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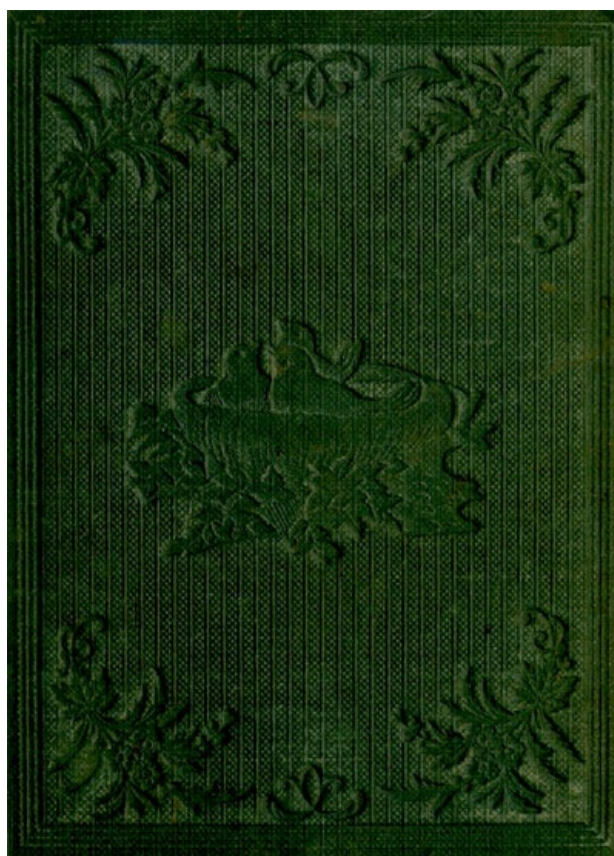
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# **Little Robins Learning to Fly**

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LITTLE

ROBINS LEARNING TO FLY.

BY

MRS. MADELINE LESLIE,

AUTHOR OF "THE HOME LIFE SERIES;" "MRS. LESLIE'S JUVENILE  
SERIES," ETC.

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## LITTLE ROBINS LEARNING TO FLY.

[7]

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### CHAPTER I.

#### MR. ROBIN'S POOR COUSINS.

EARLY one May morning, Fred Symmes was sent by his mother upon an errand to the next farm. He did not go around by the road, but jumped over the stone wall, and passed along through the pleasant orchard. As he came near the pear tree, he saw a large robin flying back and forth from it, and stopping to look, soon discovered a nest in the fork formed by two of the lower limbs.

[8]

What was his surprise, as the robin flew toward the ground, to have it alight on his arm! when he at once recognized it as Mr. Robin, who had a wife and family in the elm tree near the cottage.

"Why, what are you doing here this bright morning?" he asked, holding out his finger, upon which the familiar bird readily perched.

[9]

Mr. Robin cocked his head, turned up his bright eye, and tried to explain. But as Fred did not seem to understand, and kept saying, "I hope you have not forsaken your wife and little nestlings, pretty birdie," he alighted on the ground, picked up a worm, and flew away into the tree.

[10]

Fred quickened his steps, did his errand at the farm, and on his return, found Mr. Robin had flown away. He climbed into a tree, from which he could look into the nest. There he saw a female bird sheltering her young, who were feebly chirping as she partly rose to meet the intruder.

She uttered a cry of distress, and began to flutter her wings; but Fred quickly slid down from the tree, and put an end to her alarm.

[11]

When he reached home, both Mr. and Mrs. Robin were picking up crumbs at the cottage door.

"Grandpa," said he, when they were seated at breakfast, "I saw something very funny this morning. I found our robin in a pear tree near Mr. Bacon's farm, feeding a whole nest full of birds."

"Were they alone?" inquired Mr. Symmes.

[12]

"No, father. The mother bird was there; and he fed her too."

"I suppose the father has been killed," suggested the old gentleman. "It is very cruel to kill birds when they have little families to take care of. But I have read many instances where birds have assisted each other when in distress: where the male bird has been killed, one of his neighbors has fed and assisted in rearing the young brood, at the same time he attended to the wants of his own family."

[13]

An hour or two later, grandpa sat in his arm chair under the shade of the graceful elm. Fred had brought his tools, and was converting a large wooden box into a playhouse for his little sister. Annie stood near him, her apron filled with small bits of broken china, which she called her dishes, and which she was waiting to arrange in her new cupboard.

[14]

It was very warm; and the boy's forehead was wet with perspiration. He drew his jacket sleeve across his face, as he exclaimed, "There, Annie, your house is done."

"Thank you, thank you, dear brother," cried the little girl, in an ecstasy of delight. She emptied the bright-colored crockery on the ground, and ran to the house for her dolly and two chairs; the latter her mother had made of pieces of smooth cornstalks, fastened together with pins.

[15]

"O, doesn't it look pretty, grandpa?" she asked, jumping up and down in her glee. "See Minnie sitting in her parlor. Now I'll set up my dishes. O dear!" she added, with a quick, appealing glance at her brother, "how nice it would be if I had a table!"

[16]

"Well, some time I'll make you one," answered Fred, with a smile. "And you can put your dolly's cradle into the bedroom."

"O yes," shouted Annie, with a cry of joy; and she ran away to fetch it.

"I will help you make a table," said grandpa to Fred; "and I think we can manage to put together a very pretty one between us."

[17]

"I want to hear more about birds helping each other," said the boy. "It seems so queer that they should know enough to do it."

"It is a most interesting study," answered the old gentleman, "to watch the character and habits of birds, and one which has engaged the attention of many learned men. There is no portion of God's creation in which his wisdom is more displayed than in the formation of birds. Each and every variety are exactly fitted for the circumstances in which they are to be placed. For instance, the eagle, who lives on high crags or rocks, almost inaccessible to man, has a short, strong beak, hooked at the end, wings of immense strength, and claws large and sharp. He is gifted with extraordinary clearness of sight. Sitting on the summit of a huge rock, or sailing around at a great height in the air, he discerns his prey. Sometimes it is a fish just below the surface of the water, or a lamb accidentally separated from its mother. He shoots down, down, and with the speed, sure aim, and straightness of an arrow, pounces upon the prey, and carries it off in his strong talons."

[18]

[19]

"How different from our pretty little robins!" exclaimed Fred.

[20]

"Yes, the eagle is a bird of prey, and is formed accordingly. The robin lives upon grubs, insects, or seeds and fruit. It is not necessary, therefore, for him to be possessed of much strength. His beak is just fitted for the kind of labor he must perform in getting his food. It is slightly notched near the end. He is a very social bird, and is remarkable for the bravery with which he defends his young.

[21]

Then there is the pelican of the wilderness, who is furnished with a large pouch, joined to the lower part of his beak, in which he can carry a considerable quantity of food to his young."

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## CHAPTER II.

[22]

### THE HEN HAWK.

WHILE grandpa and Fred were talking, they suddenly heard a loud cry of distress from the hen in the coop, quickly followed by the cluck, cluck, with which she summoned her chickens under her wings.

Presently Mr. and Mrs. Robin seemed to partake of the fright. She uttered continual sharp cries, while her husband flew with quick, violent motions over his nest. [23]

Fred hastened toward the barn, and saw a large hawk sailing in the air above them. He ran to call his father, who was, fortunately, near at hand.

"Bring my gun," said Mr. Symmes, taking down a flask of powder from a high shelf in the shed.

"Now we'll soon bring him down," he continued, stationing himself at the back door. He took his aim. Annie turned pale, and pressed her hands over her ears. Then came the report; and, true enough, the great, brown bird fell to the ground just in front of the hen-coop at which it had been aiming. [24]

"That was a good shot," remarked grandpa, walking slowly to the place.

"I seldom miss fire," said Mr. Symmes, with a look of honest pride. "My hand is steady, and the gun is a faithful old fellow, that has served honorably in war, and has helped me to get rid of many an enemy." [25]

"O, father, see how it flutters! It is not quite dead."

"Bring it here, child, and I'll put an end to its pain. We should always avoid keeping any living being in misery." He wrung the hawk's neck, though Annie screamed, and then began to cry. [26]

"Why, sis, do you want our chickens and birdies all carried off?" asked Fred. "This is a bad bird, and would have stolen them away if father had not killed it. Hark! there are the robins now singing us a song to thank us for protecting them."

They all stopped for a moment to listen, as the beautiful songsters warbled forth their sweet strains, filling the air with their rich melody. [27]

"Do you suppose they really know what we have done for them?" inquired the boy.

"Certainly I do," answered grandpa, "They made known their wants as well as they were able, and in language that it was easy to understand. The little nestlings knew at once, from the cries of their parents, that there was danger near, and joined in the notes of distress. Now, while their father and mother sit quietly upon the bough singing their thanks, they feel sure the danger is past, and that no accident will happen to them." [28]

"I'm sure the chickies knew," said Annie. "They ran in to their mother as quick as they could, and cuddled together under her wings."

"They knew just as well," replied her father, "and understood her language as quick as you would if your mother saw a great lion in the yard, and called you, [\*\*?]"Annie, come here! run quick into the house, or you will be killed![\*\*?]" [29]

In the mean time, Fred had been examining the dead hawk, and now exclaimed, "O, what a strong bird this is! I don't wonder smaller ones are afraid of it."

"It is of the same family as the eagle and falcon," said grandpa, "though, as you see, its beak is very short, and bends gradually from its base. It is naturally a ferocious bird, but is capable of strong affection for those who treat it with kindness. In England, hawks were formerly much prized, as they were trained to catch game of various sorts, and sometimes became so tame that they would not only come when called, but they would bring home to their owner whatever they took in their flight. [30]

"A hawk which was once owned by a gentleman in England, escaped from its owner, after accompanying him on a hunting expedition, and flew [31]

hundreds of miles in the short space of about six hours. It alighted on a vessel bound for America from Europe, which was nearly midway on her passage, and was recognized by a silver ring on its leg, with the owner's name engraved upon it."

[32]

"Did it remain on board the vessel?" inquired Fred, earnestly.

"For some days it did, my dear, and then it took its flight."

"Do you suppose it could find its way back to its master?" asked Annie.

"O, yes, as easily as the robins in the tree will find their way back to our farm when spring comes again," said grandpa with a smile.

[33]

"The chickens are all out again now," said the little girl, running to the coop.

"Yes, indeed!" exclaimed her brother; "they have forgotten all about their fright by this time. Grandpa, what would you do with this dead hawk?"

"I would dig a hole in the ground and bury it, my dear."

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## CHAPTER III.

[34]

### LEARNING TO FLY.

THE next morning, Fred was awakened earlier than usual by a loud and continued chirping in the robins' nest. He dressed himself quickly, and ran to the window, where he saw Dick, the largest bird, sitting on the edge of the nest, while his father and mother were hopping from one bough to another, twittering incessantly, and trying to encourage him to try his wings.

[35]

Fred was greatly excited, and ran to the stairs to call his sister, who slept below in the room with her parents.

This was indeed an important day in the robins' nest. Dick and Jack, Molly and Katy, were now fledged; and it was high time for them to begin to exercise a little.

"Dick is the oldest, and must try his wings first," said Mr. Robin, firmly.

[36]

"I dare not," answered Dick. "It makes me dizzy only to look down."

"Don't stop to look, then," said his mother. "Spread out your wings and fly away. Try, and you will find it very easy. Here, see how I do it." She perched for a moment on the nest by his side, and then slowly raising her wings, flew to the ground.

"I know I shall kill myself," muttered the cowardly bird.

[37]

"Let me fly," exclaimed Jack. "It looks easy when you do it."

"It is easy," said his father. "It is only to make up your mind, 'I can fly if I will,' spread out your wings, and away you go. Dick, as you are the oldest, the privilege of leaving the nest first is yours; but if you do not start before I chirp three times, Jack may take your place."

He then began, "Chirp, chirp, chirp;" but the foolish Dick did not move.

[38]

His father was much displeased, and gave him a blow with his beak, pushing him back into the nest.

"Come, my brave Jack," said his mother; "you shall show us how easily you can learn to fly."



Poor Jack's heart beat strangely, as he saw how far it was to the ground. His mother showed him how to move his wings, continually spreading them, flying a yard or two, and then returning. [39]

"I am a bird, and must learn some time," chirped Jack; "so here goes—" And shutting his eyes, he resolutely let go his hold of the nest, and came down, rather awkwardly, to be sure, but still safely, upon the ground. [40]

His mother instantly joined him. "Good Jack," said she, "I am proud of you;" and she repeatedly touched her beak to his. [40]

"I thought I was falling, falling," answered Jack; "and now that I am here, I'm afraid I shall be obliged to stay, for it seems impossible to get back."

"Here, take this worm, my dear," said his mother, "and then mount that little bush."

Jack did so, and found he could fly a short distance with perfect ease; indeed, he was delighted with the exercise, and, being quite pleased with his mother's praise of his conduct in showing more courage than his brother, he thought, "There was never a happier robin than I am!" [41]

"I will leave you," said Mrs. Robin, "for I see your father cannot persuade Dick to venture. You may practise from the bush to the ground and back until I return. There is no danger," she added, as she saw Jack turn his head quickly and gaze anxiously around. "All are friends to us; even King, the great dog. And there he is now; so I will stay and introduce you to him." [42]

King came walking into the yard, and Mrs. Robin hopped boldly up to him, calling Jack to follow her. She stopped when she was within a few feet of him, and began talking in a loud twitter, every now and then turning her bright eye round upon the young bird. [43]

"Bow, wow, wow!" barked the dog, in such a loud roar that Jack shook all over. But King seemed to understand that Mrs. Robin had asked his interest in her young fledgling, and he was quite ready to do his part. He walked a step or two forward, and then lay down to survey the new comer at his leisure. [44]

At this minute, Annie came running to the door with an apron full of crumbs. Her face was glowing with pleasure, and her voice was so kind and cheerful, as she called out, "Birdie, birdie, pretty birdie," that Jack felt acquainted at once.

Mrs. Robin caught one crumb, swallowed it, and then, with a glance of affection at Jack, returned to her duties in the tree. [45]

The little robin hopped up nearer, and began picking up the bread, ever and anon cocking his funny little head, and chirping pleasantly, as if to thank her for her care. Then he returned to the bush, and flew up and down, up and down, while Annie laughed, and shouted, and clapped her hands, and called him the smartest bird she ever knew.

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## CHAPTER IV. [46]

### GETTING WORMS.

"COME, Dick," said Mrs. Robin, in an encouraging tone, after she had related Jack's delight at his success. "Come, now, or your little sisters will learn to fly before you do."

"I don't feel at all afraid," chirped Katy; "now Jack has learned, I know I can."

"That is right, my dear," said her mother. "But come, Dick, your father is getting impatient." [47]

Dick reluctantly hopped up on the side of the nest.

"Now," said Mr. Robin, "I will give you one more chance to retrieve your character. Spread your wings and fly away, or be content to remain in the nest without food. For I will no longer feed so disobedient and obstinate a bird."

Mrs. Robin hopped from branch to branch uneasily, while her husband was speaking. She would not be guilty of the impropriety of interrupting him; but she feared he was making a threat his parental affection would not allow him to execute. "O, I'm sure Dick will try to be as brave as his brother!" she said; "look, how he is enjoying himself, picking his fill, and chirping to the dear little girl!" [48]

"I'll chirp one, two, three," said his father, "and don't let me find you here when I'm through." [49]

Dick, though very much afraid, was more than half inclined to venture. His father's threat of leaving him without food had terrified him; and then he saw Jack in the enjoyment of plenty; but he could not quite make up his mind to let go of the nest.

"Chirp, chirp," cried his father. Dick trembled, and at last ventured to hop to the next bough; and before Mr. Robin had repeated the last chirp, his mother went behind him and pushed him off. [50]

Poor Dick was awfully frightened; but before he had time to scream, he had alighted safely at the foot of the tree.

"O dear!" said he, straightening himself up with a braggadocio air. "It's nothing at all. Here I am, safe and sound. I can fly now as well as any bird." [51]

Jack flew from the lilac bush to congratulate him on his success. "I knew you could fly, if you would only make the attempt," said he, kindly.

"Of course I can fly," answered Dick. "I was not at all afraid. I saw you wanted to alight first, and so I held back; that was all."

At this answer Jack was very angry. He flew at his brother, and was just about to pick him, when he remembered his promise to his mother to strive for peace. [52]

"After all," said he, hopping away, "you are not worth quarrelling with. You are a wicked, lying bird."

"It is now so late," said Mr. Robin to his wife, "I think we had better feed Molly and Katy, and eat our own breakfast, before I go to my cousin's family. When I come back, we will give our daughters their lessons." [53]

They flew away first to the garden, when Mr. Robin stood a moment, as was his custom, looking vacantly around. Suddenly he cocked his ear on one side, made a glancing sort of dart with his head and neck, gave one or two little hops, then listened attentively, while his eye glistened with animation and intelligence. He held his beak close down to the ground, then drew back his head and hopped once or twice; then, after a moment's pause to ascertain that all was right, he began to pick with all his might, and presently pulled out a fine worm, which his keen sense of hearing informed him was not far off, and which his hops and pickings had brought to the surface to escape what the poor worm thought was his underground enemy, the mole. [54] [55]

After having repeated this process many times, until Molly and Katy were satisfied, Mr. and Mrs. Robin flew back to the yard, and alighted at the cottage door. Here they found the family assembled to watch the motions of the young robins. Jack had grown very friendly with Annie, and had even ventured to hop up and rest on King's head. [56]

It was evident to all, that the dog was delighted with this mark of

friendship, though he considered it beneath his dignity to take much notice of the little fellow.

Dick appeared to be not so great a favorite. Fred and his sister had often watched him from the window, and had already given him the name of the greedy bird. Now he acted consistently with that character, and seemed wholly occupied with the crumbs, hopping about and picking them up as fast as possible. [57]

Mrs. Robin tried to make an apology for him, at the same time calling him to come forward and speak to his kind friends. But Dick could only stop to bow awkwardly, and then return to his food again. Indeed, he much wondered how his parents and brother could wish to spend their time in talking, while there was such a feast spread out before them. [58]

"Now," said Mrs. Robin to Jack, "I must go back to your sisters—will you go with me?"

"I will," answered Jack. "I want to tell Katy what a fine time I have had." So he turned up his head in a very arch way to Annie, and after a few pretty little chirps, flew lightly into the top of the lilac bush. [59]

Dick made no answer, and his mother determined to take no notice of him, but to let him return to the nest when he thought fit. She ascended to the tree, where Jack alighted as soon as she did.

His little heart panted with the excitement and exertion, but his mother praised him, and his sisters received him with joy.

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## CHAPTER V.

 [60]

### SORROW IN THE NEST.

"I DO not think," said Molly, "that I shall ever learn to fly."

"O, don't be afraid!" cried Jack, soothingly. "We'll all help you."

"I am not afraid, but I cannot get away from the nest."

"Why not?" asked Mrs. Robin, in surprise. "Why not?" repeated Jack and Katy.

"Because my foot is fastened to the bottom of it," replied poor Molly, in a mournful tone. [61]

Her mother hopped to her side, and endeavored to remove a long piece of worsted thread, which was woven into the nest, and was now firmly twisted about Molly's leg.

"How long has this been done?" she asked, in an anxious tone.

"I first discovered it last night," said the patient bird. "Every time I tried to stir, it bound me firmer than before. I have endeavored[\*\*endeavoured?] to remove it with my beak, but I think I have only made it worse. Now I fear I can never learn to fly." [62]

"Dear Molly," said Jack, pressing his neck to hers.

"I will stay in the nest with you," said the tender-hearted Katy.

Mrs. Robin said nothing, but after flying to the top of the tree to see whether her husband was in sight, she began to pull at the string; but every motion made poor Molly utter a cry of pain. [63]

"I must be content to remain quietly in the nest," she faltered, in a

touching tone of sadness.

Jack and Katy began to chirp most piteously, and continued to do so until their father returned.

In the mean time Dick went on eating until he could scarcely move; and when he began to think it was time to return to the nest, he was so heavy and stupid that he could not raise his wings. He heard the continued chirping of his brother and sister, and said to himself, "Probably they are anxious about me; but I will let them see that I can take care of myself." [64]

As he said this he tried to feel very brave, but he really longed for the pleasant nest and the shelter of his mother's wings. [65]

Just then he heard the [**\*cockerel?**]cockrel crowing right merrily. He had often heard it before; but now it sounded dreadfully loud and near at hand; and indeed it was so, for presently Mr. Cock came marching by, his head erect, and the comb on his foretop glowing like fire.

Dick ran to the lilac bush, and trying to conceal himself in some of the lower branches, trembled like a leaf in the wind. Here at last he fell asleep, with his head tucked under his wing. [66]

When Mr. Robin returned from his labor of love, he found his wife and family in deep affliction. Poor Molly lay exhausted at the bottom of the nest, her limb being more firmly secured to it by the exertions of her mother to remove it. Jack and Katy kept up a succession of plaintive cries, while their mother hopped from one bough to another, her tail jerking and her wings flapping in distress. [67]

They all began at once to repeat the sad story of Molly's detention, which Mr. Robin listened to with sharp cries of pain. He hopped into the nest, but the poor bird begged so earnestly not to be disturbed at present, that he postponed trying to remove the string until another day.

"Come, darlings," said he, "I will sing you a song, to try to cheer your spirits." [68]

He flew to the Observatory at the top of the tree, and warbled forth,—

"See, the morning lights the skies;  
Open, birdie, ope your eyes;  
The trees begin to blossom fair,  
And fling their odors on the air;  
And every balmy zephyr brings  
Health and sweetness on its wings.  
The plants within the garden beds  
Begin to lift their pretty heads.  
We, merry birds, extend our throats,  
And carol forth our sweetest notes. [69]  
The hen, with all her little brood,  
Comes clucking round the door for food;  
Around the yard the pigeons fly;  
The stately geese, with heads so high,  
Are marching off to swim and scream,  
And sport upon the glassy stream.  
The fields are smiling all around;  
You cannot hear one jarring sound;  
There's nothing harsh, there's nothing  
sad,  
But all seems beautiful and glad.  
O, how delightful all we see!  
And if to robins, such as we,  
So much of loveliness is given,  
How very charming must be heaven!"

## KATY'S FLIGHT.

THE next morning Molly felt quite refreshed. "My foot," she said, in answer to her mother's inquiries, "feels quite free from pain. I am convinced that it is my lot to remain quietly at home; and I will try to bear it as cheerfully as I can."

"Dear Molly," whispered her mother.

"Darling sister," repeated Jack and Katy.

Dick said nothing, but looked stupidly from one to the other, wondering what they could mean. He had returned to the nest late the previous evening, and had not heard of his sister's affliction.

Mr. Robin sat on his favorite bough, gazing sadly at the poor bird. He had not yet tried to relieve her, and notwithstanding his wife's fears, indulged strong hopes of being able to remove the string without breaking the tender limb.

"I cannot be really unhappy," continued Molly, looking cheerfully around, "while you are all so kind. To be sure, I have longed for the time when I could fly from bough to bough, or skim through the clear air; and I have hoped, when I was old enough, to find a mate and rear a family of my own in the same sweet, peaceful happiness as our dear parents have reared us; but now I resign all these innocent joys, and find my delight in sharing yours."

"Come, dear Katy," she added, "let me no longer detain you from your morning flight. I long to see how gracefully you will raise your pinions and soar away."

"Sweetest and best of sisters," murmured Katy, in a loving tone, "every moment I love you better than before, and am more sorry to leave you;" and she nestled closely to Molly's side.

"You will soon return, dear one," said her sister, tenderly; "and remember there will always be one heart in the nest that will welcome you with joy. Go now, love, and treasure up all you hear and see, to cheer me in my solitude."

While this beautiful interchange of affection was taking place, Mr. and Mrs. Robin, the delighted parents, were sitting near, their hearts every moment swelling with pleasure.

"Now," said the tender mother to herself, "I am well repaid for all my care and watchfulness of my beloved children; for all my share of the labor of building a nest; for the long days and nights, through cold and rain, that I have sheltered my eggs, until at last I have seen the dear ones come forth."

"Yes, indeed, and for the anxiety with which I have endeavored to impress virtue and affection upon their young minds. To see them growing up in the interchange of mutual affection, and to hear them give utterance to pure and noble sentiments, far exceed all the joys of my lifetime."

One thought of Dick, as unlike the others, intruded itself upon her mind; but she would not allow this to interrupt the delight she had experienced.

Very similar were the thoughts and emotions of Mr. Robin, but mingled with them was a plan he was forming for the benefit of his dear child. His purpose was to attract to his nest the notice of some kind friend at the cottage. If he could succeed in this, he was perfectly confident that she could be liberated.

But now his attention must be given to Katy, who, in obedience to her sister's wish, hopped to the side of the nest.

"O, dear!" she chirped; "it seems a very long way to the ground."

"It's just nothing at all," said Dick, spreading his wings and flying away.

"I know just how you feel," added Jack; "but it is really safe, or our parents would not allow us to try it;—and only think what delightful sails we will have through the bracing air. Come, dear; now we'll start." [79]

"Steady, my little one," called out Mr. Robin. "Open your wings like this. There, that is right; now let go the nest. One moment more, and you'll be safe on the ground."

"Bravo! pretty bird, bravo!" shouted Fred, who had that moment opened the outer door. "That was well done for a beginner. Come, hop up this way, and I'll give you some crumbs." [80]

"Chirp, chirp, chirp," answered little Katy, her bright eyes twinkling with pleasure.

Fred darted into the house, and presently returned with a liberal supply of food.

Mr. Robin caught up the largest piece just as Dick was hopping toward it, and ascended with it to the nest. [81]

"O, ho!" exclaimed Fred, "I suppose there are more birdies in the tree."

"Yes," said Annie, "[\*\*extra "]who had run to the door in her night dress, "you know we counted four little mites of robins."

"O, don't let that greedy bird get all the best crumbs!" she added, as Dick hopped from one piece of bread to another, catching them up as fast as he could. [82]

"Just see how pretty those act," said Fred, pointing to Jack and Katy.

"Yes, he stands back to give her a chance, but the greedy one cares for none but himself."

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## CHAPTER VII.

 [83]

### MR. ROBIN'S APPEAL.

WHEN the tender parents had finished their willing task of feeding Molly, they hopped forward close to the very door of the cottage, and seeing the old gentleman sitting in the room, Mr. Robin made bold to walk in and make known his errand.

"I wonder what he is talking about, so very loud and earnest," exclaimed Fred, coming in softly behind him. [84]

"I don't know; but he is very zealous about it. See how he turns first one eye, then the other, while he twitters away as if his life depended upon making us understand."

Suddenly robin uttered a sharp cry, and flew away toward the nest; and before they could express their surprise, he was back again, twittering as fast as ever.

Fred laughed aloud. "How very funny!" he cried. "What does it mean? He never did so before." [85]

"I have no doubt he is trying to tell us something; and I fear it is not pleasant news, from his mournful cry."

"I wish we could understand," said the boy.

"I once read of a man," said grandpa, "who, from his boyhood, had studied the language of birds, and by close attention had acquired such a knowledge of it, that from the song of the parents, he knew where the nests were situated, whether they contained eggs, or whether the brood was hatched. He knew even the number of young birds and their age, before he saw them. This is truly wonderful, and if I had not read it from the best authority, I could hardly credit it. If so, I suppose, by careful observation, we could in many cases understand their different notes, and thus learn their wants and emotions, as well as the birds themselves do.

[86]

[87]

"I was once walking in a wood, and caught sight of a party of jays before they saw me. They were all chattering together and enjoying themselves highly. Suddenly one of them uttered a short, deep-toned note, when in an instant all was silent,—and they skulked one by one to a neighboring thicket."

[88]

"I suppose one of them caught a glimpse of you, and warned the others that you were near enough to listen to their secrets," said Fred, with a hearty laugh.

Grandpa now took his cane and walked to the door, determined, as the appeal was made to him, to watch the motions of the robins, and try to help them if they were in trouble.

But though Mr. Robin kept repeating his flight to the nest, and his effort to talk, nothing could be made of it; and at length the poor father seemed to despair.

[89]

In the mean time, Jack, Katy and Annie were chatting merrily together; and before this first interview closed, Katy had even ventured to take a crumb from Annie's mouth. This the child thought the very summit of happiness, and called loudly to her mother to come and share her delight.

[90]

Jack was evidently very proud of his sister; and while this was going on, hopped from one to the other, his small head cocked in a very arch manner.

After a time the little ones hopped away, as they wished to fly back to the nest. Katy was quite impatient to impart her success to her sister; but when she glanced up into the tree, she was almost in despair.

[91]

"Fly up a few times into this bough," said Jack. "It is beautiful exercise."

Katy did so, and presently, with a beating heart, from the bush mounted to the nest.

"O Molly!" she cried, "if you had been with us, I should have been the happiest bird that ever lived."

"How like her mother she grows!" said Mr. Robin to himself as he gazed lovingly upon his youngest child.

[92]

"Every time I picked up a crumb I thought of you," said Jack—"of you alone here in the nest."

"I have scarcely been alone a moment," said Molly. "Either father or mother has been with me, and they have treated me to a delicious feast. I shall soon become quite reconciled to my situation. But where is Dick?"

[93]

"He is eating, as usual," said Mr. Robin, in a stern voice.

Jack and Katy now repeated the adventures of the morning, to which their sister listened with great interest.

"I can't help thinking about Mr. Robin," said grandpa, taking his cane and walking out of doors as soon as breakfast was over. "Birds have a wonderful instinct; and I have no doubt he was asking my aid about something. They will often fly to man for protection when pursued by an enemy."

[94]

"I wish you would tell us a story about a bird," said Annie, earnestly.

The old gentleman seated himself in his chair, and after resting his chin on the top of his cane for a moment, he began: "A beautiful pair of

goldfinches once built their nest on a small branch of an olive tree. The female laid the eggs and hatched the young brood, when the parents perceived that the weight of the growing family would soon be too great for the strength of the branch which supported the nest. This fact was evident to the family who lived near, and had watched with interest the proceedings of the birds.

"One morning the goldfinches found their nest was giving way, and that something must be done at once, or it would fall. They consulted together, then picked up a string, and with their beaks drew it around the slender twig, and then fastened it to a stronger and higher branch of the tree. Thus they saved their falling house."

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Transcriber's Note:

Punctuation has been standardised; spelling has been retained as in the original publication.

\*\*\* END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK LITTLE ROBINS LEARNING TO FLY \*\*\*

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