

thievish propensity the farmer is compelled to forget the useful services which were rendered in the spring-time, and to resort to some effectual method of getting rid of the nuisance.

These sparrows sometimes have terrible quarrels amongst themselves. It is really highly amusing to hear the din that arises all of a sudden over a mere trifle, in much the same way as disputes occur among ourselves about matters of not the slightest moment. Even here you see how "one touch of nature makes the whole world kin." And I was lately reading in a German magazine another "modern instance" of the great dramatist's "wise saw," which will, I think, interest you.

You are probably aware that in that country, as elsewhere, box nests are sometimes provided for birds of an interesting or peculiar kind. Starlings are often supplied with an artificial home of this sort. It saves the necessity of building a nest, develops the idea of locality, and not unfrequently ensures the return of the occupants from their migratory journey. Very well; it was noticed in a certain part of Germany that, on the first intimation of approaching storms in late autumn, a family of starlings which had tenanted one of these houses took their departure in search of a milder climate. They had not been long gone ere a family of sparrows—hungry and neglected, but always with an eye to the main chance of cheap lodgings or plenty of food—put in an appearance, and ventured to occupy the deserted quarters. No doubt they found their new abode much more pleasant than the narrow cramped holes to which they were generally accustomed. At all events, it was fortunate that they had comfortable lodgings during the season when their board was neither abundant nor varied.

By begging here and stealing there, however, the family contrived to subsist throughout the winter, and with the arrival of spring the outlook was really very cheerful. There was plenty to eat, and the young sparrows grew plump and strong. One day the father bird had gone a-hunting, and was returning homeward with a fine fat beetle, the spoils of the chase, when he heard cries of distress from afar. Dropping his prey, he flew like lightning to the spot, only to find his three sweet bairns and their mother rudely ejected from their house. They had made a splendid defence against the cruel eviction, but had been so sorely wounded they could scarcely hold a twig. Beside himself with rage, the father sparrow stormed at the enemy, whose threatening aspect, however, kept him at bay. And who, think you, was the intruder? None other than the mother starling, returned with the fine weather to ensconce herself and family in the box-dwelling which she had left the previous autumn. She appeared to think that her nice house had been damaged by its temporary tenants, and she evidently felt aggrieved that the sparrows should have resisted the return of its lawful owner. The father starling, on his part, took matters more quietly, knowing from past experience how brave and resolute his mate was. So while the struggle went on, he perched himself on the roof of his rescued home, and gave vent to his joyful feelings in a song of triumph. The sparrows recognising that nothing could avail against mere brute force, and that discretion was the better part of valour, gave up the contest, and withdrew from the scene. They were observed to come back at times, and chirrup in an impetuous angry fashion at the starlings, as if they were shouting at them in derision, "Thief, thief, thief!"

SOME LITTLE ONES OF THE STREET.

V.—THE LITTLE WATERCRESS-SELLER.



H, yes, it just is cold sometimes down by Farrin'don Market, the first thing in the mornin'. It seems, somehow, as if the big waggon-loads of green cabbages, all piled up ever so high with the wet an' the frost on 'em, brought the cold into the market; and then when you have to wait about in the street and to handle the water-cresses, it pretty nigh freezes your hands, I can tell you."

He is rather a gruff boy this—except when he is shouting down the street. His voice rises to a high note then; that is, it begins on a low note and finishes on a high one. "War-ter-cree-ses!"

The "War" is a growl, "ter" is three notes higher, "cree" touches the octave higher, and "ses" is a squeak like the creak of a rusty hinge. He is rather a muddy boy, and he wears a cap two sizes too large for him, so that it comes down behind his ears. I ask him whether he is fond of cresses himself. "He don't much care for 'em," he says; "they make bread-and-butter go down, he dare say, but then he don't want to make it go down no quicker than what it does. Perhaps I want a couple of bunches myself? if so, these are fresh as anything, and came all the way from a place called the Rye House, somewhere ever so far up the Lea river. There's some cresses with leaves that looks

brown, but that ain't because they're stale. There's brown 'uns and there's green 'uns, and the brown 'uns is reckoned the best by them that likes 'em, though they ain't easy to get lately."

This is a boy that knows something of his trade, and I feel that I have no right to keep him from his customers, so I propose to walk on a little way in front, and to meet him again at the end of the street. He had some regular customers who sent out when they heard him coming, and he took good care they *should* hear him. The funny part of it was that two or three doors were opened on the other side of the way, and yet he didn't run across the road. More than that, there was another figure moving along there, and every time the boy cried out "War-ter-cree-ses!" he looked over his shoulder across the road as if he expected to hear somebody answer. Somebody *does* answer presently, for as I walk on he suddenly turns, and with his face towards the road calls out in a louder key than ever, "War-ter!" and then from the opposite side, in a shrill piping voice, comes "Cree-ses!" and the pit-pat of a light foot.

There is a baker's shop at the corner of the long street, and in the window is a tin tray full of currant buns. I am just wondering whether this business-like boy would despise buns, when I hear him not far off. Again the cry of "Cree-ses!" answers his loud "War-ter!" and then two voices together—one a thin treble and the other a husky tenor—join in "Young war-ter-creeses!"

"Hallo, Betsy, how 've you got on?" says my young friend; and here, coming across the road, is a girl, who also carries a basket, in which two bunches of cresses only are left.

"Pretty nigh sold out, Bob," she says, as she looks at me, wondering what I have to do with it.

"This here's Betsy," says Bob; "my sister she is, and we're pardners we are. I cries, don't you see, becoss she hasn't the voice for it, whereas I've been a barker."

"A barker?—What's a barker?"

"Well, that's what we used to call it. Father, you see, was in the line—a greengrocer with a regular beat—what you might call a coster, you know, only he had his regular customers, and a donkey and cart; and I used to walk o' the other side and cry, 'Yer yar! sum-mer cab-bidge! Col-li-flow-er!'"

What a voice! that boy has! It's enough to rouse the whole street.

"That's barkin'—that is," he says, with a grin, but his face falls again into a gloomy expression. "Father had to give it up through—"

"Now, Bob," says the shrill voice of Betsy, "don't you go for to say anything against father."

"Who's agoing to?" says Bob. "He give it up

through not bein' a teetotaller soon enough, then, come. He couldn't help it becoss he'd had some money to buy the donkey of another man that wasn't a teetotaller neither, and the money got spent and the donkey had to be sold when times was bad, and except for mother's mangle we should have had precious little."

"Yes; but we're doin' better now, ain't we, Bob?" squeaked Betsy.

"Well, we tries to, and if father could only get back a donkey there's no knowin' what we might do. You see, sir, you was askin' about the water-cresse trade. Father, of course, showed us how we could go and buy: and every morning in the spring and summer we go, or at least one of us does, to Stonecutter Street, close by the Holborn Viduck [he meant Viaduct], and leading to Farrin'-don Market. That's were the growers send their creeses fresh cut from the beds. The water-cresse beds is in all sorts o' places where there's ponds, or at least running water: down at Wandsworth there's some, and at Deptford, and father says they used to be much nearer—at Hackney at a place called Morning Lane, where it's all built over now, but where the best brown creeses used to grow in Hackney brook. Well, when the carts comes in, at half-past six or seven, the salesman begins to sell off the creeses in lots, shillingsworths and six-penn'orths, and such like, and sometimes he favours a regular customer with an extra han'ful for the money. Whether or not, when you've got your lot the first thing you have to do is to sort 'em into penny or sometimes ha'penny bunches, and tie 'em round with strips o' bass, which you gets in the market, too. By the time you've done that you're pretty cold, and if you've got a penny you ain't long findin' the coffee-stall, and if you haven't you get home as quick as you can to see whether there's a slice left of yesterday's loaf. Mother's been obliged sometimes to have loaves from the parish—eighteen-pence a week and two loaves they allowed her—but you see father don't like that, and father now's got a board out in front of our house and gets in a stock of taters and carrots and such like to set up in the greengrocery, and mother's getting a little washing and ironing as well as mangling, becoss father can take it home, don't you see; and Betsy and me's handiest in the water-cresse sellin', but she ain't strong in the voice—are you, Betsy?—so we works it like this: she takes one side of the street and I take the other, and I cries for both, 'Young wa—ter—cree—ee—ee—ses!' We do pretty well some days, and there's eight-and-sixpence put by at home, sir, towards the new donkey. Thankee, sir, oh, thankee. Yes, if you would like to come and see us it's Marquis's Rents, Mile End Road."

Marquis's Rents is not at all the kind of place many people would like to live in, but it is wonderful what may be done to make even a dull, dingy place pleasant if people will only try. Perhaps turning a mangle would not be the best way of improving the temper of a cross, surly man or boy, but I was quite surprised, when I accepted Bob's invitation and called to see him one evening, to hear him singing away as though he liked it. The mangle, with its great heavy weights on the part that ran along over the folded linen and pressed it smooth, rumbled and creaked a good deal, but Bob's voice rose above the din as he sang, and a canary that hung at the window in a cage began to sing too, as I opened the door and found myself in a warm room, where a tidy-looking woman was at work ironing nicely-washed articles of clothing. There was a great smell of burning—caused by the scorching of a pad of flannel on which the hot flat-irons were rubbed clean before being used—and there was also a peculiar scent of turnips and of wall-flowers, which seemed to come from the back kitchen.

Bob looked up and nodded, but kept on turning away at the wheel of the mangle, and presently Betsy came in with a great tin teapot, and four mugs, and a basin of sugar, and then a stout-built man in a sleeved waistcoat and tight cord trousers brought in a loaf and some plates and a lump of butter on a dish.

"This is the gentleman as said he'd come and see us, father," said Bob.

Bob's mother had put aside the irons, placed the smooth, warm linen articles on a small clothes-horse that stood before the fire, and pushed back the table till it stood under the window, where a row of flower-pots, each of which held a blooming plant, stood on the sill. There was quite a comfortable look about the room. A gaily-painted American clock ticked over the mantelpiece; three or four

coloured prints in deal frames were on the walls; a fiddle hung on a nail in the recess, where, on the top of a dwarf cupboard, was the model of a ship in full sail, and a number of pretty sea-shells, some of them mottled pink and white, others of curious shape, and a whole row of them gleaming like pearls.

"My grandfather followed the sea, you must know, sir," said Bob's mother, noticing that I had been looking at these ornaments. "These shells

was my mother's, and they came to me when we was married; didn't they, Robert?" she added, turning to her husband.

"They did so," replied Robert, touching his forehead with his finger, which was his way of making a bow; "and here they've been, and here they will be, for nobody won't eat 'em, not even the donkey—which, sir, thankin' of you kindly for what you give to young Bob there. A donkey we've got, and to-morrow I starts afresh to market. Perhaps you'd like to see him."

As an introduction to the donkey was the real object of my visit, I complied, and was soon in the

back kitchen, where at this moment the stone floor was covered with carrots, turnips, potatoes, cabbages, and onions, ready, as Bob's father said, to be set out on a stall in the Mile End Road when it was dark enough to light up a naphtha lamp, and people were coming out to buy something for supper. The back kitchen led into a small yard, and on one side of the yard was a small shed, and from the shed we presently heard such a tremendous braying that I was obliged to cover my ears.

"Smells the carrots, he does, sir," said Robert, opening the door of the shed. Bob and Betsy had now come out, and we all stood admiring the new donkey—a capital fellow, of a nice mouse-grey colour, with a dark face and a bright eye, and a tail that whisked in a way that showed he had never been cruelly treated.

THOMAS ARCHER.



LONDON WATER-CRESS SELLERS.