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The Works Of Horatio Walpole, Earl of Orford

In Five Volumes

Walpole, Horace

London, 1798

The Magpye and her Brood, a Fable

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T H E
MAGPIE AND HER BROOD,
A F A B L E,

From the Tales of BONAVENTURE DES PERIERS, Valet de Chambre
to the Queen of NAVARRE ;

ADDRESSED to Miss * HOTHAM.

MDCCLXIV.

HOW anxious is the pensive parent's thought!
How blest the fav'rite fondling's early lot!
Joy strings her hours on pleasure's golden twine,
And fancy forms it to an endless line.
But ah! the charm must cease or soon or late,
When chicks and misses rise to woman's 'state.
The little tyrant grows in turn a slave,
And feels the soft anxiety she gave.
This truth, my pretty friend, an ancient wit,
Who many a jocund tale and legend writ,
Couch'd in that age's unaffected guise,
When fables were the wisdom of the wise.
To careless notes I've tun'd his gothic style;
Content, if you approve, and Suffolk smile.

* Henrietta, only daughter of colonel Charles Hotham, by lady Dorothy Hobart, daughter of John earl of Buckinghamshire, with whose sister, Henrietta countess dowager of Suffolk, miss Hotham, then ten years old, lived at Marble-hill, Twickenham.

ONCE on a time a magpie led
 Her little family from home,
 To teach them how to earn their bread,
 When she in quest of a new mate should roam.
 She pointed to each worm and fly,
 That crept on earth or wing'd the sky,
 Or where the beetle buzz'd, she call'd.
 But all her documents were vain;
 They would not budge, the urchin train,
 But caw'd, and cry'd, and squall'd.
 They wanted to be back at nest,
 Close nuzzled to mamma's warm breast;
 And thought that she, poor soul! must sweat
 Day after day to find them meat:
 But Madge knew better things.
 My loves, said she, behold the plains,
 Where store of food and plenty reigns!
 I was not half so big as you,
 When me my honour'd mother drew
 Forth to the groves and springs.
 She flew away; God rest her sprite!
 Tho' I could neither read nor write,
 I made a shift to live.
 So must you too: come, hop away:
 Get what you can; steal what you may,
 Th' industrious always thrive.
 Lord bless us! cried the peevish chits,
 Can babes like us live by their wits?
 With perils compass'd round, can we
 Preserve our lives or liberty?
 How shall we 'scape the fowler's snare,
 Or gard'ner's tube erect in air?
 If we but pilfer plums or nuts,
 The leaden ball will pierce our guts:
 And then, mamma, your tender heart will bleed
 To see your little pies lie dead.

F 2

My

My dears, said she, and bufs'd their callow bills,
The wife by foresight intercept their ills:

And you of no dull lineage came.

To fire a gun it takes some time;

The man must load, the man must prime,

And after that, take aim.

He lifts his piece, he winks his eye;

'Twill then be time enough to fly:

You out of reach may laugh and chatter;

To bilk a man is no great matter.

Aye! but—But what?—Why, if the clown

Should reach a stone to knock us down—

Why, if he does, ye brats,

Must not he stoop to reach the stone?

His posture warns you to be gone:

Birds are not kill'd like cats.

Still, good mamma, our case is hard:

The rogue, you know, may come prepar'd,

A huge stone in his fist!

Indeed! my youngsters, Madge replies,

If you already are so wise,

Go cater where you list.