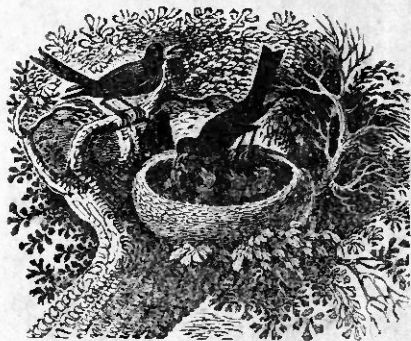


THE
BLACKBIRD'S NEST:

A TALE,
FOR CHILDREN.



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THE
BLACKBIRD'S NEST.



HENRY and George were two very engaging children. They had formed so strong an attachment to each other, that if Henry had fruit or cakes, he ran to offer them to George ; and when George had any thing given him that was nice, he would never touch it till he had carried half of it to Henry. Their play-things seemed to belong as much to one as to the other : in short, any one would have supposed that they had been brothers, rather than mere play-fellows.

As a close intimacy subsisted between their parents, they were much pleased to

observe the progress of this early friendship.—George never failed, as he went to school, to call for Henry; and Henry always delayed his return, till George was ready to accompany him. They learnt their lessons together, and had no disputes, except who should be the best scholar.

On holidays, they amused themselves with walking in the fields, where they gathered nosegays of wild flowers for their sisters, or repeated some pretty verses that their mammas had taught them.

It happened, one day, that Henry being gone out with his father, George, in order to pass away the lonesome hours, strolled by himself into the country. As he was walking along the side of a hedge, he discovered a blackbird's nest, concealed in the thickest part of the bushes. He was not one of those cruel children, who take a malicious

pleasure in depriving a poor bird of her dear little ones. He determined to wait till they should no longer want the assistance of their mother, or she feel any attachment to them. However, he did not neglect, the next day, to communicate the news of his treasure to Henry, and promised to take him to see the nest; proposing that they should go every day to visit the birds, till their wings were grown, and that then, they should be divided between them.—Henry waited impatiently, till school was over, that George might show him the nest, and they went together several succeeding days to observe the progress of the nestlings.

From the first moment that Henry beheld the nest, he conceived the idea of taking possession of it. It is difficult to imagine whence such an unworthy thought could arise; for his friend had already vol-



untarily offered to share the spoils with him. Evil thoughts insinuate themselves so easily into the hearts of men, that they have need to be always on their guard

against their approaches. Children, especially, should be watchful of the first impulse to do wrong, as from their weakness they are prone to error. This attention to themselves is an easy task, because they have their parents, or teachers, at hand, to assist them with their advice. Neither are they sufficiently aware, that a small fault in the beginning, may increase to an odious vice, which will corrupt their hearts, and debase their characters as long as they live. Henry took the opportunity, one morning, before the time George usually called upon him, of going to the place where the nest was: he found the little ones pretty well fledged, and forgetting at once the ties of friendship, and the generosity of George, he seized his prey, and carried it away with a trembling hand.

When he had got half way home, he sat down under a tree to look at the young



birds, and to hear them chirp. Then for the first time, he was struck by *the 'still small voice' of conscience*, reproaching him for the base action he had just com-

mitted. He felt greatly perplexed what course to pursue. If he carried the nest secretly home, he was certain of being discovered in a short time; and his father would punish him severely for having deceived his play-fellow, whose friendship he would lose besides. If he carried the nest back to its place, he was afraid of meeting George in his way thither. At last it came into his head, that he would throw the nest into a pond at no great distance, and make it sink to the bottom by loading it with stones.

While he was balancing upon these different projects, a boy from a neighbouring village happened to pass by, who, having seen the nest in his possession, offered him a dozen marbles in a bag, in exchange for it. This proposal seemed to him a lucky means of extricating himself from his difficulties: he accepted it with-

out hesitation, and afterwards went to school, assuming a countenance of as much tranquillity, as if he had done nothing to deserve reproach. He was still at a loss to know what excuse to make to his friend for not having waited for him as usual in the morning. George, who had no suspicion, was easily satisfied with such excuses as he was able to feign; and after remarking that the afternoon was half holiday, proposed taking that opportunity of going to take the birds, and amusing themselves with them the rest of the day.

They set out together as soon as they had finished their dinner.—George had already planned the disposal of their little family. What then was his concern to see all his hopes disappointed!—when they arrived at the bush, some plunderer had been there before them. Henry pretended equal surprise and vexation. After having

spent some time in fruitless lamentations, they returned home much out of spirits. With the design of drawing George's attention from his misfortune, Henry showed him his marbles, telling him that he had found them as he was going to school; and that now, the best thing they could do, was to play with them.

Here, my young friends, let us pause a few moments, to consider how much the number of Henry's crimes increased in one day.—In the morning he robbed his friend, by taking possession of that nest he had generously agreed to share with him. That action was followed by the cruel thought of submitting the harmless birds to a painful death; in order to conceal the fault afterwards, he had recourse to falsehood, to prevent suspicion; and lastly, he told a lie, by saying that he had found the marbles,

when in fact he had received them in exchange for the birds.

Such is the rapid progress of vice. Do not deceive yourselves: detection is certain: although you may conceal your faults for some time, yet there is a Power from which they cannot be hid, and which will not fail to bring them to light. However cautious you may be, you will betray yourselves, for you will not be able to invent so many falsehoods as will be requisite to hide your dissimulation from your companions. The first slip of your memory will throw you into such confusion, as will naturally lead to discovery; then follow disgrace, shame, and the punishments you so justly deserve.

Let us now return to the story: George, whose chief gratification in finding the nest, was the expected pleasure of enjoying the



prize with his friend, grew reconciled to the disappointment when he saw that he no longer regretted it; therefore they began to play together at marbles, and for

some time the game went on very smoothly; but at length, some other boys who were going that way, stopped to see them play; one amongst these, after having looked very attentively at the marbles, claimed them as his property; and declared that he had lost them that very morning. tied up in a little bag. Henry laughed at his pretensions, and boldly maintained that he had bought them. But George, who had just heard him say that he had found them, reproved him for denying the truth, and entreated him to restore them to their owner. Henry refused to do so, and repeated that he had found them, saying, that they were his, and he would have them. In this, however, he was mistaken, for the little stranger attacked him roughly, gave him a blow on the nose with his fist, took the marbles from him, and walked off, leaving him to make painful reflections on the first consequences of his bad conduct.

It becomes necessary to inform my readers, that the little boy who claimed the marbles had really lost them, as he said ; and that he who had given them to Henry in exchange for the birds, had found them. But as he thought he could make a greater advantage of the birds than of the marbles, he had consented to the bargain as mentioned before. This boy was the son of very honest parents, though they were extremely poor. His name was Lubin, and he was well known for many miles round the country, being employed in serving the neighbourhood with faggots, which he made himself, of the dead wood that he was allowed to pick up in the forest.—The money he earned in this manner, he carried to his mother, towards the support of the family. As his parents could not afford to send him to school, he had plenty of leisure to manage his little trade, which he carried on with great industry and activi-

ty. Little Lubin having become master of the nest, examined the birds, and finding them strong and well grown, ran with them towards the village where Henry and George lived, in order to try to dispose of the whole nest at some gentleman's house.

It happened, that the first person to whom he offered them was the father of Henry, who knowing that notwithstanding his poverty, he had established a good character for honesty, took the nest and gave him half a crown. Lubin, who never before had so much money at once, ran with haste to carry it to his mother, who received it with great joy.

Henry was not long before he returned home, holding his still bleeding nose with his handkerchief.—When the family inquired what had happened to him, he replied, that a great boy had thrown a stone at



him because he had prevented him from beating another, who was a little child. Behold a new falsehood added to the list, already too long!—His father, by way of

consolation for his misfortune, hastened to show him the nest of young blackbirds, which he had just purchased. Never was astonishment greater than that of Henry's, when he saw that it was the same nest that he had stolen from his friend George, and that he had exchanged for the marbles, which had just been taken from him, and a good beating given to him into the bargain.

It must be confessed that Divine justice was evident in the succession of these occurrences, and that it pointed out the direct means of punishing the criminal. Henry became instantly sensible that his first breach of faith towards his friend, had led him into all the sorrowful circumstances and embarrassments in which he was involved and that he had told a number of falsehoods, only to increase his own perplexity. The sight of the nest made him shed a

greater torrent of tears than the blow on his nose.

His father was at a loss what measure to pursue to appease him. "Take courage, my dear son," said he, "it is only a swelled nose; you are not hurt in any other part, and I have something to show you, that surely will give you pleasure. You have told me that your friend George has promised to share the nest that he has found between you: you shall not be inferior to him in generosity: to-morrow, before you go to school, you shall carry him two of these birds, that I have just bought of a poor boy, and he will be glad to see that your affection towards him is as strong as his towards you. This proposal was a new thunder-stroke for Henry. He perceived that it would be the surest means of exposing him to disgrace. This thought heavily oppressed him: he gave himself

up to despair ; he could not utter a word, he was every instant on the point of fainting.

His father seeing him in this situation imagined that he was more hurt than at first appeared. He ordered him to be put to bed, and gave him such medicines as he judged proper. Henry was ill without pretence ; he could not sleep during the night, and he was burnt up with a scorching fever. His father and mother began to be apprehensive for the consequences ; they earnestly besought him to tell where he felt the pain, but he obstinately determined never to discover the cause of his indisposition, even if it cost him his life. The next day George coming, according to his accustomed habit, to accompany him to school, he was told that Henry kept his bed with a high fever. This news filled his tender heart with sorrow. He entreat-

ed permission to be admitted into the chamber of his friend, which was readily granted. As soon as Henry saw him enter the room, he was seized with a violent palpitation of the heart, because he imagined that he had already seen the nest, and was come to reproach him for his ill conduct. What a dreadful picture of a guilty conscience! Who would be so mad as to commit a criminal action, if they could foresee the pangs that follow vice with unerring certainty! Who would dare to utter a falsehood, if they could be made sensible that sooner or later, truth will be made known, and detect the imposture with disgrace.

I only ask my readers to bring home to their own bosom, for one moment, the shame and remorse that overwhelmed Henry, and I think I may be certain that

they will never be guilty of any action that can deserve a blush.

George after having endeavoured to comfort his friend, left him to go to school. As he was leaving the house, he saw Henry's father in the parlour, who showed him the four birds, and said that he should feel pleasure in giving him the choice of the prettiest. George knew the nest at the first glance, and on the sudden impulse cried out, "Oh how unworthy of Henry, to take away my nest, and then so shamefully maintain that he knew not what was become of it." "Fie, George," said Henry's father; "do you dare accuse my son of so bad an action? He is not capable of it, I assure you. I bought the nest yesterday myself, of a little boy named Lubin."

It rejoiced the heart of George, to hear that Henry was innocent. That it was his nest, he was certain ; but it was possible that another might have taken it. He made an apology for his precipitation, and acknowledged that he had judged his friend too rashly.—Henry's father then inquired whether he was with his son when he received such a violent blow on the nose. "Yes Sir, we were together at the time."—"Well, what had he done to draw upon himself such rough treatment?" George made no reply:—he would not tell a falsehood, and he was afraid by a faithful recital, of exposing his friend, who he knew was guilty, at least, on that subject. Henry's father, surprised at George's confusion, insisted the more earnestly on an exact answer to his question ; and George perceiving that he could not elude his inquiries, though it most advisable to relate



what had happened with respect to the marbles, and the blow on the nose, which the little boy had given Henry.

At this recital the father cried out, "Is it possible, then, that my son has deceived me!—He told me that it was a great boy, who flung the stone at him because he tried to prevent him from striking a little one. Come with me George, I will——."

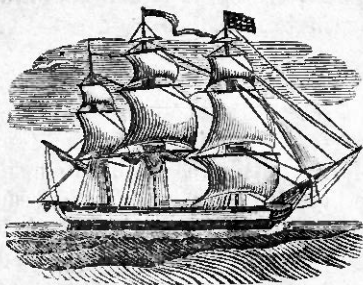
As he was saying these words he heard a knock at the door—he opened it. It was Lubin, who had brought him a nosegay of field flowers, as a mark of gratitude. "Ah, is it you, my good fellow?" cried Henry's father; "I am glad you are come at this critical moment. 'This is the boy (*turning to George*) of whom I purchased the nest.'" "Yes, I certainly sold it to you," said Lubin.—"How did you happen to find it?" said George. "I did not take it," replied the other; "I had it in barter, with a young gentleman in a scarlet coat, for a dozen marbles that I found in a bag." This reply explained

the whole matter to George in a moment. It was sufficient also to convince the father of Henry of his son's misconduct. He desired the two boys to accompany him to the chamber.

Henry no sooner saw all three enter the room together, than he supposed that his deceit was detected: he jumped hastily out of bed, fell on his knees before his father, related the circumstances as they had really happened, and entreated forgiveness with tears and sobs. George, touched to the quick to see the distress of one he had so dearly loved, threw his arms round his neck, saying, "My dear companion, I forgive you.—I see that you are sufficiently punished by the sufferings of your mind." "Ah," cried Henry, "I would not endure them a second time for the whole universe." George united with him in beseeching his father to grant him

forgiveness, which he could not refuse to their earnest entreaties.

He was satisfied with giving his son the best instructions for correcting his faults, and for guarding himself against the danger of committing any thing of a similar nature in future. His advice had all the effect he could desire. Henry, after this memorable lesson, was distinguished for noble and generous sentiments, and became worthy of the friendship that George continued to feel for him the remainder of his life.



In me behold the height of human art,
 Hear what to me the elements impart :
 My origin I owe to mother earth,
 She was the midwife forwarded my birth ;
 She gave me wings, and added to my voice,
 And Neptune made me his peculiar choice ;
 'To me committed his dominions vast—
 Jove wav'd his sceptre, and the fiat pass'd ;
 I took possession without more delay,
 And ride the liquid empire to this day.

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