

"THE EARLY BIRD CATCHES THE WORM"

Of all the things that Master taught the time I went to school,
 "Some proverbs good you ought to learn," he said, "not written by a fool."
 Some boys they came for lessons late, and girls got other blame
 So both oft-times upon the slate got cross marks 'gainst their name.
 But when he'd got the desks all full he'd wisdom then impart;
 While some were always rather dull—there were a smarter part,
 These later years I sometimes think: The place where was my due
 The mess I made with that black ink was just between the two.
 One matter still I bear in mind (those proverb lessons linger):
 To little birds to be so kind, and never rob a singer.
 The bird had gained a meed of praise we all were glad to hear,
 It had such early-working-ways—those little tom-tits dear.
 He said the early bird the worm did catch (the late ones hungry went)
 We boys must early house-door latch uplift—to school be early sent.
 This proverb too, our father said: "The early bird eats worm so big,
 You must be early out of bed—get spade, and garden dig."
 When starting out to earn my board, the "boss" advice again did give:
 I found out still that "early bird" was just the one to live.
 I thought of what is known so wide—another proverb true:
 There always is another side—to every question two.
 And so decided to take part of that poor worm so bare
 While dickie-bird had feathers smart, the wriggler had no hair.
 Of his career no one did dare of praise nor sweet word give—
 That worm so low, of feathers bare, was not the one to live.
 And so a thought came to my head: So sad that 'twas a common feature—
 When not a single good word's said of any creeping creature.
 With your permit I'd plead the cause of poor worm long neglected,
 And try and find what Nature's laws are for the thing projected;
 In heat of day I made my way with spade upon my shoulder,
 To try and find where our friend lay, so turned up earth and boulder.
 Ah! there he was—he'd gone to sleep and slumber in his burrow;
 Like other workers, health to keep for labors on the morrow.
 This thought then struck my mental sight (suspicions I'd confirm):
 I'd search again quite late some night, when wakened that poor worm.
 Oh, yes, he'd started hard to toil he'd got his task to do—
 He'd burrowed through six inch of soil on purpose to get through;
 The holes he made let in the air (the rootlets were so glad),
 That poor un-feathered worm so bare had left the earth less sad!
 And now we come back at that bird—(feel ready for a duel),
 Don't sing his praises so absurd, when, really, he is cruel.
 The worm, you see, is out all night, and that is his protection,
 In satisfying appetite—(this is for your reflection).
 I must admit he's man just like in heaping earthly stuff—
 To bed he ought to sooner go, and sleep just long enough.
 If our friend worm had early seen his bed while yet 'twas dark,
 Those "early birds" had hungry been—the blackbird and the lark.
 And yet methinks there's one excuse: (his work so long delayed),
 He'd worked all night to not much use—there was so little trade.
 And now that naughty, chirpy bird advantage took so quick—
 He knew he'd have all men's good word and children's "Pretty Dick."
 It now to you appears quite plain: Your sympathy should spread—
 The proverb is not all too sane for that poor worm's pecked head.
 Let's try and put it in new form (for Dickie's good, all right).
 But what about that little worm—the toiler through the night?
 They each are useful in their way; the worm works out of sight,
 The bird he toils the live-long-day—'tis Nature's law all right.
 You love to hear your "early bird," his sweet voice greatly mellowed,
 But little think his boasting word is from the worm he's swallowed.