

"I AM ONLY A LITTLE SPARROW."

BY MRS. L. E. WILKINS.

"I am only a little sparrow,
A bird of little degree,
My life is of little value,
But the dear Lord cares for me."

"Where'd you pick up that bit o' jingle, Nell? You're always singin' something jingly."

"At the mission-school concert Sunday night. Tot Merrill said a lot of it. If you'd only been there you'd heard it too."

"Catch us goin' there 'less some one gives us decent clothes to wear," cried Sallie Carver.

"We can't go there nor nowhere else," her sister added suddenly, "while father takes the clothes off our back to pay for his drinks. Better be glad you ain't got any father, Nell; you're better off than we are, anyway."

Poor little Nell, an orphan and almost friendless in the great world, looked at her companions with a strange wondering in her blue eyes, but made no reply.

The late afternoon sun of a perfect June day shone kindly on the three barefoot girls as they walked slowly along the dusty road, each with a few sticks in her shabby apron.

In the city behind them were their miserable, comfortless homes; here all around as they plodded on was the beautiful freshness of early summer, buttercups and daisies, waving grass and fragrant blossoms.

"Sing some more, Nell," urged Sallie after a little while.

"I don't remember much of it," Nell answered; "only one or two bits."

"Give 'em to us anyway," said Mary, "it sounds kind o' nice out here; the jingle and the grass and things seem to go together somehow."

"If my meal is sometimes scanty,
Close picking makes it sweet."

I remember that 'cause I didn't think it was true about us folks if it was about the birds," Nell said, half laughing. "I know I'm awful hungry sometimes, and what I get ain't always the sweetest."

"That's so," chimed her companions. "Guess the birds have an easier time of it than we do, anyway," said Mary. "Look at that one on the fence there singing away; he ain't hungry, I know."

"And he ain't walked all this long way after a bundle of sticks either," said Sallie; "it'll be a fearful ways back when we get our load."

"Never mind," said Nell cheerily. "Let's see who'll get the biggest lot first. Tom Stevens said there was lots of splendid chips and we could help ourselves. That must be the house, 'cause there's a lot of clatter round and men working on the roof; don't you see it?"

As Nell spoke she pointed to a large, old-fashioned house that stood some distance from the street, surrounded by well-kept and inviting grounds.

"Let's sit down and rest; it's nice in here," said Mary, when the little tramps had entered the shaded driveway.

"I'd rather wait till the men begin to go, too, 'cause then we can go all round," said Nellie. "Tom ain't here to-day, and maybe the men mightn't like us around."

"Wouldn't it be fun to live up there in the big house and have this nice shady place to lie down in every day?" said Sallie throwing herself down beneath the shade of a large tree.

"It must be awful nice to be rich folks," said Nell, "and to have a father and mother and brothers and sisters, and good clothes and plenty to eat and—"

"I should like the good clothes and plenty to eat," said Sallie.

"Oh, I remember another verse now!" broke in Nell delightedly.

"And I fold my wings at twilight,
Where'er I happen to be,
For the Father is always watching,
And no harm can come to me,
I'm only a little sparrow,
A bird of low degree;
But I know that the Father loves me—"

"Our father don't love us," said Sallie; "he don't do nothing for us, and don't like us around either. Mother always says, 'Get out the way now; dad's coming.'"

"All the girls' fathers ain't so bad," said Mary; "and dad didn't used to be."

"Teacher said it meant our Father up in heaven," said Nell; "and she said we were all sparrows too, and he would take care of

us always. She said the poetry over to me after the concert 'cause I liked it so; and when I told her I hadn't any father or mother nor nobody but old Ma'am Marsh, who let me live with her 'cause I got her sticks and helped her with the babies, she said, 'You poor little sparrow!' and then she said, 'But the dear Lord'll take care of you too, and we'll pray to him about it.' Teacher's awful nice, and I'm going now every Sunday till my shoes are all gone entirely."

"You won't go long then," said Sallie.

"Come along, girls—the men are going."

The sisters started towards the house, and Nell slowly followed.

But Nell was thinking more of the pretty hymn and what her Sunday-school teacher had said than of gathering sticks, and so it happened that Mary and Sallie had their arms and aprons full before Nell had fairly begun.

"We're going home across the field and down River street; you'd better hurry up," cried Mary to Nell.

Nell was peering timidly into the broad hall.

"Don't mind her," said Sallie; "come along. She'll hurry fast enough when she sees us going; and there won't be no bread left for our supper if we don't hurry home."

Regardless if not unconscious of the sister's words and movement, Nell now entered the hall and gazed with wonder and admiration into the spacious rooms. Filled with desire to see more and more of the great house, she ventured from one apartment to another, admiring with a child's ardor the rich stained glass in one room and the frescoed ceiling in the next. The workmen who were leaving for the night smiled to see how lost the little maiden looked, but children in quest of shavings and sticks were no unusual visitors, and they passed her by without remark.

Unobserved Nellie went upstairs into every room. Such a house was a revelation to her. She had wandered over city houses before, but none of them were like this beautiful suburban home; and the lovely chambers, the pretty dressing rooms, the long windows opening upon verandas presenting magnificent views, completely captivated the child.

Heedless of time Nell wandered about, until, though she did not know it, the last workman had gone. Presently she observed another door, and pushing back the bolt she opened it to discover a flight of stairs that led up into a long, broad attic. Thither she went, and new wonders appeared to her eager gaze. The house was undergoing repairs and alterations, and on that account many of the household goods had been removed to the upper story. Nell beheld chairs and mirrors, pictures so covered that she did not venture to more than lift the corners of the wrappings, carpets and curtains folded away, boxes and trunks and pretty little tables, and in one corner a large pile of books. Now books were poor Nell's delight, for she had a natural love for stories and poems; but no tempting volume ever found its way into the poor dwelling she called home, and she had only her own school-books to read. So now she had found a new world and she quite forgot it was not her own.

How long she sat looking over book after book she never knew. Suddenly she heard voices at the foot of the stairs.

"Why, how came this door open, father?" a lady's voice was asking. "We must have forgotten to lock it this morning." And then the door was closed, the key turned, the bolt fastened and the speakers moved on.

It was some seconds before Nell fully realized her situation, and then she tried to speak, but the sound of her own voice in the large strange place frightened her. She stood at the door and listened, and the footsteps seemed more and more distant. She stepped to call again, but the outer door closed, and then silence reigned in the great house. For the first time Nell noticed that it was growing dark. She went to the foot of the stairs and tried the door again and again, but of course without avail. Then she went back to the attic, climbed up on some boxes, and looked out of a window.

Many children in like circumstances would have cried, but Nell did not cry; she called a few times, and then sat still and watched the stars shine out in the beautiful clear sky and the night settle silently down.

"I'm safe enough here to-night," she thought, "and in the morning the workmen will come and let me out."

Of course Nell was hungry, but that was

often the case, and after a while she lay down on the floor to sleep, her head pillowed on a roll of carpeting.

"There's no one to care much if I don't go home. Ma'am will think I'm at the Carvers', I s'pose," Nell mused. Then her thoughts turned to the Sunday-school teacher whose acquaintance she had recently made, and the sparrow hymn came into her mind again and she repeated over and over,

"For the Father is always watching,
And no harm will come to me?"

and so she fell asleep.

When Nell awoke early the next morning the birds were singing again and the sun was laying his golden glory on all the world around. The poor city sparrow as she gazed from her lofty perch in the attic window was quite bewildered, and for a moment she almost fancied that she had died and gone to heaven and was looking out on the heavenly paradise she had sometimes heard described. But it was only for a moment, and ere long she heard a distant clock striking the hour of six. She counted each stroke, and then began to wish the workmen would come, for she was faint from want of food and quite ready to descend from her novel resting place.

By-and-by—it seemed a long time to Nell—a man's quick step sounded on the garden-walk. Nell looked out in the direction from which the sound came, and was delighted to see Tom Stevens approaching.

"Tom! Tom!" Nell called lustily. And Tom glanced about with a puzzled air which changed to one of astonishment when he beheld little Nell Turnbull's laughing face high above him framed in an attic window.

"How on earth did you come there?" Tom cried.

And Nell briefly told her story.

"Well, that's a good one, sis," exclaimed Tom; "you'll have to wait there till I go and call the lady herself, for Miss Holder keeps the keys of that part. It's a wonder you found it unlocked." And, promising to return soon, Tom hurried off to report at the next house, where Miss Holder and her father were temporarily staying.

Left alone again, Nell began to wonder what the peep would think about her being there.

"Maybe they'll take me for a thief," she suddenly thought, and with the thought came a vision of an officer, with brass buttons, leading off a poor hungry, friendless little girl. "Oh, dear," she sobbed, "what shall I do! They won't believe that I only wanted to see the things; they'll sure think I meant to take some." And by the time Tom returned Nellie had worked herself up into a state of fear that approached terror.

"She's a good little thing, ma'am," Tom ventured, as he and Miss Holder walked together towards the house that had so fascinated Nell. "She's all alone in the world—no father nor mother. Her father died before she can remember, and her mother died soon after. She was taken up by a woman down our court, and she's lived there ever since, helping what she could. She's a different sort of a child somehow from the mission school lately, and she's full of the songs they sing there. I know she didn't mean any mischief, ma'am."

"I dare say not," Miss Holder replied kindly. Somehow Tom's story made her think of the bright-eyed, wistful-looking little child who listened to her so eagerly the Sunday before, and she mentally exclaimed, "I wonder if it can be the same."

When the door was opened Nell, who sat on the stairs, her face expressive of the conflicting emotions within, turned her tearful eyes pleadingly towards Tom, afraid to encounter the lady's gaze.

"Why, this is my little sparrow girl!" Miss Holder exclaimed eagerly, as her eyes rested on Nellie, "the very same. You poor child, how came you here?"

Nellie's fear gave place to joy when she beheld her teacher of the previous Sunday. Still she hesitated, and told her story timidly.

"It's all right, dear; you needn't feel bad at all," Miss Holder said. "I thought I was careless to have left the door unlocked, and I blamed myself for it; but I guess it was providential after all. I've wanted to find you and hardly knew how. You must come with me now, Nellie, and have some breakfast, and then we will see what we can do for you."

It was late in the afternoon before Nell was allowed to go home, and then not empty-handed as she came, nor barefooted over the

hard road. Miss Holder herself in her carriage took Nell back to Mrs. Marsh's with many a substantial token of the interest the child had inspired.

"I've called myself a little sparrow all the week, teacher," Nellie said as they rode along.

"And I've called you my little sparrow," Miss Holder replied laughing. "You know, Nellie, I told you I would pray for you, and I did, that our Father would raise you up friends who would make your life happier and better; and I think my prayer is answered in a very nice way, for if you hadn't come into our house just as you did I might not have seen that God meant me to be the answer myself to my prayer."

Nell was rationally happy that day, and the acquaintance so strangely strengthened, ripening into an enduring friendship, opened a new world to Nellie.

It was not long before Miss Holder took Nellie into her own home to train her for a more useful life than she could learn to live amid her old surroundings, and the girl who so eagerly drank in the teaching of the Sunday-school just as eagerly received all the instruction of her kind friend.

And even now Nellie delights to repeat again and again that lovely hymn,

"I am only a little sparrow,"

and Miss Holder, in speaking of Nellie, often says,

"Oh, she is my little town sparrow that flew into our attic one night, and we are sure our Father sent her there."

WHAT MAMMA AND AUNTIE SAW.

BY JEANIE DEANS.

Mamma Austin and Auntie Jane were busily engaged in their cosy sewing-room. Mamma at the cutting-table was rapidly transforming yards of soft cashmere into shapely garments, while Auntie Jane, on her low rocker near by, gave efficient help by way of piecing, basting, etc.

In the corner were little Ethel and Janie, Mamma Austin's two daughters. Quiet, busy little things they were, amusing themselves in many ways, especially patterning after their elders. On this particular morning they had decided to play "Mamma Austin and Auntie Jane."

"You be auntie and I mamma," says little Ethel, the elder of the two. "That will be just right, you know, because I'm larger than you, and older, you know," she added, with a real grown-up air. "I'll play this hassock was a cutting-table; I'll cut and you yaste." So the little plan went on, the merry tongues growing lively; but mamma and auntie, busy with their affairs, and accustomed to the children, thought nothing of their play till the little mamma's words attracted their attention. She was saying in a decidedly self-satisfied manner, which they both at once recognized: "See, Auntie Jane, what a lovely suit this will make for doll Jemima. So much more tasteful than Kitty White's, who was here last week. Yes," added the play mamma, "and what airs that child took on; really, if she had been one of mine I should have felt bad about it; but," she added, in a very impressive manner, "there is no knowing what poor people will do if they only have the opportunity. For my part, I believe in making them know their place. I shall not allow my girls to associate with such."

The real mamma's face was scarlet now, for she remembered they were her exact words of a distant relative who had visited them the week before. She and auntie were, however, very quiet.—*Christian at Work.*

AT THE REAR END of our parlor it was not very dark. Indeed, we could see to read small newspaper print there. At that point we put a little bracket against the wall, and transferred to it a plant from the window. In four days it looked sick; in two weeks it was yellow; in five weeks it was apparently dead. Another plant was placed on the centre-table, which was about half-way from the front windows to the position of the first plant. At the end of five weeks it had lost its green, was evidently failing. The girls in our parlors are likewise pale and sickly.—*Die Lewis.*