

PET ANIMALS.

A STORY FOR CHILDREN.

BY THE AUTHOR OF "STORIES FOR THE NURSERY."

PUBLISHED UNDER THE DIRECTION OF
THE COMMITTEE OF GENERAL LITERATURE AND EDUCATION,
APPOINTED BY THE SOCIETY FOR PROMOTING
CHRISTIAN KNOWLEDGE.

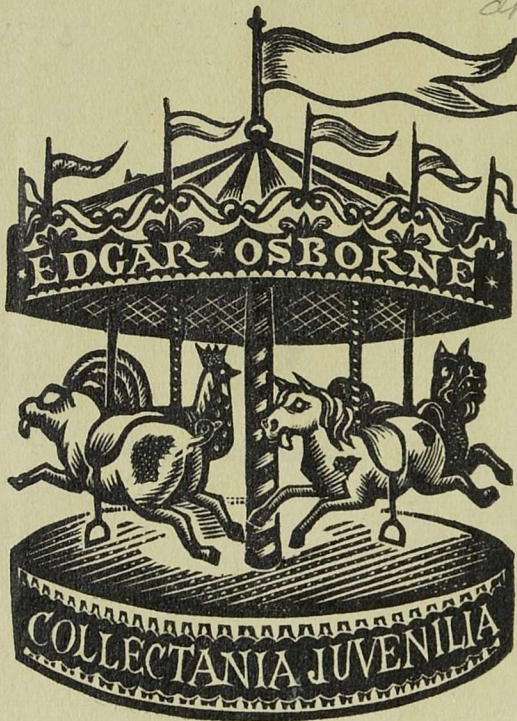
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P E T A N I M A L S .

THE animals which most people choose for their pets are dogs and cats. But there are others which it is very pleasant to keep for the sake of watching their curious ways, and which soon become tame if we are kind to them and never forget to feed them. I like those pets best which soon learn to know us, and will stay with us even if we let them run or fly about in the open air. We must not be unkind to them even if they give us a little trouble sometimes. The best of them are not always as good as we could wish them to be, but that is the fault of their nature, so that if any one can-

not say, when any mischief is done, "Poor thing, it does not know any better," he had better not keep pets at all. Dogs, for instance, are nice companions in a walk, and it is very pleasant to see how faithful they are to their master, but they are troublesome in the house, and very much given to make a sad noise at night when they ought to be asleep. Poor things, they know no better. Cats are better companions at home; but then they, too, are often very noisy in the night, and, I am afraid, are not very honest. For my part, I never knew a cat who could help dipping her whiskers in every bowl of milk she could find, running away with every fish left within her reach, or killing every bird she could catch. I once had a very pretty stuffed bird, which I was going to have placed in a glass-case. One day I unfor-

tunately left open the door of the room in which it was, and, going back again a few minutes afterwards, Pussy ran by me, looking as if she had been doing some mischief. When I went into the room, my beautiful bird lay on the ground with its head torn off. It was some comfort to me that she was disappointed of a meal, for my highly-prized hawfinch was stuffed with cotton and pepper, neither of which is fit food for cats. But poor Pussy knew no better, so I was not so cruel as to beat her.

I once saw a cockatoo which seemed tolerably comfortable, and never did any mischief. He was a large white bird with a yellow crest, and had a splendid cage to live in; but he was never shut in, except at night, to keep him safe from stray cats and other dangers. At all other

times the door of his cage was left

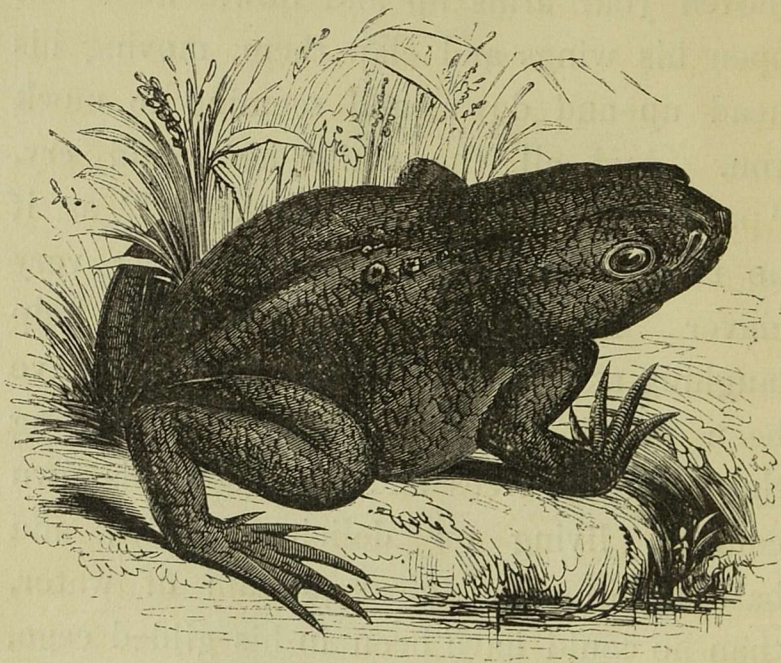


open, and he could go out and in when

he pleased. He was very fond of standing on the table when there was any one sitting at it, and if you nodded to him and moved your arms up and down, he would open his wings and clap them, moving his head up and down, and seeming to mock you. And all the while he would cry, "pretty cockatoo! pretty cockatoo!" as if he thought he was doing something very clever. But although no one could help laughing at him, yet I think he would have been much happier flying about among the beautiful trees and flowers of his own country, living on delicious fruits, and bathing in some clear stream of water, than he could have been in his gilded cage, doing funny things to make people laugh, living on bread-sops, and washing himself in a saucer.

I know a lady who has a very strange

kind of pet, a toad. He has lived for several years under some mossy stones in

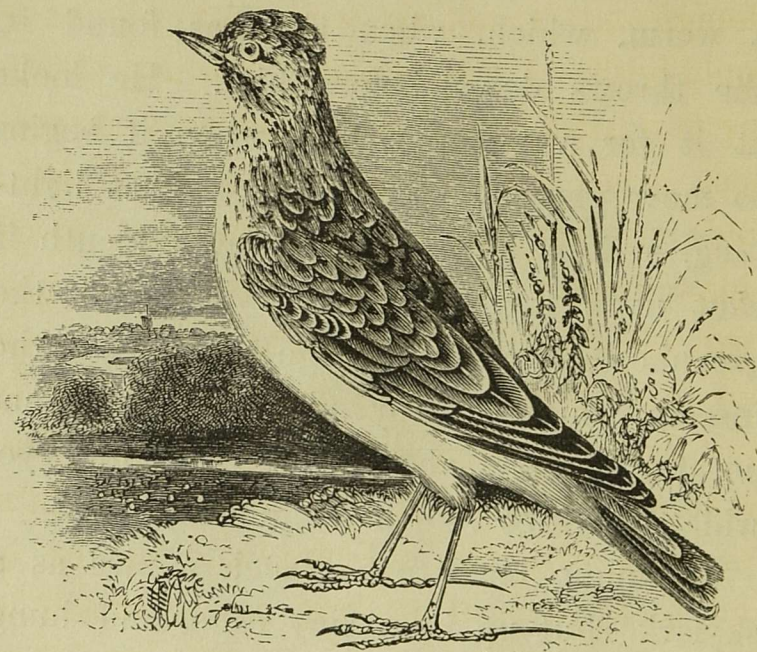


a greenhouse, and seems to have no wish to go away. When the lady goes into the greenhouse and calls him, he knows

her voice, and crawls out of his hole, knowing that he is to have a meal. He then watches her while she is digging for a worm, which, when she has found it, she throws down before him. He looks at it for a moment, and, when it begins to move, he darts at it as quick as lightning, and in an instant his ugly mouth is shut upon it. He is very useful in the greenhouse, eating a large number of the insects which destroy plants, but he has nothing pretty about him but his eye, which sparkles like a diamond.

I cannot bear to see such a bird as a skylark shut up in a tiny cage, and hung against a wall in a smoky town, with but a glimpse of the bright blue sky, in which he used to soar so happily, and but a morsel of withered turf instead of the broad meadows into which he used to drop when

his song was ended, to build his peaceful nest, or take care of his young. I think



sometimes that it is not strange that a bird who can rise into the clouds so near to heaven should sing aloud for joy; and when I see a lark in a cage singing in the

same way, his song seems to teach me that like him I ought to be happy and thankful, and sing the praises of God, though all is not so well with me as I could wish. I was standing one day watching two larks in separate cages at a cottage-door, when the woman who tended them told me that one of them was five years old, and that the other, which was but one year old, had been brought to her by a boy who took it from the nest before it was fledged. She did not know at first what to do with it, but she put it into the cage with the old bird, and he fed it and took care of it, and reared it till it grew as strong and as big as himself. The kind bird was happy, I dare say, to have some one of his own kind to love.

The only birds that I really like to see in cages are canary-birds. They do not

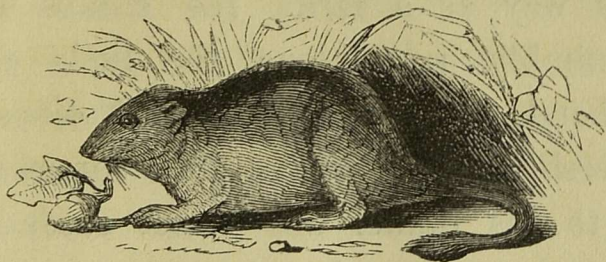
beat themselves against the bars of their cage, nor look frightened when any one comes near them; nor do they often try to get away, even if the door of their cage be left open. The reason is, I suppose, that as they have been born in a cage, they are quite content with hopping from perch to perch, or sometimes taking a short flight about the room. If they have plenty to eat, with some fresh green food now and then, and always plenty of clean water, they are not much to be pitied. In fact, it would be cruel to let a canary-bird fly away; for if the other birds did not peck it to death, which they would most likely do, it would not be able to bear the cold of winter in this country. Besides, animals which have been long tamed, seem to like the kind of life they live in houses better than going wild.

The first cats were wild animals, living in the woods, and catching birds and mice. They can still catch birds and mice, it is true, and climb trees also, but I think they would not be quite happy if they could not purr themselves to sleep on somebody's lap, or bend their velvety paws under them by some dry and warm fire-side. And what would kittens do in the woods, without the chance of finding a reel of cotton to unwind, and without ever having a romp with a cork tied to a string? They would soon grow tired of running round after their own tails; and in the woods, I suppose, the mamma cats are too busy to give much time to amusing their children. So, if cats and kittens were to run wild again, they would have to learn a new way of living. The old ones must forget how fond they are of fish

when there is no one to catch any for them, and the kittens must learn to be steady, because there would be no one to play with them. Canary-birds, too, would find a difference; for, as they have never been taught to look for their own food, they would not know where to find any; they sing a different song now from that which they used to sing in their old land, so that they would not be able to make themselves understood: nor would their old friends know them in their smart yellow coats, for since they have been kept in cages they have changed their dress as well as their song.

What white mice would do if they were allowed to run wild, I cannot say; but I should think that their brown companions would be induced to treat them rudely and teaze them, because of their delicate

coats and pink eyes. Besides, they would not find it so easy to hide away in a dark corner when they saw an owl or a cat coming near.



A dor-mouse is a very nice animal to keep in the winter. He sleeps away nearly all his time, and only awakes when he is hungry, or when a fine warm day comes. Then he should have a nut or a few crumbs of bread, or something of that sort. It does not cost much to keep him, for he is very well satisfied if he gets a good dinner once in a week or two. Then he rolls himself up again into a comfortable

ball and goes on with his long nap. It would be cruel to keep him a prisoner all the year round; for, when the warm spring comes, he is as merry and as active in his way as a lark. He climbs trees very nimbly, runs along the little twigs that bend with his weight, and dines off the fresh opening leaves. In summer he adds to his dinner any sweet seeds that happen to be ripe; but in autumn nothing will do for him but a dainty nut; so he climbs the trees where they hang the thickest, nibbles through the shell with his sharp teeth, and thus fattens himself bravely before winter sends him to bed again. Now it is no unkindness to shut him up in a box well lined with soft cotton wool all his drowsy time, and to save him the trouble of going out to look for a meal when he wakes; but it would be

very cruel to keep him in the dark when the golden sun shines bright and warm, and to put a stop to his climbing, and hunting, and nutting. I kept a dormouse once in this way all the winter; he was found lying on the ground rolled up in a ball of dry grass and leaves, at the foot of a tall poplar, from which his nest seemed to have been blown. He was put under a flower-pot in the greenhouse, and this we thought would be better for him than to let him lie on the cold wet ground. The greenhouse would keep him warm and dry, and the hole in the pot would give him air, and we knew that, though he could eat his way into a nut, and perhaps through a wooden box, he was safe enough in an earthenware pot. We looked at him sometimes, and laid him by the fire to awake him for breakfast; but he

always fell asleep again before dinner. One fine day, towards the end of winter, some one lifted up the pot to see whether he was thinking of getting up, and away he went, scampering along the shelves and climbing up and down the posts at a wonderful rate. We kept the door shut, that he might not get out; but we need not have done so, he liked his quarters too well to think of changing them. He was never seen again; but when the vines began to shoot, we began to wish that we had left the door open, or at least that we had shut him out. Every day we found shoots of the vine hanging from the tree half nibbled through, or lying on the ground. Who could have done the mischief? We thought of rats, birds, snails, caterpillars, but no one could find the culprit. At last the mischief stopped, and

we thought of the dormouse, but it was too late. All the young shoots had been destroyed, and the vine did not bear a grape for the year. But the poor dormouse knew no better, and the only punishment which he deserved was to be turned out of his warm house.

When he was gone, my little boy begged so hard that he might have some other animal to take care of, that I allowed him to buy two young pigeons, and a bag of peas to feed them with. There was great joy when the pigeons were brought home, and I was called more than once to see them at their breakfasts and dinners. At the end of two or three days, Henry thought that they must by this time know him, and where to come back for a meal. So he opened the window of the room in which they were

kept, and allowed them to go out for an airing. They were glad enough to go, flew away together to the top of the next house, where were some other pigeons belonging to a farmer, and were so much pleased that they never once came back again. We often see them flying over the house, and Henry hopes that they will one day recollect his bag of peas and come down, but it never seems to enter their heads; they whirl by and take no notice of him.

Now he has no less than four new pets, whom we call Peg, Meg, Bluecap, and Jack. The first three are hawks of the kind called kestrels. They were taken from the nest when very young, and given to him by the boy who took them, when he had grown tired of the trouble of feeding them. Jack is a magpie, who, I believe, was also

taken from the nest when young. The hawks at first were very grave birds. The feathers in one wing of each had been cut, so that they could not fly. Peg and Meg, as soon as they were taken out of the basket in which they were brought, scrambled up the trunk of an acacia tree near the house, and sat all day and all night taking no notice of anything, unless some one brought them some food, when they would clap their wings and make a harsh noise. As they would not come down to be fed, we used to fasten a piece of meat to the end of a long stick, and reach it to them. They would seize it with the left foot, and eat it bit by bit, tearing it with their sharp hooked beaks. When they had eaten what they wanted, they dropped the rest, but seemed not to have the sense to pick up anything they had lost.

By and by we found that if we threw the meat into the tree they could catch it with their talons. If they were very hungry, they were so eager that they sometimes let go their hold of the tree and fluttered to the ground, meat and all. Of that they always kept a firm hold, and when on the ground they would hold fast their meal with one foot, and scramble away with it to the shelter of a bush, where they would stay until they had finished, and then climb up again to the branches of their favourite tree. Bluecap could not climb so well as his sisters, so he made his perch on the door-scraper, where he stayed all day and all night, scarcely ever taking a walk, watching very sharply whoever came in or went out, but afraid of nobody. It was no easy matter to drive him away from his post; if any one

tried to do so, he would open his mouth as if he intended to bite, and make a very angry noise. Henry drove him away two or three times, wishing him to climb a tree, but he was always back again in a very short time.

As they grew older, they grew more active; Peg and Meg often came down from their tree and visited several parts of the garden. By and by, they travelled as far as the meadow which joins the garden. Peg was once lost for several days, but was brought back by a boy who found her on a common half a mile from the house; and Meg once stayed away for nearly a week. Where she went I never knew; but I was passing through my meadow one evening when I heard her harsh cry from the top of a little post which is used to keep a gate open. It was nearly

dark, but not so dark but that she could see to eat a piece of meat which I gave her. Poor Meg, she was very thin; I suppose she had gone away to see the world, and had lost her way home. I have heard that birds of prey can bear to fast for a very long time; she could not have eaten anything for several days, for I do not think she was able to catch either birds or mice for herself. If birds have memories, as I suppose they have, she cannot have forgotten the meal on the gate-post. Her wing was now cut again to prevent her from flying; for we thought it would be cruel to let her go away before she knew how to gain her own living. But Meg seems not to be of the same way of thinking, for, another time, she was not seen for several days, and when we had almost given her up, a boy one day came

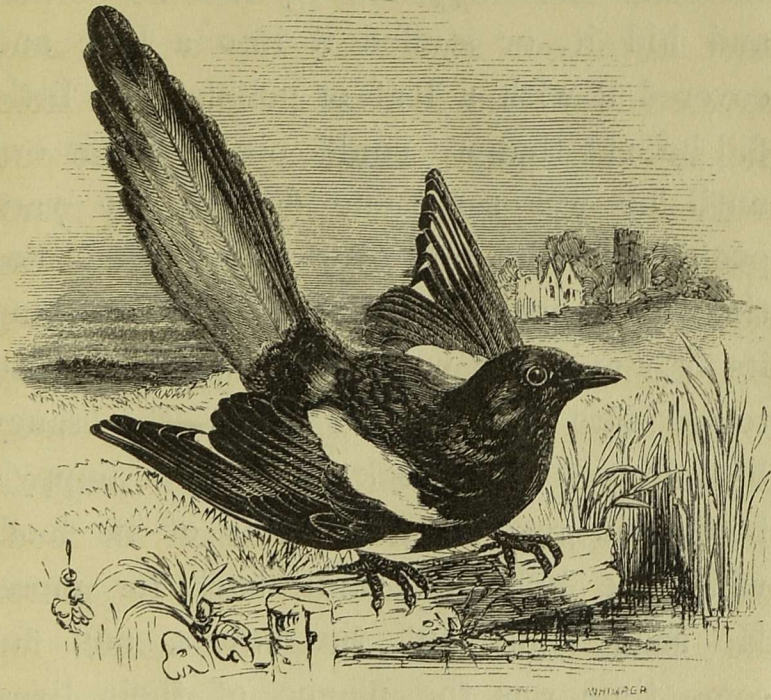
to the house to ask if we had lost a hawk. He had found a tame one, he said, near a wood, about a mile from the house. We begged him to bring her back, and in a short time he came with the poor hawk shut up in a lantern, which was the only thing he could find to carry her in. He told us that when he found her, another hawk was feeding her, and that the same bird followed him nearly all the way to the house. The strange bird must, I suppose, have found out that Meg was not able to catch food for herself, and so must have kindly taken pity on her. I have often heard that when young birds are taken from the nests, the parent birds will follow them and feed them in their cages; but Meg had left her nest at least five months, so that one would hardly have expected that her parents thought any

more about her. But whether the strange bird were her parent or not, hawks do not quite deserve the bad name which they have got for cruelty, or Meg would have been pecked to death instead of being so kindly treated. I am afraid that when we call some animals cruel, because they kill and eat one another, we forget that there are many animals which men and women keep for the very same purpose, and that a hawk is not more cruel in killing a bird or mouse for his dinner, than we are when we eat beef or mutton.

In the meanwhile Peg's wing had grown, and though she would always come to be fed if she was very hungry, she would not suffer any one to catch her.

About this time Jack, the magpie, came to live with us. He was never a grave bird. As soon as he was let loose, he ran

off and we thought he was gone; but in a short time we saw him on the top of the barn strutting about and chattering as if

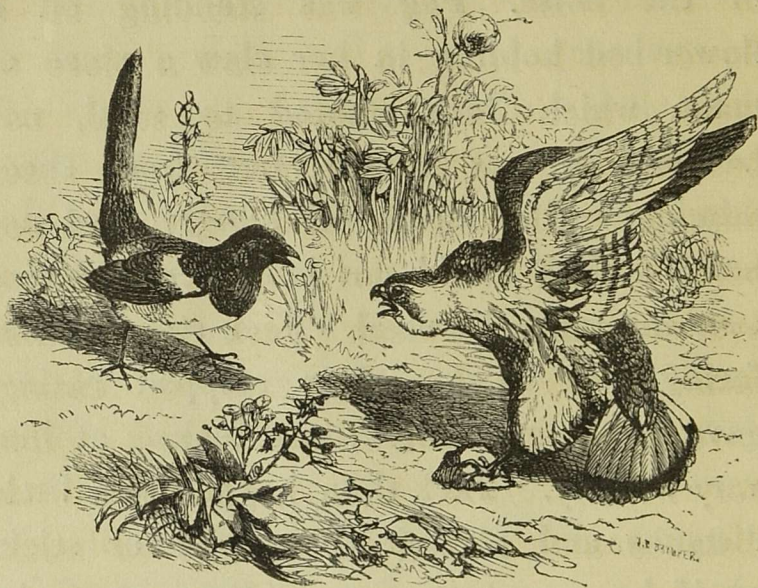


he was proud of having done a fine thing. Next day he came into the coach-house and perched on a peg. Henry gave him

some bread and bits of meat; but though he took everything that was offered him, he ate very little. He took his food in his beak and hopped away to some corner and hid it, or stuffed it into a hole and covered it with a leaf or pebble. So little did he eat that we could not make it out until he was seen one day in the yard pecking at the tail of a puppy which was tied up there, and teasing it by pulling its hair and ears until the puppy was glad to go into its house. Then the saucy bird dipped his beak into the puppy's bowl, and ran off with some of its food, which he hid, and came back for more. He soon found out the hawks, and for some time was the plague of their lives. One day, I was in the house, and heard Jack chattering and one of the hawks crying out in a very angry tone. I ran

to the window and could not help laughing heartily to see what was the cause of the noise. Peg was standing on a flower-bed holding in her claw a piece of meat, which Jack wanted to steal, not because he was hungry, but from sheer mischief. The hawk was hungry, and not being a thief could not help herself whenever she wanted a meal. Jack stood at first facing the hawk, — Peg stopped eating, gave an angry shriek, and looked at him very fiercely. Jack then hopped to a little distance and picked up a leaf or stick, as if he meant to say, — “Pray, don’t be uneasy, I don’t want your dinner, I am only amusing myself with this stick; it is very hard that I cannot have a bit of play without your making such a clatter.” Peg seemed to be satisfied, and went on with her meal. Meanwhile Jack slyly

slipped away as if he had something to do in another place; but quickly return-



ing, came, without being seen, behind the hawk, and seizing the piece of meat between her legs, tried to pull it away. But Peg kept too tight a hold, and, suddenly turning, made after Jack, carrying the prize in one claw. But Jack took

care not to come within reach of that terrible hooked beak, and having hopped to a little distance, began to pick up dry leaves again. Peg once more began her meal, but in a minute Jack was again behind her, pulling her tail; at last the tormented bird could stand it no longer, and, after two or three trials, scrambled up into the acacia tree, and finished her meal in peace.

Another day, when Bluecap (he is called so because his head is blue, while the heads of the females are reddish-brown), Bluecap was eating a piece of meat on a garden-chair, Jack saw what was going on and began his antics. First he jumped on the arms of the chair, and then on the back, looking down and chattering. The hawk made his wild cry, but went on eating. It was clear that this plan would not answer, so

down came the thief, and presently I saw his head peeping above the seat of the chair, now pulling the hawk's tail, and now making a dart at the meat. Whichever way Bluecap turned, Jack was behind him. At last I came forward and drove him away. Jack did not always get off so well, for once, when he was playing his old tricks, the hawk suddenly left the meat and made a dart at him, caught him, and did not let him go until he had picked out a good many of his prettiest feathers. Jack squalled lustily, but got no more pity than he deserved. He has learnt to behave better since. When he sees a hawk at dinner he comes up and looks on very saucily, but if the hawk attempts to spring at him, he is at the other end of the garden in a minute.

Jack is a thief unlike any other thieves

that I have ever heard of. Some thieves steal because they are hungry and know no better, and some because they are wicked. Jack steals for fun. If the glazier is mending a pane of glass, he will steal a bit of putty and gulp it down. You would think he had swallowed it; but no, he has only put it into a kind of pouch that he has under his bill, and presently he brings it up again, hides it, and comes back for some more. If the gardener lays his knife by his side while he is tying up a plant, Jack is sure to be on the watch, and in a minute he is half way across the garden with the knife in his mouth. There never was a bird so fond of teasing. One day I was sitting in a garden-chair reading, when Jack came and perched on my foot. He soon discovered the tag of my boot and tried to

steal that. I watched him a little while, and went on with my book. He fumbled about my foot for a little while, and I forgot him. Presently I felt my hair pulled, but before I could turn round, he was off: presently he was on the back of the chair again, pecking my ear. I could not catch him or drive him off, so I walked away; but I found there was something in my boot which gave me pain, and taking it off found there a piece of pipe, which he had picked up and hid away.

He teased my little girl so much that she was quite afraid of him. He found out this and teased her all the more. He would come behind her and peck her heels with his hard sharp beak, and really hurt her very much. When she ran away he chased her, until at last she would not go into the garden by herself. I was

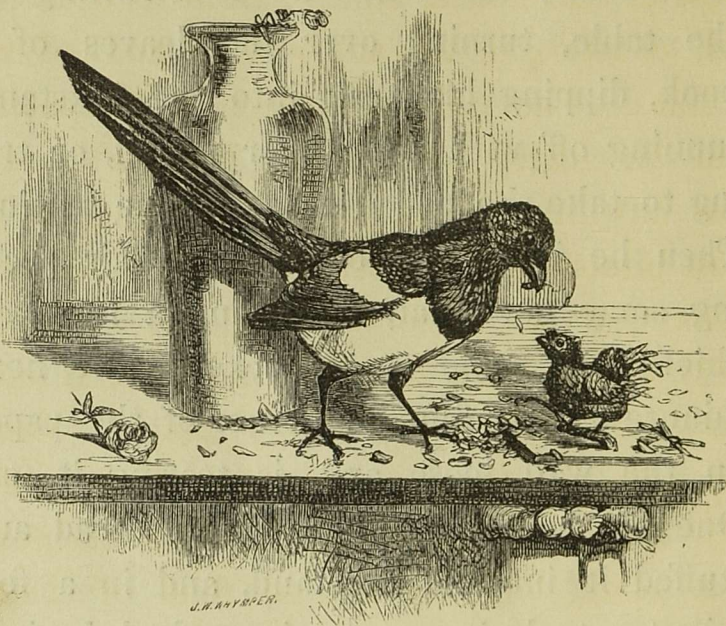
determined to cure him of this trick, so I gave her a whip and told her whenever Jack pecked her legs again to give him a flogging. No sooner was she in the garden than up came the magpie, but Kate was very brave and flourished her whip. Jack stopped and looked surprised; presently he came behind her and gave a very sharp peck, but Kate instead of running away gave chase, and it was now his turn to run. He recollected the hawk, I suppose, for although he did not know what it was to be whipped, he took good care not to be caught; but he has learnt better manners. Kate and he are now great friends. When we are at dinner he often perches outside the window-sill and knocks against the glass with his bill. When any one throws up the window the noise frightens him away; but

he is soon up again. Kate gives him a bit of cheese, of which he is very fond. He eats part at once and carries away the rest to his hiding-place.

He comes into the house whenever he can find a door or window open, and, when there, is always trying to do some mischief. Every one is tired of him, and wishes that he had never come; but he is so very droll that no one likes the thought of sending him away. In fact I do not know where to send him. If we were to take him into the fields and woods, he would run up to the first man or woman he saw, and perhaps be killed, and if this did not happen, he would not know how to gain his livelihood in an honest way. I could not bear to have him kept in a cage, and nobody who knows him will have him as a present.

His favourite place in the house is the school-room, where he plays all sorts of antics. One moment he is on the back of a chair, the next he is strutting on the table, turning over the leaves of a book, dipping his beak into the inkstand, running off with a knife or pencil, or trying to take the pen from some one writing. Then he is on the back of a chair pecking some one's ear, or pulling a handkerchief from some one's pocket. The next minute he has found a corner of the paper on the wall loose and is tearing it off. One day he picked up a bit of bread and stuffed it into an inkstand, and in a few minutes took it out again soaked in ink, and ate it. Another time he spied a butterfly in the window. This he soon caught and carried off to the garden, where he hid it under a leaf, and amused us very

much by his droll look when the poor butterfly got up and flew away. We had a small stuffed bird on the chimney-piece,



of which I suppose he was jealous, for one day we came into the school-room and found him tearing it to pieces on the floor. If we try to drive him out, he runs under

the table, and we may chase him a long time before he will find the door. He often tries very hard to be allowed to roost in the house, and when he is ordered out, chatters in an angry tone and offers to bite. The only plan then is to catch him and carry him away; but he shows how unwilling he is to go by crying in a most piteous way. A stranger would almost think that the noise was made by a young child, or, at least, that if a bird, some one must be hurting him very much. One day two painting-brushes were lost, and were afterwards found hid under the cushion of a chair. He is not so fond of some people as of others; some he always runs away from, but perches on the knees of others, and holds down his head to be smoothed, and when he is in a very steady mood, stands on the table near them while

they are writing or reading. If he is in the garden alone, he climbs a tree and sits on one of the branches, or walks about idly, or washes himself in a pool; but if any one comes out he soon joins him, hopping round and picking up a leaf or pebble. The hawks he has never anything to say to now.

One day, the drawing-room window was left open, and no one went into the room for some time. At last, when the door was opened and some one went in, Jack was found at a game of high romps. The floor was covered with all sorts of things, of which it seemed that he had been trying to find out the use. Pencils, pens, a taper-stand and taper, a needle-case, a pocket-book, lay scattered all about, with Jack standing in the middle. He did not wait to be caught, or even to be scolded, but

was out of the window in a minute. Everybody was very angry with him, and we made up our minds to send him away at once. So the next time he came within reach he was caught and put into a basket, and in the evening I carried him to a person who had said that he should like to have him. But when I found that in his new home he was to be put into a cage for the rest of his life, I thought the punishment was too great for his offence, so without opening my basket I brought him back again. The end, I suppose, will be that we must get a large cage in which he may sleep at night, and only let him out when there is some one by to prevent him from doing mischief. As long as he stays with us he is sure to be taken care of, and well fed; and if in the spring he chooses to fly away, he may go wherever

he likes. But I am much afraid that he will prefer to stay where he is.

The hawks are still very amusing. Peg can now fly perfectly well. When I go into the garden in the morning she is usually perched on the top of one of the tall trees in the meadow, but when she sees me she flies to an apple-tree in the garden, and, every time I pass by, makes a loud scream, to tell me that she wants her breakfast. I throw up a piece of meat or a dead bird, which she catches in her left foot and eats it there; or if I do not take a good aim, she sometimes darts from her perch, and catching it in the air flies away with it to another tree, or the top of a wall, and eats it at her leisure.

Bluecap has taken a fancy to spend a great part of his time under a grating placed over a cellar-window. I am in-

clined to think that he was first tempted to go there by seeing some frogs which had leapt in and could not get out again. I do not know how else to account for his choosing to stay in so dark and damp a place.

Meg lives mostly in an apple-tree in the walled garden, or in a cherry-tree in the orchard. She always takes care to let me know where she is. No matter what time of day I go into this garden, she utters her sharp cry, and, if not attended to, comes down and flutters after me, perching on my foot until she gets her bird or piece of meat. If I place a bird on my shoulder she will spring from the tree and alight on my arm. She is afraid of no one, because, I suppose, no one has ever hurt her.

What will become of all the pets I do

not know. I suppose they will stay with us all the winter, and in the spring will fly away. I shall be sorry to part with them, they are so amusing and so happy. If they do go, and find it is not so easy as they thought to get their living in the fields and woods, I hope they will come back sometimes for a dinner. As for Jack, if he goes away, he must mend his manners, for if he tries to play such tricks with wild magpies as he played with us, he will certainly be well punished.

THE END.

BY THE SAME AUTHOR,

PRICE FOURPENCE EACH.

THE MEADOW.

THE CORN-FIELD.

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