

## VII.

## LITTLE NEIGHBORS.

## TWITTER THE FIRST.

MAMMA, I do wish I had a nice, new play  
Can't you make me one?" said Bertie, pensively surveying the soles of his shoes, as he lay flat on his back with his heels in the air.

"No, dear, I couldn't possibly stop now, for I must write my letters, or they won't be in time, and papa will be disappointed."

"Then I wish I had somebody to play with me! A jolly little chap who would amuse me and make me laugh," continued Bertie, and, dropping his legs, he lay for a moment, looking as if he really did need a playmate very much.

"Tweet! tweet!" said a little voice, in such a brisk tone that the boy stared about him eager to see who spoke.

One pane of the long window that opened on the balcony was fixed like a door, so that the room might be ventilated. This pane stood open, and perched upon its threshold was a sparrow peering

in with an inquisitive air, and a bold "Tweet! tweet!" as if he said, —

"Here's a little friend all ready to play with you."

"Oh, mamma, see the cunning bird! He wants to come in! Don't stir, and may be he'll hop down and eat the crumbs of my luncheon on the table. It's Cocky Twitters; I know him by his tail, with only two feathers in it, and his twinkling eye, and his little fat body," cried Bertie, lying as still as a statue, and looking with delight at the new-comer.

You see Bertie lived near a square where many English sparrows had their homes, and all winter the kind child fed his little neighbors. Day after day he strewed crumbs in the balcony, and day after day the birds came to peck them gratefully, or to fly away with the big bits to their nests. So they learned to know and love and trust each other, and the passers-by often saw a pretty sight up in the sunny balcony where the delicate boy stood with his feathered friends about him; some at his feet, some on his shoulders, some boldly stealing crumbs from his basket, and the more timid hopping about on the wide balustrade, catching such stray mouthfuls as reached them.

Bertie was fond of his birds, and had names for



some of them, but his favorite was Cocky Twitters, a bold, saucy, droll fellow, who was always whisking about as if he had every thing in the bird-world to attend to. He fought like a little game-cock if any other sparrow troubled him, but he was good to the weak and timid ones, and never failed to carry a nice crumb or two to his old papa, who had something the matter with his wing, and seldom went far from the little brown house stuck like a wasp's nest on one of the trees.

Cocky had often thought about coming in to call, but never had found the courage to really do it, so Bertie was enchanted when, after a good deal of tweeting, much perking up of his smooth head, and many a sidelong twinkle of his little black eye, Cocky actually hopped down upon the table.

Mamma sat motionless, smiling at her little guest, and Bertie hardly dared to wink as he watched his pet's pranks.

Cocky had evidently made up his mind to have a right good time, and see, taste, examine, and enjoy all he found in this new world. So he paraded about the table, ate a bit of cake, pecked at an apple, and drank prettily out of Bertie's silver mug; then he wiped his bill quite properly, took a look at

the books, peeped into the inkstand, dragged his tail in the gum-pot, examined mamma's work-basket, and took a sniff at the flowers. After that he strolled over the carpet with such a funny swagger of his thin legs, such an important roll of his fat, little body, and such an impudent cock of his head, that Bertie burst out laughing, which made Cocky flit away to the top of the clock, where he sat and twittered as if he was laughing too.

"I wish I could keep him a few days, he is so jolly! Couldn't I put him in Dickey's cage, and feed and be good to him, mamma?"

"He would never trust you again if you did."

"But I should 'splain it to him, and tell him it was only a visit."

"He wouldn't like it, and I think you will enjoy him more when he makes visits of his own accord. He would be the maddest little bird that ever flew if you shut him up; but leave him free, and every day it will be a pleasure to open the pane and see him come in confidingly. He is tired of this warm room already, and trying to get out. Show him the way, and let him go."

"I'll have one good feel of him anyhow, but I won't hurt him," said Bertie, yielding the point, but



bound to get a little fun out of his fat friend before he went.

So he danced about after Cocky, who was so bewildered he could not find his own little door, and bounced against all the wrong panes till he was dizzy, and fell down in a corner. Then Bertie softly grabbed him and though he pecked fiercely, Bertie got a "good feel" of the soft, warm mite. Then he let him go, and Cocky sat on the balustrade and chirped till all his friends came to see what the fuss was about.

"Oh, I do wish I could understand what they say. He's telling them all about his visit, and they look so cunning, sitting round listening and asking questions. You know French and German; don't you know bird-talk too, mamma?" asked Bertie, turning round, after he had stood with his nose against the glass till it was as cold as a little icicle.

"No, dear, I am sorry to say I don't."

"I thought mammas knew every thing," said Bertie, in a disappointed tone.

"They ought to if they expect to answer all the questions their children ask them," answered mamma, with a sigh, for Bertie had an inquiring mind and often puzzled his parents sorely.

"I suppose you haven't got time to learn it?" was the next remark.

"Decidedly not. But *you* have, so you'd better begin at once, and let me go on with my work."

"I don't know how to begin."

"You must ask some wiser person than I am about that," answered mamma, scratching away at a great rate.

"I know what I'll do!" said Bertie, after meditating deeply for a few minutes; and, putting on his cap and coat, he went out upon the balcony.

Mamma thought he had gone to consult Cocky, and forgot all about him for a time. But Bertie had another plan in his head, and went resolutely up to one of the windows of the next house. It opened on the same balcony, and only a low bar separated the houses, so Bertie often promenaded up and down the whole length, and more than once had peeped under the half-drawn curtain at the gray-headed gentleman who always seemed to be too busy with his books to see his little neighbor.

Bertie had heard Professor Parpatharges Patterson called a very learned man, who could read seven languages, so he thought he would call and inquire if bird language was among the seven. He peeped



first, and there was Mr. P. reading away with his big spectacles on, and some dreadfully wise old book held close to his nose. As he did not look up, Bertie tapped softly, but Mr. P. did not hear. Then this resolute young person pushed up the window, walked coolly in, and stood close to the student's side. But Mr. P. did not see him till the remarkable appearance of a small blue mitten right in the middle of Plato's Republic, caused the Professor to start and stare at it with such a funny expression of bewilderment that Bertie could not help laughing.

The blithe sound seemed to wake the man out of a dream, for, falling back in his chair, he sat blinking at the child like a surprised owl.

"Please, sir, I knocked, but you didn't hear, so I came in," said Bertie, with an engaging smile, as he respectfully pulled off his cap and looked up at the big spectacles with bright, confiding eyes.

"What did you wish, boy?" asked the Professor, in a solemn, yet not ungentle, tone.

"I wanted to know if you would tell me how I could learn bird-talk."

"What?" and the man stared at the child harder than ever.

"Perhaps I'd better sit down and 'splain all about

it," remarked Bertie, feeling that the subject was too important to be hastily discussed.

"Take a seat, boy;" and the Professor waved his hand vaguely, as if he did not know much about any chair but his own old one, with the stuffing bursting out, and ink spots everywhere.

As all the chairs had books and papers piled up in them, Bertie, with great presence of mind, sat down upon an immense dictionary that lay near by, and with a hand on either knee, thus briefly explained himself:

"My mamma said that you were very wise, and could read seven langwitches, so I thought you would please tell me what Cocky Twitters says."

"Is Twitters a bird or a boy?" asked the Professor, as if bewildered by what seemed a very simple affair to innocent Bertie.

At this question, the boy burst forth into an eager recital of his acquaintance with the sparrows, giving a little bounce on the fat dictionary now and then when he got excited, while his rosy face shone with an eagerness that was irresistible.

The Professor listened as if to a language which he had almost forgotten, while the ghost of a smile began to flicker over his lips, and peer out from be-



hind his glasses, as if somewhere about him there was a heart that tried to welcome the little guest, who came tapping at the long-closed door.

When Bertie ended, out of breath, Mr. P. said, slowly, while he looked about as if to find something he had lost, — "I understand now, but I'm afraid I've forgotten all I ever knew about birds, — and boys too," he added, with an odd twinkle of the glasses.

"Couldn't you *reccomember* if you tried hard, sir?"

"I don't think I could."

Bertie gave a great sigh, and cast a reproachful glance upon the Professor, which said as plainly as words, "You must have been a *very* idle man to live among books till you are gray, and not know a simple thing like this."

I think Mr. P. understood that look, and felt ashamed of his sad ignorance; for he rose up and went walking about the room, poking into corners and peering up at the books that lined the walls, till he found a large volume, and brought it to Bertie, who still sat despondently upon the dictionary.

"Perhaps this will help us. It tells much about birds, and the tales are all true."

Bertie caught the book in his arms, laid it open on his knees, and with one delighted "Oh!" at the first peep, became entirely absorbed in the gay pictures. With an air of relief, the Professor retired to his chair, and sat watching him very much as he had watched Cocky Twitters. A pretty little picture he made; for a ray of sunshine crept in to shine on his bright head like a playmate come to find him; his downy brows were knit, and his rosy mouth pursed up at times with the mingled exertions of mind and body, for the book was both beautiful and heavy. His eyes feasted on the pages; and now and then he laughed out with delight, as he found a bird he knew, or gave a satisfied nod, and trotted his foot to express his satisfaction at some unusually splendid one. Once he tried to cross his tired legs, but they were too short, and the book went down with a bang that made him glance at his host in alarm.

But while he studied Audubon's birds, the Professor had studied mamma's boy, and found he *could* "reccomember" some of the traits belonging to *that* species of wild-fowl. As he looked, the smile had been playing hide-and-go-seek among his wrinkles, getting less ghostly every minute, and



when the book fell, it came boldly out and sat upon his face so pleasantly, that Bertie ceased to be afraid.

"Put it on the table, boy," said Mr. P., beckoning with an inky finger.

Bertie lugged his treasure thither, and leaning both elbows on it, began to brood again. It really did seem as if the Professor wanted to have a good "feel" of the boy as the boy did of Cocky, for presently the inky finger softly stroked the yellow head, then touched the round, red cheek, and put a little curl back behind the ear. Then the spectacles took a long look all over the little figure, from the striped stockings to the fur collar on the small coat, and something about it, a certain chubbiness of outline and softness of exterior perhaps, seemed to be so attractive, that, all of a sudden, two large hands hovered over Bertie, gently clutched him, and set him on the Professor's knee.

If Mr. P. felt any doubts as to how his guest would take this liberty, they were speedily set at rest, for Bertie only gave one wiggle to settle himself, and, turning a page, said affably, —

"Now, tell me all about 'em."

And Professor Parpatharges Patterson actually

did tell him story after story out of that charming book, till the sound of a bell made the truant jump down in a great hurry, saying, —

"Mamma wants me, and I must go, but I'll come again soon, and may be, if we study hard, we shall learn bird-talk after all."

Mr. P. shook his head; but Bertie would not give up yet, and added encouragingly, —

"Mamma says people are never too old to learn, and papa says Latin makes all the other langwitches easy; I see lots of Latin books, and you read 'em, so I'm sure, if you listen to my sparrows, when I feed 'em, you *can* understand some of their talk."

"I'll try, and let you know how I get on," said Mr. P., laughing as if he didn't know how very well, but couldn't help making the attempt.

"I'm very much obliged to you, sir, and I shall be glad to pay you for your trouble. I've got two dollars in my tin bank, and I'll smash it, and get 'em out, if that will be enough," said Bertie, suddenly remembering to have heard that Mr. P. was not rich.

"No, boy, I don't want your pennies, you shall pay in some other way, if I succeed," answered the Professor, with a touched sort of look about the spectacles.



"I've had a very nice time. Good day, sir," and Bertie held out his hand, as he made his best bow.

"Good day, boy. Come again."

I think there must have been some magic about that blue mitten, or the warm little hand inside, for, as he held it quite buried up in his own big one, Mr. P. suddenly stooped down, and said, in a queer, bashful sort of tone, —

"Suppose you pay with kisses, if you have any to spare."

"I've got hundreds; I always keep 'em ready, because mamma needs so many," and Bertie held up his rosy mouth, as if this sort of coin best suited the treasury of a loving heart.

Considering that the Professor had not kissed any one for twenty years at least, he did it very well, and, when Bertie was gone, stood looking down at the corpulent old dictionary, as if he still saw a bright-eyed little figure sitting on it, and considered that a great improvement upon the dust that usually lay there.

---

## TWITTER THE SECOND.

MAMMA was right; for Cocky, finding himself well treated at his first visit, called again, and being feasted on sugar, fruit, and cake, and allowed to go when he liked, was entirely won. From that time he was the friend of the family, and called as regularly as the postman. He knew his own little door, and if it was shut he tapped with his bill till some one opened it, when he came bustling in, chirping a gay "How are you?" and wagging his ragged tail in the most friendly manner. Weather made no difference to him; in fact rainy days were his favorite times for calling. His little coat was waterproof, he needed no umbrella, and often came hopping in, with snow-flakes on his back, as jolly as you please.

I don't know what Bertie would have done without this sociable little neighbor, for it was a stormy winter and he could not go out much; other children were at school; even mamma's inventive powers gave out sometimes, and toys grew tiresome. But Cocky never did, and such games as the two had together it would have done your heart good to see, for the boy was so gentle that the bird soon grew



very tame and learned to love and trust with the sweetest confidence. A jollier sparrow never hopped; and after a good lunch with Bertie, both drinking out of one mug, both pecking at the same apple, and sharing the same cake, Cocky was ready for play. He would hide somewhere and Bertie would hunt for him, guided now and then by a faint "Tweet" till the little gray bunch was found in some sly nook and came bouncing out with a whisk and a chirp.

When Bertie sat at lessons, Cocky would roost on his shoulder, hop over the open page with his head on one side as if reading it, peer into the inkstand inquisitively, or settle himself among the flowers that stood in the middle of the table, like a little teacher ready to hear the lessons when they were learned.

And sometimes when Bertie lay asleep, tired with books or play, Cocky would circle round him with soft flight, and perch on his pillow, waiting silently till his playmate woke, "like an angel guarding the dear in his sleep," as old nurse said, watching the pretty sight.

Professor Parpatharges Patterson was right also; for he apparently did try to understand "bird-talk,"

and did succeed; for a few days after Bertie's call a letter came flying in at the open pane just at twilight, very much as if Cocky had brought it himself. It was written on robin's-egg-colored paper, and bore the title, "Life and Adventures of Cocky Twitters, Esq."

Mamma began to laugh as she glanced over it, and Bertie screamed with delight when a funny sketch appeared of an egg with a very small but brisk little bird hopping out of it without a feather on him. It was very funny, and when mamma read Cocky's thoughts and feelings on first beholding the world, it was so droll, and Bertie was so tickled, that he rolled on the floor and kicked up his heels.

Mr. P. must have tried very hard to "recommem-ber" the accomplishments and gayety of his youth, for the sketch was so good and the first chapter of this bird-book so merry that mamma put it in a little portfolio and showed it to all her friends, for no one ever dreamed that the studious old Professor had it in him to do such a clever thing.

Bertie wanted to rush right in and thank him that very night, but mamma said he had better wait till morning and then play a little joke in return for the Professor's. So next day, when Mr. P. pulled up the