

Only a Bird.

BY MARY MORRISON.

Only a bird—and a vagrant boy
Flits a pebble with boyish skill
Into the folds of a supple sling
"Watch me hit him. I can, an' I will."
Whirr! and a silence chill and sad
Falls like a pall on the vibrant air,
From a birchen tree, whence a shower
Of song
Has fallen in ripples everywhere.

Only a bird!—and the tiny throat
With quaver and trill and whistle of
flute
Bruised and bleeding and silent lies
There at his feet. Its chords are mute,
And the boy with a loud and boisterous
laugh,
Proud of his prowess and brutal skill,
Throws it aside with a careless toss—
"Only a bird!—it was made to kill!"

Only a bird!—yet far away
Little ones clamour and cry for food—
Clamour and cry, and the chill of night
Settles over the orphan brood;
Weaker and fainter the mornings call
For a brooding breast that shall never
come;
Morning breaks o'er a lonely nest
Songless and lifeless, mute and dumb!

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Pleasant Hours:

A PAPER FOR OUR YOUNG FOLK

Rev. W. H. Withrow, D.D., Editor.

TORONTO, APRIL 8, 1899.

LOOK AND SEE.

How many schoolboys in all the land, a very thoughtful one inquires, can tell what kind of timber will bear the heaviest burden, or why you take white oak for one part of a waggon and ash for another, and what timber will last longest under water, and what out of the water? How many know sandstone from limestone, or iron from manganese? How many know how to cut a rafter or brace without a pattern? How many know which turns the faster, the top of the wheel or the bottom, as the waggon moves along the ground? How many know how steel is made, or how a snake can climb a tree? How many know that a horse gets up before and a cow behind, and that the cow eats grass from her and the horse to him? How many know that a surveyor's mark on a tree never gets any higher from the ground, or what tree bears fruit without bloom?

There is a power of comfort in knowledge, but a boy is not going to get it unless he wants it badly. And that is the trouble with most schoolboys. They do not want it. They are too busy, and have not got time. There is more hope of a dull boy who wants knowledge than of a genius who generally knows it all without study. These close observers are the world's benefactors.

BENNIE AND HIS TEXT.

"There's no use trying, mother. I have been to every house in the neighborhood, and no one wants help. We'll be turned out of home next week. It don't do us any good to be Christians, for we'll have to go to the poorhouse just the same. Oh, I can't bear it!" and poor little Bennie almost gave up in de-

spair, and sat there sobbing bitterly on the doorstep.

They were both pale and thin. The bare house told the story: no father and a consumptive mother. Bennie was a little lad of about fourteen, and had hungered so long that it seemed there was nothing left but a little shadow and two large, honest blue eyes.

Mrs. Word brushed the tears away and knelt by him, trying to console him. She whispered to him the little text that she had long ago taught his baby lips to lip: "Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you." She toasted the cold bread for their supper, and soon afterwards they began to talk over new plans.

It was fifteen miles to the city, but he declared that he could walk the distance, and she decided to let him go there and hunt work.

The morning dawned bright, and they were both up early. There was no time for delay, and as soon as breakfast was over Mrs. Word followed him to the gate. She put the letter of recommendation that good old Farmer Jones had written for Bennie right opposite his little text. He begged for her picture; and though she had but one—a little, faded thing left from girlhood—she satisfied his childish whims by putting it in the envelope with the letter.

"Now, mother," said he, "if I can't see you, I can look at this, and won't feel so lonesome."

The little, old, worn Bible was tied securely, and he put it in his pocket. They kissed each other good-bye, and poor little Bennie choked back his sobs and started up the big road. His mother watched his slender, receding form, and prayed God to strengthen him and give him work. She went about her daily tasks with a heavier heart than usual, thinking how she would miss him, her only solace.

Bennie hurried along the roadside, and nature's charms soon soothed him. He caught the fragrance of the flowers that nodded at him by the way, whispering "Trust." The very birds seemed to sing his little text, and it grew so beautiful to him that he sat down at the foot of a great tree, and soon had his Bible in his lap. Yes; the picture and letter were both secure, and there was his little text that his mother had marked: "Seek ye first the kingdom of God, . . . and all these things shall be added unto you." How plain that promise! how strong!

There were the cows grazing upon great meadows of grass, and farther on were the little lambs. The birds too had all they needed, and were happy; and it seemed that little Bennie alone was hungry. Perhaps he had not sought the kingdom of God? He hugged his little Bible tighter, and, kneeling down, the question was soon settled; his burden rolled away and faith came to comfort him.

"Hello, sonny!" shouted the husky voice of an old farmer. "Got er long way t' go, eh? Then jist hop in the back end o' my waggon an' ride. These here mules is stout 'nough t' pull sich er little pale face as ye air; an' if they hain't, guess I'll jist poke 'em er little more fodder."

Bennie thanked him, and was soon comfortably seated. They went speeding away up and down the hills, and were soon in the heart of the great city. Bennie bade his honest old friend good-bye, and some impulse turned him toward a large store, where he saw a sign: "Wanted: A Boy."

He at once entered, and tremblingly asked of the man with glasses at the tail desk: "Please, mister, are you the man that wants a boy?"

The stern man scowled, but his frowns melted when he looked down into the little, thin face and saw its wan, refined features. "Ye," he answered coldly, "but you won't do, you've got no strength."

Bennie quickly responded. "Oh, sir, but I'm stronger than I look, and mother's so hungry! Won't you please read my rec'mend letter?"

"Yes, be quick!" he answered sternly. Bennie took the old, worn package from his pocket, untied the string, found the place, and handed it to him.

The first thing that greeted the stern man's eyes was Bennie's little text: "Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you." Mr. Dinmont grow pale, for they were the same words that his mother had taught him; and he had been so false to her precept—ah! worse than false; a great sinner. They seemed to be a message from the grave.

He opened the letter, and a faded picture fell from the envelope. At one glance he excitedly gasped. "Speak! Is she living? Are you her child? O my sister! my sister!" He caught Bennie up in his arms, and the little thin thing told him all he knew.

In a few hours a carriage stopped in front of the gate at the little country home of Mrs. Wood, and soon a sister and brother mingling their tears of joy, and . . . sun went down that night Bennie's uncle had found "the kingdom of God," and a woman's heart was made to rejoice.

The little lad hugged his Bible tighter, and I am sure that "all these things" were added unto him.

"THE BURNING TREE."

BY MARGARET HOLMES BATES.

In some parts of Burmah there grows a tree, the mention of the name of which causes the native to shudder and breathe a prayer that he be spared its torturing touch. This tree is known to travellers and natives of Burmah, the villages of the Himalayas, and the Malaccan peninsula as "the burning tree." A small specimen of it has been placed in the great botanical garden in the city of Madras. It is given a liberal space and is surrounded by a strong picket fence, upon which hang placards in English and Hindustanee, bearing the words: "Dangerous: All persons are forbidden to touch the leaves or branches of this tree."

To those who know what the burning tree is, the caution is unnecessary. But it is said that the name does not give the right impression of the torture produced by the tree. It stings rather than burns. The upper side of the leaves is smooth, but on the under side are millions of microscopic stings that pierce the skin without leaving any visible mark. The fluid contained in the plant is secreted in the skin by the slightest touch, and the most distracting pain follows that may continue for months. Evidently the tree is a species of nettle. Victims say the sensation is that of having the flesh seared with hot irons, but probably they have never tried the irons enough to know. Besides, for the smarting pain of a burn there are many remedies.

After one has been stung by the burning tree, damp weather greatly increases the pain, and to dip the afflicted part into water will throw a strong man into convulsions.

This tree has been seen fully seventy-five feet in height, but, strange as it may seem, it is said that the larger the tree grows, the less danger there is in it. Possibly the poison is held in the leaves near the top of the tree, and these being difficult to reach, the tall tree is not so harmful as the small one.

The Burmese in the parts of the country where this tree grows hold it in great terror, and run wildly when they find themselves near it. There is a peculiar odour about it, that once known can never be forgotten. Persons who have been so unfortunate as to plunge into one of these trees have fallen to the ground and rolled over and over, shrieking and tearing their flesh.

Dogs touched by it are driven mad. They yelp and run, biting and tearing the parts of their bodies that have been stung. Even the thick-skinned elephant cannot withstand the touch of the burning tree. A returned missionary relates that he saw a huge male elephant tearing up trees, rolling in the soft earth, and bellowing with all his strength. On inquiring of his Burmese guide, he was told that without a doubt the elephant had been stung, as the odour of the poisonous tree was heavy in the air.

Another traveller tells of a horse that had come in contact with the tree. The poor beast ran wildly about, biting at everything and everybody, and in his frenzy jumped from a steep hillside and was killed.

The serpents of the Burmese jungle and the wild monkeys never approach the tree. They know the odour, and avoid it by instinct.

A missionary at Mandalay was very curious about this poisonous tree, and purposely touched a leaf with the tip of one finger. He said he could not describe the agony he suffered constantly for a month, and, for a year afterwards, he felt occasional darting pains in the finger after the burning sensation was gone.

The native physicians know of no antidote for the pain, nor do they know of any good in the tree.

TEACHING POLITENESS.

A mother noticed a remarkable change in the deportment of her six-year-old son. From being rough, noisy, and discourteous, he had suddenly become one of the gentlest and most considerate little fellows in the world. He was attending the kindergarten, and his mother naturally inferred that the change was somehow due to the teacher's instruction.

"Miss Smith teaches you to be polite?" she remarked, in a tone of interrogation.

"No," said the boy, "she never says a word about it."

The mother was puzzled, and all the more when further questioning brought only more emphatic denials that the teacher had ever given her pupils lessons in good breeding.

"Well, then," the mother asked, finally, "if Miss Smith doesn't say anything, what does she do?"

"She doesn't do anything," persisted the boy. "She just walks around, and we feel polite. We feel just as polite as anything."

That was all he could tell about it, and his mother began to see through the mystery.

YOUNG AMERICA.

The difference between the English House of Commons and the American House of Representatives in various matters of decorum, custom and usage, is very great. In the House of Commons children are neither seen nor heard, and the small gallery reserved for ladies is surrounded by a high grided fence, or screen, so that they are not visible to members. In the House of Representatives it is not uncommon for a member to bring his little boy or girl upon the floor. In such cases the child is always sure to receive a good deal of attention, and sometimes has the full run of the chamber. One little fellow, of six or seven years of age, who comes to the House rather frequently, finds it an excellent play-room. Yesterday while the House was in session he was up beside Speaker Reed, whose broad, jolly face was radiant with smiles as he fondled and chatted with this young member who might be said in parliamentary phrase to have risen to a question of personal privilege. Then the boy rushed down into the House lobby to play with the telephone, calling up his friends at various hotels. To my certain knowledge several members wished to use the telephone, but none of them disputed the precedence of this young legislative colt. The American mind and the American heart are very easily dominated by a child.—Independent.

BITS OF FUN.

Mrs. Naborly—"So your name is the same as your papa's, Harry?" Harry—"Yes'm." Mrs. Naborly—"How do you know, when your mamma calls, whom she means?" Harry—"Oh, she always calls me kind of coaxing."

Patient—"Look here, doctor, do you think you will ever be able to tell exactly what is the matter with me?" Doctor—"Oh, yes. I will find that out at the autopsy."

Mrs. Kelly—"So they sint yure poor little Timmy to th' reformatory? Such a good child too." Mrs. Grady—"Sure, and he wor thot, Mrs. Kelly. Iverything thot darlint iver sthole he'd bring roight home to his mother."

Miss Hichurch—"We have a dreadful time with our clergymen!"

Visitor—"What's the trouble?"

Miss Hichurch—"Well, the last one was so religious that he neglected social matters, and this one is so social that he neglects the church!"

Ignorance is never shown more effectively than in an attempt to conceal it. A countryman wandering about a cemetery, came upon a stone which bore the inscription: "Sic transit gloria mundi." "What does that mean?" he asked the sexton, who was at work near by. The sexton, not wishing to confess ignorance, replied: "Well, it means that he was sick transiently, and went to glory Monday morning."

A certain eminent bishop belonging to the Roman Catholic Church was once attacked by a Prussian lieutenant, who had more impudence than brains, and thought he could succeed in making the ecclesiastical luminary look foolish. Said he to the bishop: "Do you know what is the difference between a bishop and a donkey?" "No," said the other, "what is it?" "A bishop wears his cross in front, and a donkey wears his on his back." "Ah, indeed," said the bishop composedly; "and do you know what is the difference between a lieutenant and a donkey?" The lieutenant thought and thought, but could not find anything witty to say. "I do not know," he said at last. "Neither do I," said the bishop, quietly. It was not the bishop that looked foolish.