The sparrow and his four children

A sparrow had four young ones in a swallow's nest. When they were fledged, some naughty boys pulled out the nest, but fortunately all the birds got safely away in the high wind. Then the old bird was grieved that as his sons had all gone out into the world, he had not first warned them of every kind of danger, and given them good instruction how to deal with each. In the autumn a great many sparrows assembled together in a wheatfield, and there the old bird met his four children again, and full of joy took them home with him. "Ah, my dear sons, what pain I have been in about you all through the summer, because you got away in the wind without my teaching; listen to my words, obey your father, and be well on your guard. Little birds have to encounter great dangers!" And then he asked the eldest where he had spent the summer, and how he had supported himself? "I stayed in the gardens, and looked for caterpillars and small worms, until the cherries got ripe." - "Ah, my son," said the father, "tit-bits are not bad, but there is great risk about them; on that account take great care of thyself henceforth, and particularly when people are going about the gardens who carry long green poles which are hollow inside and have a little hole at the top." - "Yes, father, but what if a little green leaf is stuck over the hole with wax?" said the son. "Where hast thou seen that?" - "In a merchant's garden," said the youngster. "Oh, my son, merchant folks are quick folks," said the father. "If thou hast been among the children of the world, thou hast learned worldly shiftiness enough, only see that thou usest it well, and do not be too confident." After this he asked the next, "Where hast thou passed thy time?" - "At court," said the son. "Sparrows and silly little birds are of no use in that place -- there one finds much gold, velvet, silk, armour, harnesses, sparrow-hawks, screech-owls and hen-harriers; keep to the horses' stable where they winnow oats, or thresh, and then fortune may give thee thy daily grain of corn in peace." - "Yes, father," said the son, "but when the stable-boys make traps and fix their gins and snares in the straw, many a one is caught fast." Where hast thou seen that?" said the old bird. "At court, among the stable-boys." - "Oh, my son, court boys are bad boys! If thou hast been to court and among the lords, and hast left no feathers there, thou hast learnt a fair amount, and wilt know very well how to go about the world, but look around thee and above thee, for the wolves devour the wisest dogs." The father examined the third also: "Where didst thou seek thy safety?" - "I have broken up tubs and ropes on the cart-roads and highways, and sometimes met with a grain of corn or barley." - "That is indeed dainty fare," said the father, "but take care what thou art about and look carefully around, especially when thou seest any one stooping and about to pick up a stone, there is not much time to stay then." - "That is true," said the son, "but what if any one should carry a bit of rock, or ore, ready beforehand in his breast or pocket?" - "Where hast thou seen that?" - "Among the mountaineers, dear father; when they go out, they generally take little bits of ore with them." - "Mountain folks are working folks, and clever folks. If thou hast been among mountain lads, thou hast seen and learnt something, but when thou goest thither beware, for many a sparrow has been brought to a bad end by a mountain boy." At length the father came to the youngest son: "Thou, my dear chirping nestling, wert always the silliest and weakest; stay with me, the world has many rough, wicked birds which have crooked beaks and long claws, and lie in wait for poor little birds and swallow them. Keep with those of thine own kind, and pick up little spiders and caterpillars from the trees, or the house, and then thou wilt live long in peace." - "My dear father, he who feeds himself without injury to other people fares well, and no sparrow-hawk, eagle, or kite will hurt him if he specially commits himself and his lawful food, evening and morning, faithfully to God, who is the Creator and Preserver of all forest and village birds, who likewise heareth the cry and prayer of the young ravens, for no sparrow or wren ever falls to the ground except by his will." - "Where hast thou learnt this?" The son answered, "When the great blast of wind tore me away from thee I came to a church, and there during the summer I have picked up the flies and spiders from the windows, and heard this discourse preached. The Father of all sparrows fed me all the summer through, and kept me from all mischance and from ferocious birds."

"In sooth, my dear son, if thou takest refuge in the churches and helpest to clear away spiders and buzzing

flies, and criest unto God like the young ravens, and commendest thyself to the eternal Creator, all will be well with thee, and that even if the whole world were full of wild malicious birds."

"He who to God commits his ways,
In silence suffers, waits, and prays,
Preserves his faith and conscience pure,
He is of God's protection sure."

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