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OUR ROBINS.

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At a short distance from the village of S—, on the top of a hill, and somewhat retired and sheltered from the roadside, lives a farmer by the name of Lyman. He is an industrious, intelligent, and honest man; and though he has but a small farm, and that lying on bleak stony hills, he has, by dint of working hard, applying his mind to his labour, and living frugally, met many losses and crosses without being cast down by them, and has always had a comfortable home for his children; and how comfortable is the home of even the humblest New-England farmer! with plenty to satisfy the physical wants of man, with plenty to give to the few wandering poor, and plenty wherewith to welcome to his board the friend that comes to his gate. And, added to this, he has books to read, a weekly newspaper, a school for his children, a church in which to worship, and kind neighbours to take part in his joy and gather about him in time of trouble. Such a man is sheltered from many of the wants and discontents of those that are richer than he, and secured from the wants and temptations of those that are poorer.

Late last winter Mr. Lyman's daughter, Mrs. Bradly, returned from Ohio, a widow with three

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children. Mrs. Bradly and I were old friends. When we were young girls we went to the same district school, and we had always loved and respected one another. Neither she nor I thought it any reason why we should not, that she lived on a little farm, and in an old small house, and I in one of the best in the village; nor that she dressed in very common clothes, and that mine, being purchased in the city, were a little better and smarter than any bought in the country. It was not the bonnets and gowns we cared for, but the heads and hearts those bonnets and gowns covered.

The very morning after Mrs. Bradley's arrival in S— her eldest son, Lyman, a boy ten years old, came to ask me to go and see his mother. "Mother," he said, "was not very well, and wanted very much to see Miss S—." So I went home with him. After walking half a mile along the road, I proposed getting over the fence and going, as we say in the country, " 'cross lots." So we got into the field, and pursued our way along the little noisy brook that, cutting Lyman's farm in two, winds its way down the hill, sometimes taking a jump of five or six feet, then murmuring over the stones, or playing round the bare roots of the old trees, as a child fondles about its parent, and finally steals off among the flowers it nourishes, the brilliant cardinals and snow-white clematis, till it mingles with the river that winds through our meadows. I would advise my young friends to choose the fields for their walks. Nature has always something in store for those who love her and seek her favours. You will be sure to see more birds in the green fields than on the roadside. Secure from the boys who

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may be idling along the road, ready to let fly stones at them, they rest longer on the perch and feel more at home there. Then, as Lyman and I did, you will find many a familiar flower that, in these by-places, will look to you like the face of a friend; and you may chance to make a new acquaintance, and in that case you will take pleasure in picking it and carrying it home, and learning its name of some one wiser than you are. Most persons are curious to know the names of men and women whom they never saw before, and never may see again. This *is* idle curiosity; but often, in learning the common name of a flower or plant, we learn something of its character or use; "bitter-sweet," "devil's cream-pitcher," or "fever-bush," for example.

"You like flowers, Lyman," I said as he scrambled up a rock to reach some pink columbines that grew from its crevices.

"Oh, yes, indeed I do like them," he said; "but I am getting these for mother; she loves flowers above all things—all such sorts of things," he added, with a smile.

"I remember very well," said I, "your mother loved them when she was a little girl, and she and I once attended together some lectures on botany; that is, the science that describes plants and explains their nature."

“Oh, I know, ma’am,” said he, “mother remembers all about it, and she has taught me a great deal she learned then. When we lived out in Ohio, I used to find her a great many flowers she never saw before; but she could class them; she said, though they seemed like strangers, and she loved

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best the little flowers she had known at home, and those we used to plant about the door, and mother said she took comfort in them in the darkest times.”

Dark times I knew my poor friend had had—much sickness, many deaths, many, many sorrows in her family; and I was thankful that she had continued to enjoy such a pleasure as flowers are to those that love them.

As we approached Mrs. Lyman’s, I looked for my friend, expecting she would come out to meet me, but I found she was not able to do so; and, when I saw her, I was struck with the thought that she would never living leave the house again. She was at first overcome at meeting me, but, after a few moments, she wiped away her tears and talked cheerfully. “I hoped,” she said, “my journey would have done me good, but I think it has been too much for me; I have so longed to get back to father’s house, and to look over these hills once more; and though I am weak and sick, words can’t tell how contented I feel; I sit in this chair and look out of this window, and feel as a hungry man sitting down to a full table. Look there,” she continued, pointing to a cherry-tree before the window, “do you see that robin? ever since I can remember, every year a robin has had a nest in that tree. I used to write to father and inquire about it when I was gone; and when he wrote to me, in the season of bird-nesting, he always said something about the robins; so that this morning, when I heard the robin’s note, it seemed to me like the voice of one of the family.”

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“Have you taught your children, Mary,” I asked, “to love birds as well as flowers?”

“I believe it is natural to them,” she replied; “but I suppose they take more notice of them from seeing how much I love them. I have not had much to give my children, for we have had

great disappointments in the new countries, and have been what are called very poor folks; so I have been more anxious to give them what little knowledge I had, and to make them feel that God has given them a portion in the birds and the flowers, his good and beautiful creation.”

“Mother always says,” said Lyman; and there, seeming to remember that I was a stranger, he stopped. “What does mother always say?” I asked.

“She says we can enjoy looking out upon beautiful prospects, and smelling the flowers, and hearing the birds sing, just as much as if we could say ‘they are *mine!*’ ”

“Well, is it not just so!” said Mrs. Lyman; “has not our Father in heaven given his children a share in all his works? I often think, when I look out upon the beautiful sky, the clear moon, the stars, the sunset clouds, the dawning day; when I smell the fresh woods and the perfumed air; when I hear the birds sing, and my heart is glad, I think, after all, that there is not so much difference in the possessions of the rich and poor as some think; ‘God giveth to us all liberally, and withholdeth not.’ ”

“Ah!” thought I, “the Bible says truly, ‘as a man thinketh, so is he.’ Here is my friend, a widow and poor, and with a sickness that she well knows must end in death, and yet, instead of sorrow-

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ing and complaining, she is cheerful and enjoying those pleasures that all may enjoy if they will; for the kingdom of nature abounds with them. Mrs. Bradley was a disciple of Christ; this was the foundation of her peace; but, alas, all the disciples of Christ do not cultivate her wise, cheerful, and grateful spirit.”

I began with the story of the robin-family on the cherry-tree, and I must adhere to that. I went often to see my friend, and I usually found her in her favourite seat by the window. There she delighted to watch, with her children, the progress of the little lady-bird that was preparing for her young. She collected her materials for building, straw by straw and feather by feather; for, as I suppose all little people know, birds line their nests with some soft material, feathers, wool, shreds, or something of the sort that will feel smooth and comfortable to the little unfledged birds. Strange, is it not, that a bird should know how to build its nest and prepare for housekeeping! How, think you, did it learn? who teaches it? Some birds work quicker and more

skilfully than others. A friend of mine who used to rear canaries in cages, and who observed their ways accurately, told me there was as much difference between them as between housewives. Some are neat and quick, and others slatternly and slow. Those who have not observed much are apt to fancy that all birds of one kind, for instance, that all hens are just alike; but each, like each child in a family, has a character of its own. One will be a quiet, patient little body, always giving up to its companions; and another for ever fretting, fluttering, and pecking. I know

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a little girl who names the fowls in her poultry yard according to their characters. A lordly fellow who has beaten all the other cocks in regular battle, who cares for nobody's rights, and seems to think that all his companions were made to be subservient to him, she calls *Napoleon*. A pert, handsome little coxcomb, who spends all his time in dressing his feathers and strutting about the yard, is named *Narcissus*. *Bessie* is a young hen, who, though she seems very well to understand her own rights, is a general favourite in the poultry-yard. Other lively young fowls are named after favourite cousins, as *Lizzy*, *Susy*, &c. But the best loved of all is one called "*Mother*," because she never seems to think of herself, but is always scratching for others; because, in short, she is, in this respect, like that best, kindest, and dearest of parents, the mother of our little mistress of the poultry-yard.

To return to the robin. She seemed to be of the quietest and gentlest, minding her own affairs, and never meddling with other people's; never stopping to gossip with other birds, but always intent on her own work. In a few days the nest was done, and four eggs laid in it. The faithful mother seldom left her nest. Her mate, like a good husband, was almost always to be seen near her. Lyman would point him out to me as he perched on a bough close to his little lady, where he would sit and sing most sweetly; Lyman and I used to guess what his notes might mean. Lyman thought he might be relating what he saw when he was abroad upon the wing, his narrow escapes from the sportsman's shot, and from the stones

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which the thoughtless boy sends, breaking a wing or a leg, just to show how he can hit. I thought he might be telling his little wife how much he loved her, and what good times they would have when their children came forth from the shells. It was all guesswork, but we could only guess about such matters, and I believe there is more thought in all the animal creation than we dream of.

Once, when he had been talking in this playful way, Lyman's mother said, "God has ever set the solitary birds in families. They are just like you, children; better off and happier for having some one to watch over them and provide for them. Sometimes they lose both their parents, and then the poor little birds must perish; but it is not so with children; there are always some to take pity on orphan children, and, besides, they can make up, by their love to one another, for the love they have lost."

I saw Lyman understood his mother; his eyes filled with tears, and, putting his face close to hers, he said, "Oh no, mother! they never can make it up; it may help them to bear it."

When the young birds came out of their shells it was our pleasure to watch the parents feeding them. Sometimes the father-bird would bring food in his bill, and the mother would receive it and give it to her young. She seemed to think, like a good, energetic mother, that she ought not to sit idle and let her husband do all the providing, and she would go forth and bring food for the young ones, and then a pretty sight it was to see them stretch up their little necks to receive it.

Our eyes were one day fixed on the little fam-

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ily. Both parents were perched on the tree. Two young men from the village, who had been out sporting, were passing along the road. "I'll bet you a dollar, Tom," said one of them, "I'll put a shot into that robin's head." "Done!" said the other; and *done* it was for our poor little mother. Bang went the gun, and down to the ground, gasping and dying, fell the bird. My poor friend shut her eyes and groaned; the children burst out into cries and lamentations; and, I must confess, I shed some tears—I could not help it. We ran out and picked up the dead bird, and lamented over it. The young man stopped, and said he was very sorry; that if he had known we cared about the bird he would not have shot it; he did not want it; he only shot to try his skill. I asked him if

he could not as well have tried his skill by shooting at a mark. "Certainly!" he answered, and laughed, and walked on. Now I do not think this young man was a monster, or any such thing, but I do think that, if he had known as much of the habits and history of birds as Lyman did, he would not have shot this robin at the season when it is known they are employed in rearing their young, and are enjoying a happiness so like what human beings feel; nor, if he had looked upon a bird as a member of God's great family, would he have shot it, at any season, just to show his skill in hitting a mark. We have no right to abate innocent enjoyment nor inflict unnecessary and useless pain.*

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The father-bird, in his first fright, darted away, but he soon returned and flew round and round the tree, uttering cries which we understood as if they had been words; and then he would flutter over the nest, and the little motherless birds stretched up their necks and answered with feeble, mournful sounds. It was not long that he stayed vainly lamenting. The wisdom God had given him taught him that he must not stand still and suffer, for there is always something *to do*; a lesson that some human beings are slow to learn. So off he flew in search of food; and from that moment, as Lyman told me, he was father and mother to the little ones; he not only fed them, but brooded over them just as the mother had done; a busy, busy life he had of it. "Is it not strange," said Lyman to me, "that any one can begrudge a bird their small portion of food? They are all summer singing for us, and I am sure it is little to pay them to give them what they want to eat I believe, as mother says, God has provided for them as well as for us, and mother says she often thinks they discern it better, for they do just what God means them to do." It was easy to see that Lyman had been taught to consider the birds, and therefore he loved them.

Our attention was, for some days, taken off the birds. The very night after the robin's death my friend, in a fit of coughing, burst a bloodvessel. Lyman came for me early the next morning. She died before evening. I shall not now describe the sorrow and the loss of the poor children. If any

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one who reads this has lost a good mother, he will know, better than I can tell, what a grief it is; and, if his mother be still living, I pray him to be faithful, as Lyman was, so that he may feel as Lyman did when he said, “Oh, I could not bear it if I had not done all I could for mother!”

The day after the funeral I went to see the children. As I was crossing the field and walking beside the little brook I have mentioned, I saw Sam Sibley loitering along. Sam is an idle boy, and, like all idle boys I ever knew, mischievous. Sam was not liked in the village; and, if you will observe, you will see that those children who are in the habit of pulling off flies’ wings, throwing stones at birds, beating dogs, and kicking horses, are never loved; such children cannot be, for those that are cruel to animals will not care for the feelings of their companions.

At a short distance from the brook there was a rocky mound, and shrubbery growing around it, and an old oak-tree in front of it. The upper limbs of the oak were quite dead. Sam had his hand full of pebbles, and, as he loitered along, he threw them in every direction at the birds that lighted on the trees and fences. Luckily for the birds, Sam was a poor marksman, as he was poor in every-thing else; so they were unhurt till, at length, he hit one perched on the dead oak. As Sam’s stone whistled through the air, Lyman started from behind the rocks, crying, “Oh, don’t—it’s *our robin!*” He was too late; *our* robin fell at his feet; he took it up and burst into tears. He did not reproach Sam; he was too sorry to be angry. As I went up to him he said, in a low voice, “Everything I

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love dies!” I did not reply, I could not. “How sweetly,” resumed Lyman, “he sung only last night after we came home from the burying-ground, and this morning the first sound Mary and I heard was his note; but he will never sing again!”

Sam had come up to us. I saw he was ashamed, and I believe he was sorry too; for, as he turned away, I heard him say to himself, “By George! I’ll never fling another stone at a bird so long as I live.”

It must have done something towards curing his bad habits to see the useless pain he had caused to the bird and the bird’s friend; and the lesson sank much deeper than if Lyman had spoken one angry or reproachful word, for now he felt really sorry for Lyman. One good feeling makes way for another.

To our great joy, the robin soon exhibited some signs of animation; and, on examination, I perceived he had received no other injury than the breaking of a leg. A similar misfortune had once happened to a Canary-bird of mine, and I had seen a surgeon set its leg; so, in imitation of the doctor, I set to work and splinted it, and then despatched Lyman for an empty cage in our garret. We moved the little family from the tree to the cage. The father-bird, even with the young ones, felt strange and unhappy for some time. It was a very different thing living in this pent-up place from enjoying the sweet liberty of hill and valley, and he did not know our good reason for thus afflicting him any better than we sometimes do of our troubles when we impatiently fret and grieve. In a short time he became more contented. The family said

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he knew Lyman's footstep, and would reply to his whistle; sure am I Lyman deserved his love and gratitude, for he was the faithful minister of Providence to the helpless little family. They never wanted food nor drink. When, at the end of a very few weeks, he found them all able to take care of themselves, he opened the door of the cage and said, "Go, little birds, and be happy, for that is what God made you for."

The birds could speak no word of praise or thanks; but happiest are those who find their best reward, not in the praise they receive, but the good they do.

* Lord Byron somewhere says, that he was so much moved by seeing the change from life to death in a bird he had shot, that he could never shoot another. I may lay myself open to the inculcation of a mawkish and unnecessary tenderness, but I believe a respect to the rights and happiness of the defenceless always does a good work upon the heart.