

The Birds' Christmas Carol.

III.—THE BIRD'S NEST.

CAROL herself knew nothing whatever of motherly tears and fatherly anxieties; she lived on peacefully in the room where she was born.

But you never would have known that room: for Mr. Bird had a great deal of money, and though he felt sometimes as if he wanted to throw it all in the ocean, since it could not buy a strong body for his little girl, yet he was glad to make the place she lived in just as beautiful as it could be made.

The room had been extended by the building of a large addition that hung out over the garden below, and was so filled with windows that it might have been a conservatory. The ones on the side were thus still nearer the little Church of our Saviour than they used to be; those in front looked out on the beautiful harbour, and those in the back commanded a view of nothing in particular but a little alley—nevertheless, they were pleasantest of all to Carol, for the Ruggles family lived in the alley, and the nine little, middle-sized and big Ruggles children were the source of inexhaustible interest.

The shutters could all be opened and Carol could take a real sun-bath in this lovely glass-house, or they could all be closed when the dear head ached or the dear eyes were tired. The carpet was of soft grey, with clusters of green bay and holly leaves. The furniture was of white wood, on which an artist had painted snow scenes and Christmas trees, and groups of merry children ringing bells and singing carols.

Donald had made a pretty, polished shelf and screwed it on to the outside of the foot board, and the boys always kept this full of blooming plants, which they changed from time to time; the head-board, too, had a bracket on either side, where there were pots of maiden-hair ferns.

Love-birds and canaries hung in their golden houses in the windows, and they, poor caged things, could hop as far from their wooden perches as Carol could venture from her little white bed.

On one side of the room was a bookcase filled with hundreds—yes, I mean it—with hundreds and hundreds of books; books with gay-colored pictures, books without; books with black and white outline-sketches, books with none

at all; books with verses, books with stories; books that made children laugh, and some that made them cry; books with words of one syllable for tiny boys and girls, and books with words of fearful length to puzzle wise ones.

This was Carol's "Circulating Library." Every Saturday she chose ten books, jotting their names down in a little diary: into these she slipped cards that said: "Please keep this book two weeks and read it. With love, Carol Bird."

Then Mrs. Bird stepped into her carriage, and took the ten books to the Childrens' Hospital, and brought home ten others that she had left there the fortnight before.

This was a source of great happiness; for some of the Hospital children that were old enough to print or write, and were strong enough to do it, wrote Carol cunning little letters about the books, and she answered them, and they grew to be friends. (It is very funny, but you do not always have to see people to love them. Just think about it, and see if it isn't so.)

There was a high wainscoting of wood about the room, and on top of this, in a narrow gilt framework, ran a row of illuminated pictures, illustrating fairy tales, all in dull blue and gold and scarlet and silver and other lovely colors. From the door to the closet there was the story of "The Fair One with Golden Locks;" from the closet to bookcase, ran "Puss in Boots;" from bookcase to fireplace, was "Jack the Giant Killer;" and on the other side of the room were "Hop o' my Thumb," "The Sleeping Beauty," and "Cinderella."

Then there was a great closet full of beautiful things to wear—but they were all dressing-gowns and slippers and shawls; and there were drawers full of toys and games; but they were such as you could play with on your lap. There were no ninepins, nor balls, nor bows and arrows, nor bean bags, nor tennis rackets; but, after all, other children needed these more than Carol Bird, for she was always happy and contented whatever she had or whatever she lacked; and after the room had been made so lovely for her, on her eighth Christmas, she always called herself, in fun, a "Bird of Paradise."

On these particular December days she was happier than usual, for Uncle

Jack was coming from Europe to spend the holidays. Dear, funny, jolly, loving, wise Uncle Jack, who came every two or three years, and brought so much joy with him that the world looked as black as a thunder-cloud for a week after he went away again.

The mail had brought this letter:—

"London, Nov. 28th, 188—

"Wish you merry Christmas, you dearest birdlings in America! Preen your feathers, and stretch the Bird's nest a little, if you please, and let Uncle Jack in for the holidays. I am coming with such a trunk full of treasures that you'll have to borrow the stockings of Barnum's Giant and Giantess; I am coming to squeeze a certain little lady-bird until she cries for mercy; I am coming to see if I can find a boy to take care of a little black pony I bought lately. It's the strangest thing I ever knew; I've hunted all over Europe, and can't find a boy to suit me! I'll tell you why. I've set my heart on finding one with a dimple in his chin, because this pony particularly likes dimples! ('Hurrah!' cried Hugh: 'bless my dear dimple; I'll never be ashamed of it again.') Please drop a note to the clerk of the weather, and have a good, rousing snow-storm—say on the twenty-second. None of your meek, gentle, nonsensical, shilly-shallying snowstorms; not the sort where the flakes float lazily down from the sky as if they didn't care whether they ever got here or not, and then melt away as soon as they touch the earth, but a regular business-like whizzing, whirling, blurring, cutting snow-storm, warranted to freeze and stay on!

"I should like rather a large Christmas tree, if it's convenient—not one of those 'sprigs,' five or six feet high, that you used to have three or four years ago, when the birdlings were not fairly feathered out, but a tree of some size. Set it up in the garret, if necessary, and then we can cut a hole in the roof if the tree chances to be too high for the room.

"Tell Bridget to begin to fatten a turkey. Tell her by the twentieth of December that turkey must not be able to stand on its legs for fat, and then on the next three days she must allow it to recline easily on its side, and stuff it to bursting. (One ounce of stuffing beforehand is worth a pound afterwards.)

"The pudding must be unusually huge, and darkly, deeply, lugubriously black