

A FLIGHT WITH THE SWALLOWS.

BY EMMA MARSHALL.

(Children's Friend.)

CHAPTER I.—DOROTHY'S DREAM.

In a deep window-seat, hidden by crimson curtains from the room beyond, a little girl was curled up, looking out upon a trim garden, where the first autumn leaves were falling one September afternoon. The view was bounded by a high wall, and above the wall, the east end of Colchester Cathedral stood up a dark mass against the pale-blue sky. Every now and then a swallow darted past the window, with its forked tail and whitish breast; then there was a twittering and chirping in the nests above, as the swallows talked to each other of their coming flight. Little Dorothy was an only child; she had no brothers and sisters to play with; thus she made playmates of her two fluffy kittens, who were lying at her feet; and she made friends of the twittering swallows and the chattering jackdaws, as they swung in and out from the Cathedral tower, and lived in a world of her own.

The position of an only child has its peculiar pleasures and privileges; but I am inclined to think that all little girls who have brothers and sisters to play with, are more to be envied than little Dorothy. To be sure, there was no one to want Puff and Muff but herself; no one to dispute the ownership of Miss Belinda, her large doll; no one to say it was her turn to dust and tidy Barton Hall, the residence of Miss Belinda; no one to insist on his right to spin a top or snatch away the cup and ball just when the critical moment came, and the ball was at last going to alight on the cup.

Dorothy had none of these trials; but then she had none of the pleasures which go with them; for the pleasure of giving up your own way is in the long run greater than always getting it; and it is better to have a little quarrel, and then "make it up" with a kiss and confession of fault on both sides, than never to have any one to care about what you care for, and no one to contradict you!

As little Dorothy watched the swallows, and listened to their conversation above her head, she became aware that some one was in the drawing-room, and was talking to her mother.

She was quite hidden from view, and she heard her name.

"But how can I take little Dorothy?"

"Easily enough. It will do her no harm to take flight with the swallows."

"You don't think she is delicate?" she heard her mother exclaim, in a voice of alarm. "Oh, Doctor Bell, you don't think Dorothy is delicate?"

"No, she is very well as far as I see at present, but I think her life is perhaps rather too dreary and self-absorbed. She wants companions; she wants variety."

Dr. Bell knew he was venturing on delicate ground.

"Dorothy is very happy," Mrs. Acheson said, "very happy. Just suppose San Remo does not suit her, does not agree with her; then think of the journey!"

"My dear madam, the journey is as easy in these days as if you could fly over on the backs of the swallows—easier than anything. You ask my serious advice, and it is this, that you lose no time in starting for San Remo or Mentone."

"San Remo is best," said Mrs. Acheson, "for I have a friend who has a house there, and she will be there for the winter."

"Very well; then let me advise you to be quick in making your preparations. I shall call again this day week, and expect to find you are standing, like the swallows, ready for flight. Look at them now on the coping of the old wall, talking about their departure and settling."

When Dr. Bell was gone, Mrs. Acheson sat quietly by the fire, thinking over what he had said. She had tried to persuade herself that her cough was better, that if she kept in the house all the winter it would go away. She had felt sure that in this comfortable room—out of which her bedroom

opened—she must be as well as in Italy or the south of France. Dr. Bell was so determined to get his own way, and it was cruel to turn her out of her home. And then Dorothy, little Dorothy! how hard it would be for her to leave Puff and Muff, and her nursery, and everything in it. And what was to be done about Nino, the little white poodle, and—

A host of objections started up, and Mrs. Acheson tried to believe that she would make a stand against Dr. Bell, and stay in Canon's House all the winter.

Meantime little Dorothy, who had been lying curled up as I have described, had heard in a confused way much of what Dr. Bell had said. "A flight with the swallows." The swallows, her uncle, Canon Percival, had told her, flew away to sunshine and flowers; that the cold wind in England gave them the ague, and that they got all sorts of complaints, and would die of hunger, or cramp, or rheumatism if they stayed in England!

"As easy a journey as if you were on a swallow's back," the doctor had said; and Dorothy was wondering who could be small enough to ride on a swallow's back, when she heard a tap at the window, a little gentle tap.

"Let me in, let me in," said a small voice,

Dorothy was asleep—she felt she was asleep—and presently the swallow put her down on something very soft, and there was a great light, and she sat up and found herself, not in the sunny South, but on her mother's knee by the bright fire in the drawing-room.

"Why, Dorothy, you are quite cold," her mother said. "I did not know you were curled up in the window-seat, so fast asleep."

"Why, mother," said Dorothy, rubbing her eyes and giving a great yawn, "I thought I was flying off to the sunny South with the swallows. "How funny!" she exclaimed. "It was, after all, a dream! I heard Dr. Bell talking about your taking flight with the swallows, and then I thought I got ever so wee and tiny, and then the old mother-swallow carried me off. Are you going to fly off with the swallows, mother, to the sunny South?"

(To be Continued.)

ONLY SMOKE.

The old church clock had just struck twelve, and a crowd of happy boys were rushing out of school, all of them seeming glad to be rid of tasks and duties for an hour or two. They shouted hurrah! and then raced each other down the street until they

"Don't do that, Lilywhite," said one of the boys, "you'll get burnt!" but the only answer he received as George still kept playing was: "It won't burn, stupid. It's only smoke."

Just as this remark was made, one of the men came back, and with a loud shout the boys ran off on their way home. Whilst running side by side, one of them happened to see George's fingers and wrist, which soon prompted a shout of derisive laughter, and a cry of—"Oh, look at my Lilywhite hand!"

There was a sudden stop, and the hand that had been held in the smoke was seen to be covered with soot and grime. You see, though the smoke did not burn, it did blacken.

I don't like to hear that word "Only" used so often as an excuse for "dirty" actions or sinful deeds.

"Only a white lie!" as though there were two kinds, black and white, and one could be excused. Believe me, dear boys and girls, there is no such thing in God's sight. His Word declares that "All liars," little and big, white and black, those who tell lies, those who lie by a look, and the liars (for there are such) who act a lie when no word is spoken, shall be shut out of heaven.

Take care of the first wrong step. "Only a glass of wine!" said a lad; but he grew up to be a drunkard, and died in a lunatic asylum.

Only one act of passion! But an angry woman had years of bitter sorrow for that moment of fury in which she threw a fork at her child and blinded him for life.

Only a false report! still the whisper of it ruined a reputation, blasted a good man's prospects, and spoiled a life.

Only a little sin! Dear boys, dear girls, remember the smoke.

Little sins grow into larger ones; and what is hard at first becomes easy, so easy that almost before the sinner knows, he commits the deed that at one time would have made him shudder to think about.

Only one bad companion! who thinks it looks "big" to say bad words, and do wicked deeds; and he does more harm to his school-fellows than all the other boys put together.

George Herbert's father taught his boy a lesson from those two words: "Only smoke!" and then finished as I have done, by warning the lad against evil companions, telling him this little story of two kings:

King J. was a good man who loved God, and he had a friend King A., who was a mighty sovereign, but a wicked man. Well, the powerful but sinful ruler asked the good king to visit him, and the invitation was accepted. But just about this time war was declared by another nation, and as the good king was his guest,

his wicked friend suggested that they should both go together to the fight.

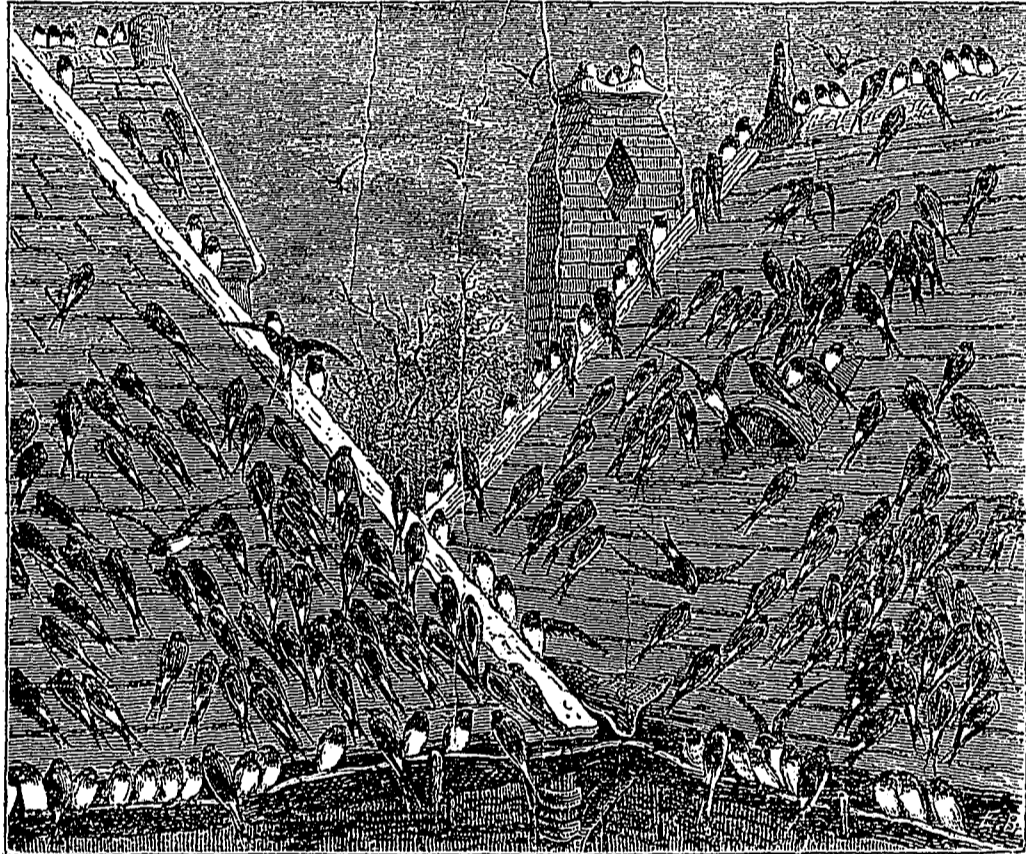
King J. was in his royal robes, but the wicked King A., was disguised; and so the enemy pressed hard on the good man, thinking he was the king they fought against, and it was only by crying out to God that he was saved from an untimely death.

Bad company—only for once—was nearly fatal to King J., but God spared his life, and we find that he never sinned in like manner again.

But the wicked king was slain, for one of the captains of the invading army "drew a bow at a venture," and sent his arrow into the thick of the fight, and God's unseen hand directed it to the breast of the cruel and idolatrous sovereign.

You may find the names of these two kings in 2 Chron. xviii.—*Early Days.*

NEVER BE AFRAID of sudden death; but be ready for it. God is always at hand whether we see him or not. Death will remove from our eyes the material veil that hides the spiritual world; and it will introduce us to the realities which faith had grasped ten thousand times. We shall see Him whom unseen we loved; and He will not be a stranger but the oldest and dearest friend.



SWALLOWS PREPARING FOR FLIGHT.

which was like a chirp or a twitter, rather than a voice.

And then Dorothy turned the old-fashioned handle which closed the lower square of the lattice window, and in came the swallow. She recognized it as one she knew, the mother-bird from the nest in the eaves.

"Come to the sunny South," it said. "Come to the sunny South."

"I can't without mother," Dorothy said. "Oh yes, you can. Get on my back."

"I am much too big. I am nearly eight years old."

The swallow tittered, and it sounded like a laugh.

"You are not too big; just get on."

And then the swallow turned its tail towards little Dorothy; and to her surprise, she saw her hands were tiny hands as she put them round the swallow's neck, and tucked a pair of tinier feet under her wings.

"Are you ready?" said the swallow. "I don't know. Stop—I—"

But in another minute she was flying through the air on the swallow's back. Over the great cathedral tower, over the blue hills, away, away. Presently there was water beneath, dancing and sparkling in the western sunshine; then there were boats and ships looking so tiny. Everything did look so small. Then it grew dark, and

came to a place where some men were busy laying large gas-pipes in the trench dug ready and close to the pavement.

Some of the boys only just glanced at the workmen and then hastened on towards home, but a few went across the road to warm their hands at a large fire which the workmen had made in a kind of iron basket.

It was a fine sight when one of the men poked the fire, for showers of bright sparks shot upwards, much to the delight of those schoolboys. Soon, however, the flames died out, and wreaths of white smoke went curling and twisting upwards beneath the bright sunshine.

One of the boys who had stopped to look at the fire was George Herbert, a bright-faced lad, who was noted for his tidy habits and love of neatness; indeed, his face and hands always seemed clean, and his playmates had nicknamed him "Master Lilywhite."

Other boys inked their fingers and blotted their copy-books, but somehow George managed to avoid doing so, and that morning those hands of his looked white and clean as he held them out towards the fire.

There was nobody near to stop him, and presently George began to wave his fingers backwards and forwards in the white, curling smoke, which kept steadily rising upwards.