

## THE HISTORY OF TIP-TOP

Under the window of a certain pretty little cottage there grew a great old apple-tree, which in the spring had thousands and thousands of lovely pink blossoms on it, and in the autumn had about half as many bright red apples as it had blossoms in the spring.

The nursery of this cottage was a little bower of a room, papered with mossy-green paper, and curtained with white muslin; and here five little children used to come, in their white nightgowns, to be dressed and have their hair brushed and curled every morning.

First, there were Alice and Mary, bright-eyed, laughing little girls, of seven and eight years; and then came stout little Jamie, and Charlie; and finally little Puss, whose real name was Ellen, but who was called Puss, and Pussy, and Birdie, and Toddie, and any other pet name that came to mind.

Now it used to happen, every morning, that the five little heads would be peeping out of the window, together, into the flowery boughs of the apple-tree; and the reason was this. A pair of robins had built a very pretty, smooth-lined nest in a fork of the limb that came directly under the window, and the building of this nest had been superintended, day by day, by the five pairs of bright eyes of

these five children. The robins at first had been rather shy of this inspection; but as they got better acquainted, they seemed to think no more of the little curly heads in the window than of the pink blossoms about them, or the daisies and buttercups at the foot of the tree.

All the little hands were forward to help; some threw out flossy bits of cotton,--for which, we grieve to say, Charlie had cut a hole in the crib quilt,--and some threw out bits of thread and yarn, and Allie unravelled out a considerable piece from one of her garters, which she threw out as a contribution; and they exulted in seeing the skill with which the little builders wove everything in. "Little birds, little birds," they would say, "you shall be kept warm, for we have given you cotton out of our crib quilt, and yarn out of our stockings." Nay, so far did this generosity proceed, that Charlie cut a flossy, golden curl from Toddle's head and threw it out; and when the birds caught it up the whole flock laughed to see Toddle's golden hair figuring in a bird's-nest.

When the little thing was finished, it was so neat, and trim, and workman-like, that the children all exulted over it, and called it "our nest," and the two robins they called "our birds." But wonderful was the joy when the little eyes, opening one morning, saw in the nest a beautiful pale-green egg; and the joy grew from day to day, for every day there came another egg, and so on till there were five little eggs; and then the oldest girl, Alice, said, "There are

five eggs: that makes one for each of us, and each of us will have a little bird by-and-by;"--at which all the children laughed and jumped for glee.

When the five little eggs were all laid, the mother-bird began to sit on them; and at any time of day or night, when a little head peeped out of the nursery window, might be seen a round, bright, patient pair of bird's eyes contentedly waiting for the young birds to come. It seemed a long time for the children to wait; but every day they put some bread and cake from their luncheon on the window-sill, so that the birds might have something to eat; but still there she was, patiently sitting!

"How long, long, long she waits!" said Jamie impatiently. "I don't believe she's ever going to hatch."

"Oh, yes she is!" said grave little Alice. "Jamie, you don't understand about these things; it takes a long, long time to hatch eggs. Old Sam says his hens sit three weeks;--only think, almost a month!"

Three weeks looked a long time to the five bright pairs of little watching eyes; but Jamie said the eggs were so much smaller than hens' eggs that it wouldn't take so long to hatch them, he knew. Jamie always thought he knew all about everything, and was so sure of it that he rather took the lead among the children. But one morning,

when they pushed their five heads out of the window, the round, patient little bird-eyes were gone, and there seemed to be nothing in the nest but a bunch of something hairy.

Upon this they all cried out, "O mamma, DO come here! the bird is gone and left her nest?" And when they cried out, they saw five wide little red mouths open in the nest, and saw that the hairy bunch of stuff was indeed the first of five little birds.

"They are dreadful-looking things," said Mary; "I didn't know that little birds began by looking so badly."

"They seem to be all mouth," said Jamie.

"We must feed them," said Charlie.--"Here, little birds, here's some gingerbread for you," he said; and he threw a bit of his gingerbread, which fortunately only hit the nest on the outside, and fell down among the buttercups, where two crickets made a meal of it, and agreed that it was as excellent gingerbread as if old Mother Cricket herself had made it.

"Take care, Charlie," said his mamma; "we do not know enough to feed young birds. We must leave that to their papa and mamma, who probably started out bright and early in the morning to get breakfast for them."

Sure enough, while they were speaking, back came Mr. and Mrs. Robin, whirring through the green shadows of the apple tree; and thereupon all the five little red mouths flew open, and the birds put something into each.

It was great amusement, after this, to watch the daily feeding of the little birds, and to observe how, when not feeding them, the mother sat brooding on the nest, warming them under her soft wings, while the father-bird sat on the topmost bough of the apple-tree and sang to them. In time they grew and grew, and, instead of a nest full of little red mouths, there was a nest full of little, fat, speckled robins, with round, bright, cunning eyes, just like their parents; and the children began to talk together about their birds.

"I'm going to give my robin a name," said Mary. "I call him Brown-Eyes."

"And I call mine Tip-Top," said Jamie, "because I know he'll be a tip-top bird."

"And I call mine Singer," said Alice.

"I 'all mine Toddy," said little Toddie, who would not be behindhand in anything that was going on.

"Hurrah for Toddie!" said Charlie; "hers is the best of all. For my

part, I call mine Speckle."

So then the birds were all made separate characters by having each a separate name given it.

Brown-Eyes, Tip-Top, Singer, Toddy, and Speckle made, as they grew bigger, a very crowded nestful of birds.

Now the children had early been taught to say in a little hymn:-

"Birds in their little nests agree;  
And 'tis a shameful sight  
When children of one family  
Fall out, and chide, and fight;" -

and they thought anything really written and printed in a hymn must be true; therefore they were very much astonished to see, from day to day, that THEIR little birds in their nest did NOT agree.

Tip-Top was the biggest and strongest bird, and he was always shuffling and crowding the others, and clamouring for the most food; and when Mrs. Robin came in with a nice bit of anything, Tip-Top's red mouth opened so wide, and he was so noisy, that one would think the nest was all his. His mother used to correct him for these

gluttonous ways, and sometimes made him wait till all the rest were helped before she gave him a mouthful; but he generally revenged himself in her absence by crowding the others and making the nest generally uncomfortable. Speckle, however, was a bird of spirit, and he used to peck at Tip-Top; so they would sometimes have a regular sparring-match across poor Brown-Eyes, who was a meek, tender little fellow, and would sit winking and blinking in fear while his big brothers quarrelled. As to Toddy and Singer, they turned out to be sister birds, and showed quite a feminine talent for chattering; they used to scold their badly behaving brothers in a way that made the nest quite lively.

On the whole Mr. and Mrs. Robin did not find their family circle the peaceable place the poet represents.

"I say," said Tip-Top one day to them, "this old nest is a dull, mean, crowded hole, and it's quite time some of us were out of it. Just give us lessons in flying, won't you? and let us go."

"My dear boy," said Mother Robin, "we shall teach you to fly as soon as your wings are strong enough."

"You are a very little bird," said his father, "and ought to be good and obedient, and wait patiently till your wing-feathers grow; and then you can soar away to some purpose."

"Wait for my wing-feathers? Humbug!" Tip-Top would say, as he sat balancing with his little short tail on the edge of the nest, and looking down through the grass and clover-heads below, and up into the blue clouds above. "Father and mother are slow old birds; they keep a fellow back with their confounded notions. If they don't hurry up, I'll take matters into my own claws, and be off some day before they know it. Look at those swallows, skimming and diving through the blue air! That's the way I want to do."

"But, dear brother, the way to learn to do that is to be good and obedient while we are little, and wait till our parents think it best for us to begin."

"Shut up your preaching," said Tip-Top; "what do you girls know of flying?"

"About as much as you," said Speckle. "However, I'm sure I don't care how soon you take yourself off, for you take up more room than all the rest put together."

"You mind yourself, Master Speckle, or you'll get something you don't like," said Tip-Top, still strutting in a very cavalier way on the edge of the nest, and sticking up his little short tail quite valiantly.

"O my darlings," said their mamma, now fluttering home, "cannot I



ever teach you to live in love?"

"It's all Tip-Top's fault," screamed the other birds in a flutter.

"My fault? Of course, everything in this nest that goes wrong is laid to me," said Tip-Top; "and I'll leave it to anybody, now, if I crowd anybody. I've been sitting outside, on the very edge of the nest, and there's Speckle has got my place."

"Who wants your place?" said Speckle. "I'm sure you can come in, if you please."

"My dear boy," said the mother, "do go into the nest and be a good little bird, and then you will be happy."

"That's always the talk," said Tip-Top. "I'm too big for the nest, and I want to see the world. It's full of beautiful things, I know. Now there's the most lovely creature, with bright eyes, that comes under the tree every day, and wants me to come down in the grass and play with her."

"My son, my son, beware!" said the frightened mother; "that lovely-seeming creature is our dreadful enemy, the cat,--a horrid monster, with teeth and claws."

At this, all the little birds shuddered and cuddled deeper in the

nest; only Tip-Top in his heart disbelieved it. "I'm too old a bird," said he to himself, "to believe THAT story; mother is chaffing me. But I'll show her that I can take care of myself."

So the next morning, after the father and mother were gone, Tip-Top got on the edge of the nest again, and looked over and saw lovely Miss Pussy washing her face among the daisies under the tree, and her hair was sleek and white as the daisies, and her eyes were yellow and beautiful to behold, and she looked up to the tree bewitchingly, and said, "Little birds, little birds, come down; Pussy wants to play with you."

"Only look at her!" said Tip-Top; "her eyes are like gold."

"No, don't look," said Singer and Speckle. "She will bewitch you, and then eat you up."

"I'd like to see her try to eat me up," said Tip-Top, again balancing his short tail over the nest. "Just as if she would. She's just the nicest, most innocent creature going, and only wants us to have fun. We never do have any fun in this old nest!"

Then the yellow eyes below shot a bewildering light into Tip-Top's eyes, and a voice sounded sweet as silver: "Little birds, little birds, come down; Pussy wants to play with you."

"Her paws are as white as velvet," said Tip-Top, "and so soft! I don't believe she has any claws."

"Don't go, brother, don't!" screamed both sisters.

All we know about it is, that a moment after a direful scream was heard from the nursery window. "O mamma, mamma, do come here! Tip-Top's fallen out of the nest, and the cat has got him!"

Away ran Pussy with foolish little Tip-Top in her mouth, and he squeaked dolefully when he felt her sharp teeth. Wicked Miss Pussy had no mind to eat him at once; she meant just as she said, to "play with him." So she ran off to a private place among the currant-bushes, while all the little curly heads were scattered up and down looking for her.

Did you ever see a cat play with a bird or a mouse? She sets it down, and seems to go off and leave it; but the moment it makes the first movement to get away,--pounce! she springs on it, and shakes it in her mouth; and so she teases and tantalizes it, till she gets ready to kill and eat it. I can't say why she does it, except that it is a cat's nature; and it is a very bad nature for foolish young robins to get acquainted with.

"Oh, where is he? where is he? Do find my poor Tip-Top," said Jamie, crying as loud as he could scream. "I'll kill that horrid cat,--I'll

kill her!"

Mr. and Mrs. Robin, who had come home meantime, joined their plaintive chirping to the general confusion; and Mrs. Robin's bright eyes soon discovered her poor little son, where Pussy was patting and rolling him from one paw to the other under the currant-bushes; and settling on the bush above, she called the little folks to the spot by her cries.

Jamie plunged under the bush, and caught the cat with luckless Tip-Top in her mouth; and, with one or two good thumps, he obliged her to let him go. Tip-Top was not dead, but in a sadly draggled and torn state. Some of his feathers were torn out, and one of his wings was broken, and hung down in a melancholy way.

"Oh, what SHALL we do for him? He will die. Poor Tip-Top!" said the children.

"Let's put him back into the nest, children," said mamma. "His mother will know best what to do with him."

So a ladder was got, and papa climbed up and put poor Tip-Top safely into the nest. The cat had shaken all the nonsense well out of him; he was a dreadfully humbled young robin.

The time came at last when all the other birds in the nest learned to

fly, and fluttered and flew about everywhere; but poor melancholy Tip-Top was still confined to the nest with a broken wing. Finally, AS it became evident that it would be long before he could fly, Jamie took him out of the nest, and made a nice little cage for him, and used to feed him every day, and he would hop about and seem tolerably contented; but it was evident that he would be a lame-winged robin all his days.

Jamie's mother told him that Tip-Top's history was an allegory.

"I don't know what you mean, mamma," said Jamie.

"When something in a bird's life is like something in a boy's life, or when a story is similar in its meaning to reality, we call it an allegory. Little boys, when they are about half grown up, sometimes do just as Tip-Top did. They are in a great hurry to get away from home into the great world; and then temptation comes, with bright eyes and smooth velvet paws, and promises them fun; and they go to bad places; they get to smoking, and then to drinking; and, finally, the bad habit gets them in its teeth and claws, and plays with them as a cat does with a mouse. They try to reform, just as your robin tried to get away from the cat; but their bad habits pounce on them and drag them back. And so, when the time comes that they want to begin life, they are miserable, broken-down creatures, like your broken-winged robin.

"So, Jamie, remember, and don't try to be a man before your time, and let your parents judge for you while you are young; and never believe in any soft white Pussy, with golden eyes, that comes and wants to tempt you to come down and play with her. If a big boy offers to teach you to smoke a cigar, that is Pussy. If a boy wants you to go into a billiard-saloon, that is Pussy. If a boy wants you to learn to drink anything with spirit in it, however sweetened and disguised, remember Pussy is there. And Pussy's claws are long, and Pussy's teeth are strong; and if she gives you one shake in your youth, you will be like a broken-winged robin all your days."