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Author: Mrs. George Cupples

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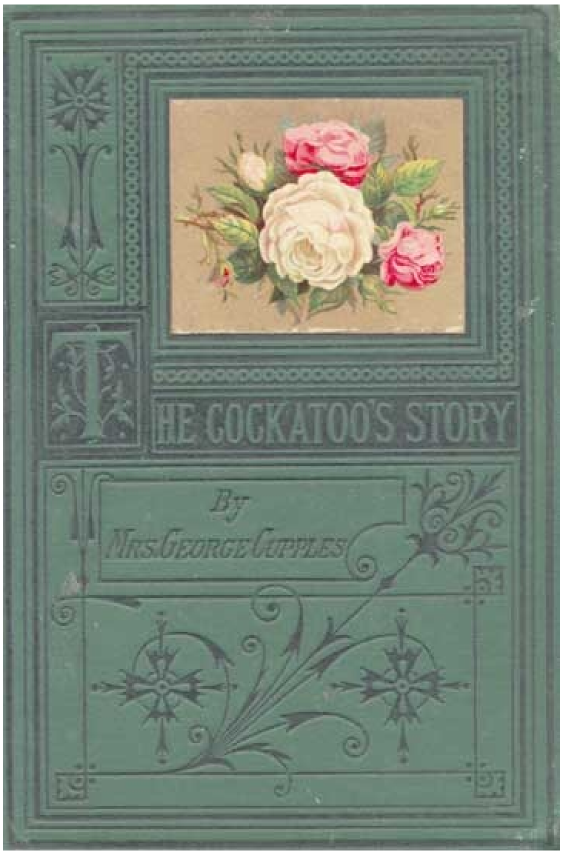

THE

COCKATOO'S STORY.

By

MRS. GEORGE CUPPLES.

WITH 12 ILLUSTRATIONS.

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A GREEDY DOG *Page [80](#)*.

THE COCKATOO'S STORY.

"I begin to be ashamed of myself—I really do," said a white cockatoo, as he sat on his perch one day. Then he gave himself a good shake, and after walking up and down once or twice, he continued, "I think it vexes the boy, and I can see he means to be kind. And, oh dear, dear! I see now I brought the troubles on myself."

"Kind!" screamed a small gray parrot from a perch on the opposite side; "of course he [Pg 8] means to be kind. You won't often meet a kinder; let me tell you that, sir. If I could only get this chain off my foot, I'd come over and give you as good a pecking as ever you got in your life, you sulky, ungrateful bird you! And then Master Herbert stands, day after day, trying to tempt you with the daintiest morsels, and there you sit and sulk, or take it with your face turned from him, when hunger forces you."

"There is no need to be so angry, old lady," replied the cockatoo. "Didn't you hear me say, I begin to be ashamed of myself? But if you only knew how I have been used, you would not wonder at my sulks."

"Oh, if you have a foundation for your conduct, then I'll be happy to retract," said Mrs. Polly, walking about her perch very fast indeed, and ruffling up her feathers as she walked. "No bird I [Pg 9] ever had the pleasure of living beside could say I was unreasonable; so please state your case, state your case—I'm all attention, at-ten-tion;" and she lengthened out the last word with a shrill scream peculiar to parrots.

"But it would take ever so long to tell," said the cockatoo, "and my feelings or my nerves have got the better of me at this moment, and I really couldn't; only if you heard my history you would think it very wonderful indeed;" and here Mr. Cockatoo lifted up his foot and scratched his eye.

"A history, did you say?" said the gray parrot, pausing in her walk along her perch, and looking at him over her back. "Pray, how old are you, may I ask?"

"Well, I'll be about two years old," said the cockatoo, straightening himself up, and looking over [Pg 10] to the gray parrot, as if he expected the news would surprise her greatly.

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed Mrs. Polly; "two years old, and has a history! Oh dear! my old sides will split. What a youth he is, to be sure, ha, ha, ha!"

"I don't see anything to laugh at," said the poor cockatoo, collapsing into his sulky state once more. "I tell you I *have* a history, and a wonderful history too. I wish you would stop that chatter."

"Boy, boy, you'll be the death of me," said Mrs. Polly, not in her own language, but in the words taught her by Master Herbert.

"Oh, if you are going to speak in the language used by these abominable people who keep us here as prisoners and slaves, I've nothing more to say," [Pg 11] said the poor cockatoo, scratching his eye once more.

"Well, I won't then," said Mrs. Polly graciously. "I have been told it is the height of bad manners to speak in a foreign language, if it is not understood by your companion, so I shall confine myself, when addressing you, to my mother tongue. And now, since you have told me your age, would you like to know mine?"

"Yes," said the cockatoo, for he really was a little puzzled as to Mrs. Polly's behaviour.

"Well, I'm seventy years old!" replied Mrs. Polly, drawing up her neck as far as its limited length would permit. "And now you can understand why I laughed, sir; for it did look a little absurd to hear a bird of your tender years speaking of a history. Think what mine must be, and what I must have come through and seen in my long life!" [Pg 12]

They were here interrupted by the appearance once more of Master Herbert, who brought a most tempting piece of cake in his hand. Going up to the cockatoo, he said, "I suppose I needn't offer you this, Cockatoo. You are determined not to be friends." The cockatoo put out his claw for it, and took it gently from Herbert's hand, who could not fail to see there was a marked difference in the bird's appearance.

"Good boy, good boy!" shrieked the gray parrot from her perch, quite forgetting she had promised never to speak the English language, in her eagerness to mark her approval of his conduct. "Now, if you really would like to please Master Herbert," she continued in her own parrot tongue, "I'd say the words he has been trying to teach you for days. Come, out with it, old boy;" and again she relapsed into the English language. [Pg 13]

CAKE FROM MASTER HERBERT. *Page 12*.

[Pg 14]

[Pg 15] The cockatoo looked into Herbert's kind eyes, and said as plainly as he could, "Pretty Cocky."

"Oh, you can speak after all," said Herbert. "Well, now, that's jolly; I thought you were going to be a good-for-nothing stupid creature. Come now, say it again; but give us the whole of the word."

Assisted by Mrs. Polly's "Out with it, old boy," the cockatoo tried his best, but could only get the length of "Pretty Cockat——" However, Herbert was content with this for a beginning, and turned to the gray parrot with a kind inquiry after her health; who instantly replied, anxious perhaps to make up for her companion's tardiness, "Thank you, sir; how d'ye do?"

"I'm glad *you're* clever, Mrs. Polly," said Herbert. "Uncle James was just saying to Lucy the other day, you were the cleverest parrot he ever saw, and he has brought home dozens now." [Pg 16] Mrs.

Polly did not understand all her young master said; but she knew by his voice and eye he was praising her, so she said, with a pretty courtesy, "Thank you, sir!" which made Herbert laugh very heartily; and when he further requested her to dance, she did so at once, whistling a tune to herself for an accompaniment. "Do you know, Mrs. Polly, you are to have another companion very soon?" said Herbert, giving the gray parrot another piece of cake. "He's a great scarlet macaw, and Uncle James says he is getting him sent from South America. Oh dear! I should like to be able to understand your chatter—I mean your own language, Polly—because you could tell such a great deal about the different countries you have come from. There's Cockatoo, he could tell us [Pg 17]
about the Indian Islands, and Borneo;—that was where Uncle James brought you from, sir, when he was on his voyage to Canton. He got ever so many birds of paradise, too; for, luckily for him, they had just come over from New Guinea, and the other islands where they generally stay. Oh dear! I do wish I understood your language," he repeated again.

At this moment, a great humble-bee came humming in at the window; and on looking up, what should Herbert see but a tiny fairy sitting on its back! In a moment the bee lighted on the table, and stopped its humming; and then the fairy's voice could be distinctly heard, as she stood up on the back of the humble-bee, saying,——

"Little boy, with eyes so blue,
You are kind and you are true
To the birds, the beasts, the flowers,
Their language we will make it yours:
Then listen to Miss Polly's speech,
And hear what lesson she will teach."

With these words she waved her shining silver wand, and touching him first on one ear, and then [Pg 18]
on the other, as she rode past him, was borne away out of the window once more, on the back of the humble-bee.

Herbert didn't know very well what had happened, and thought he was dreaming, till he heard Mrs. Polly saying to the cockatoo, "Now, sir, if you sulk, Master Herbert will know what it's for."

"I say, Polly," said Herbert, "am I really to understand your language? Did you see the fairy too?"

"Oh yes, sir," replied Mrs. Polly. "I saw her, and heard what she said; and let me tell you, sir, it isn't every boy that receives such a reward; but you must have pleased the fairy Fauna, by being [Pg 19]
kind to all the creatures, great and small. Yes, she has heard no doubt how you open the window, and put the bees and the blue-bottle flies out, instead of killing them. I shouldn't wonder if it was that great spider whose life you spared who told her. You remember your cousin Dick wanted to kill it; and I noticed she guided the bee with threads from a spider's web."

"Well, I'm very glad," said Herbert laughing. "I must say the reward is greater than I deserve, for it seems an easy thing to be kind to animals and insects."

"It's not such an easy thing as you think, sir," said Mrs. Polly. "I've lived seventy years in this world, and I've kept my eyes wide open, and I've seen boys, ay, and girls too, do very cruel things to dumb animals." [Pg 20]

"Dear me, Polly, have you lived seventy years?" replied Herbert in much astonishment; "I had no idea of it. Uncle James says parrots live to a great age—he knew one that was a hundred years old; but somehow I thought you were quite young. I mustn't ask you to dance quite so often, for your legs must feel rather stiff at times. But what was *that* the fairy said you could teach me? Is it a story? I must hear it."

"Very well, sir," said Mrs. Polly, courtesying again, just to show how agile she was, for she did not like the idea of her old legs being thought stiff. "But before you came in, Mr. Cockatoo was preparing to tell me his history, the history of his life. He is two years old, Master Herbert, and as he fancies the world has ill-used him, I think it would make him more comfortable to tell his story first, if you don't mind, sir." [Pg 21]

"Oh, very well," said Herbert, delighted to think that he could understand the cockatoo also. "But I must not forget my lessons. I shall go now and learn them; and in the afternoon, when you are in your cages, I will bring the fish-hooks I have got to make, and while I do them we can listen to the story."

"We shall be all the better of a few quiet hours," said Mrs. Polly, who was very fond of a nap in the afternoon, especially after partaking of rich cake. "Dear me, Master Herbert, one gets quite stupified looking back into one's life. We'll lay our brains in sleep, sir, while you're at your lessons. Good-day, good-day." Out of compliment, she finished off with Herbert's own language, though had she said it in her own he would have understood it quite well. But Polly hadn't lived for seventy years for nothing. [Pg 22]

In the afternoon the cockatoo's cage was placed at the open window, Polly preferring to have hers on one side, to be away from the draught; and when Herbert had got his box of hooks, and his coloured feathers, and reels of silk placed conveniently, he bade Mr. Cockatoo begin his story. [Pg 23]

LISTENING TO THE COCKATOO'S STORY. *Page 22*.

"You said some time ago, Master Herbert," began the cockatoo, "that I was brought from the [Pg 24] Indian Islands; and I suppose you're right, sir, though I can't say I ever heard the name before to-day: all I can say is, I remember the place well. When I popped my head out of my shell, I found other three heads had done the same, so I was the youngest of my family. A sad circumstance for me, as you will see. There we lay, without a single feather, and not even a particle of down to cover us, our heads feeling far too large for our naked bodies. We had to be as patient as we [Pg 25] could, down in our nest in an old rotten tree, till the down began to come; but it was three or four months before we were fairly covered with feathers. Somehow, being the youngest, my feathers were longer of coming than were the others; and when our mother was out of hearing, my brothers would laugh at me, and make fun of my big head—for it certainly was a very large head. This treatment spoiled my temper, and I would sit and sulk by myself, taking a delight in refusing to join in any of their sports when a fourth was required. I used to creep up to the top of the tree, and sit trimming my feathers, spreading them out and trying to make the most of their scanty appearance, till my patience was rewarded; for beyond a doubt, at the end of the fifth month my plumage was something wonderful to behold for beauty. As for my head being large, it now [Pg 26] helped to show off the splendid yellow crest; and the awkward look was quite gone. Still my temper hadn't improved; indeed I think it was worse, for conceit was added to my other bad qualities; and when I would have liked to be amiable and join the merry flock of cockatoos that lived in the trees near us, they would have nothing to say to me. My mother used often to moan and vex herself about me, and she did her best to keep as near me as she could, warning me that it was not safe for a cockatoo to wander far from his home. And then she would tell me of wonderful escapes she had made in her day, both from wild animals and the snares of wicked men. Though these stories frightened me terribly, I must own, making my crest stand up with fright to hear her, still I used to beg her to tell me more, for it was often a change from the dull [Pg 27] hours I spent; and I must say my mother behaved in a most amiable manner towards me.

"Then she would take pains to show us what kind of fruits to eat, warning us particularly against the fruit of the cotton-tree, which, though pleasant to the taste, was a dangerous one for taking away the senses. Ah, if I had only followed her advice! Still, with my mother for company now and then, my days were very happy, in spite of the coldness and dislike of my brothers and their young companions. Indeed, living in my lovely home, it would have been strange if I had felt anything else. How often since, while sitting in this cage or on my perch, have I thought of those happy days of freedom! Forests of woods and grasses, bearing the most lovely flowers and the [Pg 28] most delicious fruits, from the edge of the sea to the top of the mountain. And then the clear cool water, where we could plunge ourselves several times a day;—how different from the small quantity Marjory allows me! We lived close to the banks of a small river; and oh, it was so delightful, after plunging into the water, to keep shaking my plumage, until the greater portion of water was out, and then sit in the sun till I was quite dry! There were no men on our island, else I should have remembered seeing them; and nothing ever disturbed our slumbers, save the wild pigs that sometimes went about routing and grunting, or a cry from one of our band.

"And so time passed on, till we were a year old, when one day we were startled by hearing screams from a thicket not far off. On getting along as fast as I could, I met my brothers flying [Pg 29] from one branch to another in the direction I was coming from, who screamed to me to escape, for an enemy was at hand. One of them said something about my mother, but what, I could not make out clearly; only I knew she was in danger somehow. I was in such a hurry to get to see [Pg 30] what had happened to her—for I did love my mother—that I positively took a good long flight, and landed on a tree some distance off. Then, what was my astonishment to see a great large face, [Pg 31] quite different from anything I had ever seen before, looking at me from round the trunk! And there, too, at the bottom of the tree, lay my poor mother, evidently dead. I heard him cry to another man below to hand him up his bow and arrow; but before he had got it I flew off once more, taking a longer flight than before. An old cockatoo told me afterwards that very likely my mother was not dead, but that she had only been stunned, as those men would have a button on [Pg 32] the arrow to prevent it from killing her. It took me ever so many days to find my way back to my old home; and when I did find it, not one of my old companions was there. Gloomy though my disposition was, still I did not like the idea of living alone, and I set out to try to find them. On my way I met an old cockatoo who had been a friend of my poor mother's, and who like me had lost her companions, so we agreed to go on together. I found her a most intelligent companion, and she was very useful in showing me what fruit was good for eating, for there were many new kinds. She showed me some curious birds'-nests, and told me that men ate them; and a good [Pg 33] hearty chuckle we had over it, you may be sure. We regaled ourselves by picking out the pulp of the banana, the palm, the lemon, and the berries from the coffee-tree; and coming upon an almond-tree, we stayed under it for a whole week. Then we proceeded on our journey. We must have travelled miles, and we were beginning to despair of ever seeing the flock again, when we heard a great chatter chatter, and in a few minutes we came in sight of a great number of birds of different colours, in earnest conversation.

DANGEROUS COMPANY. *Page 29*.

"'Stop, my boy,' said my companion; 'we had better not show ourselves for a little. They may be friends; but birds though they are, if they see anything strange in our appearance, they will fall upon us, and may peck out our feathers, if not our very eyes.'" [Pg 34]

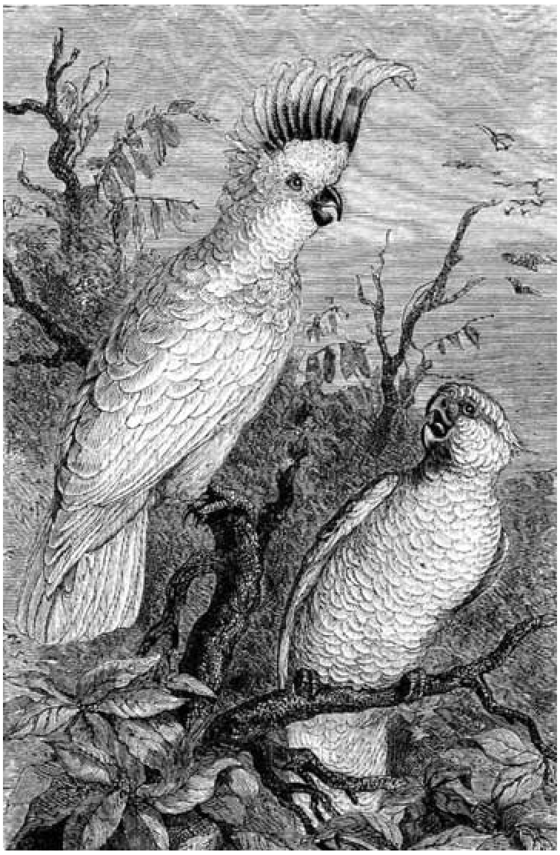
"After waiting for a little," continued the cockatoo, "and after listening very hard, my companion explained to me she thought we might venture to join the group; for if they weren't cockatoos, they were our cousins the parrots; and in a minute more she spread out her wings, and alighted in the midst of them. They were somewhat startled at first; but on her explaining why she was there, they received her very kindly; and she then called out to me to approach, for I had waited in a bush out of sight, feeling a little shy and nervous. They were greatly delighted with my appearance, and I fear they quite turned my head by their praises. I know I gave myself airs, and strutted about in a manner that would have vexed my poor mother, could she but have seen me. My companion over and over again reminded me to beware of conceit, saying that even in a [Pg 35] cockatoo it was a dangerous thing to carry about with one; and that though our cousins were pleased with me at present, they would tire of praising me by-and-by, if they saw how foolish it made me. But I was only a year old at that time, and had always been a little headstrong and difficult to manage.

"As my old friend had said," continued the cockatoo, "my newly-found cousins were not long in finding out my bad qualities, and they were almost harder upon me than my own brothers had been; which caused my temper to give way again, and from being a very frank, obliging bird, I became quite a cross, ill-natured one. One day I had retired to the woods, and was sitting sulking by myself in a bush, when the old cockatoo came and perched herself on the branch above me. [Pg 36] For some minutes she sat looking at me without uttering a sound; but every now and then she would shake her head, or raise up her crest in rather a fierce manner. At last I couldn't stand it any longer, and I cried out in a very angry tone of voice, 'Why, what do you mean by looking at me like that? I would rather not be disturbed.' And I gave a very ugly and angry screech.

"'Cockatoo,' said she, 'I am grieved to the heart by your behaviour. Take my advice, sir, and mend your ways, else I fear something bad will come of it.'

"'I will not be interfered with,' I said; 'and I don't care if you never speak to me again;' and I screeched louder and uglier than before.

[Pg 37]



UNWELCOME ADVICE. *Page 36.*

[Pg 38]

"I must say she was very good to me, though I couldn't or wouldn't see it at the time; and seeing that I was determined to be sulky and ill-natured, she left me. Two or three days after, a green [Pg 39] parrot, that my friend had warned me against, came and sat in a bush near me. He kept chattering away to himself,—speaking about the hard way he was used by the other parrots, and threatening to fly away and see them no more. Now, I had noticed they were rather severe upon him, but I also knew he was not a well-behaved bird by any means; but in my present state of mind I couldn't help pitying him.

"Creeping along the branch, I ventured to inquire what was the matter, when he poured into my ears a perfect shower of complaints against his brothers and sisters, friends and companions, and even against his parents. Two or three times I tried to get in a word of inquiry as to whether some of his trouble had not been brought on by his own conduct; for at that moment I [Pg 40] remembered how gently my mother used to speak to me when I used to rage against all the cockatoos in my happy home by the bank of the river. However, it was useless to interfere with him, for the mere mention of the idea made his rage something fearful to witness. The sight of him called to mind, too, what my mother used to say to us when we lay curled up snugly in our nest in the old tree, before my brothers had learned to tease me. 'Children,' she used to say, 'a beautiful plumage is all very well, but a happy-looking face, and a kind, amiable disposition, are to be prized far before the loveliest coloured feathers.'

"This parrot now before me was as lovely a bird of his kind as one would wish to see; but his face was purple with rage, and his lovely feathers were all ruffled and rumpled with passion, so that [Pg 41] any kind of feathers might have served him equally well.

"I cannot tell how it was," said the cockatoo, "but from that time I was always meeting the discontented parrot; and we gradually got more and more intimate. My good friend, the old cockatoo, did not hesitate to warn me against my companion; but I was angry with her, because I fancied she lectured me, having no right to do so, and treated me as if I had been a perfect baby.

Then one night, after a long conversation with the parrot, I agreed to fly away with him, and seek our fortunes on some other part of the island. It was arranged that we should set out the next morning before the sun was up; for the parrot thought if he went away in open daylight, his father, who was a very fierce parrot, would interfere with our flight. I cannot tell you why I felt [Pg 42] sorry, after the parrot left me, at the idea of leaving my good, kind friend, the old cockatoo; but I really was. She had been so good to me, and had so much to tell me about what she had seen during her long life, and in her travels, that time passed very quickly indeed. That evening, too, when I had retired to the branch I had selected for my sleeping-place, I overheard a conversation between a very large mother parrot and her three young ones, that somewhat filled my heart with alarm. 'Be contented, children,' the mother parrot was saying. 'I have known many parrots [Pg 43] come to an untimely end, because they were always wanting to see what was beyond the trees and bushes of their own home. I remember my grandfather telling me about how a brother and he had strayed away far into the woods, and they were overtaken by the darkness, and were [Pg 44] forced to remain in a tree all night. But he had not fallen asleep long when he heard a great shriek; and on opening his eyes, what should he see but an immense ape clutching his brother by the throat, and carrying him away up to the top of the tree out of sight. It was all my grandfather could do to get his wings to carry him home, he was so weak and faint with the fright; and never again did he wander from his companions.' [Pg 45]

A LESSON IN CONTENTMENT. *Page* ***42***.

"Oh, that I had listened even then to the old mother parrot's wise advice!" said the cockatoo, as he scratched his eye. "Ah, sir," he said, turning to Herbert, "it's harder to bear troubles when they come upon us by our own folly.

"The sun was scarcely up when the green parrot was beside me; and as I had promised to join [Pg 46] him, I did not like to hesitate or draw back now. So we set out on our travels, without even saying good-bye to any one. For days we travelled on through the forest, and a happy enough time it was; for my companion was apparently delighted at the idea of his freedom, and chattered away in a very amiable manner. But toward the end of the third day we were startled by hearing strange sounds; and on peering down from the branches, we saw a man. I did not know he was a man at the time; but I found out to my cost what he was only too soon. He had some dogs with him, and seemed to be waiting for something, for he peeped cautiously round a tree every now and then, bidding the dogs lie close. Then in a moment came a fearful crack from a gun he carried, and something gave a great roar and a wild snort, and I nearly lost my senses with the [Pg 47] fright. It was all I could do to clutch on by the branch, my legs shook so with fear; and as for my companion, if it hadn't been for falling into a cleft in a branch, he would have gone straight down on to the man's wide-spreading hat. The cry had come from a boar, which lay dead or dying; and in a very few minutes the man had fastened something to his legs, and began dragging him away, while the dogs capered, and danced, and barked round them.

"You may well believe we felt no anxiety to continue our travels, for a little. There were not many trees near us with fruit that we cared for, except a cotton-tree; and I ate and ate, wondering why my mother could have been so stupid as to say its fruit was not safe. But all at once I began to feel my eyes shutting; and to rouse myself I flew on to another tree, where my companion soon [Pg 48] joined me. Though it was broad daylight, I was as sleepy as if it had been the dead of night; and I recollect nothing more, till, on opening my eyes, I found myself in a dark, dingy place, and heard strange noises—grunts coming from under my feet, cries from every side; and then such a number of strange-looking creatures all about, and one quite different in colour from the others standing near where I was tied; for I soon found I was securely fastened by the foot."

"That was my uncle," said Herbert; "and he told me how he had found you and your companion quite stupified with eating the cotton seeds; and that was a Dyak log-house you were in."

"When I recovered my senses," said the cockatoo, "I had been taken on board ship, and placed in a large wicker-cage. There were ever so many more birds in the ship, but I did not see them then, [Pg 49] and thought I was quite alone. However, I had not been many hours in my cage when, to my horror, a large monkey came and stared at me, putting his ugly hairy face so close to the cage, that it was all I could do to scream with fright. At first the men drove him away, but they were soon too busy to pay any attention to my cries; and somehow I got to be less frightened, when I saw that he couldn't get near me, though he tried ever so hard. Round and round he went, tugging at the bars in vain; then he mounted on the top, and peered at me through the openings, grinning in a very ugly manner. Now, I had always been considered a bold cockatoo, and anything but a coward; and so, when I saw his tail sticking between the bars, I flew down to the bottom of the cage, and seizing it, gave it such a bite that I nipped the piece quite out! Away he [Pg 50] went, howling and yelling; but though he showed it to ever so many of the men, they said it served him right for teasing me. [Pg 51]

THE COCKATOO'S REVENGE. *Page* ***50***.

"It was, no doubt, very dull, but I was greatly cheered by the company of a little girl, the [Pg 52] daughter of one of the passengers. She used to come down every morning, and chatter away to me about all sorts of things, not one of which I understood, except that she always called me Pretty Cockatoo, as you do, Master Herbert. She knew, too, what I liked to eat, and would bring me almonds, and fruit, and sweet cake, and would stay chattering away to me while I ate them. Soon I began to weary for her coming, and would sit counting the hours, and forgetting my wrongs, while waiting for her to come again. I liked the almonds, of course; but I liked to see her [Pg 53] face, and hear her kind voice, far more. And I think I was less sulky and unhappy during that time than I had been all my life. It was the parting from her that upset me, and made me fall into a gloomy and sulky state of mind. I well remember the last day we were together. She came to me with a piece of cake she had saved for me from her own lunch; and I seemed somehow to understand what she was saying. I felt at the time she was asking me to be a good bird; but now that I have known you, sir, so long, and am better acquainted with the English language, I know she told me how much happier I should be if I were good. 'Oh fie, Cockatoo,' I think I hear her saying, 'how naughty of you to bite the captain's finger; you ought to be a good bird, sir,—and he is so kind to you, and all the birds aboard.' It was all very well for Miss Maud to speak of the [Pg 54] captain being good; but I could not forget he had taken me from my home, and made me a prisoner. Ah, sir, you would not like to have your liberty taken from you; you would feel it hard; and you would look upon the person who held you captive, however kind he was, as a foe instead of a friend."

"And are you still longing for your freedom so much, Cockatoo?" said Herbert, who could not bear the idea of any of his pets being unhappy.

"Oh yes, sir," said the poor cockatoo. "I often feel how delightful it would be if I could get this ring off my foot and fly away to the shrubbery; and how I should rejoice to plunge in that little pond where you have your gold-fish."

"Now, I should like to give you your heart's desire, Cockatoo; but if I set you at liberty in this [Pg 55] country you would die. We have no orange, lemon, or coffee trees in our garden; and though we have apples and pears in plenty, you could not stand the long cold nights. But I'll tell you what I will do: if you will make a promise not to fly far, and to return to your cage when I call you, I shall let you free to fly about in the shrubbery; and you can bathe in the pond, if you do not harm the fish."

"Oh, thank you, Master Herbert," cried the cockatoo. "I'll come back at a moment's notice,—I really will."

"Mee-a-ow, mew," cried Polly, imitating the cry of a cat. "Beware of Miss Puss."

"You're right, Polly; that is very amiable of you," said Herbert. "Now, here goes, Cockatoo, and I shall expect you to report yourself, as uncle might say, in an hour's time." With that he opened [Pg 56] the cage door, and with a glad scream away flew the cockatoo.

"I don't know if I have done right or not, Polly," said Herbert. "I hope he will return, else my uncle will be very angry. He thought Cockatoo was the finest bird he had ever seen of the kind. Come now, Polly, you promised to tell me your history after Cockatoo had told his."

"Oh no, sir, I made no promise," said Mrs. Polly, walking up and down the perch very fast, turning at each end with a graceful and coquettish air. "After such a wonderful story as we have heard, it would quite spoil it to listen to such an old, humdrum affair as mine." [Pg 57]

FREEDOM FOR AN HOUR. *Page* *56*.

"Now, Polly, don't be cross," said Herbert; "the fairy must have fancied you could tell a good [Pg 58][Pg 59] thing, else she wouldn't have said what she did."

"Oh, she had no idea I could tell a story," said Polly; "she only meant that, considering my great age, I ought to be able to give you a word of good advice. She only said it out of politeness."

"A fairy would be sure to know all about you," said Herbert, "and would never say what she didn't mean."

"Ah, there's more than fairies do that," said Polly, pausing to shake her head. "I once knew a little boy who said to his cousin, 'Oh, I hope your mamma will let you come again on Saturday;' and then, when his cousin was out of hearing, he turned and said, 'I hope he won't get leave to come, he's such a cross-patch.'"

"O Polly, what a sly rogue you are! I see I shall have to be careful what I say before you," said

Herbert. [Pg 60]

"I hate deceit," said Polly. "Ah, I knew a man who was well punished for a fine trick he played; and about a bird of my species, too."

"Do tell it me, Polly, there's a dear," said Herbert.

"Well, I was once the favourite Polly of an old bird-stuffer," said Mrs. Polly; "and great pains he took to teach me many songs and words of your language, and very proud he was when I managed to say them. He was so very fond of me, that after I had gone to bed, with my head on my back, he would creep downstairs and repeat the words he had been dinning into my ears all day; and just to get rid of him, more than to please him, I used to say them correctly, and so off he would go to bed as pleased as possible. One day a gentleman brought two birds to be stuffed, and I heard him say they were trogons. Now, they are very rare birds; and after the gentleman [Pg 61] went away, my master exclaimed, 'I have long been wanting a bird of this kind. I think I could manage to make one to myself out of some of the feathers!'

"Now, the very night before, my master had come down with his red night-cap on his head to teach me to say, 'Honesty is the best policy;' because he wanted me to call out to the servant-maid, 'Who stole the tea?' and finish off with the other as a warning. So I said under my breath, but loud enough for him to hear, 'Honesty, sir, is the best——;' and then screamed out, 'Who stole the——? Oh, fie for shame!'

"You should have seen how he started, Master Herbert; but he went on with his wicked intentions, and actually kept back every third feather, making a bird to resemble a trogon out of them. When he tried to get me to say that about honesty, I never would do it again, but kept [Pg 62] saying instead, 'Oh fie! Who stole the feathers?' And the more he wanted me to change the word into tea or sugar, the more I cried 'feath—ers.' He was so angry with me about it that he sold me to an old lady, who took me away in her carriage."

"But where did you come from first of all, Polly?" said Herbert. "Where were you born?"

"I really cannot tell you, sir," said Polly. "I have heard the old bird-stuffer telling people I was a native of Western Africa, but whether that was true or not I do not know. All I can recollect of my first home was sitting beside an old parrot like what I am myself now, who, I suppose, was my mother; and on looking round, I saw a strange animal glaring at me from the trunk of the tree behind. I fluttered and screamed, but my mother did not seem to fancy there was any danger, till, [Pg 63] all at once, she was pounced upon by the animal, and dragged away, and I never saw her more. Then I crept back into the nest, and lay half-dead with fright, moaning and crying at times for very loneliness; but she never came. And even now, Master Herbert—would you believe it?—I keep thinking of that dreadful time, and I have to shriek out for some relief to my feelings. You often ask me what I am crying for, but you will know now. And you often wonder why I won't be friends with the cat, and try to bite her when I get a chance. Well, the animal that stole my mother was so very like a cat, that I cannot help hating everything that looks like one.—But don't you think, sir, Mr. Cocky is staying out beyond his time. I am not sure of him, sir. Remember, by [Pg 64] his own showing, he was an ill-behaved, ungrateful bird in his youth."

"Yes; but, Polly, don't you think he has some good qualities too?" said Master Herbert. "I liked to hear him tell how he went to look for his mother, when the rest were running away, leaving her to her fate. I really think, if his brothers had been kinder to him he would have been more amiable. And papa often tells me that if he sees a boy kind to his mother, he is pretty sure to turn out a good man in the end. But tell me, Polly, how you got on after your mother left."

"Well, sir," continued Polly, "as I sat looking out of the nest in the tree, another parrot came and sat beside me, asking all sorts of questions as to where my mother had gone; and when I told him, he stayed and took care of me. I suppose he must have been my father. But before I was [Pg 65] many months older, I was knocked down off the tree, just in the same way as Cockatoo says his mother was knocked down, and I was put into a cage and carried away along with ever so many birds. I've scarcely any recollection of living out of a cage, sir, or off a perch, the time I stayed in my native woods being so short, and so very long ago."

"And how did you like the old lady, Polly?" inquired Herbert.

"Oh, very well indeed, sir," she replied. "I had plenty to eat and drink, and a very fine brass cage to live in, and a servant to attend to my wants along with the other birds my mistress had. I cannot say I was ever troubled with a restless disposition,—owing, I suppose, to my having been taken from my native land when I was so very young,—and I always felt very happy. My mistress took a great deal of notice of me, teaching me a great many things, and particularly songs. I used [Pg 66] to sing a verse of an old song called 'Crazie Jane,' and another called 'The Maid of Lodi,' which used to be a great favourite with my mistress; and when I saw her coming in with some dainty bits from the dessert after dinner, I used to dance about my perch, and cry out,—

'I sing the Maid of Lodi,
Who sweetly sung to me,'

which used to make her so happy, poor old lady. But I am sorry to say my singing led me into some trouble. I used to be put in the kitchen at night to benefit by the heat of the fire, and I used to be teased a good deal by the servants to sing. Now, it was past my usual bed-hour when I was taken to the kitchen, and as I always went to bed at sunset, I used to be quite angry with them, [Pg 67] and would say all sorts of impudent things instead of singing. But, as they would then walk away with my dishes, and threaten to pour water on me if I didn't do what they said, in desperation I would sing my songs to get rid of them. One young woman, the lady's-maid, was particularly tormenting in this way; and when Tom, the footman, tried to teach me a new song, I could not help noticing she was in a great fright. I pricked up my ears at once, and showed Tom I was all attention. In a very few days I could say it quite correctly, but no one knew of it except Tom. Seeing the lady's-maid preparing to go out one day, and dressed in her very finest clothes, I took the opportunity to ask her for a drink of water, my dish being empty; but she was in a hurry, and cross at something, and instead of replying civilly, she made such an ugly face, and flapped her [Pg 68] handkerchief at me. My mistress, who was going out too, had her back turned at the moment, else the maid had not dared to do such a thing. But I had not learned to bear insults quietly then, and was young and hot-headed, so, thirsting for revenge, I screamed out what Tom had taught me:

'How happy you shall be
With your bold soldier boy!'

How frightened she did look, to be sure! Up she came to the cage, and in the most coaxing voice said, 'Pretty Polly! would Polly like some fresh bread and milk?—Oh, please, madam, wait till I get Polly some food! Her dish is quite empty, poor, dear bird!' and away she flew to fetch me some.

"'Why, what's Polly saying, Emma, about a soldier?' said my mistress solemnly. 'Now, you know I [Pg 69] abhor soldiers.'

"'How happy you shall be!
Come with me—you shall see
Your bold soldier boy!'

I sang out again, dancing about my perch in great delight at the mischief I was causing.

"'Emma, what do I hear?' said my mistress. 'Have you still anything to do with that soldier, after what I said?'

"And now I began to feel sorry for poor Emma, who fell a-crying, and held up her hands in despair or entreaty. Then I thought to myself, what good had my revenge done me? So hoping to help her out of the difficulty, I called out, 'Tom, Tom, Tom! Come here, sir! Oh fie!'

"Tom was at the door waiting for our mistress, I knew; and being a kind-hearted lad, he came in at once; and seeing Emma in tears, and hearing the story, told he had taught me the song, and [Pg 70] she knew nothing about it. Though my mistress said she was satisfied with Tom's explanation, she was still angry, and ordered poor Emma to take off her finery and remain at home. After she was gone, Emma took my cage into the garden, where I was often allowed to remain for hours. But I was very much surprised when she took me out and allowed me to sit on her hand, much to little Dido the Italian grayhound's indignation, for he was always a jealous animal. I really believe she wanted me to fly away then and there. But, as I told you before, Master Herbert, I never was of a restless turn, and had no ambition to leave my home. Seeing this, she gave me a great twist by the toes to put me back into the cage; but as she pinched me very hard, I tried, in self-defence, to bite her, and in the scuffle she broke a piece of my toe off, which has never grown on again. [Pg 71] But whenever I look at it I am reminded, if revenge is sweet, it doesn't escape without something bitter too; and Miss Emma no doubt felt the same, because I left my mark for ever upon her soft white arm."

"Thank you, Polly," said Herbert. "I see the fairy is right in saying you have many useful lessons to teach; but I must now go and see what Mr. Cockatoo is about. I do hope he hasn't flown away, for Uncle James would never forgive me for letting him off, he thinks so much of his beautiful plumage."

Herbert had a good hunt all over the grounds for the cockatoo, and was just going to give him up, when, as he approached the summer-house, he heard him chattering, and trying to say, "Pretty Cockatoo." [Pg 72]

"Oh, you're there, are you?" said Herbert. "It's past the time I allowed you to stay out, so come along, old fellow,—a bargain's a bargain."

"Just one more flight, sir," said the cockatoo. "My wings are so stiff, I've only taken a very few."

Herbert having consented, away flew the cockatoo down on to the path; but at that moment a huge cat, which lived outside, and which had a lively young family of five kittens, under the summer-house, saw the bird and made a pounce at him, catching him by the feathers of his tail. Fortunately Herbert saw what had happened, and before the cockatoo had time to scream, he had pitched his cap at Mrs. Puss, and then drove her away with the branch of a tree lying near. Mr. Cockatoo was shaking with fright, and was thankful to find himself inside his cage once [Pg 73] more, with the door securely shut. For some time after, when Herbert urged him to take a little exercise, he refused, saying that he agreed with Mrs. Polly in thinking that, as they were now in a foreign country, flying about did not seem to suit his health, and that there were worse places than his cage.

Some days after, Herbert's cousins came to pay him a visit; and as Minnie was recovering from a severe illness, the sofa was taken out of doors, and placed under the spreading branches of an oak-tree. There she lay, enjoying the fresh cool air that wafted along under the branches; while Herbert read aloud her last new book to her and her sister Grace. Polly, who had taken a great fancy to Minnie, had requested Herbert to place her perch close to them; for, though she liked to be out of doors, her terror of cats was so great, that unless she was closely guarded she preferred to remain in her cage. It was a book on natural history Herbert was reading from. In the midst of a dry description of the habits of the humming-bird, he suddenly broke out with—— [Pg 74]

"'The humming-bird! the humming-bird!
So fairy-like and bright
It lives among the sunny flowers,—
A creature of delight!

"'In the radiant islands of the East,
Where fragrant spices grow,
A thousand thousand humming-birds
Are glancing to and fro!'"

"Oh! how beautiful they must be!" exclaimed Herbert, pausing in the reading. "How delightful it must be to visit foreign countries! Only think of 'a thousand thousand humming-birds!'" [Pg 75]

HERBERT AND HIS COUSINS. *Page 74*.

"Do you know," said Grace, "when I was a little thing, I used to lie awake at night and think of all the different animals and birds and fishes there are in the world, till I declare I got so frightened I used to scream out. Nurse used to call it the nightmare; but it was no such thing. I wish I could have thought of only the humming-birds—it would have been lovely." [Pg 76] [Pg 77]

"Cheer up, Sam!" sung Mrs. Polly from her perch, in a very pathetic voice, which set the children laughing heartily; for somehow, as Minnie said, Polly always knew how to bring in her wise sayings just when they were wanted,—and there was no doubt she was the very cleverest parrot that ever lived.

It was during the visit his cousins paid Herbert, that the great macaw arrived from Uncle James; and Herbert was delighted to find he was not a wild specimen, as he had supposed, but quite an educated one. They called him the "Great Mogul;" but though he was tamed, he had learned so many bad words from the sailors, that Herbert thought it would be better to keep him separate from Mrs. Polly and the cockatoo till he had forgotten them. He was a very greedy bird, and ate so fast that he was constantly dropping the best parts in his hurry to get some more. Dash, a little terrier belonging to Herbert's cousins, was not long in finding this out; and whenever he saw the boys feeding the parrots, off he would go and seat himself at the foot of the perch. He used to sit up and beg all the time, and evidently thought the pieces were thrown down to him out of pure good-nature; for he was always exceedingly polite to the parrots, and when he heard them shrieking at sight of the cats, would bark and drive them away. [Pg 78] [Pg 79]

[Pg 80]

THE "GREAT MOGUL". *Page* ***78***.

"I can't say I admire the appearance of the 'Great Mogul,'" said Charley laughing; "he has such ugly bare cheeks." [Pg 81]

"Oh! but look at his beautiful tail; and could anything be more beautiful than those scarlet feathers?—and see to his blue wings! I don't wonder he is considered the most magnificent of the parrot tribe."

"It is certainly a very beautiful bird," said Charley; "but I've read somewhere about it looking like a richly-liveried footman, and whoever said so was not far wrong."

Dash had slipped away when he found there were no more pieces to be got from the macaw; and when Herbert and Charley went into the room where Mrs. Polly and the cockatoo stayed, there they found him, sitting at the foot of Cockatoo's perch begging for a dainty morsel. The cockatoo was chattering away to him; but had Dash only known all the severe names he was being called, [Pg 82] he would scarcely have sat there so calmly. Polly, however, who had a greater command of the English language, was doing her best to restrain his greedy disposition. "Oh fie, sir!" she kept saying. "Greedy Dick!—Who stole the sugar?—Leave the room this moment!—Oh fie, sir!"

Dash did lay back his ears and look round, a good deal ashamed of himself; but he could not tear himself away so long as the cockatoo held that tempting morsel. The greedy dog knew that both the cockatoo and Polly never held anything long, and that if he only had patience he would get it in the end. Polly was calling out for the twentieth time—"Leave the room, sir!—Greedy Dick!—Oh fie! fie!" when Herbert and Charley entered. [Pg 83]

"Why, what's the matter, Polly?" said Herbert. "It's not a good thing to lose your temper in that way. Come, tell us who this greedy Dick is, that you are always sending out of the room."

Charley was always delighted to be with Herbert when he fed the parrots; for though he did not understand their language, as Herbert did, his cousin acted as interpreter, and some of the stories were really very entertaining. The other children were often there too; and over and over again they vowed to be kind to all living creatures, in the hope that they too would be allowed to understand the language of the birds.

"Yes, sir; I shall be most happy to tell you about greedy Dick," said Polly. "But I should like to see the new parrot. Cockatoo there says he is so beautiful that we are thrown quite into the shade, [Pg 84] and he has been mourning ever since."

"Well, at present I really cannot let you see him," said Herbert. "He says such naughty words, that I am forced to keep him in a room by himself; but if you like, I can show you a picture of him, or of some birds like him in their native woods." Here Herbert ran off for his book on natural history; and while he was gone, Polly entertained Charley as well as she could till Herbert's return. Polly admired the picture very much; but said, though his plumage was very fine, no doubt, she did not like the expression of his face—though she dared say it was not a good likeness. She said this out of civility, but all the time she thought the "Great Mogul" a most unlovable-looking bird, and she was very glad to find herself a gray parrot instead. [Pg 85]

"And now, Polly, since I have shown you the picture," said Herbert, "tell us about greedy Dick."

"It is a sad story, Master Herbert," said Polly, shaking her head and moving about her perch very slowly. "Oh dear!—oh dear!" she continued in English; "I'm really quite—oh fie! fie!" Then in her own language she went on to say: "Dick came to stay with a lady I had the pleasure of residing with, after I left my old friend who had the maid. I was really a fine-looking bird at that time;" and here Polly flounced out her feathers coquettishly, as if she were still a young bird. "I did like living there; no servants ever were allowed to wait upon me, for the young ladies of the house were so fond of me they fed me with their own fair hands. Dick was their nephew, and a nice-looking boy,—clever, too,—very; but he had one bad habit that grieved his aunts very much. At all [Pg 86]
his meals he would keep stuffing and stuffing himself, just like a little pig feeding for market. He always chose the daintiest dishes, and would look so ill-natured if any of his aunts happened to say, 'Why, Dick, you will die of apoplexy; you have been helped to that pudding three times.'

"He never knew when to stop, and oh dear! though he was a good-looking boy enough, how ugly he did look when he was eating! His Aunt Mary, and my favourite mistress, used to say so often, 'Greedy Dick,' that I very soon picked up the words; and when I saw him slipping into the press to steal the sugar, I would call out—'Oh fie! fie!—who stole the sugar?' His aunts used to tell him that even a bird had more sense, and used to beg him to take an example from me; for I did not [Pg 87]
gobble up everything I got at once, but put it in my tin dish till I was hungry. Ah! Master Dick knew that very well indeed; and many a time had he slipped up and stolen my piece of sweet-cake, or other dainty.

"One day his Aunt Mary came to my perch and said, 'Come now, Polly; you shall have this nice piece of sugar if you will say 'Pretty Mary.' I had tried hard for ever so long to say it, but somehow my tongue would not twist out the exact words. But I was not pleased with Miss Mary for asking me to say it for a bribe; she ought to have known me better, I thought, and I sat quite silent, determined not even to say 'Pretty Polly.'

"'Oh now, Polly, that is naughty!' she said, seeing my sulky looks. 'Well, you shall have it if you take it out of my mouth.' [Pg 88]

PRETTY MARY. *Page 88.*

"Of course I could not object to that," said Polly with a laugh; "So I stepped on to her finger as desired, and took the bit of sugar from her pretty red lips, and put it into my tin dish. Then, to show her I was grateful for her kindness, I cried out, 'Mary! pretty Mary!' and she was so pleased, she wanted me to have another piece of sugar as a reward; but I would not have it. No; I made my little speeches for love, and not for sugar. [Pg 89]

"When I was sitting quietly thinking of things in general, and my mistress in particular, Master Dick, who had been sitting at the window all the time, and saw what his aunt had given me, and where I had put it, came stealthily across the lawn; and putting up his hand took hold of my piece [Pg 90]
of sugar.

"Now, I had determined in my own mind I would punish him the very first opportunity; so I flew [Pg 91]
upon him in a moment; and catching hold of the sleeve of his coat, held it fast with my claws. He tried to shake me off, but I flew on to his head before he could get away; and I do not know who

screamed the loudest. Aunt Mary and one or two of the servants came running out; but though they tried to get me on to my perch, I kept calling, 'Who stole the sugar? Oh fie! greedy Dick!'

"The boy had been so frightened that he forgot to drop the sugar; and on his aunt opening his hand, there it was, safe enough. She had seen him from her room window take it out of my dish; and when I at last allowed her to lift me on to my perch, she gave Master Dick such a beating that he did not steal my sugar any more.—But, Master Herbert, there is something the matter with the cockatoo," said Polly; "I hear him saying some angry words to somebody in the garden." [Pg 92]

On looking out of the window, Herbert saw his cousin Grace standing with a young visitor before the cockatoo's perch. Jane, the visitor, was calling him "Ugly Cocky! bad Cocky! ugly Cockatoo!" and telling him that all the nice things would be given to the pussy cat, and everything disagreeable to him. She was doing this for no reason whatever, except that she once heard her brother speaking to a parrot in this manner to see it made angry; and poor Cockatoo, who always considered himself a very pretty bird, and had never been spoken to so unkindly before, was certainly ruffled enough.

"Pretty Cockatoo," he said in reply, looking from Jane to Grace, who could not bear to annoy the poor bird. [Pg 93]

"Oh, don't speak so, Jane," said Grace; "Cockatoo is such an amiable, pretty bird! He has been so good-natured ever since we came; and Herbert says he is trying to be contented, though of course he greatly prefers to live in his native woods, poor bird."

"But how does Herbert know the cockatoo likes that?" said Jane.

"Oh, because a fairy gave him permission to understand the language of the birds," replied Grace; "and the cockatoo told him his whole history."

"Oh dear! how funny!" said Jane. "I wonder if the fairy would give me permission!"

"No, I don't think so," said Grace; "people must be very kind to all the animals, both great and small, else the fairy will not give them that power. [Pg 94] But Herbert says, if we are very kind to the animals, even although we do not understand their language exactly as he does, we will get to understand a different kind; and by the expression in their eye, and by their voice, will know when they are happy or sad. Now, you always kill every insect and fly you see."

"I really can't help killing them. I wonder why they were made at all," said Jane.

"But, Jane, do you never think how displeased God must be if you kill even a beetle?" said Grace. "I remember reading somewhere——

'The poor beetle that we tread upon,
In corporal sufferance finds a pang as great
As when a giant dies.'"

"I can't help it," said Jane; "I do hate beetles; and even if they do suffer, I must kill them."

By this time the two girls had come close to the place where Herbert and Charley were, and they [Pg 95] heard what Jane said quite plainly. Herbert was about to express his indignation, when Polly called out, "I'm shocked! leave the room! murder! oh dear! oh fie!"

"You may well say so, Polly," said Herbert. "I cannot understand how any one can kill one of God's creatures—more especially a girl."

That afternoon, when the children were busily engaged playing at blowing soap bubbles, Jane stole out into the garden, and crossed over to where Polly was sitting among the bushes. Of late Mrs. Polly had rather enjoyed being set at liberty, and, with Cockatoo, would sometimes defy the cat and her kittens. Coming up to her now, Jane began to tell Polly she never meant to kill an animal or an insect again; and that she meant to strive very hard, in the hope that the good fairy [Pg 96] would let her understand the language of the birds.

Herbert, who had been playing as busily as any of his cousins, began to notice that the cockatoo was a good deal afraid of the airy soap bubbles—especially when they lighted on his back—and so he took him off his perch as quietly as possible, not to disturb the game, and carried him away, to place him beside Mrs. Polly. By this means he had overheard Jane's speech.

"I am very glad to hear you say so," he said. "I am sure if you would only take the trouble to examine a little more closely the insects you are so fond of killing, you would be surprised at their beauty. I will lend you my book, if you like. I really cannot understand why boys and girls take such little interest in natural history. Speaking of fairies, you will read of them there in the shape [Pg 97] of the butterflies—what can be more fairy-like?—and I will tell you what mamma often says: if we only knew what pleasure we could draw from common objects around us, rainy days would be less dreary, and we should have happier hearts and more contented minds."

"I feel you are right there, Master Herbert," said the cockatoo. "I have felt twice as happy since Mrs. Polly persuaded me to make the most of my present condition; and I ought to have known it by experience—having brought all my troubles upon myself by cherishing a discontented spirit."

"Ah, children, children," said Mrs. Polly, with a wise shake of her head, "when you come to look back upon life from as long a pilgrimage, you will see that the busier you are, and the more good [Pg 98] you do, there will be less inclination to be discontented. And with such a beautiful world around you, and so much to learn about it, and the wise lessons it can teach, who would be anything but contented?—But I am keeping you from your companions, Master Herbert, so I must wish you good-day, sir. Good-day, miss," said Polly in English; "I'll now take a nap;" and with that she laid her head on her back, and went off to sleep.

As Cockatoo followed her example, Herbert knew by experience no more could be got out of them; and with a united "Good-bye, dear old Polly! Good-bye, Cockatoo!" Herbert and Jane returned to the house and were soon sending a whole fleet of soap-bells up into the sunshine.

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