# SING A SONG OF SIXPENCE

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*** START OF THIS PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK SING A SONG OF SIXPENCE ***

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[Transcriber's note: the illustrations in this book were originally black and white line drawings. They appear to have been colorized by a previous owner of the book.]

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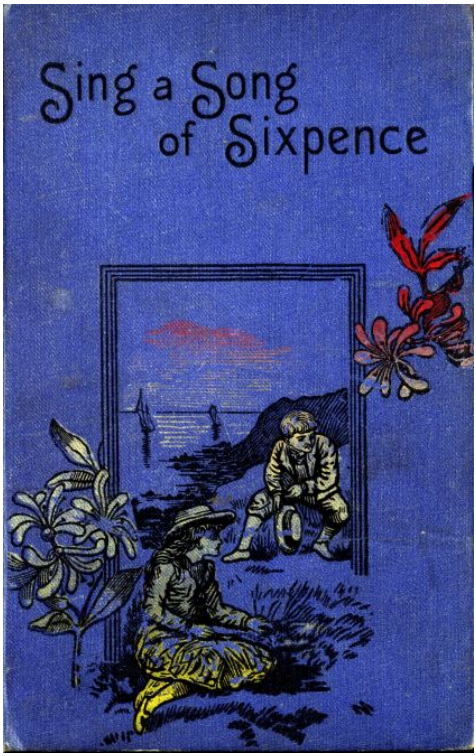


*Cover*

BY
MARY HOLDSWORTH.

EDINBURGH AND LONDON:
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1892

*Nellie*

BY THE SAME AUTHOR.

*Uniform in Pretty Cloth Binding.*

SING A SONG OF SIXPENCE. MARY, MARY, QUITE CONTRARY. WHERE THE SKY FALLS. ADVENTURES OF KING CLO. A PRINCESS IN DISGUISE. A STRANGER IN THE TEA.

# Sing a Song of Sixpence.

*Headpiece*

A brand new sixpence fresh from the Mint! How it sparkled and glittered in the dancing sunlight! Such a treasure for a small girl to possess! But then, on the other hand, what a heavy responsibility!

*Nellie*

All day long it had been burning a hole in her pocket, and as for learning lessons, not an idea would enter her head. Everything went in at one ear and

out of the other, as Miss Primmer sternly remarked when Nellie could not say her poetry. But, indeed, Nellie *did* try hard to learn her lessons; she squeezed her eyes together as tightly as possible, though how shutting her eyes was to prevent the lessons from coming out of her ears was not very clear. "But *I must* learn them now," she sighed, "or Miss Primmer will keep me in to-morrow, and I shan't be able to go out with Nursie and Reggie to spend my sixpence. Oh dear! I wish I could learn my poetry and keep it in, I guess I'd better get a bit of cotton wool to put in my ears and then it *can't* come out. There, now!

"'Mary had a little lamb,
Its fleece was white as snow,
And everywhere that Mary went
The lamb was sure to go.'

"That's lovely! I wish I'd a lamb. I think I'll buy one with my sixpence. Won't it be nice? And I can keep it in the garden, and me and Reggie can take it out for a walk. Oh, and have a blue ribbon round its neck and a sash on! He shall have my blue sash, and I'll save it some of my milk from breakfast. Unless it's chocolate creams. How many should I get for sixpence? Loads, I should think! I *love* chocs., but I'd like a lamb too! I'll buy them both–a lamb and some chocs. Lemme see now. What was I saying? Oh, my poetry.

"'It followed her to school one day'–

Oh, and take it to school. Won't it be fun? What will Miss Primmer say when she sees my lamb? She won't say nothing to a dear, darling little lamb! I *love* lambs! Me and Reggie will have some wool off it to make some stockings for Pa. I'll make them all by myself, and Pa will think I'm dreffle clever, won't he? And some for Ma, and Uncle Dick. Oh, and Aunt Euphemia shall have some for her niggers. Where's my sixpence gone? It was in my pocket. Oh, here it is! What do they put the Queen's head on it for? And a crown. It does look funny, as though it would tumble off. I wish I was the Queen and wore a crown. I'd have lots of sixpences. I'd go to Miss Primmer's and give all the little girls one each, and then they could all have a lamb each and some chocs. And I'd have lots of chocs.–*loads* of them. I wish it was to-morrow to spend my sixpence."

Nellie sat gazing dreamily into the nursery fire, with wide-open blue eyes, "Lemme say my poetry again.

"'Mary had a little lamb'–

With a blue sash on. What shall I call my lamb?" She went on gazing with loving eyes at her bright new sixpence. "I think I'll call her the Queen. You won't mind my calling my lamb after you, do you?" she said to her Majesty, who was looking very dignified indeed; at least, as dignified as it was possible to look when she had to hold her head as stiff as possible to keep the crown from toppling off. It must have given her a crick in her neck.

Her Majesty smiled graciously.

"Oh, not at all, don't mention it," she said politely.

"Thank you so much," said Nellie, who was sitting in front of the fire with her hands clasped across her knee.

"Get up and make your curtsey; I suppose you know how," said her Majesty.

"Oh yes, Miss Primmer always makes us curtsey when we come in and go out," answered Nellie, getting up and making the best one she could.

"That is not very graceful. This is the way," the Queen said, coming forward and showing her how to do it. "Only you see I have to keep my head steady to keep the crown on, so it's rather awkward."

Nellie bowed as she was directed, and the Queen returned the bow with great dignity. Nellie was much impressed. Fancy the Queen bowing to her! What lovely tales she would have to tell to-morrow!

"What are you going to do with your new sixpence?" asked her Majesty, when she had seated herself again.

"I thought I'd buy a lamb, and then I could make a pair of socks for Pa with the wool."

The Queen smiled. "Very sensible indeed," she said, patting Nellie on the head; "and you might make me a pair too, you know."

Nellie's eyes sparkled. "And will you really wear them?" she asked eagerly.

"I *always* wear stockings," said the Queen in an offended tone. "You don't suppose I go about barefoot, do you?"

"I did not mean that!" cried Nellie, aghast. The bare idea of such a thing!

"And don't make them too large," went on the Queen; "I am very particular about the fit."

"I'd like to be a queen and wear a crown," said Nellie, after a pause.

Her Majesty smiled. "Indeed! And pray, what would you do if you were?"

"I'd buy a lamb for all the children at Miss Primmer's. Oh, and chocs.–such lots of chocs. And I'd put on my best frock every day, and have cake every time I wanted it, and I'd have as many sixpences as I liked, and—-"

"Stop, that will do," said the Queen; "if you always wore your best frock you'd soon want a new one, and then where would all your sixpences be? And as for the cake, I always keep *my* cupboards locked, so that no one can take a piece without asking for it; and the honey cupboard. I am very fond of honey."

"Yes, I know, we sing about it in school," said Nellie.

"Oh, indeed? you do, do you? That's very nice. But what do you sing about me?"

"Oh, we sing:–

"'Sing a song of sixpence, a pocket full of rye,
Four and twenty blackbirds baking in a pie.
When the pie was opened the birds began to sing,
Was not that a dainty dish to set before a king?
The king was in his counting house, counting out his money,
The queen was in the parlour eating bread and honey,
The maid was in the garden hanging out the clothes,
There came a little blackbird and snapped off her nose.'"

"That's very pretty," said her Majesty; "I wish I could write poetry like that."

"Can't you?" asked Nellie, looking surprised; she thought queens could do everything.

"No," said her Majesty with a sigh; "I never could, though I've often tried."

"Try, try, try again," said Nellie. "We sing that in school too."

"Well, what shall it be about?" asked the Queen.

"Oh, about my lamb," said Nellie promptly.

"Where is it?" asked the Queen, putting on her spectacles. "I think I'll write about you."

"Here I am," cried a funny squeaky little voice, and there, if you please, was the prettiest, fleeciest little white lamb you ever saw in your life, with a blue ribbon round its neck, and Nellie's best blue sash tied in a bow round its tail.

"Oh, how sweet!" cried the Queen, clapping her hands.

The lamb tossed its head proudly.

"Come near and let me look at you, you pretty thing," said the Queen, patting it. "Now I'll write my poetry. Get me a bottle of ink and a copy-book to write it in."

"Would not a slate be better," said Nelly politely, "and then you could copy it neatly into your book afterwards, you know. That's the way we do at school."

"Well, yes, perhaps that would be best. I might make a blot."

Nellie got her slate and a piece of pencil with a nice point. The Queen took it, and sat for about five minutes groaning and turning up her eyes to the ceiling, but nothing came of it. Nellie watched her anxiously.

"Have you not 'most finished?" she asked after a while.

"*Could* you tell me how to spell honey?" asked the Queen. "I quite forget,

it is so long since I went to school."

"I don't know," said Nellie, "I have not learned that yet. I'll get the dictionary.

"There now," said the Queen triumphantly, holding up the slate for Nellie to look at. It was written in large round letters, something like Nellie's writing, with double lines to keep it even.

"Oh dear, what can the matter be?
Dear, dear, what can the matter be?
Oh dear, what can the matter be?
Nellie's so long making tea!
She promised to give me some bread and some honey,
Some cake and some jam–I gave her the money,
What can she be doing? It *is* very funny, I *do* want
my afternoon tea."

"There," said the Queen with a deep sigh, "you can't say I never wrote any poetry. By-the-by, don't you think it's nearly time the pie was done?"

"Pie?" asked Nellie, looking surprised.

"Yes," said her Majesty sharply. "You said there were four and twenty blackbirds baking in a pie, didn't you? Just go and see if it's done, I'm getting hungry."

"But where is the king? You can't have it without him?"

"Never mind him. Let me have the pie."

"Was it from the king's counting house my sixpence came?"

"Of course," said the Queen testily. "Now go and see about that pie."

Nellie went. It was a most delicious pie, crisp and brown. It made her mouth water to look at it.

"I do hope the Queen won't be greedy and want to eat it all herself," she thought, as she took it in and put it on the table.

"Present it on one knee," commanded the Queen.

Nellie did so. The Queen seized the knife and cut open the pie. All the blackbirds began singing so sweetly. It was the loveliest concert you ever heard in your life.

"Now that's what I call a most dainty dish," said her Majesty, looking much pleased.

"But you are not going to eat the dear little birds?" asked Nellie anxiously.

"Of course not," said the Queen pettishly. "Get me a bit of bread and honey. You know how fond I am of it."

One of the blackbirds flew out of the window as Nellie went to the cupboard

to get out some honey for the Queen and a piece of cake for herself.

"Cookey makes such nice cakes," she said, with her mouth full.

"You should not talk with your mouth full," said the Queen. "You can give me one to taste."

Nellie went down on one knee and presented it the way she had been shown. The Queen took it at once and began to eat it. Such big bites she took too, which rather surprised Nellie, who had seen Miss Primmer at afternoon tea daintily mincing thin wafers of bread and butter.

"What are you staring at?" asked the Queen. "I hate to be stared at–it's very rude. Get me my bread and honey at once."

Nellie presented that too on one knee.

"Have you not a drop of tea? I'm dreadfully thirsty," asked the Queen.

"I have nothing but my doll's tea set, and they are rather tiny," answered Nelly doubtfully, going to the cupboard and getting them out.

"Never mind, I can drink all the more," said her Majesty, and indeed she *did* drink. Nellie had never seen anything like it. There was no time for her to drink a drop herself, she was so busy waiting on the Queen. After a bit she quite lost count of the number of cups she drank.

"Don't you think you have drunk enough cups now?" she asked at length, thinking it about time she had a cup of tea herself.

"Drunk enough cups indeed," said the Queen huffily, "as if I have drunk *any* cups."

Nellie was silent for a moment.

"It's dreffel wicked to tell stories," she said, holding up one finger warningly. "Do you know where you'll go if you tell stories?"

"I shall go home," said the Queen, "if you are going to be rude; besides, I have not told any stories."

"Oh! You said you had not drunk any cups, and you have drunk *millions*."

The Queen drew herself up haughtily.

"Pray, how many cups did you put out?" she asked in a very dignified manner.

"Six," answered Nellie promptly.

"Well, then, count them. There they are. One, two, three, four, five, six. How can you say I have drunk any of them? and millions too. It is you who are telling the stories. I *never* drink cups. I drink tea."

Nellie did not know what to say to this. "Well, you drank plenty of tea, then," she said. "You did not leave any for me."

"I think it is about time I went home, if that is the way you treat your visitors," said her Majesty, highly offended. "It is very rude to tell people how much they eat. I shan't come to see you again. And after letting you have that

six-pence, too."

"It was Pa who gave it to me," said Nellie, who was a very truthful child.

"Well, how did my head come on it then if it did not come from me in the first place?"

Nellie could not answer a word.

"Well, I must be going," said the Queen, recovering her good humour now that she had silenced Nellie.

Nellie was just making her a grand curtsey when the door burst open and in rushed the maid, holding her handkerchief to her face.

"It's the blackbird," she sobbed. "He's snapped off my nose."

"Stick it on again," said the Queen.

Nellie ran to get some sticking plaster, and stuck it on as hard as she could.

It looked rather funny, she thought, but could not exactly understand why for a little while, until she discovered it was stuck on upside down.

"You had better take it off again and put it on straight," said the Queen. But nothing would induce it to come off, it was stuck on so tight.

"I guess she'll have to stand on her head to blow her nose," said Nellie, thoughtfully.

"Of course, the very thing," assented the Queen, cheerfully. "Well, I really must be going. Good-bye now, whatever, and don't forget my stockings," she continued, waving her hand in token of farewell, and she vanished, banging the door after her.

Nellie woke up with a start.

"Why, Miss Nellie, whatever are you doing all in the dark? And you have let the fire out too."

"Oh, Nursie, such lovely things have happened. The Queen has been here, and my lamb; oh, and lots of things."

"The Queen, indeed! Fiddle-sticks," said Nursie, with a sniff of disbelief.

"Yes, she was. And she had tea with me out of my doll's tea-set. And here's my dear little lamb. Why, wherever has it gone?" asked Nellie, rubbing her eyes and looking around.

"And what on earth is that wool sticking out of your ears? Have you the ear-ache?"

"Oh, Nursie, I only put it there to keep my poetry from coming out."

"Well, I never did!" said Nursie, holding up her hands in surprise. "You are the *queerest* child!"

*Nellie*

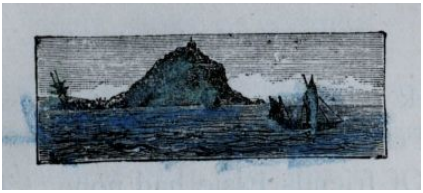
## The Story of a Robin

She was a strange child, and led a lonely life, shut up in the almost deserted castle with no one but her miserly old grandfather and old Nanny for company. It was no wonder that she grew up with curious unchildlike fancies, which were yet not altogether unchildlike. Her mind found food for itself in the woods with their ever-changing tints, the sky, the clouds, the sunset, and last, but by no means least, the restless, never-silent sea, which bathed the foot of the rock where stood the picturesque old castle.

Of friends Elsie had none. The Squire could not afford to keep company–he was as poor as a rat, he used to say. Old Nanny was nearly as miserly as he–you would have said she counted the grains of oatmeal that she put into the porridge; not a particle of anything was ever wasted in that frugal household. Report said–but I am not responsible for the truth of this statement–that the miser had once

*Nellie*

*tailpiece*



*headpiece*

*robin*

had a piece of cheese which was always brought to table, not to eat, mind you, oh dear, no! but so that the odour might give a relish to the dry bread! Elsie had not even a dog for a companion–for that would have required, at least, some food. She used to look out of her little turret window and watch the clouds floating about in the sky, and the stars smiling down at her as they twinkled merrily up above. The moon was a very great friend of hers; she loved to see his broad cheerful face rising over the tree tops, and peeping in at her latticed windows.

Almost the only living creatures that she could make friends with were the bats and owls that found an abode in the ruined walls of the castle, and the robins that came hopping merrily around in search of the crumbs that were not there. She loved, too, to watch the spiders that came crawling stealthily out of their webs to catch any unwary fly that might be so bold as to venture into such an inhospitable mansion.

She had no toys–never in her life had she even seen a doll. Think of that, little Dorothy, with your collection of all kinds, from the rag baby to the beautiful wax and china ones with real hair and eyes that open and shut, and with all the

dolls' clothes a child's heart could desire. She did not miss them–never having known the pleasure of such possessions.

But one real live pet she had–a robin that used to come hopping on to her window sill every morning, and for whom she saved a few crumbs from her scanty breakfast unknown to "gran'fer" or old Nanny, who you may be sure would never have countenanced such waste. He was a merry little birdie, with such a knowing twinkle in his eyes, that seemed to say he knew all about little Elsie and her ways, and was glad to come and cheer her up, and to make up to her for the lack of other friends by singing to her every morning his sweetest song. Fine times they had, too, when "gran'fer" was busy counting his money, and old Nanny was out gathering sticks. They never bought anything at Castle Grim that they could get without paying for. "Castle Hopeful" she called it, though why she chose such a very inappropriate name for it, it would be hard to say. If you come to think of it though, there was some sense in it, seeing that it left so many things to be hoped for–things that never came. As for such a thing as a new hat or a new frock, *that* was too great a treat to be ever wished for. When the frock she wore would no longer hang on the fragile little form, when the bony arms came out half a yard below the sleeves, and the long thin legs from under the short skirt, then old Nanny grudgingly took out of the moth-eaten old wardrobe an old one of Elsie's mother's, and cut it down until the child could get inside it with something like ease. To be sure Nanny was no dressmaker, and the frock was neither pretty nor elegant; and as for fit, why, that was a mere trifle not worthy of serious consideration. Elsie could have jumped into it, but it was a frock, and that was enough. The little fisher-children who used to come gathering sea-weed and shells on the beach used to look up with wistful eyes at the lonely little figure in the turret-window, singing and talking to herself; but she was never allowed to speak to them–Nanny was very strict about that. Elsie was one of the "quality," and must not mix with the fisher-children.

The child had learnt her letters, no one knew how. Moreover, she was the happy possessor of a few ragged old books–minus the covers and a few of the pages–which she had found in rummaging about in the old lumber room amongst broken furniture that would not sell, but was too good for firewood.

Such treasures these books were to Elsie–strange reading for a child, but very precious to her all the same. No "Alice in Wonderland," no "Little Folks," no "St Nicholas," or "Fairy Tales"; but the "Pilgrim's Progress," garnished with pictures–such pictures, enough to make your hair stand on end,–Foxe's "Book of Martyrs," and last, but by no means least, that most delightful of all books, "Don Quixote." How Elsie loved the Don and his bony steed! She knew all his adventures by heart–all that were in the book, that is–for, of course, both the beginning and the end were lost.

If you will promise not to mention it, I will tell you a great secret. Elsie was writing a story herself. It was the nicest story you ever read in your life; but it was not very easy to read, being written in large badly-formed childish characters on odd leaves of old copy books, and sometimes the story and the copies got rather mixed; and the spelling was, to say the least of it, quite unique, but it was a lovely story for all that. Perhaps some day you will read it yourself. Elsie used to read it aloud to her little friend the robin, and he listened with his pert little head on one side as he hopped about picking up the crumbs she had saved with so much difficulty for him; he was a most grateful little birdie, and never forgot a kindness. She always knew his tap! tap! at the window, and used to run to open it for him. It is very nice to have a little bird for a friend, for it never quarrels or sulks like some little boys or girls do, when it cannot get its own way.

It was a bitterly cold day in December. The snow had been falling all night, and when morning came the earth was covered with a beautiful soft white carpet. It was lovely to look at. Elsie sat up in her little turret chamber watching the happy little fisher-children snowballing each other. She would have liked a game with them, but she knew that Nanny would not let her go. It was so cold, too, for there was no fire anywhere but in the kitchen, and Nanny was making what she called the dinner, and was always very cross when Elsie got in the way, so Elsie sat upstairs in her little turret chamber trying to warm her cold little hands by wrapping them up in an old shawl which had certainly been a good one in its day, but unluckily there was very little of it left. After watching the children for a time, she crept downstairs into the kitchen.

"Oh, Nanny, let me help you with the dinner," she said pleadingly, "it's so cold upstairs."

The old woman was not a bad sort, but she was rather cross; everything had gone wrong with her that morning. First, she could not get any sticks on account of the snow, and the ones she had were damp and would not burn; then the Squire had grumbled at her for extravagance.

"Oh, get out of the way, you are more of a hindrance than a help," she answered pettishly.

Elsie went back again to her little room and looked out of the window at the pure white snow. How lovely it looked! She would just run out to see what it was like on the soft white carpet. How happy the hardy fisher-children looked, with their fresh glowing faces and sturdy limbs, as they pelted one another with the soft powdery snow!

She put on her old shawl and her apology for a hat, and stole quietly out to the enchanted land. Old Nanny saw her go, but took no notice, muttering to herself as she went on with her household duties. The fresh keen air made little

*Elsie*

Elsie feel quite gay and happy as she frisked about revelling in her new-found liberty.

"Oh, the snow! the lovely snow! I wonder who put it up in the sky? I wish I could go up to see who is making the dear little feathers. Is it the Man in the Moon, I wonder? I'd like to see him make the feathers. Perhaps if I go far enough I'll get to the end of the world, and then I'll get up into the clouds, it does not look very far," she said to herself.

On she went merrily, with her eyes eagerly fixed upon the near horizon; but the way was long, and the poor little feet grew heavy and tired. Her boots, much too large for her, and very thin, were wet through and through, but still she struggled bravely on. The snow was falling thickly and silently. The large flakes filled the air, blotting out the familiar landscape. There was everywhere nothing to be seen but snow! snow! snow!

"I wonder if this is the right way," thought Elsie, as she plodded painfully along. "Perhaps gran'f'er will be cross if I get lost."

She turned round to try and retrace her steps, but the little footmarks were covered with the fast falling snow, she could not see which way she had come. For a time she wandered on wearily and aimlessly, until she took a false step and felt herself slipping, slipping. Where? Was it into the middle of the earth? or was it into Snow Land? Only Snow Land was up above, and she was going down, down, down! In vain she tried to keep her footing; she sank down into the drift. The snow came down blinding and choking her. The cruel cold snow that looked so soft and gentle and yielding. She shut her eyes to try to keep it out.

"I wonder if gran'fer will be sorry if his little girl is lost? and Nanny? and oh! my dear little Robin, who'll save him the crumbs if I have to stop down here? My dear little Robin! I wish gran'fer would come! I'm getting so sleepy!" and the poor tired child lay still with closed eyes.

Tap! tap! tap! What was that on her forehead.

Elsie opened her heavy eyes and looked around. There was her own dear little Robin flapping his wings and hovering around her. Was it a dream? Elsie rubbed her eyes. No, there he was in reality, in his warm red and brown coat.

"Oh dear Robin! fly home and tell gran'fer I'm lost in the snow!" she cried entreatingly.

Robin perched his saucy little head on one side, and looked at her with his bright twinkling eyes as though he quite understood what she said.

The snow had ceased falling, and the sky looked thick and yellow as though it were lined with cotton wool. Elsie felt cold and stiff, and her limbs ached–she felt she could not stay much longer in her snowy bed.

"Fly home, Robin, and tell gran'fer," she repeated, and Robin flew away.

Elsie sighed, and half wished she had not sent him. He was company, at

*robin*

any rate; she was tired of being alone. But gran'f'er would soon know, and come to fetch her home.

She tried to keep her eyes open to watch for his coming, but it was hard work, and oh! she was so tired! so tired! Would gran'fer never come? Perhaps he was so busy counting his money that he would never think of his little girl lying out there under the cruel snow!

At Castle Grim, in the old-fashioned kitchen, sat Nanny over the fire, shivering, but not with the cold, though it was cold enough.

Where could the child be? The soup was ready for the master as soon as he should come in, but the child, little Elsie, where was she? Presently a shuffling step outside was heard, and the miser came in. He was a curious looking figure, with scanty grey locks hanging over his stooping shoulders. His clothes were green with age, but well brushed and mended. He seated himself at the table, and looked round for his little grand-daughter.

"Where is Elsie?" he asked with a frown.

The old woman's voice trembled.

"She went out into the snow, and has not come back," she answered, putting her apron to her eyes; "and these old bones are not fit to go out to look for her."

The old man got up and went to the window. The dusk was beginning to come on in the short December afternoon.

"Which way did she go?" he asked at length.

"I don't know. I did not watch her go," mumbled the old woman. "I was too busy–I can't be always watching folks."

"We must track her footsteps," said the miser, getting his greatcoat. But in the grounds in front of the house the snow lay in an unbroken sheet; no signs of any footmarks–they were all covered by this time. Nanny and the miser looked at each other in consternation.

"She is lost in the snow," muttered the old woman sitting down in front of the fire, with her apron over her head, rocking herself to and fro. The miser, too, sat down, and covering his face with his hands, groaned aloud.

What was he to do? Where to go? On one side of the castle lay the sea, on the other the moor. It was like looking for a needle in a bottle of hay to search for her–and there were no tracks to follow. The old man was greatly distressed; miser though he was, he had a man's heart, and in his own way he loved his little granddaughter, though, to be sure, he loved money more–or thought he did. But the child was very dear to him–she was all that was left to the lonely old man.

The pair sat in silence for a while, plunged in thought; suddenly the miser arose.

"Light the lantern," he said briefly.

"What are you going to do with it, master?" she asked in a shrill quavering

treble.

"To search for the child. Be quick."

Nanny groaned. "You'll go and get lost too," she whined. "And there'll be nobody left but me."

Tap, tap, tap, at the window pane.

"What's that?" asked the old man sharply.

Nanny hobbled to the window and looked out; there was nobody.

Tap, tap, tap again at the window. The miser himself went this time and opened it.

In flew a robin, hopping about with his head on one side, and his keen twinkling eyes fixed upon the miser.

"Bless me! It's a robin! What does it want? Crumbs? Can't afford to keep birds," said the old man gruffly.

Robin flew to the window, and then turned as if to say, "Follow me."

The old woman watched it curiously.

"Birds are queer creatures; you would almost say it knew where the child was," she said.

"Eh! What?" asked the old man sharply, looking more attentively at the bird.

Robin gave a little chirp, tapped at the window with its bill, and then turned again as if to say "Why don't you come?"

The miser brightened up.

"Dear me! I really think you are right," he said, again taking up the lantern.

Robin flew out, stopping every now and then to see if the miser was following him. On, on they went a weary way. The moon struggled hard to pierce through the thick clouds, and shed a pale silvery light around to guide them on their way.

At last, with a succession of little chirps, Robin stopped before something that looked like a dark speck. The miser followed cautiously, for he well knew the treacherous moors. He stood still while Robin scraped away the snow from her face with his little bill, and there lay poor little Elsie, fast asleep, nearly buried in the snow. Gran'f'er very carefully lifted her out of the drift, and wrapping her in his great coat, wended his way home with a great joy in his heart, Robin hovering around all the way.

Old Nanny was sitting by the dying embers with her apron over her head, rocking herself backwards and forwards, and crooning a doleful dirge; but she sprang up joyfully when the old man entered with the child in his arms.

"Make up the fire," were the first words he said. Nanny put on a small stick.

"A good roaring fire," added the old man. Nanny could hardly believe her ears, but she cautiously put on another stick.

The old man carefully laid Elsie down on the one arm-chair the room possessed.

"More, put on more, pile it up the chimney, let us have a bright warm fire to bring her back to life," he said, rubbing his hands. Nanny nearly dropped with surprise. Never, never before during the fifty odd years that she had lived at Castle Grim had such an order been given. In a few minutes a bright cheerful fire was blazing on the hearth, and the kettle singing lustily.

Restoratives were applied to the little white-faced child, and she was well rubbed and wrapped in blankets. Soon she opened her eyes. The first thing they lit upon was the robin, who had followed them in and was hopping about with his head on one side, looking very proud and clever indeed, as he had a right to be, for was it not he who had found out where Elsie lay buried in the snow, and had brought gran'f'er to look for her?

"Oh, Robin! dear Robin!" cried the child in a weak voice. "Dear gran'f'er, it was Robin who came to tell you where I was. I sent him, you know."

Gran'f'er, who had been sitting watching the pair, said suddenly, with an air of great resolution–no one knew how much it cost him to say it–"Robin is to have some crumbs every day. I am very poor, and it will nearly ruin me, but he shall have them."

Elsie's eyes sparkled. "Oh gran'f'er! My own dear little Robin! Do you really mean it?" she asked, clapping her weak little hands.

"Yes," said the old man firmly. "He shall have them."

"Dear little Robin, do you hear what gran'fer says?" cried Elsie joyfully.

Robin looked very knowing indeed, as if he understood all about it, and with a jerk of his perky little head, as much as to say, "Good-bye, I must be off to my family, or else they'll think I'm lost in the snow too." Off he flew.

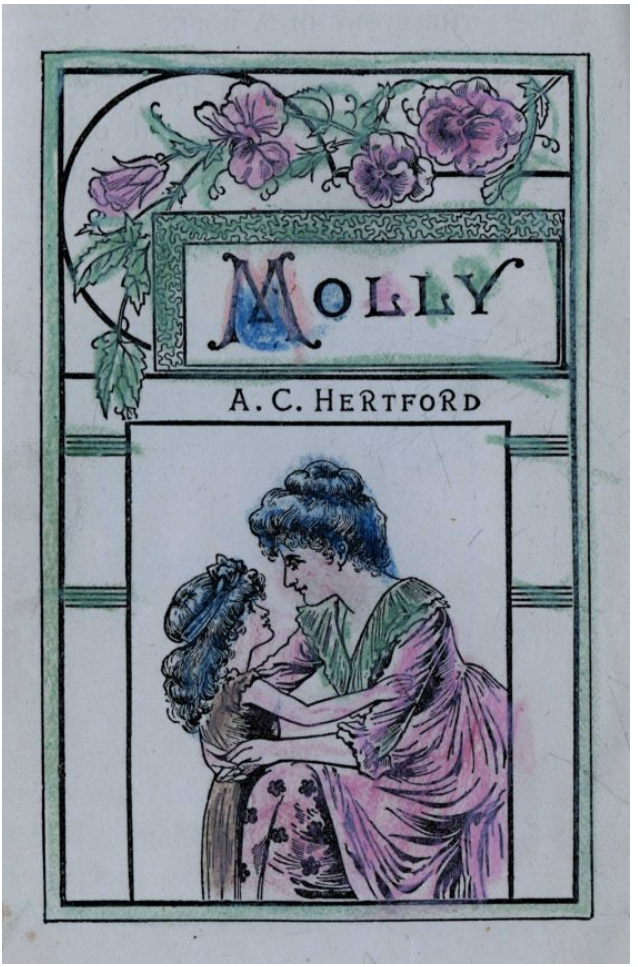
Who says birds have no sense? Not Elsie certainly, nor yet gran'fer, for he thinks Elsie's robin the most wonderful bird that ever lived.

Elsie is all right again now; and, indeed, she is not at all sorry she was lost in the snow that day, for it has shown her how much gran'fer loves her. And gran'fer–you would not know him–he has quite turned over a new leaf, and is a miser no more. He now wears a good suit that is not more than twenty years old, and has become quite liberal too, for he no longer counts the sticks, nor the peas that are put into the soup. He has kept his word about the crumbs; every morning a handful is thrown out, which Robin, with his head very much on one side, and accompanied by his family and a select circle of friends, picks up with great relish, doing the honours in his best style. And not only that, but–believe it or not as you will, it is certainly true–every Christmas a sheaf of corn is nailed to the barn door for the birds, more particularly for the robins, though all are welcome; and you never in your life heard such a chirping and chattering as

there is when this interesting ceremony takes place. The birds come from far and near, the fathers, the mothers, the sisters, the cousins, and the aunts, to join in the feast; and gran'f'er, and Elsie, and old Nanny come out to watch them eat their Christmas dinner.

*birds*

*tailpiece*




*Molly*

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