" asked Pointer eagerly.

"You forget, my dear friend, her size; the woman could have stunned her with a blow."

"True," said Pointer, "but oh! that I had been there!"

"The situation was very grave," continued pussy.

"The situation--do you mean the place

where she was sitting? how so?" asked Pointer.

"The situation was grave," repeated pussy. "I can't speak plainer; I mean it was a very anxious state of things."

"Oh! I see, pray go on," said Pointer.

"The woman had evidently come with some dark design. The plate-closet was inside the kitchen, grandmother's quick eye saw that the door into the middle of the house was ajar, she darted through it and began to mew."

"That wouldn't frighten anybody much, I should think," said Pointer with a suppressed laugh. "I mean, it wouldn't scare the thief, much less rouse the household."

"I beg your pardon," said pussy; "the advantage of having a character for great quickness is, that when you do get agitated, people are sure to think there's some good cause for it. Grandmother ran upstairs mewling louder and louder till her voice

became an agonised wail. Her master and mistress knew directly that something very uncommon was going on. The gentleman got up and opened the door, and as he did so he heard the sound of a silver spoon falling on the floor downstairs. He hastened down and caught the thief in the pantry. He knew her by sight as a suspicious character who got her living by begging, but as she implored him to let her off and had not had time to take anything away, owing to grandmother's noble conduct, he satisfied himself with seeing her off the premises, and returned upstairs, where grandmother was reaping the reward of her fidelity by reposing on her mistress's bed. For many years after that she lived honoured, and died lamented, and her memory is cherished as an example of the devotion and cleverness of which cats are capable."

"Most interesting, truly, my dear friend," said Pointer, "and I may say instructive, for

while you have been relating it, I have drawn this lesson from the story, that, while we each have particular duties and powers suited to enable us to perform them, we ought not to think it impossible for others sometimes to take our place, nor grudge them the praise they justly deserved when they have had the opportunity of doing what is specially our own work ; but as long as I live, dear pussy, you may depend on it you will never have to defend yourself, for I consider you no less than the house as under my protection, and woe to man or dog who might hurt a hair in your body !”

Pussy responded to this touching speech in her usual expressive way by a murmur of satisfaction, and turning under her pretty soft paws, lay gently down till her face was close to Pointer's, as if to show her grateful confidence, and by her quiet song lulled both him and herself to sleep.

LIFE IN THE EAVES.

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CHAPTER I.

“So you’re come at last,” said one little brown bird to another, as he hopped down beside her under the chimney-stack on the roof of the old manor house. “I thought you were never coming, and I have sat here moping myself stupid for the last hour. How could you be so long?”

“Why, you see, dear,” said the other, “I found so much to do. I saw the Pirkys, and Pickys, and Peckys, and some more of our friends, all going together to one part of the garden, and I followed them, and found the

gardener had just been sowing some fresh grass seed, on purpose for us, of course, and I couldn't lose the chance, as the others would have eaten it all up if I had come back for you, before we could have got to the ground again together. Oh! it was so good! I'll be on the look-out and tell you the first thing, as soon as I see him sow anything again, and we'll be the first on the spot, you and I."

"I don't want anything, I'm sure: you may have it all yourself, I can find my own food," said the cross little bird.

This was not at all nice or pretty, you see, for crossness is very ugly, even in a bird.

Mr. Cocktail, as we may call the sparrow, for his tail stuck out so straight and sharp, hopped about and pretended not to see his wife was in such bad humour—perhaps the best thing he could do, and presently a number of

his friends came and perched on another chimney close by, all chattering very fast and seeming much taken up about something, and he thought he had better go and see what it was; and while he is so engaged we may take a look at him.

His feathers were, for the most part, a pretty brown striped with black, and the top of his head a kind of blue grey; he had little yellow and white streaks on his wings, a patch of white on his cheeks, and a pretty light grey waistcoat. He had a stout little body and legs for such a little bird, and a thick strong beak, which, I am afraid, he was naughty enough to use rather often in his quarrels with other sparrows like himself. Mrs. Cocktail was not unlike him, only the top of *her* head was of a brownish-grey colour, and there was a line of pale yellow over her eyes.

When Cocktail had joined their friends

Mrs. Cocktail began to feel it dull to be alone ; so, shaking off her crossness, she joined the party, and soon was as lively as any of them.

“ How many worms did you find this morning ? ” said one.

“ Oh ! plenty. I’m nearly choked,” said the other, “ the sun brought them all out so nicely.”

“ Ah ! I’ve found a rosebush all over caterpillars’ eggs,” said a third.

“ Oh, where ? where ? where ? ” shrieked a dozen voices.

“ Not going to tell,” said he ; “ you’ll go and eat them all up.”

“ Take that, for an ill-natured thing,” said a neighbour, giving him a peck.

“ Never mind,” said the others. “ We’ll watch him and follow.”

“ I’m going to build in this chimney-corner,” said a little hen.

“No, you can’t,” said her neighbour; “I’ve chosen it.”

“But I *will*,” said the first; and with that there was such an uproar, you would have thought a dozen cats were among them, for some took one side and some the other, till, all at once, some crumbs of bread were shaken out of a window below, on the ground.

“Look,” said Cocktail to Mrs. Cocktail, glad to make up for his neglect of the morning; and down they flew, followed by the whole flight of sparrows, and happily there were nearly enough crumbs to satisfy all. And then, as evening was coming on and perches had to be chosen, with still more struggling, and scolding, and shoving, and pushing, and chirping, the whole party retired to rest, to wake with the first glimpse of daylight to the great business of the year, choosing sites for nests.

The Cocktails at last succeeded, after many struggles, in getting to themselves a chimney which they thought was just the place for them, so nicely surrounded on all sides. "To be sure it was rather deep, but that was easily mended," they said, "with a little labour." So they set to work, and most busily did they bring mouthful after mouthful of hay and straw and fine twigs of trees and shrubs to fill up the hole to the right height for their nest. But it was very strange! however much they carried, the hole never filled up. They would sit on the top and peer down, first with one eye and then with the other, but could see nothing in the darkness. At last, one day Mr. Cocktail fancied he did see some sign of its filling up, and thought the hay was getting a little nearer to the top. Next morning he said, he would step down upon it and see how it felt. Poor

Cocktail! he did not know what had happened inside the house. Mrs. Dosy-cosy, being very fond of neatness, had spied some few bits of straw lying on the hearth of the room to which the chimney belonged, and which happened to be the one Meta slept in, and looking up she saw the great mass the Cocktails had collected. "Well, I never! did you ever?" she exclaimed to Sarah. "Who would ever have thought," said Sarah, "that those little birds could bring such a load together; and with that she put her hand up above the grate and brought down all the Cocktails' work, which, all tangled together, reached from the bottom nearly to the top of the chimney, it not being very high. "I couldn't have believed it if I had not seen it," added she.

Next morning, after a good deal more chirping and hopping and fluttering than

usual, the little birds jumped on the edge of the chimney to look at their work. "I'll just step down and feel it," said Mr. Cocktail; and with that he popped in, but, oh! horror of horrors, there was nothing to stand upon, and the chimney was so narrow that he could not lift himself by his wings, which only fluttered helplessly. After each flutter down he went farther and farther into the black hole till he was quite lost to sight. "Cocktail's lost," "Cocktail's gone down," shrieked all the other sparrows, and fluttered and hopped and screamed all at once, so that not one could hear what another said, while poor Mrs. Cocktail sat on the chimney edge, looking down into the darkness and squeaking her little throat out.

Meantime, what was become of Cocktail?

It was a beautiful spring morning; but though the sun was shining brightly through

the window little Meta was still asleep, for it was not later than five or six o'clock. In her sleep she dreamt that the wind was making a loud noise in the chimney, and it grew louder and louder, for Cocktail's wings fluttering as he came down had the effect of a rushing sound in the chimney like wind. Suddenly Meta felt something fly quickly over her face, and she gave a little scream, for it startled her, and she could not think what it was. Her mother heard her, and came running in. "What is the matter, Meta?" she said. "Oh, mother," said Meta, "there is some creature in the room; what can it be?"

Just then Sarah spied Cocktail under a chair, where he had fallen down exhausted, and was panting for breath.

"Why, it's a poor little sparrow," said Sarah. "It must be the one that has been building its nest in the chimney. I will let

it out at the window ; it must be in a great fright, poor little bird ! ”

With that she drew up the blind and opened the window, and Cocktail, clever enough to see in a minute his chance of escape, and having by this time recovered his breath, spread his little wings, and to Meta's great delight flew straight up and out at the window.

When he appeared outside, he found the sparrows still screaming and chirping, and Mrs. Cocktail looking down the chimney ; but, much to his surprise, they would not look at him, when he hopped down beside them. The fact was, he was so covered with soot that had fallen on him in his journey down the chimney, that he looked quite black, and even his dear little wife did not know him. It was not until he chirped that they would believe it was the real Cocktail, and after a while

he himself began to feel there was something very odd the matter with his feathers. Seeing a large puddle in the gravel walk he went and popped into the very middle of it, and gave himself a good wash, after which he was quite cheerful, and flew with Mrs. Cocktail to look for some breakfast. Happily, they lighted on a fine fat caterpillar that had come out to bask in the sun for a little, and he made a meal for them both.

When breakfast-time came, Meta's father asked her what she had screamed for in the morning, and her mother told him what had happened, and how she had let the sparrow out of the window. He then asked her if she would like to look into a sparrow's nest, and of course she said she wished it of all things. "Very well," said John, "you must wait a little, and give them time to get over the fright they had to-day; but I'm much

mistaken if there won't be a nest just under the gable of the house. You won't be able to look right into it, for house sparrows always make a little lid to cover the nest, but you can watch them building."

That afternoon Meta thought she would watch the sparrows, and see what they were doing, so she took her little bit of knitting, and sat down at a window that looked over the gable her father had spoken of, which was not far below the chimney down which poor Cocktail had fallen. You may guess they had both given up, with one consent, trying to build their nest in a deep hole. "They had had enough of that," they said, for, like most sensible people, they had gained a little wisdom from experience.

There was a small ledge formed by the top of a leaden pipe, on which they found they could lay the foundation of their nest,

and it was sheltered by the overhanging roof. Happily for Meta, by climbing up into a high recess in front of the old window, she could get a view of the spot. At first, when her little face was seen, the Cocktails set up a loud shriek and fled, but she remained quite still, and presently, first one, and then the other, returned, hopping and peeping and chirping, and seeing no prospect of danger, they crept under cover of the eaves. By-and-by up flew Mr. Cocktail with a mouthful of twigs, which with many flourishes he twisted into a sort of groundwork; then came Mrs. Cocktail with some bits of straw and a large piece of flue out of the dusthole; then came some odds and ends of paper, wool, and one or two hen's feathers; and this went on all the afternoon: but though there was a great deal of fussy chirping and fluttering, Meta could not see exactly what

they were doing, as they were under the shelter of the roof,—only once, when they had both flown away, she saw, by stretching her neck a long way out, that they had made what looked to her like a heap of rubbish, and that was a tile covered over at the top with a kind of lid, and that there was only a small opening for them to creep in at. By the time the Cocktails had struck work for the day, and with the other sparrows had gone to roost with all their usual bustle, Meta's tea was ready, but she made up her mind to bring her work to the same window every day and watch them.

She told her father, when he came in, what her afternoon's amusement had been, and he said he was very glad to hear that some of the sparrows had been so lawfully engaged, for others had been so impertinent as to hop at his very heels while he had

been sowing vegetable seed in the garden, trying to pick it up as fast as he put it in; "but I have been even with them," he said, "for I have spread branches of furze all over it, and they'll be clever if they get through it."

"Well, I never heard of a gardener but yourself," said Mrs. Cosy, "that wouldn't shoot the sparrows, and rout out their nest, and try and get rid of them in any way. I never saw such a man as you are for dumb animals."

"I think, Mrs. Dossy-cossy," said John, "you would have heard of a good many more, if all gardeners had learnt as well as I, how much more good than harm those little birds do. I'm not going to say they don't do mischief—far from it—the little sneaks watch me with their sharp bright eyes, and are behind me in a moment when I have sown

any seed; but just look you what would happen if they weren't there. Why, all our rose-bushes would be eaten up with caterpillars, just as the seedlings would be devoured with slugs if there were no thrushes and blackbirds to keep them down. I saw in a newspaper the other day that a gentleman had had as many as 118 sparrows shot just to find out what they lived on, and when they looked inside them they found 115 had been eating nothing but insects, beetles, and grubs of all kinds and their eggs, and I have heard that the folk out in Australia would give their ears for them, if they could get them."

"How is it all gardeners don't know their use, then?" asked Sarah.

"Why, just because a good many people won't look beyond their noses," answered John. "They see the sparrows eat the seeds, but they don't see them catch the insects, so they make

up their minds they don't do it, and nothing but experience would make them believe it. I was told once that the great king Frederick of Prussia thought them so mischievous he put a price on their heads and had them all shot down, but in a little time after, the trees were so covered with caterpillars and other insects, that they were stripped bare of both fruit and leaves, and the king had to give quite another order, and command them to be brought from all parts."

"My first place," continued John, "was with a gentleman who thought a deal about animals, and I'm very glad I knew him, for he gave me many thoughts I have never forgotten. He used to say, if men only believed in the wisdom of God in making all things, they wouldn't be so ready to fancy this creature and that was of no use but to be destroyed. Of course, he would say, things

are out of joint in the world as it now is; still, there's a great deal left as it was in the day when 'God saw everything that He had made, and, behold! it was very good,' and where it is not so, he would add, you'll generally find it's because man has meddled with it. 'We can't help killing animals,' he used to say, 'but it's well to remember that it was only after the flood man was given leave to do it for his own support, and that God thought so much about the creatures He had made, and the life He had given, as to give a law to man about it.' He had other notions about the life of animals that might sound queer to some people, but when he put it before you all right and straight, it was hard to say no to it. 'Yet,' he would say, 'I'm not going to lay down the law about that or anything else we know so little about,—all I say is, we do know very little, so don't

let us talk as if we knew everything.' He said, we needn't expect to find anything told us in the Bible but what concerns the salvation of our souls, and how we may best serve and glorify Him who created and redeemed us, but it does tell us that the same God who gave us life and being has given the beasts whatever kind of life they have, with powers of enjoyment and suffering, and for His sake let us try and keep them from the last as much as we can, for it's through our sin they know anything at all about it."

"Well," said Mrs. Cosy, "I daresay it's because we don't think, that we do a good many things, only when they come very much in our way it does try one's patience, like those mice, and one can't always stop to remember all those grand reasons for not killing creatures."

"Oh," said John, "my master never said it

wasn't needful to kill animals sometimes. He only thought people were a great deal too fond of doing it!"

"For my part," said Sarah, "there's one reason why I always like little birds, specially sparrows. It says in the Bible, that not one of them falls to the ground without God's will, and often when I find it so hard to believe that the Almighty thinks of a poor ignorant woman like me, that verse comes to my mind, and I think, Well! surely, if He thinks about sparrows He doesn't forget me, and it is so nice to feel that."

"That's just what master used to say," said John, "that there are no such words as 'great' and 'little' with God. All things have their place with Him. He was very fond of that verse I was teaching you last Sunday, Meta. Can you say it?"

"Yes, father," said Meta; "it was this,—

‘Who is like unto the Lord our God, that hath His dwelling so high; and yet humbleth Himself to behold the things that are in heaven and in the earth?’”

“And do you remember what I told you it should make us feel?” said her father.

“You said that God is so very, very great, that everything is very small in His eyes, and yet He does not despise anything He has made, however little it is.”

“Yes,” said her father; “and the heart of God is so large, that there is room in it for all things, and a little thing hasn’t to be pushed to one side to make room for a greater thing, as it is in our little hearts, for He can think of all at once, and He can watch over and care for the smallest of His creatures, just while He is ordering the greatest events of the world.”

CHAPTER II.

I SUPPOSE now you would like to know what went on in the nest under the eaves.

Mr. and Mrs. Cocktail looked with great pleasure at their handywork, or I should say, rather, their beak-and-claw work, "and," said Mr. Cocktail to Mrs. Cocktail, "my dear, I think it only needs now to be shaped and pressed round, which no one can do so well as yourself." Mrs. Cocktail felt pleased at this little compliment, and squeezed herself in at the little hole at the top, and worked herself round and round the nest till it was

all made smooth and proper. Next morning, though Meta could not see it, there lay in the nest a very pretty little fairy-like egg, rather a bluish-white, spotted with dark brown or grey. The morning after, there was another, and then another and another, till there were no less than five, and from that time Mrs. Cocktail never left the nest, except now and then, at the earnest request of Cocktail, who felt uneasy at her taking no exercise, and feared her health would suffer. He would come and tell her he had left a fine insect or grub in such or such a place, and that, if she did not go quickly, it would escape, or some other sparrow would get it, and he would promise to take great care of the eggs till she came back. To be sure he was a little awkward, and she had to scold him one day because he was so stupid as to stand over them, forgetting that he must sit down to

keep them covered up and warm ; but he did his best.

At length, on the fourteenth day, there was a faint sound inside the egg-shells which only the quick and tender ear of Mrs. Cocktail could have heard, and with the help of a gentle tap from her little beak, first one and then another of the little eggs burst open, and something not at all pretty came to sight.

Each one looked like a little bit of raw meat with a lump at one end and a great beak fastened to it, and this beak was always open. But they were beauties, Mr. and Mrs. Cocktail thought, and said to each other, and they made such a noise and outcry that Meta was sure something had happened.

“How long is it since you first saw them building their nest?” asked her father.

“Two or three weeks,” said Meta.

"That's just it, then," he replied, "the young ones must be out."

And now Meta had quite enough to do watching the sparrows going in and out of the nest and to and fro with their beaks full of food, and it made her laugh to see them sit on the edge and pop down their heads to the creatures inside, and she could see they did it very regularly. Pop one, pop two, pop three, pop four, pop five, then round again; they never gave it twice to the same.

And so time went on, until sharp points of quills began to come out on the raw little creatures, and these quills grew longer and longer, and out of them came feathers which by degrees spread and covered the little bodies. The bodies grew, and the eyes opened, and five little Cocktails rejoiced the eyes of their parents.

"My dear," said Mrs. Cocktail, one day

when the young ones were nearly fledged, "I think to-morrow we may take the nestlings down on the grass for a little; it's high time they learnt to shift for themselves, for really they're getting so unruly I can't manage them much longer."

"Ah! I'm afraid I've been too much away from home," said Cocktail; "you should have told me sooner. Take that, and that, and that, and that, and that," said he, giving the young ones a peck all round; "however," he added, "there's no harm in beginning."

"Indeed, father," said the eldest, "I shall be very glad to get out of this stuffy nest, the others do crowd upon me so; I'm sure I could manage to fly now; I've tried two or three times." And with that he scrambled to the edge of the nest and tried to spread his poor little newly-fledged wings, and, before father or mother could stop him, he had

thrown himself off, and, not knowing how to balance himself, fluttered helplessly to the ground.

Both parents flew after him in the deepest distress, screaming so loudly as to call together all their friends and neighbours from other parts. Each one had a remark to make and some advice to offer. Some said they "always knew how it must end; the Cocktails were such bad managers! and let their children have so much of their own way."

Others called to young Cocktail "to make an effort," he was "giving way very childishly, why not spread his wings and fly up to the nest?"

Others called to their friends to bring a drop of water to refresh the fainting little bird who lay senseless on the grass, but not one went to get any, and there it might have

lain till it had died, if Meta had not been attracted by the noise, and fearing pussy had got one of the birds, ran down to see what had happened. All the sparrows flew away when she appeared except the Cocktails, who sat on a neighbouring tree to watch their child. Meta soon found the poor little bird, and took it up in her hand, fearing it was dead. From the place in which she found it, she was sure it was out of the nest she had been watching, and in great distress ran with it to her mother.

Sarah felt it, and seeing its eye open she dropped a drop of water on its beak. As soon as it felt the water, it shook its little head, and opening its mouth some of the water ran down its throat, and seemed to revive it, to Meta's great delight; but, as it was evidently lame and ill, Sarah got a small unused cage and put some hay in the bottom,

and set the birdie on it; then, leaving the door open, she bade Meta take it upstairs and place it on the broad ledge outside the window from which she watched the sparrows. "If it is one of that nest," she said, "the old birds will soon come and feed it, and if they do not, we must try and do so ourselves. I couldn't bear to let the poor little thing die of want."

Meta did as she was told, and sat down to watch. In about half an hour she had the great pleasure of seeing the two old Cocktails come and perch on the top of the cage, peer into it and chirp, and an answering chirp came from the little sick bird; then, first one bird and then the other stepped on the door and put a mouthful of food into the open beak, and flew away for more. This they did till it was satisfied and crept into its little nest of hay and went to sleep. And there we

must leave it, and hope that it had time to think whether it would not have been better to bear a little crowding from its brothers and sisters without getting cross, than to suffer so much pain and have a large room all to itself.

Life in the Eaves.—2nd Series.

LIFE IN THE EAVES.

No. II.

MR. AND MRS. PIRKY were young, and young people are often apt to think they are much wiser than they really are. So the Pirkys, having seen the trouble the Cocktails had got into, were quite sure *they* would never have been so foolish. How could they, when there was a nice wide gutter for them to build their nest in? So they set to work, and in a very short time their nest was built. This was in beautiful warm, dry, spring weather, and Mrs. Pirky sat in her nest to make it ready for the eggs, and looked down on all the pretty grass and flowers in the garden, and listened to the twittering

of her mate, thinking herself a very happy, clever little bird. Alas! early next morning she awoke, feeling very cold, and soon found her feet and feathers next the nest were quite wet; still she sat on, till the water rose on every side, and at last a large wave dashed against the side of the nest and splashed right into it. She flew out, and with a loud shriek called Pirky to her side, and they both were made very sad by seeing a large stream of water rushing all over their labour of the previous days. It had begun to rain early in the morning, but as the gutter was partly covered by the eave, it did not rain down on the nest, and was only felt when there was enough to overflow the pipe which poured into the gutter. While the Pirkys were gazing at their ruined nest, in melancholy surprise, they heard a door open below, and a voice said,

"Why, the water is streaming in at this corner, there must be a slate loose."

"It's those sparrows again, I'm pretty sure," said John, stepping out and looking up; "yes, there is a nest, I declare. Ralph," he said to the under-gardener, who was passing, "just get the ladder, and see if the gutter isn't stuffed up."

So Ralph fetched the ladder, and set it up outside against the corner, where the rain had come streaming through the roof of the kitchen, owing to being stopped in its course.

Then the Pirkys had the still greater pain of seeing handful after handful of their work pulled out and thrown on the ground. There they sat, through most of that dull rainy day, with drooping wings and dragged tails, moping under the shelter of a chimney-stack. Towards evening the rain slackened,

the clouds broke, and a gleam of sunshine appeared, and then Pirky thought he might as well take a little flight round the house. In a few minutes he returned, shouting—"Wife, wife, come here quick; here's a beautiful nest, all ready made to hand. Why didn't we find it out before?"

Mrs. Pirky was still too much dispirited to move very quickly, but she did go at last, and when she got to the place, was as truly delighted and surprised as Pirky himself had been, for there, in a beautifully sheltered corner, quite overhung by the old roof, and not in any gutter, but fastened firmly to the side of the house, was an empty nest, nice and round and large, with walls so hard, they seemed like the walls of the house itself, that would never let in any wet, and inside it was lined throughout with soft feathers. "What good fortune!" they both

said it was; they would take possession of it at once, only they might as well put in a few blades of grass and bits of wool to freshen it up a little, as it smelt fusty. So Mrs. Pirky stepped into her ready-made nest, and found it very cosy and quiet, and for a little while all went well. The first two or three eggs were laid, and Mrs. Pirky, who had never had a family before, felt very, very happy.

One evening, when Pirky was out getting his supper, he remarked a strange bird flying backwards and forwards, near the nest, in a way which was quite new to him. First, it would skim lightly along close to the ground, then, suddenly rising higher than the house, it would wheel first to one side, then to the other, making circles in the air, and at last rest for a moment on the roof of the house, but it was soon off again, whirling about over head.

"What a very odd way of flying that is!" said Pirky to himself, "none of our family go about in that manner, it's very ridiculous." Looking again at the stranger, he was alarmed to see that he was drawing nearer and nearer to the nest, till at last he actually looked into it.

"I must go home at once," said Pirky; so, nearly choking himself on his last mouthful of caterpillars, he flew to the nest and reached it just as the stranger was saying, "Get up, if you please, ma'am, and let my wife have her nest."

"*Her* nest," shrieked Pirky; "what do you mean, you impertinent fellow, that doesn't know even how to fly straight? my wife has had that nest for days."

"But *my* wife," returned the stranger, with dignity, "has had it for *years*."

"Idiot!" replied Pirky, under his breath,

for he had no doubt, after this answer, that the stranger was mad. This was the Pirkys' first season, and they had never seen a swallow, nor could they understand such a notion as a bird having the same nest for more than a year; so Pirky drew near the nest, and whispered,—“Don't be frightened, my dear, it's only a poor mad bird, that doesn't know what he's saying. You sit still, and I'll perch in front, and take care he comes no farther.” Meantime the swallow flew away, uttering a low sweet call, and as we know a little more about him than Pirky did, we will tell you something of his story. It was quite true, as he had said, that he and his mate had had that nest for years. Three or four years before they had chosen the spot, and with diligent labour had built it of clay, which they carried, bit by bit, in their bills, from the edge of a neighbouring pond,

or from the roadside puddles; and well did they know how to stick one bit against the other on the side of the house, just beneath the eaves, until they had made a nest of the shape of a round deep saucer, and while they were working, the sun and the air helped them, by drying and hardening the moist earth till it was as strong as brick-work, and great was the pleasure felt by the family who lived in the Manor-house, where the children watched their proceedings, for they thought, like many other people, that no old house is perfect until it has been honoured with the confidence of the swallows.

When the outside walls were finished, the little wife gathered a quantity of soft feathers and lined the nest completely, and nestled in to warm it for her brood, while her husband amused himself with his companions, skimming lightly over the sheet of water near the

house, or dipping into it for a bath, flying along with his beak half open, and woe betide any flies, beetles, or midges he met with in his course, for he knew how to steer towards them, and before they could look about them, clap they went into the open bill, and were swallowed down without stopping his flight for a second ; and so great was the riddance by this means to our friend the gardener, of thousands of mischievous insects, that the swallow was even a greater favourite with him than the sparrow.

Sometimes, I suspect, he admired himself in the clear water, as he floated over it on a still evening, for he was an elegant little fellow, and studied grace in his movements a good deal more than Pirky or Cocktail. He had a fine slender shape, though his neck was short, and his breast broad for his size. His beak, which, as I have said, he usually kept

open, to trap any game that came in his way, was slightly hooked, for the same purpose, and his little tongue was broad, flat, and sharp at its edge, and divided at the tip, so as to make it easy for him to catch food after his own peculiar fashion ; but his feathers were the prettiest part of him. Those on the upper part of his body, which was about seven inches long, were a glossy bluish-black, with a lustre which gleamed in the sun. His head and throat were a chestnut-brown, with a broad black line on the top ; and the other parts were a reddish-yellow. He had a pretty tail, in which the feathers grew so as to look like a fork, the long ones at the side, and the short ones in the middle, and each was marked with white, so that, when his tail was spread to balance his flight, it seemed as if there was a band of white across the dark-blue back. His wings were long

for his size, for it was his nature to have them in constant use; indeed, we may call him and his wife Mr. and Mrs. Fleetwing, so swift were they in darting about. Their feet were their weakest part, for they used them very little, and could not walk as prettily as they flew. While Mrs. Fleetwing was sitting on her six sweet little white eggs, dotted with dark red or brown, her husband amused himself chasing flies, and sometimes, not always, bringing them to her. He was not so careful in this way as the less graceful Cocktail; but when the little ones appeared, all his fatherly pride awoke, and, with his wife, he was never tired of carrying insects to the nest every few minutes, till the little creatures were old enough to leave it.

“My dears,” he then said to them, “it is time now that you should be introduced to your relations and friends, for it has never

been the custom of our tribe to live in retirement. We know too well the benefit of being on friendly terms with those of our own race, and the time is not far off when you, too, will find how necessary we are to one another."

The young ones listened with steadfast eyes and open beak, and were each rewarded for their attention with a fly, at the end of the discourse.

"You must first," continued their father, "manage to get to the edge of that stack of chimneys. This you can do to-morrow, and return at sunset to our nest. Then, do you see those trees with branches drooping over the water?"

"Yes," chirped the young ones.

"Well, you must all try and get to them in another day or two. You will sit on the branches and watch your mother and me catching flies all day, and for a few nights

you will return to our nest to sleep ; after that you will choose your own place of rest on the tree, as your mother will have younger nestlings to attend to. Now, flap your wings, to strengthen them for to-morrow's flight."

Next morning, before the sun rose clear and bright in the still grey dawn, the parents' sweet, soft twittering woke and encouraged the young ones, and while all around was quiet, the little Fleetwings, one by one, fluttered the short distance to the chimney-stack, and perched themselves side by side on the edge, to which their father directed them.

After two or three days they managed to get as far as the willow-tree, and then, to their great surprise, they found several of the branches crowded with young ones like themselves, gathered from nests in various directions. It was very shy work, certainly,

to have to stand up suddenly before so many cousins, and their parents kept whispering to them to be sprightly, and fold their feathers gracefully, and not look as if they had never been taught how to behave in company. But it was all of no use,—it only made them sit more bunchly on their branch, squeezed up together, as if they could hide behind each other; but they need not have been so ashamed, for all the other young families felt the same, and it took some days to make them feel at ease, and acquainted with each other. But when they grew stronger, and able to follow their parents, in short flights, over the water, and catch a few flies for themselves, they lost their awkwardness, and got to like the other young swallows so well that they would all fly together in search of food, often led by the eldest among them, who would rise in the air, and call them with

one shrill note, and up they would all go like a little cloud, as if they were playing at "follow my leader," and so they learnt to turn and twist, and sink and skim, and rise just like their parents; and a very good thing it was that they thus gained the use of their wings, for soon came a time when the nights felt long and dark, and, however much they huddled together, they could not keep themselves warm; they often went supperless to bed, too, for the cold seemed to have taken away most of the flies and beetles, and it was not nearly so easy to get food as it used to be.

"Oh, dear! oh, dear!" they cried, "when will the blessed sun rise again? He used not to stay so long away. Can't we go and find him?"

"Yes, my children," said both their parents together, who now paid them a visit, after a

long absence, "we will go to him. It is the habit of our race to follow the blessed sun, for we cannot live without his warmth. You will be on the watch for the signal-call to-night."

That evening the note was sounded sooner than usual for the flight in search of food, and on going to roost the young ones were much pleased to find themselves joined by their parents, who brought with them a brood of young brothers and sisters, whom they had been carefully training for the flight, and looking round they saw, not their own tree only, but the willows and osiers, in every direction crowded with friends and cousins, and long lasted the twittered consultation between the elders, who had made the journey before, and therefore knew how to guide the rest, till at length the last head was turned under its wing, the last foot tucked up.

The first streaks of dawn had scarcely brightened the sky when the twittering began again, and pluming and oiling of feathers went on at a great rate. As the swallows could eat their food flying, there was not much time wasted on breakfast before starting. At last, with one or two loud shrill calls, a swallow flew up in the air, and the whole assembly rose after him like a dark cloud, and swiftly, steadily on they went towards the south. For a long way they flew and flew on, through morning and mid-day, till they reached the sea, and the young Fleetwings were enchanted with the bright new world below them, on which, however, they were not allowed to alight. When they got above the sea, their surprise was great. "What is that water?" they said to their parents; "and why is it so large? May we not go down and bathe, and catch flies as we do at home?"

"No, children, that is the sea," said their parents; "we must hasten over it, for there is no place of rest near."

"But oh! father, mother," said the youngest Fleetwing, "my wings are so tired I shall drop; I can't fly any more."

"Keep up a little longer," said his father. "I see a ship, and you can rest a few minutes on the ropes. Your mother and I will stay with you, and you," he said to the rest, "go on with our friends."

So the parents and the child dropped down on the friendly ship, and clung to the rigging, and they heard the sailors say to each other, "We shall have an early winter this year; there are the swallows already."

But there was no time to be lost; so, as soon as the young ones had rested and taken breath, on they flew again, trying to overtake the little cloud of travellers, with whom they

came up at nightfall, as they were settling to roost. By day-break they were off again, over towns and woods, and rivers and plains, on and on they went, never stopping more than they could help, till they came near the sunny south; and then, when orange-groves and chestnuts and olives came in sight, down they dropped in small companies, to take rest and refreshment, and some said they would not go any farther, while others said they would press on to the blue sunny Mediterranean sea, and others went farther still, and crossed the straits to the warm sands of Africa.

And, before we land them in their new home, let us be grave for a minute, and think what lesson they may teach us by their steady flight, for I am sure God means us to learn some good from all the creatures He has made. We, too, ought to be winging

our way to a fairer land and a brighter sun, and, like the swallow, nothing should stop our flight, nor tempt us to linger till we reach it. Can you tell me what that land is? I think some of you are saying, "It must be heaven." Yes,—

"There everlasting spring abides,
And never-withering flowers."

And the time of our flight is the number of years we each have to spend on earth, and we must try and keep our minds fixed on that bright, beautiful place of rest, and not settle down satisfied with anything on this side of it, or we shall prove ourselves not nearly so wise as the swallows. They know, by the wisdom God has given them, that if they loiter on their way, dark, cloudy days will come, and they would perish with cold. So we must not forget, however pleasant this world is at times, that it will not

last always, and it is our wisdom to make sure of a home in that land where there is happiness for ever, and room for all who are willing to go. But to return.

Our little swallows were among those who chose to stay near the beautiful sea, and overjoyed were the young ones to bask in the sunshine again, and skim along the blue water, chasing and catching the many, many flies, and then going to roost in the olive and fig-trees. And so the months wore on, which in their native home were cold, and dull, and chilly, and at last the sun grew hotter and hotter in that beautiful land, and the Fleetwings began to gasp for breath at mid-day, and to long for the cool breezes of their native country; and as they had gone so they came, steadily flying in large companies over land and sea, till, on a soft April day, our little party was

back under the eaves of the old Manor-house; and so they went and came year after year, till the time at which our story began, when Fleetwing found little Mrs. Pirky established in his wife's nest. When he flew away the first evening, and told his wife what he had found, they had a private consultation, and agreed, as they had only just arrived after their long journey, they would sleep over it, and see what could be done next day. "Perhaps," they said, "the strange bird would have the sense to leave it herself." But no; when they went in the morning there she was, steadily sitting inside, and she had another little egg, which made her still more resolute to stay; and Pirky was there in front, his feathers bristling with anger, ready to give battle to any one who might dispute his right.

"I don't like the looks of that bird at all,

my dear," said Mrs. Fleetwing. "He is a great thick-set fellow, a sparrow, I believe, and they are all so very quarrelsome and vulgar; I hope you won't be tempted to fight him."

"I certainly shall not lower myself by having a pitched battle with him," said Fleetwing; "but to give up our rights,—no, never!" Each time he drew near the nest, however, Pirky opened his beak from ear to ear, and croaked at him with all his might. He tried flapping his wings in his face, going and returning, and watching in vain, and the Pirkys thought at night-fall they had won the day. Far from it—the Fleetwings called a council of their relations early next morning in the willow-tree, and laid the matter before them. "Shameful, monstrous!" sounded on all sides. "Let us all fall on them in a body and peck them to death,"

said some. "No," said an old swallow, "you young ones don't know half a thing. We should only bring their whole tribe upon us, and they're much heavier birds than we are, and we should get the worst of it. But," said he, turning to the Fleetwings, "if she is so fond of your nest, why not force her to stay in it, so that she can never get out?"

"Capital," said all the other swallows. "Build her up; build her up!"

"But how? She'll fly away before we have time," said Fleetwing.

"Not she," said the others; "she's too much set on her ugly little eggs; besides, we'll all help you. We'll all help, and it will be done soon enough." So, very soon, Pirky was alarmed to see a crowd of birds just like the first in the air over his head. Down they came in a body, and he was

forced to fly to a little distance, and they all gathered about the nest. What were they going to do? and his poor little wife! He heard her frightened chirp as the strange birds drew round her. He flew nearer, and saw that each of the strangers had their beaks full of wet earth, such as the nest was built of, and each laid it on the edge, and then flew away for more.

"Come out, come out," called Pirky. "How can we stand against such a number?"

"And leave my eggs, my dear lovely eggs, the first I ever had!" cried Mrs. Pirky, in sad grief.

Back came the swallow, and the Pirkys saw the walls of the nest were growing higher and higher. Mrs. Pirky's little heart beat faster and faster. "Did they really mean to build her up in the nest, so

that she could never get out? and my dear, dear eggs!"

There is no knowing but that Mrs. Pirky's motherly devotion might have proved stronger than her fear, and she would indeed have been built up and starved to death, if the swallows, in one of their journeys, had not knocked off a crumb of plaster from under the eave, which, falling on her back, made her start suddenly out of the nest, and she was just in time, for after the next visit of the Fleetwings and their friends, the walls of the nest would have risen too high for her to fly over.

It seems a very cruel thing for the swallows to have done, but we must not be too hard on them, for the provocation was great, and they had never learnt, as we have, to be forbearing to others, and to return good for evil.

Whether the Pirkys were too much discouraged to begin another nest I never heard ; but, as they were spirited little birds, I hope not, and that, when they got over their fright, they were both wiser and more humble, not above taking advice from their friends, and ready to own that there were *some* things in the world which they had not lived long enough to learn.

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