

HUM, THE SON OF BUZ

At Rye Beach, during our summer's vacation, there came, as there always will to seaside visitors, two or three cold, chilly, rainy days,--days when the skies that long had not rained a drop seemed suddenly to bethink themselves of their remissness, and to pour down water, not by drops, but by pailfuls. The chilly wind blew and whistled, the water dashed along the ground and careered in foamy rills along the roadside, and the bushes bent beneath the constant flood. It was plain that there was to be no sea-bathing on such a day, no walks, no rides; and so, shivering and drawing our blanket-shawls close about us, we sat down at the window to watch the storm outside.

The rose-bushes under the window hung dripping under their load of moisture, each spray shedding a constant shower on the spray below it. On one of these lower sprays, under the perpetual drip, what should we see but a poor little humming-bird, drawn up into the tiniest shivering ball, and clinging with a desperate grasp to his uncomfortable perch. A humming-bird we knew him to be at once, though his feathers were so matted and glued down by the rain that he looked not much bigger than a honey-bee, and as different as possible from the smart, pert, airy little character that we had so often seen flirting with the flowers. He was evidently a humming-bird in

adversity, and whether he ever would hum again looked to us exceedingly doubtful. Immediately, however, we sent out to have him taken in. When the friendly hand seized him, he gave a little, faint, watery squeak, evidently thinking that his last hour was come, and that grim death was about to carry him off to the land of dead birds. What a time we had reviving him,--holding the little wet thing in the warm hollow of our hands, and feeling him shiver and palpitate! His eyes were fast closed; his tiny claws, which looked slender as cobwebs, were knotted close to his body, and it was long before one could feel the least motion in them. Finally, to our great joy, we felt a brisk little kick, and then a flutter of wings, and then a determined peck of the beak, which showed that there was some bird left in him yet, and that he meant at any rate to find out where he was.

Unclosing our hands a small space, out popped the little head with a pair of round brilliant eyes. Then we bethought ourselves of feeding him, and forthwith prepared him a stiff glass of sugar and water, a drop of which we held to his bill. After turning his head attentively, like a bird who knew what he was about and didn't mean to be chaffed, he briskly put out a long, flexible tongue, slightly forked at the end, and licked off the comfortable beverage with great relish. Immediately he was pronounced out of danger by the small humane society which had undertaken the charge of his restoration, and we began to cast about for getting him a settled establishment in our apartment. I gave up my work-box to him for a sleeping-room, and

it was medically ordered that he should take a nap. So we filled the box with cotton, and he was formally put to bed, with a folded cambric handkerchief round his neck, to keep him from beating his wings. Out of his white wrappings he looked forth green and grave as any judge with his bright round eyes. Like a bird of discretion, he seemed to understand what was being done to him, and resigned himself sensibly to go to sleep.

The box was covered with a sheet of paper perforated with holes for purposes of ventilation; for even humming-birds have a little pair of lungs, and need their own little portion of air to fill them, so that they may make bright scarlet little drops of blood to keep life's fire burning in their tiny bodies. Our bird's lungs manufactured brilliant blood, as we found out by experience; for in his first nap he contrived to nestle himself into the cotton of which his bed was made, and to get more of it than he needed into his long bill. We pulled it out as carefully as we could, but there came out of his bill two round, bright scarlet, little drops of blood. Our chief medical authority looked grave, pronounced a probable hemorrhage from the lungs, and gave him over at once. We, less scientific, declared that we had only cut his little tongue by drawing out the filaments of cotton, and that he would do well enough in time,--as it afterwards appeared he did, for from that day there was no more bleeding. In the course of the second day he began to take short flights about the room, though he seemed to prefer to return to us; perching on our fingers or heads or shoulders, and sometimes choosing

to sit in this way for half an hour at a time. "These great giants," he seemed to say to himself, "are not bad people after all; they have a comfortable way with them; how nicely they dried and warmed me! Truly a bird might do worse than to live with them."

So he made up his mind to form a fourth in the little company of three that usually sat and read, worked and sketched, in that apartment, and we christened him "Hum, the son of Buz." He became an individuality, a character, whose little doings formed a part of every letter, and some extracts from these will show what some of his little ways were:-

"Hum has learned to sit upon my finger, and eat his sugar and water out of a teaspoon with most Christian-like decorum. He has but one weakness--he will occasionally jump into the spoon and sit in his sugar and water, and then appear to wonder where it goes to. His plumage is in rather a drabbled state, owing to these performances. I have sketched him as he sat to-day on a bit of Spiraea which I brought in for him. When absorbed in reflection, he sits with his bill straight up in the air, as I have drawn him. Mr. A- reads Macaulay to us, and you should see the wise air with which, perched on Jenny's thumb, he cocked his head now one side and then the other, apparently listening with most critical attention. His confidence in us seems unbounded: he lets us stroke his head, smooth his feathers, without a flutter; and is never better pleased than when sitting, as he has been doing all this while, on my hand, turning up his bill,

and watching my face with great edification.

"I have just been having a sort of maternal struggle to make him go to bed in his box; but he evidently considers himself sufficiently convalescent to make a stand for his rights as a bird, and so scratched indignantly out of his wrappings, and set himself up to roost on the edge of the box, with an air worthy of a turkey, at the very least. Having brought in a lamp, he has opened his eyes round and wide, and sits cocking his little head at me reflectively."

When the weather cleared away, and the sun came out bright, Hum became entirely well, and seemed resolved to take the measure of his new life with us. Our windows were closed in the lower part of the sash by frames with mosquito gauze, so that the sun and air found free admission, and yet our little rover could not pass out. On the first sunny day he took an exact survey of our apartment from ceiling to floor, humming about, examining every point with his bill--all the crevices, mouldings, each little indentation in the bed-posts, each window-pane, each chair and stand; and, as it was a very simply furnished seaside apartment, his scrutiny was soon finished. We wondered at first what this was all about; but on watching him more closely, we found that he was actively engaged in getting his living, by darting out his long tongue hither and thither, and drawing in all the tiny flies and insects which in summer time are to be found in an apartment. In short, we found that, though the nectar of flowers was his dessert, yet he had his roast beef and mutton-chop to look after,

and that his bright, brilliant blood was not made out of a simple vegetarian diet. Very shrewd and keen he was, too, in measuring the size of insects before he attempted to swallow them. The smallest class were whisked off with lightning speed; but about larger ones he would sometimes wheel and hum for some minutes, darting hither and thither, and surveying them warily, and if satisfied that they could be carried, he would come down with a quick, central dart which would finish the unfortunate at a snap. The larger flies seemed to irritate him, especially when they intimated to him that his plumage was sugary, by settling on his wings and tail; when he would lay about him spitefully, wielding his bill like a sword. A grasshopper that strayed in, and was sunning himself on the window-seat, gave him great discomposure. Hum evidently considered him an intruder, and seemed to long to make a dive at him; but, with characteristic prudence, confined himself to threatening movements, which did not exactly hit. He saw evidently that he could not swallow him whole, and what might ensue from trying him piecemeal he wisely forbore to essay.

Hum had his own favourite places and perches. From the first day he chose for his nightly roost a towel-line which had been drawn across the corner over the wash-stand, where he every night established himself with one claw in the edge of the towel and the other clasping the line, and, ruffling up his feathers till he looked like a little chestnut-burr, he would resign himself to the soundest sleep. He did not tuck his head under his wing, but seemed to sink it down between

his shoulders, with his bill almost straight up in the air. One evening one of us, going to use the towel, jarred the line, and soon after found that Hum had been thrown from his perch, and was hanging head downward, fast asleep, still clinging to the line. Another evening, being discomposed by somebody coming to the towel-line after he had settled himself, he fluttered off; but so sleepy that he had not discretion to poise himself again, and was found clinging, like a little bunch of green floss silk, to the mosquito netting of the window.

A day after this we brought in a large green bough, and put it up over the looking-glass. Hum noticed it before it had been there five minutes, flew to it, and began a regular survey, perching now here, now there, till he seemed to find a twig that exactly suited him; and after that he roosted there every night. Who does not see in this change all the signs of reflection and reason that are shown by us in thinking over our circumstances, and trying to better them? It seemed to say in so many words: "That towel-line is an unsafe place for a bird; I get frightened, and wake from bad dreams to find myself head downwards; so I will find a better roost on this twig."

When our little Jenny one day put on a clean white muslin gown embellished with red sprigs, Hum flew towards her, and with his bill made instant examination of these new appearances; and one day, being very affectionately disposed, perched himself on her shoulder, and sat some time. On another occasion, while Mr. A was reading, Hum

established himself on the top of his head just over the middle of his forehead, in the precise place where our young belles have lately worn stuffed humming-birds, making him look as if dressed out for a party. Hum's most favourite perch was the back of the great rocking-chair, which, being covered by a tidy, gave some hold into which he could catch his little claws. There he would sit, balancing himself cleverly if its occupant chose to swing to and fro, and seeming to be listening to the conversation or reading.

Hum had his different moods, like human beings. On cold, cloudy, gray days he appeared to be somewhat depressed in spirits, hummed less about the room, and sat humped up with his feathers ruffled, looking as much like a bird in a great-coat as possible. But on hot, sunny days, every feather sleeked itself down, and his little body looked natty and trim, his head alert, his eyes bright, and it was impossible to come near him, for his agility. Then let mosquitoes and little flies look about them! Hum snapped them up without mercy, and seemed to be all over the ceiling in a moment, and resisted all our efforts at any personal familiarity with a saucy alacrity.

Hum had his established institutions in our room, the chief of which was a tumbler with a little sugar and water mixed in it, and a spoon laid across, out of which he helped himself whenever he felt in the mood--sitting on the edge of the tumbler, and dipping his long bill, and lapping with his little forked tongue like a kitten. When he found his spoon accidentally dry, he would stoop over and dip his

bill in the water in the tumbler; which caused the prophecy on the part of some of his guardians that he would fall in some--day and be drowned. For which reason it was agreed to keep only an inch in depth of the fluid at the bottom of the tumbler. A wise precaution this proved; for the next morning I was awaked, not by the usual hum over my head, but by a sharp little flutter, and found Mr. Hum beating his wings in the tumbler--having actually tumbled in during his energetic efforts to get his morning coffee before I was awake.

Hum seemed perfectly happy and satisfied in his quarters; but one day, when the door was left open, he made a dart out, and so into the open sunshine. Then, to be sure, we thought we had lost him. We took the mosquito netting, out of all the windows, and, setting his tumbler of sugar and water in a conspicuous place, went about our usual occupations. We saw him joyous and brisk among the honeysuckles outside the window, and it was gravely predicted that he would return no more. But at dinner-time in came Hum, familiar as possible, and sat down to his spoon as if nothing had happened. Instantly we closed our windows and had him secure once more.

At another time I was going to ride to the Atlantic House, about a mile from my boarding-place. I left all secure, as I supposed, at home. While gathering moss on the walls there, I was surprised by a little green humming-bird flying familiarly right towards my face and humming above my head. I called out, "Here is Hum's very brother." But, on returning home, I saw that the door of the room was open, and

Hum was gone. Now certainly we gave him up for lost. I sat down to painting, and in a few minutes in flew Hum, and settled on the edge of my tumbler in a social, confidential way, which seemed to say, "Oh, you've got back then." After taking his usual drink of sugar and water, he began to fly about the ceiling as usual, and we gladly shut him in.

When our five weeks at the seaside were up, and it was time to go home, we had great questionings what was to be done with Hum. To get him home with us was our desire; but who ever heard of a humming-bird travelling by railroad? Great were the consultings. A little basket of Indian work was filled up with cambric handkerchiefs, and a bottle of sugar and water provided, and we started with him for a day's journey. When we arrived at night the first care was to see what had become of Hum, who had not been looked at since we fed him with sugar and water in Boston. We found him alive and well, but so dead asleep that we could not wake him to roost; so we put him to bed on a toilet cushion, and arranged his tumbler for morning. The next day found him alive and humming, exploring the room and pictures, perching now here and now there; but as the weather was chilly, he sat for the most part of the time in a humped-up state on the tip of a pair of stag's horns. We moved him to a more sunny apartment; but, alas! the equinoctial storm came on, and there was no sun to be had for days. Hum was blue; the pleasant seaside days were over; his room was lonely, the pleasant three that had enlivened the apartment at Rye no longer came in and out; evidently he was lonesome, and gave way to

depression. One chilly morning he managed again to fall into his tumbler, and wet himself through; and notwithstanding warm bathings and tender nursings, the poor little fellow seemed to get diphtheria, or something quite as bad for humming-birds.

We carried him to a neighbouring sunny parlour, where ivy embowers all the walls and the sun lies all day. There he revived a little, danced up and down, perched on a green spray that was wreathed across the breast of a Psyche, and looked then like a little flitting soul returning to its rest. Towards evening he drooped; and, having been nursed and warmed and cared for, he was put to sleep on a green twig laid on the piano. In that sleep the little head drooped--nodded--fell; and little Hum went where other bright dreams go--to the Land of the Hereafter.