

THE  
ARMFIELDS'  
ANIMAL-BOOK

CONSTANCE SMEDLEY ARMFIELD  
WITH PICTURES BY MAXWELL ARMFIELD



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THE ARMFIELDS' ANIMAL-BOOK

BY THE SAME AUTHOR & ARTIST

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# THE ARMFIELDS' ANIMAL-BOOK

BY  
CONSTANCE SMEDLEY ARMFIELD

WITH 8 ILLUSTRATIONS IN COLOUR BY  
MAXWELL ARMFIELD

LONDON: DUCKWORTH & CO.  
3 HENRIETTA STREET, W.C.2

To  
THE MIDLAND COUSINS  
HUGH  
ROGER  
PEGGY  
CELIA

*First published in 1922*

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How many miles to Wonderland ?

Threescore and ten.

Can I get there by candlelight ?

Yes, and back again !

There are ways that follow the ocean's flow,  
The ways the great seaturtles know,  
Or ways deep down in the meadow grass,  
Where the grasshoppers nimbly pass.

How many miles to Wonderland ?

Threescore and ten.

Can I get there by the moon's pale light ?

Yes, and back again !

Follow the way of Arabia  
Where the horses gallop anear, afar,  
And the camel swings o'er the desert sand  
In ways the Wise Men of old have planned.

How many miles to Wonderland ?

Threescore and ten.

Can I get there by noonday light ?

Yes, and back again !

Follow the way the eagle flies,  
Solemnly passing across the skies,  
Or take the way the swallows know  
As over the whole wide world they go !

How many miles to Wonderland ?

Threescore and ten.

Can I get there by morning light ?

Yes, and back again !

Through mountain peaks there is a way  
Which ravens follow at break of day,  
Or where the river flushes rose,  
The way the lonely bittern goes.

CONSTANCE SMEDLEY.



## How the Turtles Learned to Differ

“**H**ERE is where we stop,” said the oldest Great Wise Turtle, and he set his foot upon the speechifying-stone.

The occasion was the annual Spring Congress of the Turtles, and they had swum from many distant countries to this delightful island, so fresh with the young almond trees, and cactuses on the sand, and the blue mountains rising in majestic peaks from the emerald green of the young grass. Some of the new-comers were hurrying up the shore and others were looking about them as if not knowing where to go, so it was necessary for the oldest Great Wise Turtle to ascend upon the speechifying-stone.

“Friends,” said he, in his rich, juicy, sonorous voice, “here, on this pleasant but unfrequented island, turtles have assembled from time immemorial to lay their eggs within the sand. For the benefit of those friends who are making their first appearance here, let me tell them we dig an even trench, deposit the eggs in a tidy row, cover them, and leave them to develop in the care of the sun. Our offspring will be given the right directions where to find us, and when they are full grown will seek us, but not till they are able

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to take care of themselves. This is achieved by leaving them to the care of the sun and not interfering, and I may say that turtle parents are considered the most progressive models for the entire animal and human kingdom."

The oldest Great Wise Turtle concluded to a burst of polite applause, but he did not get off the speechifying-stone, because no congress concludes with only one speech. A second turtle was even now stretching out its neck and beginning to move.

"But I am by no means convinced we have arrived at perfect parenthood," said the second turtle. "In fact, I do not consider we have anything like solved the parent problem. We are not moving upward. Every year we come here and remain on this low shore. Why should we not boldly strike out for the mountain-tops and deposit our offspring there, so that they could have elevated views directly they see light?"

"I beg to second that motion," cried a third turtle. "I have long admired the beautiful blue colour of the distant mountains. If our children could be born there, they would almost certainly be born with blue shells instead of having shells the colour of this dusty shore. Progress by all means, if it leads to blue shells!"

This proposition was received so enthusiastically that the oldest Great Wise Turtle had to flap his fin or foot or paw, or whatever you call it, quite a little before he could gain attention. But then, how his full rich voice floated out!



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“My friends,” said he, “the mountains are not blue when you reach them: they are only made of dust like the shore. And when you speak of our offspring acquiring elevated views—if they were born on a mountain-top they would look down on everything, and the first thing a young turtle must do is to push his neck outward and upward, or he wouldn’t have a neck worth mentioning. Let our offspring have the mountains to look up to, my friends, and thus be encouraged to exercise their rubber necks!”

The congress applauded very much at this, but still another turtle was rising. This was a lady who wiggled her neck first to one side and then to another and did not seem very certain of the value of her remarks.

“What do you think about making a move to the nice fresh grass?” she said. “Then our dear little babies would have plenty of delicate food all round them directly they come into the world, and the nice fresh grass is so much more tender than the sea food, and they would not have to expose themselves to the waves, nor pounce in and out of the surf, and really go to a lot of trouble finding the food the sea casts up. They could just sit still and eat and eat——”

“Oh, yes, an excellent idea for our darling children,” other lady turtles began to pipe, for in spring, when the turtles come up to lay their eggs, they all become most vocal.

But the oldest Great Wise Turtle was pounding his foot or fin or paw, or whatever you call it, on the

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speechifying-stone, and shouting, "Yes, and if we left our offspring among the grass and flowers, they might very easily turn into land turtles and then you would never see your precious darlings again. No, no, my good ladies, the little journeys up and down the sand to the sea exercise their little legs, and besides they become used to gaining their food from the sea, and when the call comes to join us, they trust themselves to the sea, for they know it is full of the food they relish and are not in the least disturbed by its waves and commotion."

As usual the oldest Great Wise Turtle carried every one with him, but scarcely had he ended when another turtle had thought of a new point.

"We have heard a lot about this sun and its good influence in making our offspring grow," said he, popping out his head from an exceedingly hard shell. "But have we tried anything else? How can we know the sun is the best influence if we never try anything else? You say we want our children to be hardy and grow used to water? Well, snow is frozen water, isn't it? Look at all that snow in the valley yonder. Why not lay our eggs under the snow this year, and let our offspring start life thoroughly cold and damp. That would get them used to the sea, wouldn't it?"

This turtle was terribly pleased with himself for thinking of this, and his wife immediately rose to second his motion and said in a faltering, timid voice, "Yes, and the snow is white. Perhaps our children

would have white shells. Would not that make a nice change? Oh, do let us try and see how they would look—I mean, what would happen!”

“The answer to that is, that nothing would happen if we did anything so plumb ridiculous,” said the oldest Great Wise Turtle. “I don’t believe many of our offspring would trouble to push through their shells if they knew nothing was in front of them but cold and damp. Also snow when it melts is mud. Do you want your offspring to change into mud turtles?”

Oh, no, they did not want their children to be mud turtles!

“Friends,” said the oldest Great Wise Turtle, “every year this Congress meets and every year we hear propositions to do this and that; but we always lay our eggs in this one place, and why? Behold the stones! Yes, the stones, waiting to deliver their sermons directly our youngsters pop out of the sand! When our children come to us, they will tell us what they have heard, but we have to leave the young people to receive their own message. That is as certain as that this congress is held on this island, and always will be held here as long as turtles become vocal with ideas and motions and resolutions every spring! I move the Congress be adjourned.”

And then the oldest Great Wise Turtle stood on the speechifying-stone while everybody crowded round him, and congratulated him on the beautiful Congress that had just been held. But suddenly an uproar started some little distance off, and, lo and behold, a

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turtle had mounted on to another big stone, and turtles were beginning to congregate around it, just as if another Congress were beginning. Now directly a Congress is over it breaks up and never begins all over again immediately, and the turtles turned round and stared as if their eyes would pop out of their heads. For the turtle on this other big stone was waving and flapping her foot or paw or fin, or whatever you call it, exactly as if she were the oldest Great Wise Turtle himself and stood on the real genuine speechifying-stone. And what dreadful, extraordinary remarks she was making!

“Why leave our offspring to hear sermons from these old stones?” she cried. Yes, it was a she! (I am very sorry to have to say so, but it most undoubtedly was a she-turtle—I cannot say a lady-turtle, because all lady-anthings always go about their business in a decent quiet way when a Congress is over. They don’t try and congress all over again, just anyhow.)

“I don’t trust these old stones to teach anything sensible,” she was saying. “They don’t look progressive to me. I want my offspring to get a message from that glorious flaming red cactus over there! I want them to see red directly they open their eyes. Hurrah for red, red turtles!”

And there she was snapping about and waving both fins or feet or paws, or whatever you call them, in the most unconventional disorderly manner you ever saw.

My! The oldest Great Wise Turtle was glad he

had not left the speechifying-stone, because he could wave one fin or foot or paw, or whatever you call it, and call the Congress to order if it did not wish to adjourn, and thus prevent the interloper from thinking she was holding a Congress that was all her own. Since the time when turtles had been turtles, there never, never had been more than one Congress at a time.

But before the oldest Great Wise Turtle could speak, another turtle had pushed the snapping turtle off the other great stone (which shows it wasn't a proper speechifying-stone, for no oldest Great Wise Turtle had ever been pushed off the real true speechifying-stone), and had hopped up on it and was shouting, "I object to leaving my offspring here for quite the opposite reason. These stones are much too near that horrid red cactus, and I don't want my children to see red or be near the odious colour. Down with everything red, red, red, red——"

Now the shell of the oldest Great Wise Turtle had a little red decorating it in a pretty and dignified pattern, and even now one of his friends was rising and calling out he wanted his children to be near the red cactus so that they could study its colour and adopt some into their make-up and thus become leaders of turtles and stand on the speechifying-stone some day. There *was* a clamour and a bawling and an outcry! Shocking, quite shocking!

But the oldest Great Wise Turtle had been getting his voice ready during this distracting time, and when

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the other turtles were becoming a little less vocal, he suddenly let it out—boom, boom, boom!—so that every one had to listen because they couldn't help it.

“My good turtles,” said he, “that cactus has always been there and always will be, and it never had any influence whatsoever. We were all born in sight of it, and no turtle has a red shell, and the only influence we have to consider is the influence of the sun and the sermons the stones contain.”

That was so true that the Congress really did disperse this time, and the turtles laid their eggs away most neatly in the sand and went off like wise parents, leaving their young ones to receive their sermons from the stones around them.

Well, the sun shone and shone and gradually its warmth penetrated to the turtles' trenches, and one by one the little turtles broke their shells and burrowed through the sand and poked their heads out and beheld the wonderful new world, with the sea splashing white and blue upon the clean white sand, and the sun shining in the great blue sky, and the shadows blue upon the rocks and stones. It was a lovely, clean, fresh world they came into, all alone upon their island.

“Blue sea, blue sky, blue shadows,” sang the tiny turtles as they waddled and paddled and crept and crawled to the clean-smelling sea with all the little appetizers it was bringing to them.

But one little turtle pushed up its head and stared

so long at the sun that when it looked round the earth it saw everything pink, and it came waddling and creeping and crawling down to the sea, saying, "Pink sea, pink sands, pink stones, pink turtles, pink everything!"

"We are not pink," cried the rest of the turtles, "we are blue like the rest of the blue world!"

But another little turtle had been lying flat, gazing along the surface of the sea and the sand and the shining wet shells of the little paddling turtles, and suddenly he said, "No, we are all golden! Golden sea, golden sand, golden shells, golden everything!"

Oh, my, there was a snapping and a tweeting and an argufying at this, specially from the turtle who saw everything pink (and who, curiously enough, was the child of the turtle who had wanted its children to see everything red).

But a very, very little new-born turtle with a faint pattern of crimson on its shell was clambering on to the speechifying-stone, and when it reached the top it extended its tiny little paw or foot or fin, or whatever you call it, and said, "Friends, have you been looking carefully at the stones all around us?"

Well, no, they hadn't, because they had been so busy argufying.

"It seems to me," said the tiny little new-born turtle on the speechifying-stone, "that the stones are all different, and if you will all kindly look at them a long time without saying anything at all, as I have just been doing, you will see the stones are pink and

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blue and violet and yellow, and different shapes and sizes, and so are all of us."

Well, the little turtles looked at the stones very solemnly and then they looked at one another, and they saw the stones were different colours and shapes and sizes and so were they.

Then the very little turtle on the speechifying-stone waved its tiny paw or foot or fin, or whatever you call it, first to one little turtle and then to another, and each in turn arose and told what it had discovered, and lo and behold there was a beautiful Summer Congress of new-born turtles giving their views on the world, though the turtles were too inexperienced to know they were holding a Congress. They just held it by instinct.

This Congress kept on for some time, though it was varied by bathing parties and paddling parties and races and sports and picnics, because it was a Summer Congress and more of a holiday affair. When it was over, they dived into the sea in the most natural manner possible and swam to the homes of their parents, arriving in time for the parents' Autumn Congress, at which the reception of the young turtles was an important feature.

The littlest new-born turtle who had stood on the speechifying-stone rose to reply to the greeting, and he extended his fin or foot or paw, or whatever you call it, and said, "We were in some confusion at first and were almost quarrelling. But we studied the stones, and learned from them that they were different from each



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other, and we were different too. Until we had looked at the stones, each of us thought the world was all one colour, and to each of us it was a different colour, and we thought that every one who disagreed with the colour each of us saw, was wrong."

This sermon was hailed with applause by all the big turtles because of the serious way in which the littlest turtle delivered it, but behind their paws or fins the grown-up turtles smiled and whispered to one another how funny it was to see these young turtles so solemn, as if the stones had taught them anything new or important, when every turtle knows that every one is different and sees things differently.

However, the oldest Great Wise Turtle, who was all for encouraging the young ones, rose up now and said very kindly, "We are glad to hear your experience, though it is hardly new to us. Those of you who looked at the almond trees, so full of blossom, naturally thought everything was pink, and those whose first sight was the mountains, naturally thought everything was blue, and those of you who opened their eyes on the grass, naturally thought everything was green, and those who looked at the cactus, thought everything was red, and those who beheld the snow, imagined everything was white. We have learned by experience that almond trees are pink and mountains blue and grass green and snow white and cactus blossoms red!"

The parents applauded this tremendously, because it was just as well the little turtles should know their

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parents didn't need sermons from stones, or young turtles either, to teach *them* anything !

But half a dozen little turtles were starting to their feet crying, " Almond trees are not pink : they are a delicate green, leaf and fruit alike, for we have eaten the fruit, and there is no almond blossom." And another little turtle yelled out, " Mountains are not blue, but a deep, deep violet, except in the day when they are burned to a sort of yellow " ; and still another cheeped, " And grass is not green, but a dusty brown " ; and another said, " Cactus flowers are not red, but a creamy white, and they stick out from the green stalks like candles " ; and then all the little turtles cried together, " And what do you mean by saying there is snow on our island ? "

Oh, what a babble arose as the parents tried to teach the little turtles that almond trees are pink and bear flowers, not fruit, and mountains are blue and not burnt-gold colour, or violet, and that grass is delicate green and not a dusty brown, and that cactus flowers are always, always red !

At last the little turtles pulled away and went off in a corner and looked at each other and said, " Why, our parents see things differently from us, but we *know* they are wrong ! "

The old turtles were saying the same thing about the young ones, but very quietly a rather young turtle was getting up, and then she said—yes, it was a she-turtle, but this was a quiet, gentle lady-turtle with very understanding eyes :

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“Do you know, as the little ones spoke, I seemed to remember opening my eyes on a world where the almond trees were green, and mountains and grass burned gold, and where a tall green cactus stood, studded with creamy flowers that shone at dusk like candles. Could it be that when we first poke our heads out of our shells the world really does look different? And there are no flaming red flowers then, because that cactus is not in bloom?”

The other parents were shaking their heads, however, and calling out, “Order, order!” and the oldest Great Wise Turtle said it was most out of order to think the little turtles knew more about the island than their parents did, and anyhow the little turtles would be grown up next year and they would all go to the island together and then they would see which was right.

And of course at the next Spring Congress, when the little turtles had grown up into parents too, the island was just as the grown-up turtles had said, and so they proved successfully the new-born turtles must have seen things wrong.

But at the Summer Congress the stones preached exactly the same sermon, that every one sees things differently because they are different, but that does not mean they are wrong. And all the little new-born turtles saw the island exactly as their own parents had seen it when they first came out of their shell and expressed their views one to another, until

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the time came to seek their parents' Congress, and then——

Then you can tell this story all over again from the very beginning, and over and over as long as turtles lay eggs in the sand.





## How the Grasshoppers Honoured

**T**HE King's mowings were over and the field lay bare and exposed to the brightest heat of the sun. But though the grass had been cut down, and what was left was not much better than dried-up stalks, there was plenty of colour and gaiety. The Bindweed had arrived in force and was climbing everywhere, all over the dried-up grass, using it for a foothold, but otherwise taking no notice of it. The flowers in their elegant pink flounces were much too elegant to associate with the dull brown grass, and, besides, the wild strawberries were lifting up such attractive red headgear and talking so sweetly with the new-comers. While the grass became drier all the time, the strawberries, on the contrary, became more and more pleasant. They complimented the full-blown flowers, and they were delightful with the perky little buds who were preparing to make their debut. But underneath all this light society talk the old grass thought very different thoughts, and when the Bindweed flowers curled up their dainty selves at sundown, and the strawberries stood sentinel in a gallant fashion, the grass began to murmur.

## 24 How the Grasshoppers Honoured

“ My word, these are different flowers from those who lived amongst us in the days when we held our heads high ! Buds were buds in those days. You never see one of those Bindweed buds with a modest droop ; each is out in the full blaze of the sun from birth, staring all over the place, seeing everything there is to see. Why, there’s nothing hidden from the buds nowadays ! And their elders don’t seem to think any protection for them necessary. Look at those buds talking to the wild strawberries, and when they do come out, full-blown at once exactly like their elders. And as for paying attention to us, in whose field they are visiting, they simply trample over us, without so much as a bend or bow. Manners ! Why, they haven’t any good ones. Upstarts, every one of them, upstarts from the moment they poke their cheeky little tips into the air ! ”

Up to this time the field kept early hours, as the Bindweed was firm about its beauty sleep, but one evening as the grass began to fuss and murmur, the quiet was invaded by a strange new sound. Behind the hedge came a strumming which shrilled louder and louder until the grass couldn’t hear itself speak ! Then dark forms began to leap and jump all over the field, and when the sun arose and the Bindweed flowers opened widely to salute it, behold, the grass was invaded by one of the most joyous, not to say noisy, crowds you can imagine. There they were, darting and flitting from bud to flower, explaining they had come out of the neighbouring field which was to be



## How the Grasshoppers Honoured 25

mown to-day and introducing themselves as Bohemians, artists, musicians, dancers, quite delighted to find the field full of such charming and elegant flowers.

Oh dear, what audacious compliments they paid, and how outspoken the bold things were, strumming on the musical instruments they carried, and never hesitating to break into verse or song as the inspiration moved them! So fanciful they were in their remarks! The buds stretched up their tips to hear more and more of this amusing talk, and the elder flowers opened their hearts to it. True, the new-comers were fitful folk, and when a flower thought one had settled down for a nice long chat, whizz-whirr, off the giddy creature would fly, with a playful little rhyme, such as—

On the wing  
To each new thing!

OR

A new flower  
Every hour!

OR

Sunbeams start,  
So does art!

But the buds and flowers could watch the delightful visitors performing antics wherever they were, and they were as amusing to watch as to talk to. What leaps they took! What bounds! There were no bounds to the buds' admiration.

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And when the day was over, do you think the new-comers ceased? Oh dear, no! Sundown was the signal for them to tune up, and out came all the musical instruments, and serenades commenced which lasted almost until dawn and which the buds declared they heard in their dreams and found most charming.

The grass didn't get a chance to talk until just before dawn, and then you may be sure it had plenty to say. First it rustled about the late hours it was forced to keep, and then the grass-stalks commented on the erratic movements of the visitors and said they were nothing better than flitters and quitters. As for the buds, the grass was sure they would have their heads turned, and said that was what came of exposing them to any influence that came along, though indeed the Bindweed were no better than the Bohemians. Each was a frivolous set, one with their flounces and buds, and the other with their dancing and music. Why, these Bohemians spoke in poetry as often as not, and the grass felt poetry was a most dangerous indication of lightmindedness. Good dry prose, and not much of that, suited them down to the ground. Flights of fancy, that was all poetry amounted to, and well suited no doubt to these Johnny-head-in-airs!

But every night, when the grass was rustling away, fretful and fidgety, the dew would gently steal down on it and whisper gently that the grass must keep its place and continue to support the visitors, and form bridges and ladders and leaping-off places for

## How the Grasshoppers Honoured 27

both flowers and Bohemians. "Yes, they are certainly light-weights, and have few or no roots," murmured the dew, "but your roots help you to bear them all with ease. And you would miss them if they were not here. Besides, there is a purpose in their visit, and you will find it out some day."

The season continued with undiminished gaiety, and presently the Bohemians decided the time had come for them to give a ball; they had received such charming hospitality, and so a deputation called upon the tallest flowers and strawberries. "And as charity balls are all the rage, we should like this to be a charity ball," they concluded amiably.

"But who is there who is in need of charity?" said the strawberry that was reddest and sweetest and generally most prominent. "I'm sure every one in this field is as well-off as he can possibly be, and then we are all so contented."

"But there must be some object for the ball," said the Bohemians. "There's always an object for a charity ball. Something for the profits to go to; surely you know some one or something that could profit by our ball?"

"Of course I know," squeaked a bud who had pushed its saucy tip into the conference. "Charity begins at home, of course!" The bud had just learned this wise remark, and as buds know few words of wisdom, she was proportionably proud of it. And directly she spoke, so potent are words of wisdom, even in the mouth of a bud, that the

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Bohemians and the Bindweed looked at one another and said, "Of course we know who should profit by it and needs charity! The grass!"

"Oh, but it used to be so soft and protective and easy-going before the days of the King's mowings!" sighed the sweet, sweet strawberry. "The dear grass was so lovely to our own young buds. They were gentle and timid and green, very different from you upstanding buds of to-day, but how fond the grass was of them!"

"We're ready enough to associate with the grass," cried one of the buds, "but it's so stiff. A charity ball would be just the thing to give it a lift."

"But the grass lifts us up," said the Bindweed flowers.

"I have it," cried a Bohemian, who, being an artist, always knew the right expression; "it shall be a charity ball in honour of the grass."

"But—but, what is a charity ball?" said a tiny bud who was so unfolded and green it did not understand that buds are supposed to know everything, and the Bohemians made it a low bow and answered, "A ball where every one shows charity, so please bring heaps and heaps of it, and remember everything that happens at the ball is to be in honour of the grass."

Then the Bohemians withdrew in great excitement to make the plans, while the Bindweed set discussed which buds would be ready to come out.

Of course the ball had to be in early morning

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when the Bindweed flowers were freshest and looked their best ; and then they had to discuss what sort of dances there should be, and one Bohemian rose to say the dances must be strictly on the earth, without any wild flights or leaps from one flower to the other. Because then, if they danced close to the roots of the grass, they could look up at the grass, and looking up at anything was a way to honour it. Up to this time every one had looked down on the grass nearly all the time !

Well, the Bohemians thought this was a delightful idea as they would have to learn new dances, and study of anything new is such a delight.

Then another Bohemian spoke of costumes, and proposed they all should wear bright grass-green, in honour of the grass in its heyday or highday, before the King's mowings had come to cut it down, and again the Bohemians accepted the idea enthusiastically, for all artists love new costumes. They discussed the style and decided they must dress as grass blades, and for the benefit of the buds who do not know everything, they explained that a blade means the same as a sprig, and both are synonyms for beaus. So they agreed to wear very slim skin-tight costumes, green tights and sheath-like coats, in which they could dance among the beginnings of the grass and incommode no one.

Well, presently the great day came, and all the Bohemians lined up in a magnificent procession, each in his green uniform, and advanced into the

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field in a wonderful wavy line, bowing to each piece of grass as they passed it, and saying, "Pray excuse," "Pardon me," "My mistake," if any brushed against a grass-stalk. Blade is an old-fashioned name, and the costumes were old-fashioned too, and being artists the Bohemians behaved in perfect keeping.

Then the dance began ; no more skimming about in the air or waltzing round the buds, but all together in good old country dances, weaving in and out among the grass-stalks, and bowing and honouring between every dance. Such a pretty sight it was in the brown and gold field of burnt-up grass, with the pink Bindweed buds and blooms smiling away, and the nimble green Bohemians, so graceful and orderly, doing everything together just as the grass moves when it is at its prime.

At first the grass-stalks didn't know what to make of it, but when the Bohemians kept on bowing and honouring, the dried-up grass began to feel a faint stir of politeness and began to bend a little in response, and then as the dance figures moved this way or that, the grass would sway to one side or another watching them, and of course when the grass swayed, the Bindweed flowers and buds swayed too, so that it looked as if the whole field were dancing !

Such is the power of a good example !

"But how nice it is to dance together," cried the perky buds, and actually thanked the grass for giving them a turn ; and the grass murmured to each other,

## How the Grasshoppers Honoured 31

“What memories the grass-green costumes bring! It is as if the field is young again!”

When they had finished, the Bohemians lined up again and made their final honours, and then they retired quite early and made ready for a wonderful serenade composed for the occasion, in which they sang the praises of the grass exclusively—whether green, gold, brown, or in full feathery bloom; the Bohemians had a different verse for each occasion, and the grass had to confess that poetry was not without charm, after all. So much depends on the subject!

But what do you think happened that night?

The roots of the grass had been so stirred by the attentions of the gay Bohemians, that they talked and talked all night, and in the morning ever so many young green shoots of grass were starting up, and the very blades and stalks of the grass were tinged with green.

Such wonderful stories had been told of the delights above ground that the young shoots had all come up to see, and sap was rising in each grass-stalk! But there the Bohemians were, at their old games, darting and leaping and hopping and flying all over the field, though their costumes were still bright green.

“Why, they are just like Grasshoppers,” cried a perky young bud, and all the buds took up the name and cried, “Grasshoppers! Grasshoppers!”

“You honour us,” said all the grass-stalks, bowing

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almost to the ground, and then up they started and waved this way and that all together, saying to the buds and the blooms, "Will you honour us, pray? Dancing is so inspiring to the tender emotions! And we have so many tender shoots!"

You see, the grass had received the profits of the Grasshoppers' Charity Ball; every one had brought it so much charity, it had plenty to give away now and to spare.







## How the Horse Looked Ahead

ONCE upon a time two horses lived in the desert: a beautiful Chestnut and his Cream-coloured companion. They ran with a drove of horses, sniffing the wind and racing hither and thither wherever they fancied, and sometimes they would pause to watch the caravans of camels and dromedaries wending their way at an even swinging pace across the sand.

“How tedious to walk one by one in a procession!” cried the Chestnut, but Cream-colour watched the camels travelling into the far distance, and said, “They vanish over the hills on the horizon which we never reach.” “Give me the desert,” said the Chestnut horse, looking back on it.

One night, as the horses rested in the shadow of some great rocks in a narrow gorge, they were surrounded and captured, and the Chestnut and Cream-colour found themselves tied with ropes and travelling behind a caravan of camels. How the Chestnut whinnied and tried to turn his head and get free so that he might gallop back to the country he was used to! But Cream-colour looked ahead at the line of camels, and saw they were carrying bales of fragrant hay.

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“ I believe that hay is for us,” he whinnied softly. “ Look, Chestnut ! This caravan of camels is bearing our food. How I look forward to the next stopping-place ! ” And sure enough, when the caravan halted, the men brought bales of hay to the horses.

In a few days they crossed the distant hills they had so often watched, and beheld the white walls and gates of a town rising from the sand. A ring of palm trees encircled it and trees rose up among the houses, and the horses were led into a great square where many other horses were assembled. Stalls of tropical fruit stood beneath the trees, odorous and spicy, and flaming with gold and orange and rose ; sweetmeat-sellers offered their wares ; and here and there, on a gorgeous carpet, squatted a story-teller, making his tales lively with his quickly moving hands. There was music, too, for here was a negro beating on a drum, and a flute-player making sweet melody, while the dancers jingled their strings of coins and jewels as they moved in beautiful postures and enchanted the crowds with their dainty steps and hand-twirls.

In spite of all these other attractions, however, many people came about the horses, and they were led up and down while traders came up to them and patted them and raised their feet and opened their mouths, and were altogether very sociable, not to say intimate.

As the Chestnut and Cream-colour waited beneath the shade of a high wall, Cream-colour was looking

before him, thoroughly interested in all these novel sights, but Chestnut threw back his head and neighed and neighed.

“At least we were allowed to travel when we were with the caravan,” he cried. “But now we are tied up so tightly we cannot move from one place to another.”

“Oh, ignorant one,” twittered the shrill voice of a swallow who had built her nest in the archway overhead. “Do you not know this is the most famous market in Arabia? Here are Moors and Indian Princes, Turks and Ethiopians. They have come to conduct you to the far corners of the world.”

“Yes, indeed. To-night you will all have travelling enough,” cheeped the other swallows who were flying round.

“Look, look who is coming!” neighed Cream-colour.

A distinguished-looking man, with a pointed auburn beard and enormous golden earrings, was approaching. He wore a cone-shaped hat, a richly patterned shirt and most magnificent trousers, and from the way every one made way for him it was plain he was some great one. He came up to the traders who stood beside the horses, and after much conversation summoned a line of servants, who laid ivory tusks, glorious silken shawls, and ingots of gold before the traders' feet. Then they led the horses from the market-place.

Now the Chestnut tried to turn his head in vain,

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for the new master would allow no looking back. His whinnies became quite desperate as he cried out against the new bridle that had been put on him. "We could toss our heads in the market as much as we pleased," he cried. "I don't see how I can get on unless I am allowed to toss my head as much as I want to."

But Cream-colour was lifting up his nostrils and sniffing the air. "What is this fresh salt taste?" he asked. "Do you not notice how the air is changing? Oh, look ahead, look before you. What are we coming to? It is not unlike the desert, with its giant waves, but it is blue instead of sand colour, and the waves are moving far more quickly than the sand waves. See how it stretches before us, as if for ever and ever!"

"It seems to me we have come to the end of the world," whinnied the Chestnut. "I would give anything to be able to turn my head for a last look at the walls of the town, and the hills, and all the dear old sights that we shall never see again." And he pulled and tugged at his bridle until his mouth was sore and his neck aching.

"What are they going to do with us?" said the Cream-colour, for such interesting things were happening ahead. Boards were laid down over the moving shining surface of the waves, in a kind of bridge, that reached to a wooden building which was surrounded by the waves and moving with them.

"What, am I to leave the good firm earth?" whinnied the Chestnut, tossing its head at last, so

that his master had to throw something across its eyes as the plank was traversed. But Cream-colour stepped quietly along, for he was curious to see what the inside of the swaying wooden building was like. The planks certainly creaked a little beneath their tread, but they supported both horses and men, and that was the important thing.

They were led down into a dark but comfortable place, and then the building began to creak and roll and move and they heard the sailors crying that the ship was moving out of harbour.

You may be sure the Chestnut had something to say to this. Now he was all for returning to land, whether a halter or bridle held him, whether he trudged behind a caravan of camels or stood in a market. The great thing was to be back on the firm ground, for these boards beneath his feet were pitching and tossing in every direction.

“I thought you liked a tossing movement,” said Cream-colour, munching steadily at the excellent hay in the manger before him. “I never expected to be carried, even as the precious ivory and shawls and gold are carried on the camels and the dromedaries. We must be considered of great value by our new master, and perhaps we are being carried to another market where there will be even more amusing sights. I hope so, for I thoroughly enjoyed watching the story-tellers and the dancing-girls, and I look forward to tasting some of those pleasant-smelling sweetmeats some day, too.”

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After what seemed like a long time to the Chestnut, chafing and fretting about the earth they had left, as he thought, for ever, but a short time to the Cream-colour, enjoying his good food and thinking of the corners of the world to which the swallows had told them they were now being taken, the ship cast anchor, and they were led up into the fresh air and sunlight.

A very different city rose up from the sides of this harbour. Great palaces of stone and marble lined the quay, and the horses were led along a broad road shaded with magnificent trees until they arrived at a compound. In the centre was a gravelled space, and groups of stables stood around. Here the horses found themselves indeed in luxury. Embroidered blankets were thrown over them and the finest barley set before them.

Next morning their keeper placed silken bridles on them and exercised them round and round the compound, and this he continued to do for several days, until the Chestnut began to look back on the journey in the ship, and said that standing still was better than this endless travel in a circle.

But Cream-colour said, "My retrogressive friend, do you not notice our master expects something new from us each day? He induces us to trot or gallop or canter or walk at an even pace as the fancy takes him. I have a notion he is training us to dance, and when he is satisfied we shall be allowed to perform in a market-place."



This notion was confirmed next morning when the keeper led both horses to the smithy and had them fitted with iron shoes inlaid with gold. Then he set saddles on their backs, incrusting with precious metals, and hung them with jewelled reins and bridles until they jingled and sparkled even as the dancing-girls had done.

"I knew he was teaching us to dance, and this is our reward," cried Cream-colour delightedly, and lifted his head and arched his neck and raised his feet high even as the dancing-girls had done.

But they were not led to the market-place, but up a hill on which stood a magnificent palace. They paused before a round archway, through which they could see splashing fountains and great palm trees. Here they waited for some time, until the Chestnut began to fidget, stamp, and paw the ground impatiently.

"Why don't they throw our blankets over us?" he fretted. "We always have our blankets on when we stand still in the compound. I can tell you, when one is used to a thing one feels the lack of it," and he scratched up the gravel and tried to stand on his head, to attract the keeper's attention.

"Hush, hush," murmured Cream-colour, for everything here was so quiet and restful, the stamping seemed dreadfully out of place. And then suddenly he whispered, "Look up, look up, my friend. Do you see who is flying overhead?"

For a familiar twitter was sounding. There were

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the swallows they had met at the fair in Arabia ! The Chestnut was so busy regretting his blanket he had no time to attend to them, however, and that was a pity, for the swallows had news of some importance.

“ The Queen-Mother is peeping from her window,” they were twittering. “ The King’s son is coming soon to ride, and she wishes him to have the gentlest and safest of companions. You are dancing too much, my Chestnut friend, too much altogether ! ”

But the Cream-colour was standing listening to every word, for the news that the King’s son was coming seemed to shine and glow as if the sun had come quite near.

And then, out of the cool darkness of the archway, and down the marble steps, a slender boy approached, flashing with jewels more beautiful than any the dancing-girls had worn. He paused before the Chestnut horse and stroked its mane, so that it quieted and raised its head, for the touch of the King’s son was as the caress of a rose-petal, and his voice was silvery as the splashing fountain.

“ So you were chosen for me ! ” said he. “ Very beautiful is your saddle and your bridle, and your shoes are of pure gold ; you are certainly the best to look at, but my mother has chosen your companion and her wish is law.” And then he came to the Cream-coloured horse and touched it lightly and said, “ So you are my horse and are to carry me wherever I wish to go ! Let us be good friends from the start,”

and soft and fragrant against his lips Cream-colour felt a delicious sweetmeat. Then the King's son sprang into the saddle and his touch on the reins was as the touch of a soft spring breeze, and the keeper mounted the Chestnut horse, who knew better than to shake his mane when that firm grasp was on his bridle, and they all raced down the hill and out on to a broad straight road.

When they returned it was evening, and the swallows twittered a song of congratulation, for the King's son kissed the nose of Cream-colour and told him they would be friends for ever and ever.

As they returned to the compound, the Chestnut looked back on their ride and regretted it was over, but Cream-colour looked ahead to the morrow, when he would carry the King's son again. The jewels and gold had not been a reward for their dancing, but had been in honour of his master. Verily they had been brought from the desert for good purpose, but he did not look back on the journey, delightful as it had been all the way: was he not the horse that looked ahead!







## How the Camel Unbent

**O**NCE upon a time there was a most patrician Camel, which was no fault of his but his misfortune. He came of a long line of racing camels, and was hailed as the most superfine example of his line directly he appeared on earth, and was presented to the greatest Wise Man of Chaldea. Never had this patrician Camel born a burden other than his august master. He was used to the finest dates for provender, the sweetest water from the water-skins, the finest of embroidered cloths and the fleeciest of blankets. When they went on lengthy journeys a caravan of beasts of burden followed, laden with all that the patrician Camel might require. And in consequence of all this care, the Camel's ear was tuned to the slightest indication of his master's wishes ; he scarcely needed a touch upon the bridle ; his speed was as the desert wind and his endurance as the desert monoliths.

Now once a year it was the custom of his master to ride forth across the desert to a great camp, where Wise Men from all parts of the world forgathered ; for Wise Men held conferences even in those far-off days. He took with him a great caravan of men

and burden-bearers, and his retinue was even now preparing for this journey. But the Wise Man had ridden far into the desert for greater peace and meditation and was returning home at evening when the Camel felt a check, and paused while his master gazed curiously ahead.

“There is a new star in the East,” said the Wise Man, and sat there while the rose-flushed sky paled into darkness, and the star gleamed white.

The patrician Camel was used to standing motionless, but to-night they remained throughout the night hours until dawn spread silvery veils on the horizon through which the star still shone.

“A day-star has arisen,” said the Wise Man, and they paced slowly to the camp. That day marked a great change in everything. The plans for the journey were stopped; the Wise Man had decided to travel alone. Moreover, his choicest treasures of gold were packed, with a bundle of provisions and rugs for the night watches; and then all these things were placed on the patrician Camel.

What a stir arose when the servants beheld the racing Camel loaded more heavily than any burden-bearer would have allowed; but greater was their surprise when the Camel accepted the load with his usual superior expression. “They are imposing on you,” cried the other camels as water-skins were finally piled on to him, but the patrician Camel looked down his lofty nose and said, “If my Master desires this service from me, it is because no one else is



worthy to fulfil it." As the patrician Camel had been brought up to feel superior, and as all camels are set in their ways, he was not moved by outward circumstances. The patrician complaint is internal.

The Wise Man was not surprised because he knew he could depend on patrician obedience, and he therefore set out on the journey to the meeting place, confident in his Camel's ability to bear him there with all he needed. This year there was no great camp, for the other Wise Men had also come alone; they rode on racing camels, too, and as their masters spoke of the star the camels murmured to each other of the city they were going to, and the new King whose coming the star predicted.

They all agreed no ordinary beast could be admitted into the great city, nor any but the most patrician of creatures into the presence of this new transcendent King, and the camels hoped they would do their masters honour, and bear them speedily across the desert and endure a strain and load which would break the heart and wind of an ordinary Camel.

"They have honoured us by choosing us for this great mission—let us prove ourselves," said they, and other similar remarks which can all be telescoped into a brief phrase, "*Noblesse oblige*," and which sort of talk the patrician Camels found intensely stimulating.

When they were loaded next morning, they rose with particular erectness and alacrity, and stood in

a line looking down their noses with disdain for any hardships they might be called upon to bear ; then they started with the quiet even pace of the perfect servant, and the Wise Men meditated at ease, knowing they could depend upon patrician loyalty.

The journey was long, but every night the Wise Men watched the star, and sometimes it seemed so bright that the camels found themselves gazing up at it, instead of down their noses, and even forbore to look at one another in admiration of each other's pluck and fortitude. When they looked at the star they forgot the hardships behind and before them, which was more of a rest than suffering them heroically, and kept the camels in the pink of condition so that they arrived before the city in excellent trim.

But to their amazement, the way up the hill was narrow and crowded with motley processions from every country in the world. Here were dromedaries and mules and asses, dogs and horses, even a lordly elephant, with a crowd of Jews and Romans, Arabs and Egyptians, Greeks and dark-skinned men from countries the camels had never heard of, for even a Wise Man's Camel does not know everything. Some of the travellers were wealthy, but others were of very common clay, no better than peasants with market produce, or womenfolk with waterpots, or children bowed beneath household stuffs and wares. All climbed and screamed and chattered and pushed uphill until they came to a space before the city

gate, and here the beasts piled up in a scrambling, struggling mass, for the gate was so narrow the camels and dromedaries had to kneel and be unloaded before they could squeeze through.

No one made way for the Wise Men, and they waited against the wall, crushed amidst the desert traffic, treated with no more consideration than anyone else. But now and again they spoke to one another as though they were still in the wide untrodden spaces of the sand and sky, and their words were quiet and thoughtful, so that a great peace gradually seemed to steal around them and the cries lessened, and at last the crowd made way before the gateway and the camels advanced and knelt and were unloaded by their masters' hands.

They knelt again the other side, for the long and tedious process of reloading, but no camel winced or moved a muscle in irritation, and the Wise Men worked methodically and calmly amidst the uproar. They had no fear of their camels misbehaving, for well they knew patrician patience.

This city, however, was not the city of their dreams. The streets were narrow and ill-smelling, and pariah dogs nosed in the gutters and snapped at the camels' heels. People struck at the camels impatiently and jostled and pushed them, so that their sensitive natures recoiled at the ill-treatment they had never heretofore experienced. But they made their way with unruffled dignity to the palace of Herod.

Strange indeed it seemed to be among the suppliants for audience, even of Herod, and to be pushed here and there by the arrogant servants of the King. Word came at last for the Wise Men to be admitted into Herod's presence, and the camels were led into an inner courtyard: here they were tied up just beyond a fountain, and no food nor drink was given them, although provisions were scattered carelessly about the ground and trodden under foot. Long they waited while their masters had audience with the King, and it was a matter of difficulty to maintain a dignified attitude of meekness. The meekness, indeed, was not so internal as the patrician complaint, for the camels could not resist murmuring to one another, "A very different reception will be given us when the treasures we are carrying are unloaded in the presence of the King."

"Yes, he will doubtless be surprised."

"It will be interesting to see within the royal stables."

But when their masters returned, the camels were conducted out of the palace yard, down the stone steps of the narrow streets, through the gate and out beyond the city. The servants had falsely told the Wise Men the camels had been fed and watered, and though the way was downhill, the load seemed heavier than ever, for even a patrician camel has an appetite. The violet hills were turning purple now and the sky was deepening to profound hues, and before them the new star moved steadily, as if

to guide them on. The Wise Men were silent, and the soft pad, pad of the camels' footsteps made no sound.

How vain seemed the dreams of the camels as they turned their backs on the great city where they had thought to win such recognition and honour! And for what end had they carried the treasure-sacks across the wilderness? But the cool white star was shining brightly before them. The Camel looked ahead now steadily and it seemed as if the star was blazing in his heart, destroying the hunger and the thirst. Yes, all the dreams of a great reception and the King's honour and praise were gone. Nothing was important but the star: its light, so mild and yet so bright, made flaring torches of the city, or its smoky oil lamps dim; on this quiet road there were no flickering shadows, but everything glowed with gentle radiance. Why travel to these crowded cities in search of Kings, and why should we honour Kings, who are but men? thought the Camel. Do not the heavens hold wonders far more worthy of our thought? And are not the hills more spacious and exalting than any palace yard? So he swung along, meditating even as the Wise Men meditated. Since he had left the city he no longer felt patricianly apart from the universe; instead there came a growing sense of oneness with the largeness and the quiet of the night.

But now they were on the road to Bethlehem, and meeting and passing the country folk who had

come up to their birth-place for the poll-tax. They were a humbler crowd, people of strong smells and rough speech, often without an ass to carry their children or provisions. The night was cold and they huddled round little fires, and their overladen beasts tried to snatch a mouthful of coarse herbage, for they had no money for an inn or stable. When the Wise Men made their way to the market-place it was a congested mass of homeless folk, for the poor lodgings of the place were crowded.

As the Camel waited, he saw what little care was taken of the poor folks' creatures, and marvelled at the patient way in which they rested on the cold earth, or munched poor straw, or stood there supperless. These thin and weary asses did not endure disdainfully, nor set stimulating examples to each other, nor bear their lot with patrician fortitude: they suffered and endured as every one else was suffering and enduring, making no complaint and grateful for the least of mercies. They moved gently among the crowd, careful not to tread on the children who had fallen asleep by the roadside, and seeking to do what was required of them. Standing and watching the moving pageant in the soft light of the star, the Camel found his eyes were moist, and his patrician nose no longer good to look down. He looked up to the star with gratitude, because the beasts could move more certainly in its light, and the children were better protected. It would indeed have been dreadful if

such crowds had gathered on a night without a star.

The other camels were murmuring for the silence of the desert, but the once-patrician Camel felt a wave of something warm and ardent rising in him, and was glad his back was laden with a heavy load, and that he stood among his fellows, no better off than they were. As for silence, the starlight enfolded him and every one in its strange peace.

Now came another summons, and the Wise Men left the market-place for an outlying inn. Its courtyard was empty, for all who could crowd inside were gathered together in the lighted walls, and these humble folk had no servants nor beasts to wait outside. So the camels waited alone, until a rough plain fellow came out and threw some scraps before them, the coarse and rancid leavings of the common guests who supped there. Still any food was now acceptable.

As they knelt to eat, something stole along the shadowed wall ; then a pariah dog snuffed near them, keeping at some distance, for he feared the great beasts who rose from the stones like mounds of shadow. His bones stood out from his skin and his eyes gleamed red and desperate, and the once-patrician Camel felt the warm and ardent wave rising higher and higher, and he raised his head and called to the dog, "Here is enough for all of us." But the kind words were the signal for a stream of dogs to start out of the dark corners of

the yard, and the camels found themselves crowded and surrounded by the unclean creatures of the gutter.

And yet, as the dogs burrowed into the heap of food and gobbled up the fragments, none of the camels felt incommoded! As they all ate together, the star shone down upon the common food and turned it into silver and pearl, so that each mouthful tasted better than the last, and was completely satisfying. As they knelt beside the dogs and shared their supper, the camels did not even notice their masters coming up to them and lifting off the treasure-sacks. They were being filled with strength that made them forget burdens. Such a divine peace filled the courtyard, at whose farthest end a dim light issued, just below where the star shone, rather low now in the heavens. It almost touched the stable roof.

A murmur of voices like recurrent rushes of birds singing was coming from round about the stable, and presently the Wise Men came out empty-handed and crossed the yard. As they approached the camels, one said, "We must go swiftly," and another said, "By a secret way," and still another said, "The star will guide us, for it will remain above the manger." Then the camels were told to rise, and soon they were out on the road again, refreshed and rested, riding out into the darkness.

How light the burden was now that the treasure-sacks were gone!



And as they passed this creature or another, slinking or hasting on his evening business, the once-patrician Camel bent his head to this or that, and called softly, very softly, so as not to hurt the lovely stillness, " Good night, my friend ; good night ! "







## How the Swallows Learned the Song

**O**NCE upon a time there was a nest of young Swallows who thought that the world had been made for them specially, and belonged to them exclusively, and who were a great trial to their parents and everybody else in consequence. Every morning they opened their young beaks and cheeped without stopping for a single minute until they went to sleep at night, and even then they cheeped now and then in their dreams. This was the song they sang over and over for about sixteen hours every day :

More and more refreshment  
Is each swallow's need,  
Portioned out with justice  
So that all may feed.

Now the parents had sung this song to them directly they opened their beaks, but the little Swallows had come to think they had made it up themselves, and actually thought they were giving their parents instruction, and the food would not be brought nor divided fairly if they did not cheep this song at the top of their voices for sixteen hours each day.

Meanwhile the parents were trying to teach the

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fledgelings a new verse, and as the baby Swallows grew larger and stronger and began to peep over the edge of the nest they found themselves singing this, which they quite imagined they had made up and were singing for the first time on earth:

Birds must leave their birth-place :  
They must learn to soar ;  
Little wings grow stronger,  
Flying more and more.

Now considering they had been watching their parents soaring in the air, ever since the Swallows had known anything, they would have been very unusual Swallows indeed if they hadn't found out by this time what wings were meant for, even more unusual Swallows than they thought themselves! But, oh dear, they all thought they had found out this great truth for themselves, and that they were imparting the news to their parents and everybody else, and they stood on the edge of the nest and puffed out their fat little chests and opened their beaks way down to their stomachs. As to the noise they made, it was like a hundred whirligigs. When one little Swallow actually left the nest and took his first little flight with his parents flying close to him and round him, explaining exactly how to do it, you never heard such a fuss as the others set up. He really thought he had done something marvellous, and so did each of the other little Swallows as one by one they fluttered out and found the air upheld them.

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When they were all safely out of the nest and on their own wings, the parents began to teach them the third verse, but I grieve to say the youthful Swallows would now pay no attention to their parents at all. The one thing they felt they had to do was to get out into the wonderful big world and lead lives of their own, and directly they discovered they could pick up their own food they thought they had learned everything there was to learn, and were more sure the world had been made specially for them, and belonged exclusively to them, than ever. They were so busy making a noise in the world and they were so pleased with the noise they made, and admired each other's performances so extremely, that they did not even hear their parents as they flew round and round them, trying to teach them the third verse which every young Swallow has to learn.

The one chance the parents had was at nightfall. For while during the day the young birds were very bold and flew to the tree-tops across the field and balanced on the wires of the fence, and were generally very active and adventurous, yet when the light began to grow golden and the shadows to steal out farther and farther, the Swallows felt a funny little sinking feeling, and sometimes the very adventurous ones who had flown a long way away were not perfectly sure of the way in which their home lay.

So that when the parents called, the Swallows deep down in their hearts were not entirely oblivious of the summons, but were glad enough to find themselves

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before the home porch again. I must say they lingered outside for some time chasing each other and dancing about and snatching supper as they flew around, and once they reached home they did seem to pay attention to each other exclusively, but the parents were able to sing the third new verse amongst the excited brood. If the parents had not reared several broods of Swallows they might have been discouraged at the inattention, but being experienced they merely said to each other, "Well, we must do our duty as parents and keep on telling them, and by and by they will learn unconsciously, however slow they seem to be."

The days went by with the young ones leading lives of their own and the parents patiently teaching and teaching, and at last the summer passed, as summers have a way of doing, and the young birds began to have a strange sensation. One morning the youngest felt something peculiar about the excessive chilliness in the morning air, and the same day another youngster noticed the sun was setting earlier, and still another discovered there were not so many flies around. Each announced the news with great excitement, and all the brood agreed something remarkable was happening, and felt they were very advanced at having found this out. In fact their cheeps grew quite pretentious as they discussed the restless and unusual feelings they were sharing.

All this time the parents had continued to sing



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the third verse, and suddenly one of the little Swallows discovered he was singing something new as he darted with the brood that evening:

Now the autumn's coming  
And the summer's o'er;  
Wings were made to bear us  
Safe from shore to shore.

Oh, what a clamour of applause greeted this original verse which the parents had been singing to their brood for weeks past, even as they had sung it to immemorial broods!

For directly he heard it, every little Swallow felt it was so TRUE! It afforded the solution of everything, and it was so refreshingly novel, so different from all the tunes they had sung before. It satisfied their restlessness and explained it, too, and they all crowded round the tiny bird and imitated him. This was not difficult, for the parents had drilled them well and they almost knew it by heart.

They did not sing it to their parents, but lowered their cheeps when they flew past, for the parents were old birds, and the Swallows were under the impression they were the only brood of discoverers in the world and that they had passed far beyond the understanding of their parents. But the parents knew they had learned the verse all right, and were starting on the fourth one just as patiently, getting in a bit here and a bit there between the cheeping and the squawking.

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So that one little Swallow flew out one morning with :

Stretch your wings out bravely  
And the ocean dare ;  
Air will never fail us,  
Air is everywhere !

“ Lead us, marvellous young one,” cried all the other little Swallows. “ What a wonderful message ! Directly you sang it we knew this was the message we had been waiting for. Blaze the way, lead on, and we will follow. How could you think of such a wonderful song ? ”

The parents might have told them how, but they were too happy—the brood was getting ready to leave the porch—to interfere. They didn't mind anything as long as their children would move in the right direction.

For there was still another verse to learn, which ought to have been learned weeks ago, before the young Swallows left the nest for the long sea journey that awaited them ; past broods had always mastered it before they flew away. But this brood had been so taken up with its own cleverness and wonderfulness that it was the most backward brood the parents had ever reared, and they scarcely knew what to do about this long, long journey it was full time to take. But if they did not fly now, it would be too late, and so they had to allow the little birds to start, all unprepared, and trust they would pick up the last verse as they travelled.

## How the Swallows Learned the Song 61

But, oh, the excitement when the young birds found themselves leaving the porch and the nest and the familiar fields, as they thought for ever! They did not know the parents had come and gone for many years, and that the outward flight each autumn was as certain as the fall of the leaves, as was also the return in the spring with the fresh young green. As they never listened to their parents, how could they know these things? So they followed the young bird they called their leader, and felt they were more marvellous than ever, flying out into the unknown for the first time in history.

The parents kept close by them, cheeping the fifth verse, but the Swallows were much too excited to hear. There were so many new things to see: here was a range of hills, and now they passed over a forest; and what a lot they had to say to one another about these discoveries! As far as they knew, no one had ever flown over hills or a forest before!

They flew and flew till the sun went down and their wings began to have a sleepy go-to-bed feeling, and then their twitters ceased and each little bird felt the most peculiar sinking, worse, far worse, than any he had experienced before. Where was the porch and the nest? And how could they go to bed without a nest and a porch? Would they have to fly all night? Oh dear, that was a dreadful prospect.

And then, so quietly and sweetly and surely, came the old, old home-call from their parents. The young Swallows were glad enough to hear it now;

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in their hearts they were always glad to hear it, though they pretended to take no notice, but to come home just when they felt inclined and not a minute before. But to-night there was not even any pretence of being saucy ; the five of them flew straight towards it, cheeping faintly, one would almost say gratefully ; and then, if perches did not rise up under them as they flew, and they found they could sit down at once in mid-air and tuck their heads under their wings and go straight off to sleep ! For the parents had brought them to the telegraph wires, which make the best sort of perches for travelling birds.

Well, they slept and slept with the wires making a lovely cooing, murmurous lullaby until the sky was flooded with pale rose, and their parents were about them, twittering desperately this last verse, which they did want the little Swallows to learn before the something-that-was-going-to-happen happened !

They twittered so loudly that the babies heard it in their dreams and woke up, half-singing, but when they found themselves on a great bare stretch of shore with an immense shining surface of rose and silver stretching far and far away, the young birds could not listen to anything but their own cries of amazement. Could it possibly be that they had discovered this stupendous sight ? They had known they were clever and unusual, but now they really hardly knew what to make of themselves. Were they birds at all ? Their parents were birds. Were

## How the Swallows Learned the Song 63

they not a kind of angelic species? Super-birds? A new race of something or other, which would explain why their parents seemed so dull and behind the times to them?

Oh, if you could have heard the little Swallows' cheeps and calls and cries as they circled and darted over the shining sands and felt the freshness of the ocean! It was so large, and they commanded all of it!

What, listen to the cheeps of their parents, still patiently flying around them twittering something or other?

But the parents' calls were becoming excited, too. What was coming? Who was coming? What was that the parents were saying? Look behind!

One of the little Swallows did have the curiosity to turn his head, and then, what met his view?

Out of the clear dawn sky was coming a crowd of flying wings and a storm of cheeps and twitters. Here were hundreds of Swallows exactly like themselves, descending on the telegraph wires and wheeling and darting and playing all round them, while a line of more sober Swallows exchanged greetings with their parents who seemed to know everybody.

And now their parents were bearing down on them, with this long line of Swallows following.

"Come, come, my dears," cried the parents. "Here are all your relatives! You must now be introduced to the family. They want to hear you sing the song, so that they may be sure you are ready

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for the long ocean journey which no Swallow can take unless he is fully prepared.”

What a note of anguish sounded in the parents' voices, for they knew the brood had not learned the fifth verse, and there was only the faintest chance that they had picked it up in their sleep last night. Poor parents, who had tried so patiently to teach the brood all summer, and now beheld disgrace awaiting them.

The little birds, however, were paying no more attention to their parents than usual.

What, you will say, when the parents had led them to the telegraph wires and taken such care of them?

Alas, yes, the brood was staring with all its eyes on a wheel of young Swallows exactly the same age as themselves. They were flying round and round in a most original interesting way, making a perfect circle, one after the other. And they were all singing a new verse of the song!

“Thrilling! Marvellous!” gasped the youthful brood, turning their backs to their parents, and also their relatives, whom they seemed to know instinctively belonged also to the past. “The song of the future; that completes our song!” And suddenly opening their beaks until they really seemed as if this time they would split in two, the entire brood rose from the telegraph wires and joined the wheel of young Swallows, with whom they flew in perfect accord, singing together the verse that the parents feared they did not know:

## How the Swallows Learned the Song 65

“Homes are waiting for us  
On each foreign shore,  
For of homes and sunshine  
There’s a boundless store!”

“No, we have not yet been able to teach them manners,” said the parents, who were so happy at this unexpected burst of knowledge that at the moment they did not mind anything else. “The great thing is that they have learned the song.”









## How the Eagle made Friends

**O**NCE upon a time there was an Eagle who lived all by himself on the top of a high mountain. His eyrie was among the rocks, with a slab of granite shelving overhead, and precipices on three sides. From his lonely perch, he could see the four great air-roads, north, south, east, and west, along which the birds flew on their business here and there about the world.

Sometimes he would circle over them as he pursued his majestic flight, but while he did not hurt or hinder them, he felt quite apart and very superior. He seemed to have nothing in common with these creatures who travelled everywhere in flocks and took so keen an interest in one another's trivial doings. Sometimes they would be excited about the stores of food awaiting them, and sometimes they would be rejoicing in the prospect of good nesting-places, and sometimes they would be discussing the best way of making the long journeys and the most convenient stopping-places on the way.

But the Eagle never troubled about domestic trifles. He never left his mountains, but remained alone through the harsh winter when the storms raged

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and dark clouds hid the earth for days together. He had no need to think about food, for his eyes were keen and his mighty wings gave him a mighty range of flight. And as for flying hither and thither with a pack of companions, absorbed in their doings, why, the Eagle despised the notion. He thought only of himself, and gloried in the wild mountains and snow-covered peaks, because no other birds could endure their isolation.

So the hedge-birds passed in twittering, chattering crowds, and the herons and the bitterns flew in lovely lines, and the swallows curved and darted, but the Eagle circled splendidly above and beyond them all.

The years went by and the Eagle grew stronger and stronger, but he remained just as unsociable. He did not exactly feel lonely, for he was very good company for himself, but he did feel more and more certain that he was different from every other bird under the sun, and belonged all to himself, and on that account was rather magnificent and wonderful.

One day the Eagle had flown farther than usual, beyond the mountains and the foothills, over a fertile valley. The sun was so radiant and the air so fresh he felt he could fly for ever and ever, and was winging his way to the distant plain when a shrill, sweet song came to his notice. Shriller and sweeter it sounded, until the notes became a distinct tune, and to his astonishment he heard a bubbling, floating song, where he could not say, but somewhere in the vast skies.

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What a joyous song it was! All about some one very magnificent who dwelt high in the air and was above and beyond all creatures. Very pleased the Eagle listened, for he thought the song was in praise of his mighty self, but as it proceeded his brow grew dark and puzzled, for the song spoke of this great one's kindness to all, and told how his splendid presence came into the smallest home, making everything beautiful and happy. Yes, that was the chief note of the song—happiness! The happiness which came to every one because of this Great One high up in the skies, showering happiness, happiness, and making all creatures grateful in consequence, even the humble singer.

But who reigned in the skies except the Eagle? And who could be singing so sweet and clear a song? The Eagle was accustomed to respectful silence when he soared abroad, but this singer was not paying any attention to him. And the funny thing was that the Eagle could not discover where the song was coming from.

Here came a line of scarlet flamingos, but when the Eagle followed them, he found he was going away from the song. Back he circled until the song was plain, and found himself amongst some warblers on the northern road, but they were calling to one another of cherry orchards and leaf-hidden strawberries. And then came gulls from the great lakes, hurrying seaward, but when the Eagle followed them, he found they were talking of the fresh sea breezes and the joy of sailing

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on the foaming breakers, and dabble-dabbling on the firm, white sand. He soon lost the song of happiness as he followed them.

And now for a little while no birds appeared on any of the air-roads, and the Eagle made a discovery. He could hear the sound most plainly when he hovered over a white speck far below. Down he dropped, therefore, in small circles as if he were descending a spiral staircase in the skies, and the song grew louder and louder until he discovered something else, and that was that the performance was now proceeding from over his head. He had neared the earth, and the white speck was a cosy farm set in green meadows. Then the Eagle rose again, and suddenly, before his eyes, beheld a tiny bird hovering almost motionless with its beak wide open, singing so ecstatically it never even saw the Eagle.

The Eagle made a majestic swoop above it, and then the song faltered, for the Eagle had come between the bird and the sun, and was speaking in its loud and rasping voice. "Where did you spring up from?" cried the Eagle loftily.

Oh, what a rapturous trilling answer came!

"From my home in the meadow," sang the Lark. "I live away down there among the tender green of the high grasses and the sweet breath of the clover and the clinging meadow-vetch. It is good to think of it up here, and good to drop into its shelter when the sun goes down. The brook ripples us to sleep, and the stars watch from their high places, so that we

have no lack of bedroom candles. But that is at night-time, of which your shadow reminded me for a moment. Allow me to pass to one side. Ah, now I am in the sun!" And such a peal of ecstasy arose that the Eagle could scarcely believe so great a flood of noise was coming from the little creature.

"Who is this Great One of which you sing?" cried the Eagle.

"The sun, of course," sang the Lark. "The sun whose light causes the grasses to grow tall and give shade and shelter: the sun who sends its warmth into the clover-blooms; the sun that reigns above us all, so high that we never can reach it but ever must praise it. Oh, happy Eagle, whose strong wings can circle nearer and nearer; little birds can only send their songs forth and trust that the music will reach into the skies."

"Do you mean to say you, a little meadow-bird, rise up here each day just to sing to the sun?" said the Eagle.

"Indeed, yes," said the Lark. "And now, alas, the sun will soon disappear behind the mountains, and it is time for me to drop down to my nest among the grasses. I presume your home is among the topmost peaks, for you carry the scent of snow and of wet rocks and lichen with you. Your shadow, too, is cold as the shadow of great mountains. That is strange, for living so near the sun one would think you would be filled with its warmth and would give it out to all. But I must hasten to my family and think no

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more on strange things. After all, what one should think about up here is the sun itself, the glorious, shining, all-pervading sun ! ”

With this the Lark dropped like a falling stone.

But the Eagle rose higher and higher, far above the mountain peaks. For the first time he felt a desire to remain in the sun as long as possible. Wonderful floods of orange and rose and gold were staining the skies and turning the snowy crags to radiant palaces. Upward soared the Eagle in the marvellous peace of the last hour of the day, and when at last he returned to his eyrie he was still thinking of the sun and looking forward to the earliest hour of morning.

As the dawn-light flashed across the mountains, the Eagle's wings flashed too, in great soaring circles, until he floated higher than he had ever been, in a silence so profound that he could not break it by a single sound but was filled with joy in the intense radiant stillness.

And now the Eagle looked down on the strings of birds along the air-roads and began to wonder about them. Why were they flying back and forth thinking only of the little things of domestic life, when this great sun reigned above them ? Why did they not fly higher and higher, striving to reach it ? Why did they not sing songs of praise ?

Slowly the Eagle descended, hovering nearer and nearer the birds, until his shadow fell across a string of Herons, and he spoke to them. Yes, actually spoke !

“ Where are you bound for ? ” asked the Eagle.



“Are we not on the south road?” replied the Herons, very startled.

“Oh, my friends, why do you not seek the sun?” said the Eagle.

“Why else are we flying south?” said the Herons, more and more confused. “What do we travel for, back and forth across the earth, except to seek the sun?” And the Herons increased their speed, and straightened out and winged away.

“But the sun is above you!” cried the Eagle.

“No, no, before us, before us!” cried the Herons, and went so fast they disappeared in no time.

Now came a troop of Swallows, and again the Eagle spoke to them. But again the Swallows twittered and darted, and answered, “Why have we been to Egypt all the winter if not for the sun? And why are we returning to our nests beneath the eaves? Because the sun is shining there. We have known about the sun all our lives, good Eagle, although it seems to be a new idea to you!”

And as the Swallows flew on, they made a noise which sounded very much like laughter.

Now it was the Eagle's turn to be confused, but he saw along the north road a flock of Wild-Geese coming and he approached them and asked where they were flying, and again they answered that the sun was now upon the marshes and lighting up the estuaries, and the great goose games would soon be beginning.

“But why do you not sing songs of praise to the

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sun? ” asked the Eagle, following the Geese. “ When I pass over you, you always are silent.”

“ We grow silent when your shadow comes between us and the sun,” answered the Geese with a merry cackle, for now that the Eagle was speaking to them he did not seem so alarming.

“ But I have heard you calling to one another, and you are always speaking of the earth,” persisted the Eagle.

“ No, no, we speak of what the sun brings to light on the earth,” cried the Wild-Geese stoutly, and began to call to one another of the endless pleasures and beauties of the marshes.

Then the Eagle returned to his eyrie, but this time he looked upon the air-roads with new eyes. It was the sunlight glinting on the myriad bodies that made the brilliant streaks and streams of gold and blue and scarlet, of iridescent greys gleaming with a thousand colours, of white as dazzling as the highest snows. And all were travelling to seek the sun. From the earth so far below, the songs of the hedge-birds ascended to the sun.

As the Eagle stretched his giant wings and rose to heights which the other birds could never reach, his heart was filled with a new sensation. There, as he floated in the high heavens, or below, on the air-roads of the birds, or far, far below among the grasses close upon the earth, the birds united in joy and praise and love of the same sun. How foolish he had been to feel superior or apart from them! However high

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he soared, he could not love or praise the sun more than the tiny meadow-lark. This way, that way, every way, the birds were flying towards the sun.

He did not need to talk with them. He knew they all were one.

For now the sun was shining in his heart, and all the birds were his friends.







## How the Ravens were Fed

“ I HAVE seen the Bittern from the Nile. He says it is a plague such as fell on Egypt before the great migration ; and he says that the Israelites are coming now into this country, and that the plague has something to do with their coming ! ”

The Raven croaked three times and flapped his giant wings as he settled on the rock where the nestlings huddled. The Mother Raven was beating her wings in a flurried tumult as she half rose up, and then decided to return to the nest.

“ Oh dear, oh dear ! ” she croaked. “ And those children ate some this morning. It falls all over the rock and the nest as well. As soon as the dew goes there it lies, no larger than hoarfrost and white with a terrible whiteness, all over everything like snow, only it glistens more. I felt sure it was poisonous ; but to hear it is a plague ! ” And she opened her wing feathers wide so that she might close them again, for there seemed no other reason.

“ The Bittern says the air is full of omens, ” said the Father Raven. “ He speaks of a plague of darkness which fell in Egypt, and says the air has the same

queer feeling as just before it happened. Our great-great-grandfather said a plague of darkness was upon the earth before the Flood. Perhaps the sun will not rise to-morrow. Perhaps the plague of darkness is already come."

"Darkness? What is darkness?" piped a small Raven, lifting its beak out of the nest.

"It is when there is no light," answered the distracted parent. "Now that it is night, it is dark."

"But what are all those little things shining up there?" asked another little Raven, popping its head up.

"Those are the stars, my child," said the father bird. "If the plague of darkness comes, there will be no stars. Before the days of the great flood there was a night without a star."

"Oh dear, oh dear, if the flood should be coming again!" wailed the mother bird.

"Flood? What is flood?" squawked a little Raven.

"It is when the waters cover the earth," croaked the mother bird.

"There is a flood," said the ignorant little Ravens one to the other, peeping over the side of the nest to where the lakes lay cuddling in the hollows of the mountains.

But the parent birds were flapping about and consulting with harsh and fearful cries.

"The river is in flood now," said the Father Raven. "It is rising steadily, as if to bar the passage of these migrating peoples. And then this peculiar plague——"



“ I must find a cave,” said the mother bird. “ I shall not be at ease until I have found a cave with a large stone which can be rolled to the entrance. The flood will cover the mountains, quite possibly ! But in a cave we can shelter until the flood is past.”

“ And what is a cave ? ” said the small Ravens.

“ A hole in the rocks,” said their mother. “ There will be rocks above us and round us and it will be quite, quite dark.”

“ No stars ? ” said the little Ravens.

But the distracted mother was consulting with the equally distracted father and could talk of nothing but giant waves that rose and rose until there was nothing but rolling waters.

In the days of the first flood of consequence, a deep impression has been made on that Raven which went to and fro over the earth, and his descendants had been brought up to know all there was to know about floods. They might be said to be authorities on the topic, just as the Bittern was an authority on plagues. They all knew the signs of something terrible, awful, overwhelming. Oh, how the Ravens croaked and flapped, and flapped and croaked !

But the youthful Ravens were not inclined to stay completely silent.

“ We do not want to go into a cave,” they were squeaking. “ We love to be out on the mountain-peak looking up at the stars ; or down at the floods. The stars are as beautiful when one sees them in the floods.”

“Listen to the innocents!” said their mother. “You are only little know-nothings. When you have had the experience I have had and your father has had, and when you have listened to the experience of all your forefathers, you will know better than to talk about the beauty of stars at flood-time! But I must be off and find that cave.”

“And I have a mind to go down to the valley again and see what the waters are doing,” said the father bird. “Be sure you do not touch the plague stuff if by any chance we are not back at dawn.”

“If there is a dawn!” croaked the mother bird. “Let us be off at once while there are stars to give light!”

So the parent Ravens flapped their great black wings and flew away over the mountains, and the little Ravens peeped over the nest for a while, rather excited at staying up so late, and then very sensibly decided there was nothing unusual that *they* could see this night of so-called omens, and closed their eyes and went to sleep.

They slept and slept until they woke in curious quiet; no mother or father flapped around to call them, though the sun had risen all right. They opened their beaks and squawked, but no one came to put anything in them.

“Well, there is one thing that is certain,” said the young Ravens. “We want breakfast.”

“My, doesn’t the plague smell good,” said another little Raven, smelling and sniffing, for the nest was

covered with the strange white stuff, glistening and round as hoarfrost. "Oooh! Look, look at the bees," squeaked a little Raven, and they watched the honey-bees clustering on the white frosted substance on the grasses.

"Here, you!" cried the little Ravens. "Did your mothers and fathers give you permission to have that for breakfast?"

"We haven't any mothers and fathers round here," said the bees good-temperedly. "We have to take care of ourselves," and off they flew. "This is 'manna' and it comes wherever the Israelites travel," they called as they departed.

"We haven't any fathers and mothers round here either this morning," said the little Ravens, and then they smelt the good sweet smell all round them, and said to each other, "I guess this stuff is for young ones who have to take care of themselves!"

Well, of course, this extremely wise conclusion settled it. The young Ravens just fell to, and they ate and ate until they were so blissfully full they had to keep their mouths open so that they could breathe deep, deep. They seemed to get more of the flavour that way, too.

"A blissful experience!" said the little Ravens one to another. "Perfectly blissful! It is good to take care of ourselves. Hurrah for flood-time, that keeps our parents busy! But the plague of darkness has not come. Hurrah for the sun and the stars and the nice blue shining floods!"

Presently the great rock spread its shadow over them, which signified it was time to rest awhile, and then the sun-rays gilded the distant peaks and the great performance of the evening skies began, and all the clouds and peaks were gay with brilliant colours. Then the blue came out deeper and deeper, and presently the stars shone through, and then it was night again, and still no parents had returned. But the morning feast had been so ample that the little Ravens peeped over the nest quite perkily. They certainly looked forward to the morning, and for two reasons. Perhaps their parents would return and it would be nice to see them, and tell them how well they had got on; or, perhaps, their parents would not return, and in that case they would still be little birds who had to take care of themselves and could enjoy the manna with zest again. So, anyhow, there was something to look forward to.

They went to sleep very peacefully therefore, although they did seem to hear a rather curious swishing and rustling which appeared to be coming from inside the great rock and was rather mysterious. But as the little Ravens had had none of their forefathers and parents' experience and only a pleasant experience of their own, they did not bother about the noise, for it never occurred to them that it was an omen of anything, nor indeed anything but a rather peculiar and unusual sound.

Well, things went on like this for several days: the manna fell each morning with the dew, and the

little Ravens feasted royally, for they found that when the sun was high the sweet food melted right away ; and the great rock shaded them when the sun's rays were too hot, and the pageant of the skies gave a nightly performance, and the stars shone brightly forth to cheer them through the sleepy hours, in case they woke up and felt like company. The curious noises in the rock did not cease, but they grew used to them. And they became thoroughly used to taking care of themselves ; in fact, they were beginning to look over the nest and talk about flying, and probably would have started out if they had not been so exceedingly comfortable and happy just as they were.

And then, all of a sudden one morning at daybreak, they heard a familiar croak and there was their father coming up the valley, oh, so agitatedly. Directly he saw them, he cried, " Where is your mother ? " and my, there was a croaking and a flapping when he heard they had not seen her since he left. He had not been back because most terrible things had been happening. First, the people the Bittern had spoken of had come right up to the banks of the river, and the waters had risen up in huge waves and had rolled back on either side, and the Raven remembered his great-great-grandfather saying that was how the waters had behaved when the great flood came and covered the whole earth. The people had begun to cross on the dry land, but he could not wait to see them covered by the floods as his great-great-grandfather had told him the other people on the earth had been,

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but had hastened back to tell his wife and consult with her about her plans. And now she was nowhere to be seen. Oh dear! Oh dear!

It was no good at all for the little Ravens to tell him they were all right because they were little birds who could take care of themselves. He was so confident the river was going to rise and rise and rise, until it was all over everything, same as his great-great-grandfather had remembered. He was making such a noise, flapping, and croaking, and cawing, that he did not hear the rustling and swishing in the rock, until one of the little Ravens, who was slightly more curious than her brethren, asked him what it was.

Well, that almost finished the Raven. That noise certainly meant the end of the world had come. He screamed to the small birds to get out of their nest and fly—he didn't know where, to be sure, but it was just too dreadful to see their little heads poking over the nest close beside the rock in which those mysterious, peculiar, curious noises were happening. He made so much noise that the little Ravens began to copy him and try and flap their wings like he did, and push about in the nest and stumble up on to the edge and stand there flapping and flopping in a most insecure fashion, because while he was telling them to fly, he had no idea where they were to fly to, and all he could croak out was, "Destruction! Destruction! If you can't fly, it will be our destruction!" which isn't at all helpful when you never have flown at all, and don't exactly know how to set about it.

So much flurry was going on that when a great shadow fell upon them it took them by surprise ; there overhead was the giant Eagle who lived in the mountains and reigned over all the birds.

He certainly wanted to know all about it, for the mountains were echoing the noise, and peace was gone. When the Eagle could make out what the Raven was saying, however, he wasted few words.

“ Why, that’s my cave,” said he, and flew round to the other side of the rock, followed by the Father Raven, still explaining about the flood.

The Eagle knew all about the strange behaviour of the river, but he was not alarmed, because he remembered a similar experience in the Red Sea when these Israelites had come up out of Egypt some forty years ago, and nothing had happened to any bird then, so far as he remembered, and he did not anticipate anything would happen to any bird now. These people had their own ways of crossing seas and rivers, that was all.

But the noise in his cave was a very different matter, for it meant that while he had been away, surveying the visitors, some impudent creature had made free of the Eagle’s home ; and sure enough, the stone in his doorway had fallen, and the presumptuous invader could be clearly heard calling for help inside.

The Eagle was glad of the Father Raven’s assistance in pushing the stone out of place, and then out flopped and flapped the Mother Raven, looking most dusty and bedraggled and thin. Yes, she had looked for

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a cave, and found one most conveniently handy, and then the stone had fallen and shut her in, when she was flying around inside to see if it would be suitable for her dear children.

You should just have seen the Eagle when he heard the Mother Raven had actually been considering bringing her whole brood to live in his cave! But before he could utter sufficiently impressive words, there came another boom, boom, boom, and there was the Bittern flying along at a tremendous pace, screaming, "The waters are coming! the waters are coming! High as a mountain the waters of Jordan are rolling down again. The GREAT FLOOD has begun."

"Have the people crossed?" said the Eagle, speaking very short and sharp because he had no mind for all this blether of croaking and cawing and booming (and he *knew* it was a bad example for the young birds too).

Oh, yes, the people had crossed, but what had that got to do with it? These waters were high as a mountain and——

"And what's that over yonder?" said the Eagle, and they all looked, and there was a lovely rainbow high in the skies.

Well, that was a rainbow, but the waters of the flood——

"Tush!" said the Eagle, very shortly, like that. "When you see a rainbow, it is a promise and a sign. Floods are sent to help those people, not to swallow



them. So now, if you please, let us all return to our own nests."

He looked very hard at the Mother Raven as he spoke and she flew rather more quickly than usual round the rock to her brood, who were roused by now, and all on the edge of the nest. As she came round, they lifted up their beaks and squawked with joy and tumbled into the nest again, for they did so want to tell her comfortably all about it. It was such a great story, how they had been little birds who took care of themselves!

The Mother Raven shook her head many times when she heard they had eaten the manna, but whether they would have continued to be good children, or little birds who took care of themselves, I do not know; nor did she know, for the next morning there was no white glistening hoarfrost anywhere, and the mother bird told the young ones that if they wanted breakfast they would just have to get up and fly round for it, which they did.

It was all right now they knew where they had to fly to; and flying to breakfast is a very much pleasanter and easier task than flying from destruction!







## How the Bittern Boomed

**I**T is the way of a Bittern to stand in his place and meditate. Still waters run deep, and the thoughts of bitterns are deep as they are silent. Many people passed across the river where the Bittern meditated, but no one guessed the subject of his meditation. Shoulders hunched, head downbent, he stood with his eyes fixed on the flowing stream before him; when the tide bore objects fit for his consumption, his neck would thrust out with lightning suddenness and his long beak would open wide and snap the thing he wanted; and the next minute would see him with his head between the shoulders and his small bright eye contemplating the current fixedly again.

The Bittern had been in his place for a long time and had become quite a landmark. The people who crossed the river would look down at him and say, "There's the Bittern," and though he never deigned to take notice of them, he was not insensible of their attention. He professed to notice no one; his own company, said he, was all he wanted. By day he looked at his reflection in the water, and admired the glossy colours of his plumage, and by night he

stared at his dark silhouette and admired the symmetrical curves and the long thin legs of his figure. Either was good to look at.

Sometimes the passing birds sat on the sedge or the willow trees and tried to rouse him. The loquacious little swallows rested there on their journeys to and fro, and told him of the wonders of their travels: the horses who had risen from desert places to kings' palaces, and camels who could run by night and day and never weary. But the Bittern said he was quite satisfied with his experience just where he was.

Sometimes the meadow-lark would come for a sip of water, and would speak of the joys of rising high above the earth and of the great birds one met up there, and the majestic flights one witnessed. But the Bittern drew his head in a little farther and said he did not believe in gadding about. People should know where to find one. Night and day he was at his post, and could be depended on. Besides which, he liked the things he was used to. No strange birds for him—and as for flights, he was not flighty.

But one day there flapped along the river-bed a large black Raven. He paused when he saw the Bittern, for his solemn looks attracted the newcomer.

"I've just come up from the Great Lake," said the Raven.

"I have no desire to visit it," said the Bittern,

checking the Raven promptly, for he detested travellers' tales.

"Well, I had," said the Raven. "But, then, our family is famous for its liking for great prophets. But the one at the Great Lake has no need of us; he has all he needs. A wonderful sight, to see the crowds around him. He is coming down to your side of the lake, or sea, as they call it. You will be sure to hear about it."

"The people who come this way have other things to think of," said the Bittern, humping himself still more. In his heart of hearts he felt a queer prick at the mention of this prophet. He sounded too important. The Bittern was the landmark of these parts, and one landmark was enough.

"Well, keep your eyes open and you'll soon see when he is on the way," said the Raven and flew off slowly, leaving the Bittern disturbed.

It did seem as if there were more people about than usual soon after the Raven's coming. Strange people, too: wild-eyed creatures from the mountains, and keen-eyed traders in unfamiliar clothes, and peasants and delicate ladies borne in litters; there were many children, too, carried on mules or in little push-carts; and old men and women, hobbling and limping. Strange travellers, indeed, who scarcely glanced at the Bittern, or if they did, looked beyond him again and said, "Oh, here's the ford."

"Is it not wonderful to see the people?" piped the Lark one morning. "The Eagle tells me they

are all going to the prophet, and he will rid them of their troubles so that they sing even as I do when I rise to greet the sun."

"They make enough noise as it is, in all conscience," said the Bittern very gruffly. "But I have something better to do than to think about people."

"Yes, of course. Such a prophet is more worth thinking about than the crowds who follow him," said the Lark blithely, but the Bittern drew in his neck until it didn't seem as if he had any, and said, "Prophets profit me nothing."

He certainly was unsociable. But he didn't like it when the crowds began to lessen and then to stop altogether, as if the prophet had moved on, and the road across the ford no longer led to him. Now came a great solitude, for the familiar travellers were missing. It was as if every one had gone to the prophet, and for the first time the Bittern found himself thinking and thinking out beyond the radius of what he looked upon. His eyes were still fixed on the water, but his thoughts were journeying with the crowds, and picturing the shores of the Great Lake and the mysterious prophet who took people's troubles from them and made them light of heart and shrill and sweet of voice, like the Lark who praised the sun.

He could not imagine those travellers lighthearted.

He could not imagine the prophet either, nor the shores of the Great Lake; and gradually his neck drew out and his eyes began to look ahead over the



wide waters of the river and way up into the high skies, and suddenly the Bittern opened out his wings and rose and flew—after the people who had gone to the prophet.

He was not at all happy. He was nervous for the first time in his life. He felt there would be such a commotion when he came among every one, and the people who had crossed the ford saw him out of place. What excuse could he make? Those inquisitive swallows would be sure to be around and they might think he had taken their advice and taken to travelling. He had always set them a good example up till now, but after this escapade his substantial position would not be the same; his influence would be weakened.

Yet he had to fly forward, however much he doubted the wisdom of his course. Now that he had made the start he must continue.

Here was the lake! The great expanse of water was distressing; the Bittern felt such a speck as he winged his way across the lower end; and when he beheld crowds gathered on the shore, he came to ground and stood among the sedges a little distance off. If he had flown among them, he would not have been seen at all. As it was, they would be looking at the strange arrival and wondering who he was, until they recognized him, and then—Then the Bittern drew in his neck and humped his shoulders. Well, they must talk, that was all. He must prepare himself to hear their silly cries, “Oh, there’s

the Bittern from the river! What is he doing here?"

But no one looked his way. He kept his eyes on the water, but he could see the crowds reflected in the lake. Ah, there went a fish! Out darted his long neck and open beak, and then he drew back with a sputter. The water was salt. So different from the good, sweet river mud.

And here was another novelty: the fish had escaped him.

To have come all this way to disgrace himself! Not that anyone was paying him any attention. Always the crowd was looking towards the little fishing-boat from which a faint voice sounded.

The Bittern had had quite enough of standing there by himself. He had had quite enough of the Great Lake. And as for the prophet——

He stretched out his neck and rose up with a loud booming noise: he also had a voice. And he flew right over the crowd, over the fishing-boat, uttering his loud boom, boom. Was not he the sacred bird of the Nile?

Crash! Something struck him as he flew; the people were looking up at him now, but there was horror on their faces.

"Would you come between us and the master?" said a rough voice, and another stone hit him on the wing. His leg was already drooping, and he fell down, down, into the fishing-boat itself. As he dropped, there was a horror of great darkness, and of strength that failed him, and of shame.

For a moment he knew nothing ; then he seemed to wake up to great freshness, though it was still dark, the cool freshness that comes in the air before dawn, when the river flows more swiftly and the sedges stir. Then came the divine peace of noon-day when not a ripple breaks the waters and the sun bathes all in light. And then came a touch as of caressing winds, soothing the burning and the shame, and bidding him awake for the cool of the evening after the bright day.

“ Arise ; go to thy place,” said a low voice, and the Bittern opened his eyes and saw eyes looking down on him. Then he knew he was understood at last. He had wanted to be loved and honoured by every one ; and it was right to be loved and honoured by every one. The prophet knew that it was right. The Bittern had not known how to set about achieving the result, but the prophet knew. Great trust filled him ; he rose to his feet and stood with firm ground under them, waiting a moment, for the prophet was still looking at him, knowing his place was worthy to be honoured. A good place, his right place, the place beside the ford, the landmark by the ford, by which all people might know where was the ford ! Yes, the prophet understood perfectly, and the Bittern stood more and more firmly, with the peace growing more positive. There was to be no wandering any more, he was to return to his place, and he opened his wings with the new strength filling them—oh, how light they seemed !

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How light the air! He was up and away over the uplifted faces, all looking at him now with joy and light in their eyes, even as the eyes of the prophet shone, for they watched him, too.

All, all, as one, were bidding God-speed to the Bittern.

He boomed sonorously, joyfully, to all.

Now he marked the course of the river over the plain, and noted how the ford cut off several weary miles for the travellers on their way; and he saw how deep the waters were a little farther up, and again below the ford, and how safe a passage was the one he guarded.

Then he was back in his old place, and here was the Lark saying, "How we have missed you! Where have you been?"

"To see the great prophet," said the Bittern.

"And does he take people's troubles from them?" said the Lark.

"Yes," said the Bittern.

"Do they sing and praise?" cried the Lark.

The Bittern lifted up his voice and boomed in greeting, for the people who had been helped by the prophet were beginning to return. Here were the first-comers, running and singing.

"Hear them! Hear them!" said the Bittern. "They will tell you of the great things he has done. But he sent me to my place."



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