

The Swallow and the Little Birds

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By voyages in air,
With constant thought and care,
Much knowledge had a swallow gained,
Which she for public use retained,
The slightest storms she well foreknew,
And told the sailors before they blew.
A farmer sowing hemp, once having found,
She gathered all the little birds around,
And said, "My friends, the freedom let me take
To prophesy a little, for your sake,
Against this dangerous seed.
Though such a bird as I
Knows how to hide or fly,
You birds a caution need.
Do you see that waving hand?
It scatters on the land
What well may cause alarm.
"Twill grow to nets and snares,
To catch you unawares,
And work you fatal harm!
Great multitudes I fear,
Of you, my birdies dear,
That falling seed, so little,
Will bring to cage or kettle!
But though so perilous the plot,
You now may easily defeat it:
All lighting on the seeded spot,
Just scratch up every seed and eat it."
The little birds took little heed,
So fed were they with other seed.
Anon the field was seen
Bedecked in tender green.
The swallow's warning voice was heard again:
"My friends, the product of that deadly grain,
Seize now, and pull it root by root,
Or surely you'll repent its fruit."
"False, babbling prophetess," says one,
"You'd set us at some pretty fun!
To pull this field a thousand birds are needed,
While thousands more with hemp are seeded."
The crop now quite mature,
The swallow adds, "Thus far I have failed of cure;
I have prophesied in vain
Against this fatal grain:
It's grown. And now, my bonny birds,
Though you have disbelieved my words
Thus far, take heed at last,—
When you shall see the seed-time past,
And men, no crops to labour for,

On birds shall wage their cruel war,
With deadly net and noose;
Of flying then beware,
Unless you take the air,
Like woodcock, crane, or goose.
But stop; you're not in plight
For such adventurous flight,
Over desert waves and sands,
In search of other lands.
Hence, then, to save your precious souls,
Remains but to say,
"Twill be the safest way,
To chuck yourselves in holes."
Before she had thus far gone,
The birdlings, tired of hearing,
And laughing more than fearing,
Set up a greater jargon
Than did, before the Trojan slaughter,
The Trojans round old Priam's daughter.
And many a bird, in prison grate,
Lamented soon a Trojan fate.
It's thus we heed no instincts but our own;
Believe no evil till the evil's done.