

THE MAN AND THE BIRDS

This is a story of an average man, not a scrooge but a kind, decent and mostly good man. He was generous to his family and upright in his dealings with other men. However, he just didn't believe all that incarnation stuff which the churches proclaim at Christmas time. It just didn't make sense and he was too honest to pretend otherwise. He just couldn't swallow the Jesus story about God coming to earth as a man.

"I'm truly sorry to distress you,' he told his wife, "but I'm not going with you to church this Christmas Eve." He said he'd feel like a hypocrite and that he'd much rather just stay at home but he would wait up for them. And so he stayed home and they went to the midnight service.

Shortly after the family drove away in the car, snow began to fall. He went to the window to watch the flurries getting heavier and heavier and then went back to his fireside chair and began to read his newspaper. Minutes later he was startled by a thudding sound. Then another and then another...a sort of thump or thud. At first he thought someone must be throwing snowballs against his living room window.

He went to the front door to investigate and found a flock of birds huddled miserably in the snow. They'd been caught in the storm and, in a desperate search for shelter, had tried to fly through his large landscape window. Well, he couldn't let the poor creatures lie there and freeze, so he remembered the barn where his children stabled their pony. That would provide a warm shelter, if he could direct the birds to it.

Quickly he put on a coat and galoshes then tramped through the deepening snow to the barn. He opened the doors wide and turned on a light, but the birds wouldn't go in. He figured food would entice them in so he hurried back to the house to fetch bread crumbs. He sprinkled them on the snow, making a trail to the yellow-lighted, wide-open doorway of the stable. But to his dismay the birds ignored the bread crumbs, and continued to flap around helplessly in the snow.

He tried catching them. He tried shoing them into the barn by walking around them waving his arms. Instead, they scattered in every direction except into the warm, lighted barn. And then he realised that they were afraid of him. To them, he reasoned, I am a strange and terrifying creature. If only I could think of some way to let them know that they can trust me. That I am not trying to hurt them but to help them. But how? Any move he made tended to frighten and confuse them. They just would not follow. They would not be led or shooed because they feared him.

"If only I could be a bird," he thought to himself, "and mingle with them and speak their language. Then I could tell them not to be afraid and could show them the safe, warm barn. But I would have to be one of them so they could see, hear and understand." At that moment the church bells began to ring. The sound reached his ears above the sounds of the wind. He stood there listening to the bells pealing the glad tidings of Christmas....

and he sank to his knees in the snow.