

Leslie Madeline

Minnie's Pet Parrot



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Содержание

INTRODUCTION	4
CHAPTER I.	6
CHAPTER II.	11
Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.	14

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INTRODUCTION

The object of these little books is not so much to give full, scientific information with regard to the animals of which they treat, as to bring before the child such facts concerning them as shall interest him in their history, awaken a desire to know more of the particular traits of each, and especially lead him to be kind to them as a part of God's creation.

Natural history we deem, according to the opinion of an eminent writer, as "not only the most captivating of the sciences, but the most humanizing. It is impossible to study the character and habits of the lower animals without imbibing an interest in their wants and feelings."

Dr. Chalmers, who was famous for his interest in the brute creation, says, "To obtain the regards of man's heart in behalf of the lower animals, we should strive to draw his mind toward them. The poor brutes look, tremble, and give the signs of suffering, as we do. A threatened blow strikes them with terror, and they have the same distortions of agony on the infliction of it. Their blood circulates as ours does. They sicken, and grow feeble with age, and finally die, as we do. They possess also instincts

which expose them to suffering in another quarter. The lioness, robbed of her whelps, makes the wilderness ring with her cries; and the little bird, whose tender household has been stolen, fills and saddens all the grove with her pathetic melody.”

The author has been careful to select only facts well authenticated. She takes this opportunity to acknowledge most gratefully her indebtedness to those friends who have contributed original anecdotes which have come under their own observation; and also to state that she has quoted from most of the popular English works on these subjects, prominent among which are Jesse, Richardson, and Hamilton, on dogs; Youatt, the Ettrick Shepherd, and Randall, on sheep; Morris, Brown's Natural History, Chambers's Miscellany, etc.

She has been greatly encouraged, in the preparation of these volumes for the young, by the flattering reception of the previous productions of her pen. If these should meet with similar favor, they may be followed by other volumes of the same character and objects.

The Author.

CHAPTER I.

MINNIE AND HER PARROT

In these little books, I am going to tell you about Minnie, her home, and her pets; and I hope it will teach every boy and every girl who reads them to be kind to animals, as Minnie was. Minnie Lee had a pleasant home. She was an only child, and as her parents loved to please her, they procured every thing which they thought would make her happy. The first pet Minnie had was a beautiful tortoise-shell kitten, which she took in her baby arms and hugged tightly to her bosom. After a time, her father, seeing how much comfort she took with kitty, bought her a spaniel. He already had a large Newfoundland dog; but Mrs. Lee was unwilling to have him come into the house, saying that in summer he drew the flies, and in winter he dirtied her hearth rugs. So Leo, as the great dog was called, was condemned to the barn, while Tiney could rove through the parlors and chambers whenever he pleased.

In Minnie's seventh year, her father bought her a Shetland pony and a lamb, which he told her was called a South Down – a rare and valuable breed. The little girl now thought her hands quite full; but only the next Christmas, when her uncle came home from sea, he told her he had brought an addition to her pets; and true enough, when his luggage came from town, there

was a bag containing a real, live monkey, named Jacko.

These, with the silver-gray parrot, which had been in the family for years, gave Minnie employment from morning till night.

You will wonder, perhaps, that one child should have so many pets; and, indeed, the parrot belonged to her mother; but when I tell you that, though her parents had had six children, she was the only one remaining to them, and that in her infancy she was very sickly, you will not wonder so much. The doctor said that their only hope of bringing her up was to keep her in the open air as much as possible.

“Let her have a run with Leo,” he used to say; or, “Get her a horse, and teach her to ride. That will do her more good than medicine.”

When her father came home from town, if he did not see his little daughter on the lawn, playing with Fidelle, the cat, and Tiney, the dog, he was almost sure to find her in the shed where Jacko’s cage was kept, with Miss Poll perching on her shoulder.

When visitors called and asked to see her, her mother would laugh, as she answered, “I’m sure I don’t know where the child is, she has so many pets.”

Minnie was not allowed to study much in books; indeed, she scarcely knew how to read at all; yet she was not an ignorant child, for her father and mother took great pains to teach her. She knew the names of all the different trees on her father’s place, and of all the flowers in her mother’s garden; but her favorite

study was the natural history of beasts and birds; and nothing gave her so much pleasure as to have her father relate anecdotes of their intelligence and sagacity.

He had a large, well-selected library, where were many rare volumes on her favorite subject, illustrated with pictures of different animals. When Mr. Lee could not recall a story as often as she wished, she would take his hand and coax him to the library. Then she would run up the steps to her favorite shelf, and taking down a book almost as large as she could lift, say, playfully, "Now, father, I'm ready for you to read."

Mrs. Lee often found them sitting together, talking over the wonderful feats of some dog, cat, horse, or monkey, and laughed as she said to her husband, "I believe Minnie comes naturally by her love for animals, for you seem as much interested in the stories as she does."

Mr. Lee lived in a very handsome house about seven miles from the city where he did business. He had made a great deal of money by sending ships to foreign lands, freighted with goods, which he sold there in exchange for others which were needed at home. He now lived quite at his ease, with plenty of servants to do his bidding, and horses and carriages to carry him wherever he wished to go.

But in this volume I shall speak of himself, his family, equipage, and estate, only as they are connected with my object, which is to tell you about Minnie's pet parrot, and also to relate stories of other parrots, all of which are strictly true.

Poll was brought from the coast of Africa by a sea captain, who presented her to a lady, aunt to Mrs. Lee. At the lady's death it was given to her niece, and had been an important member of the family ever since. It was not known how old she was when she was brought to America; but she had been in the family for fifteen years, and therefore was old enough to know how to behave herself properly on all occasions.

Miss Poll had a plumage of silver-gray feathers, with a brilliant scarlet tail. Her eyes were a bright yellow, with black pupils, and around them a circle of small white feathers. Her beak was large and strong, hooked at the end. Her tongue was thick and black. Her claws were also black, and she could use them as freely as Minnie used her hands. When her mistress offered her a cup of tea, – a drink of which she was very fond, – she took it in her claws, and drank it as gracefully as any lady.

In the morning, when her cage was cleaned, she always had a cup of canary seed; but at other times she ate potato, cracker, bread, apple, and sometimes a piece of raw meat. She liked, too, to pick a chicken bone, and would nibble away upon it, laughing and talking to herself in great glee.

Miss Poll, I am sorry to say, was very proud and fond of flattery. If Mrs. Lee went to the cage, and put out her finger for the bird to light upon it, and did not praise her, she would often bite it. But if she said, "Sweet Poll! dear Poll! she is a darling!" she would arch her beautiful neck, and look as proud as any proud miss. Then she would tip her head, and put her claws

in her mouth, just like a bashful little girl.

Poll was exceedingly fond of music, and learned a tune by hearing it played a few times; but she had a queer habit of leaving off in the middle of a line, when she would whistle for the dog, or call out, "Leo, come here! lie down, you rascal!"

Poll was very fond of Minnie, and indeed of all children.

When she saw the little girl come into the room with her bonnet on, she exclaimed, in a natural tone, "Going out, hey?" When Minnie laughed, she would laugh too, and keep repeating, "Going out? Good by."

Parrots are said to be very jealous birds, and are displeased to have any attention shown to other pets.

I think Poll was so, and that she was angry when she saw Minnie show so much kindness to Fidelle. One day she thought she would punish the kitty; so she called, "Kitty, kitty," in the most sweet, coaxing tones. Puss seemed delighted, and walked innocently up to the cage, which happened to be set in a chair.

"Kitty, kitty," repeated Poll, until she had the little creature within reach of her claws, when she suddenly caught her, and bit her ears and her tail, Fidelle crying piteously at this unexpected ill treatment, until some one came to rescue her. Then puss crept softly away to the farther end of the room, and hid under a chair, where she began to lick her wounded tail, while Poll laughed and chuckled over the joke.

CHAPTER II.

THE PARROT AND THE TRAVELLER

One morning when the whole family were in the breakfast room, Poll began to talk to herself, imitating exactly the manner of a lady who had recently visited the house with her children.

“Little darling beauty, so she is; she shall have on her pretty new bonnet, and go ridy, ridy with mamma; so she shall.”

In the midst of this, the bird stopped and began to cry like an impatient child.

“Don’t cry, sweet,” she went on, changing her voice again; “there, there, pet, don’t cry; hush up, hush up.”

This conversation she carried on in the most approved baby style, until, becoming excited by the laughter of the company, she stopped, and began to laugh too.

After this, whenever she wanted to be very cunning, she would repeat this performance, much to the amusement of all who heard her.

Poll was a very mischievous bird, and on this account was not let out of her cage, unless Minnie or some one was at liberty to watch her.

Mrs. Lee, who usually sat in the back parlor, from which place she could hear Poll talk, was sure to know if the bird was doing

any great mischief, for she always began to scold herself on such occasions.

“Ah, ah!” she exclaimed, one day; “what are you about, Poll?”

Mrs. Lee rose quickly, and advanced on tiptoe to the door, where she saw the parrot picking at some buttons on the sofa, which she had often been forbidden to touch. Much amused at the sight, she listened to an imitation of her own voice, as follows:
—

“Go away, I tell you, Poll! I see you! Take care!”

Finding her buttons fast disappearing, she suddenly entered, when the bird went quickly back to her perch.

In the afternoon, when her husband returned from town, she related the incident to him and to Minnie.

“That shows us,” answered the gentleman, laughing, “how careful we ought to be what we say before her; we shall be sure to hear it again.”

After tea, when Minnie and her father were in the library, they heard Poll singing a variety of tunes in her merriest tones. They stopped talking a while to listen, and then both laughed heartily to see how quickly she struck into a whistle, as Tiney walked deliberately into the room in search of her little mistress.

“What a funny bird she is!” cried Minnie; “she runs on so from one thing to another.”

“In that respect she shows a want of judgment,” replied her father; “but, by the way, I have a story for you of a curious parrot, which I will read.

“A gentleman who had been visiting a friend near the sea shore, and concluded to return by way of a ferry boat, walked to the beach to see whether there was one ready to start. As he stood looking over the water, much disappointed that there was none in sight, he was surprised to hear the loud cry of the boatman, —

“Over, master? Going over?”

“Yes, I wish to go,” he answered, looking eagerly about.

“Over, master? Going over?” was asked again in a more earnest tone; and again he repeated, —

“Yes, I wish to go as soon as possible.”

“The questions were repeated constantly, and yet no preparation was made for granting his request. He began to be somewhat indignant, and seeing no one near upon whom he could vent his wrath, he walked rapidly toward a public house near by. Here his anger was speedily changed to mirth, for on going near the door he saw a parrot hanging in a cage over the porch, from whom all the noise had proceeded.”

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