

The Kind Deeds Messenger



The Latham Foundation Story Service for the Public Schools

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If we include animals in the law of duty and compassion, as we are commanded to, we work at the same time for the uplifting of our fellow-men.—Lamartine.

AMONG THE EARTH WORMS

By DOLORES WILKENS KENT

(Amigo, the little Elf, has become a magic Bumblebee, who is to live a year and a day studying the lives of insects, birds and animals, so that he may find out why human beings understand these nature creatures so poorly.)



"One thing puzzles me. I see that Mr. Earthworm is moving, but how does he do it," said Brother Buzz.

THERE must have been some heavy showers during the night, for when Brother Buzz flew out of his cosy little den at the base of the pink geranium-covered tree stump, the ground was sopping wet. The rain drops were still falling now and then, as the breeze softly blew the branches of the trees; but the sky had cleared, tho' a few little fleecy white clouds were floating about in the deep blue.

It was a beautiful fall morning in the garden where Brother Buzz lived; the wet trees glistened in the sunshine; the brilliant autumn-tinted leaves shone in their crimson and gold as tho' burnished by the cleansing rain, and every flower raised its little head, refreshed.

Brother Buzz buzzed around, sipping honey here and there, drinking the rain-drops that sparkled like diamonds in the golden rays of the sun. "Buzz, buzz," said Brother Buzz, "this is certainly a very nice breakfast."

He droned down to a border of clove pinks and tried a bit of that spiced honey; then, he sat blinking and wondering just what he would do next. Suddenly he spied a lot of long, dark-brown wiggling things on the garden-walk.

"Buzz, buzz," murmured Brother Buzz. "What on earth are these things?" He had been talking to himself and was quite startled to hear a voice say—"Creeeek, creeeek, those are earth-worms."

Brother Buzz looked all about, he couldn't tell where this strange voice came from. He looked up at the sky—it wasn't from there—he looked to the right—nothing, to the left—still nothing. He looked down—in the side of a small bank of earth a cricket was standing in the doorway of his tiny home, he was gently rubbing his wings together, and every time it made a noise like a creaking little song.

"Good morning, Brother Buzz," he said. "I have watched you flying about and often wanted to have a chat. You were wondering what earthworms are?"

"Buzz, buzz," said Brother Buzz. "Good morning, Mr. Cricket, I've never seen earthworms before, where do they come from?"

"They are all under the ground," answered Mr. Cricket, "but you haven't seen them because you were not particularly interested. You have to hunt in order to find them. These have been washed up by the rains."

"Buzz, buzz, washed up by the rains," repeated Brother Buzz. "I don't quite understand?"

"Earthworms live in tunnel-like holes in the ground," explained Mr. Cricket patiently. "When it rains many of them get washed out."

"Buzz, buzz, well, well!" said Brother Buzz, flying down on the walk to get a closer look at the worms. He buzzed over to where a big fellow was slowly dragging his queer body across the path. Brother Buzz droned almost in his face; that is, the place where his face ought to be, for Brother Buzz honestly couldn't find much of a face anywhere, only a queer slit-like mouth.

"Buzz, buzz, good morning!" Brother Buzz greeted him politely. The earthworm dragged along without an answer or even a wag of his tail, if one could call the end of his long body a tail.

"Buzz, buzz, I say—good morning—" Brother Buzz spoke still louder, thinking, perhaps, the earthworm was hard of hearing.

Mr. Cricket gave a little amused trill.

"Buzz, buzz, buzz, good morning, good morning, good morning!" This time Brother Buzz almost screamed, trying to make himself heard.

This was too much for Mr. Cricket, he fairly shrieked. Brother Buzz buzzed louder than ever in indignation; he hated to be laughed at; most of us do.

"Creeek, creeek, creeek," laughed Mr. Cricket, so hard that the cunning little beret perched on the side of his head fell off. Brother Buzz fairly bumbled. "Buzz, buzz," said he, "may I ask what you are laughing at? I don't see anything funny in the fact that Mr. Earthworm is too rude to answer me."

Mr. Cricket wiped his eyes with his left front leg, then he calmed down a bit, picked up his beret, stuck it over one ear as before and said—

"Forgive me for laughing like this, old chap, but it was so funny to hear you shouting at the earthworm, when he is deaf and dumb and can't see."

"Buzz, buzz, what, what?" stammered Brother Buzz.

"Exactly," repeated Mr. Cricket, coming over beside Brother Buzz. "Look closely and you will see that he has neither eyes, nor ears; so, of course, he cannot see nor hear as we do, but, he is extremely sensitive as there is a long nerve that runs the entire length of his body."

"Buzz, buzz, ooh, my! I should say he must be sensitive, with a nerve like that in his body," declared Brother Buzz. "He must feel pain keenly."

"Yes, indeed," Mr. Cricket nodded sadly, "and careless or cruel people never seem to think about that when they crush him under their feet."

"Buzz, buzz," said Brother Buzz thoughtfully, "one thing puzzles me, I see that Mr. Earthworm is moving, but how does he do it—without legs or feet?"

"Come stoop way down," suggested Mr. Cricket, bending over until his little nose was almost touching the earth. Brother Buzz did the same.

"Now, do you see funny short stiff bristles? And do you notice that the body of the earthworm is made up of rings? Between these rings are strong muscles. He pushes out one ring, using the bristles as feet, then draws the next ring up to it, then another and another, and when he gets to the last ring, he begins all over again. It's slow, but he covers a lot of ground."

Brother Buzz sat down flat on the garden walk and fanned himself with his hat. "Buzz, buzz, my, my!" he said. "This standing on your head is hot work, but really, Mr. Cricket, what a queer person this earthworm is. I think he is very interesting. Doesn't hear or see or walk, yet he gets along almost as well, however. How does he breathe? I don't see a nose," added Brother Buzz, stroking his own lovingly.

"Air passes through his skin; he really breathes through his skin." Mr. Cricket was becoming very interested in his subject. "And besides that the earthworm can feel the slightest jar. If you walk near him, no matter how gently, he can sense your footstep and disappear into his hole. He, also, can tell the difference between night and day. As a rule he eats at night, as he doesn't like the light."

"Buzz, buzz, well, I never!" ejaculated Brother Buzz. "I should say the earthworm is marvelous! Can I see where he lives?"

"Surely. I'll take you to a good place." Mr. Cricket looked about. Not far away was a big oak tree. Underneath the ground was always moist, and humans hardly ever went there. "That's the place," said he. "I believe we could find lots of earthworm burrows over there. You fly and I'll hop. Be with you shortly—by, by!" and Mr. Cricket gave a big jump in the direction of the tree.

Brother Buzz flew over in a bee-line and decided to search on his own account but he couldn't find a worm anywhere, and he didn't see a single hole. So he finally sat down and waited patiently, sipping some honey from a big purple iris. He was quite startled when Mr. Cricket, apparently out of nowhere, jumped right beside him on the flower.

"I can't find a worm or a hole," complained Brother Buzz.

"You don't know where to look," trilled Mr. Cricket. "I can see at least six holes right around us."

"Buzz, buzz, where, where?" asked Brother Buzz, turning about in a circle. "Do you see that tiny mound of earth?" asked Mr. Cricket. "Well, that is made by an earthworm and is right beside his hole." They flew and hopped down and Brother Buzz studied closely the funny earth pellets that formed the mound.

"The earthworm," said Mr. Cricket, gaily jumping over the little heap, "eats his way into the ground, forming his tunnel by swallowing the earth, and when it passes through his body he pats and pushes the castings into this form with his tail, like a little trowel."

He also digests his food before he eats it. You see he likes decayed leaves and when he gets a fresh leaf, which he cannot eat with much comfort, having neither teeth nor tongue — just large, loose lips — he sends out from his mouth a juice that makes the fresh leaf turn black and decay. This juice makes the leaf soft, and also enriches the castings he throws out of his body the fine soil that is good for growing things. Now, here is the burrow."

Brother Buzz peered into the dark little tunnel home of the earthworm, but it seemed empty. Mr. Cricket, who was hopping about, called him: "Come over here, Mr. Plowman is in."

Brother Buzz flew to his side. "Wait a minute," said he. "Why do you call him 'Mr. Plowman'? I can't see why eating dirt and digging holes gives him that name?"

"There is the secret," laughed Mr. Cricket, pointing to the ground. "In digging that long tunnel and casting back the soft earth on the surface, he loosens and stirs the ground, just like plowing, and when you have millions and millions of earthworms all over doing this work you can imagine the result. In damp places they live close to the top, but in dry ones they dig way down to where the earth is moist."

"Good gracious!" And Brother Buzz gazed respectfully at Mr. Plowman who was waving his head just above the top of his hole as tho' searching for something. He found what he wanted—a leaf, and taking the small end in his mouth, he slowly began dragging it back into the burrow.

"Buzz, buzz, will you look at that?" exclaimed Brother Buzz. "Why does he carry leaves and those tiny rocks to his hole?"

"That is his way of locking the front door," answered Mr. Cricket. "He piles up leaves and rocks in the mouth of his hole so that no one can get in; but in such a way that he can push by."

"Buzz, buzz. Do they live this way all the time?" asked Brother Buzz.

"Well, yes, tho' in the winter they dig deeper and have a sort of room at the end where two or three Mr. Plowmen can curl up together on the tiny round pebbles they carry down and sleep away the very cold winter days."

"Buzz, buzz. Curl up on stones! What on earth do you mean?" gasped Brother Buzz, who was particularly fond of a soft bed.

"Yes," said Mr. Cricket, positively, "just that. They lie on the pebbles—some think it is because in that way they can get more air above and below."

Mr. Plowman had now dragged the leaf entirely into the hole, from which a bit stuck out in a funny way. He then came half out again, waving about as tho' hunting for something else, when Brother Buzz gave a sudden gasp—

"Buzz, buzz! Look, look!" he cried. Mr. Cricket turned to see a big fat robin redbreast flying down toward the earthworm. The little Plowman had begun to retreat, but—would he be quick enough. Before Mr. Cricket could think of a thing to do Brother Buzz had flown straight at the head of the robin. With a loud buzz-z-z-z he went smack into Mr. Robin's face. The bird was so staggered with surprise that he sort of fell, more than flew to the ground, where he chattered with rage. Brother Buzz circled around and came down

beside him.

"Buzz, buzz. I am so sorry," said that naughty Brother Buzz. "I was flying about; got dizzy and didn't see you coming."

"No, I should say you didn't!" scolded Mr. Robin. "You nearly put my eye out, and I had just seen such a nice fat worm."

"Buzz, buzz, is that so? What a pity!" said Brother Buzz, soothingly. "But, there are lots of worms. Rest awhile before you start hunting again. If your eye feels like my head it must be pretty sore." And Brother Buzz took off his hat and rubbed his head ruefully.

Mr. Robin couldn't help smiling. Brother Buzz was such an amusing little chap, but, then he happened to glance where he had seen that earthworm; it was no longer visible. Mr. Robin smoothed his ruffled feathers; and muttering something about "fresh insects" flew away with a disappointed look at the empty worm-hole that had one little leaf sticking out.

"Thinks he's clever, doesn't he?" said a small voice beside Brother Buzz. And there sat Mr. Cricket calmly chewing a blade of grass. "You saved one little worm," he continued. "The birds do love them—it's a pity, for the Plowmen are mighty fine little people, mighty fine!"

"Buzz, buzz. They certainly are," assented Brother Buzz. "Do the humans realize what great work these earthworms do for them?"

"Some people do," answered Mr. Cricket gravely. "The ones who have taken the trouble to study these busy plowmen; they know that without them the earth would be hard, and trees, plants and flowers could not grow. Most of the whole world's surface passes again and again through the bodies of the earthworm, stirring and changing it into soft, rich earth, giving to the world its grain, fruits and plants—without which man, birds and beasts could not live."

"Buzz, buzz," bumbled Brother Buzz. "As I see it the earthworm really gives the most valuable service to mankind of all insects, birds or animals."

"Absolutely." Mr. Cricket nodded his head emphatically. "Without him there would be no vegetation."

"Buzz, buzz," asked Brother Buzz eagerly. "Are the humans grateful and kind to the little Plowmen?"

"As I said, only those who study and understand," said Mr. Cricket, and he put a world of scorn into his voice. "The others, just because the earthworm is ugly, think nothing of crushing him under their feet, or hanging him on a hook as fishing bait."

"Buzz, buzz. Ugh! How horrible," shuddered Brother Buzz. "Well, this has been a most instructive afternoon, but I must go now; it is getting late. Goodby, and thank you for telling me all about Mr. Plowman and what a wonderful little fellow he is. I shall tell all my friends to be kind to him and never hurt him."

Brother Buzz flew back to his pretty flowered den and the next morning he buzzed in and told me of his adventure with Mr. Cricket, and asked me to write it so that all you children would understand and appreciate little Mr. Plowman.

HUMANE EDUCATION COMMITTEE

The work of the Committee on Humane Education which Vierling Kersey has enthusiastically advocated, is going forward satisfactorily. Our superintendent of the Alameda County Schools, Mr. David E. Martin, will be Chairman of the Committee, which will meet at his office on January 14, 1931, at two o'clock, P. M.

The following article has appeared in the news items of many papers:—

Instruction of humane studies in California schools, as advocated by the Latham Foundation of Oakland, has been strongly indorsed by Willard E. Givens, superintendent of Oakland city schools.

He made this indorsement to the Foundation when, by advice of Vierling Kersey, it announced plans for forming a committee of educators to meet in Oakland January 14 to formulate a definite program of humane education.

This program will be presented to Vierling Kersey, State Superintendent of Public Instruction, who will give it to the State Curriculum Commission and the California Board of Education for final judgment.

"Humane education teaches a child to be kind and thoughtful for the welfare not only of animals, but of his playmates, parents and adult friends," said Mr. Givens. "It helps to mold his whole viewpoint on life."

The following committee members who have been definitely heard from as we go to press, are forming sub-committees which will take under consideration, systematizing the different aspects of Humane Education for study in the schools. Mr. Walter C. Nolan, Deputy Superintendent in charge of Personnel of San Francisco City Schools; Mr. Rudolph Lindquist, Assistant Superintendent of Schools of Oakland, and Mrs. Katherine Borneman, Superintendent of Hayward Grade Schools.

SCHOOL PROJECTS

The following story comes to us from Jean Calhoun, president of the Low Fifth Grade, Washington School, San Leandro, one that we find most appropriate for our New Year issue.

We have already given the projects from Palomares, Tennyson and Cornell Schools and we appeal to all the schools to contribute to this project so that they may be represented in the visual program that we are compiling for school use throughout the state.

CHRISTMAS CHEER

Mrs. Whitaker's class, the low Fifth Grade, has been doing its share for this year. The children gave \$1.50

for the *Post Enquirer* Salvation Army fund to feed the poor children at Christmas time.

Our principal, Mr. Banta, has put a lovely Christmas tree in our auditorium. The whole school have given clothes, food and toys to give to the Health Center of San Leandro, to distribute to the poor children.

Mary Ellen, one of our school mates, has the chicken pox. Our room wrote some letters and stories to her, telling about our Christmas party.

President JEAN CALHOUN,

Washington School, San Leandro.

THE YELLOW STRAY

By IANTHA A. COOKE

(Mrs. Iantha A. Cooke, teacher H5 in Washington School, San Leandro, California, has sent us the following poem, the true story of her own dog. It was her "kindly hand" alluded to in the closing lines which brought happiness out of misery to the "Yellow Stray.")

Homeless and hungry I am today,
A yellow dog—a worthless stray,
Wandering and lonely, dejected and sad,
Forlorn and wretched, and of course I'm bad—
Or so they say, when I beg for bread
At all the doors where my steps have led;
I crawl on the ground with my head in the dust,
To show that I am humble, for beg I must;
No other way have I, my wants to make known;
Could I only speak, I would cry and groan
And tell them I'm homeless and hungry and sad—
Not worthless and onery, and hopelessly bad.

The cabin's deserted, the Master's away;
I watched for his coming for many a day;
The kitten kept crying till I nearly went mad;
When it perished of hunger I only felt glad,
Tho' 'twas lonelier than ever, with the stillness around,
As I crouched by the door on the cold damp ground.
The Master seemed kind in his own rough way;
Could I only know what he said that day,
When he closed the door, and patted my head,
And turned to the hill where the pathway led.
How could he leave me and the kitten behind,
If his heart was right, and his thoughts were kind?

So now I'm only a yellow stray,
Begging my bread from day to day,
A home I am hunting and a master kind,
Not one who would leave me starving behind.
A "Home" with you lady? A crust of bread?
You will take me in and give me a bed?
I will roll at your feet and lick your hand,
For no dog is happier in all this land!
Oh, sweet to know my wanderings are o'er!
A kindly hand on my head once more!
A friendly voice in my yearning ears!
No more heartaches, no more fears!

—Washington School, San Leandro.