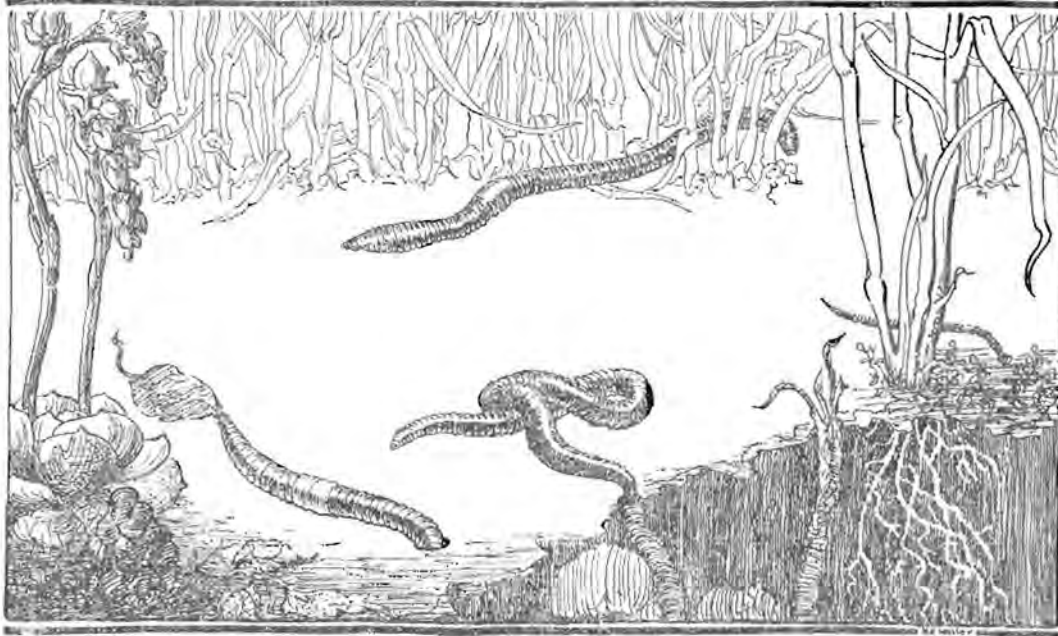


THE KIND DEEDS MESSENGER

THE LATHAM FOUNDATION STORY SERVICE
FOR THE PUBLIC SCHOOLS



I would not enter on my list of friends
(Though graced with polish'd manners and fine sense,
Though lacking sensibility) the man
Who needlessly sets foot upon a worm.

—COWPER.

OUR FRIEND SLOWLY-LOWLY,—THE EARTH WORM

By E. M. S. FITE



O-OO-DADDY, you just ought to have seen them! Hundreds of them all over the driveway and walk! The ground was so sopping wet that they were washed up out of their holes." All of this was said almost in one breath by little Virginia Mann as she capered around her father trying to tell him what she had seen.

"What are you talking about Virginia, what were washed up out of their holes?" asked Mr. Mann.

"Why, Daddy! worms of course! ugly, slimy, wiggly wriggly worms and some of them were drowned, and I think we shall kill the rest of them and sweep them away."

"Now Virginia, think twice before you kill those worms," said Mr. Mann. "I have told you and Tom many times that all life has its place and is of some use in the world and should not be wantonly destroyed. I can't stop now to talk to you, but let the worms alone, and this evening I shall tell you about the worms in our after dinner talk."

Later, Mr. Mann was as good as his word, and when he settled himself for the after dinner talk, with Tom and Virginia in their usual places, he began.

"So, little Miss Virginia you think that the earthworm is an 'ugly, wiggly, wriggly' creature without any rights, and no reason for living. Now I do not agree with you, and instead of that I shall call him 'Our Friend Slowly-Lowly,' for our friend he surely is! and he is the lowliest of creatures and slow at that. When I tell you some of the facts about this remarkable little creature you will change your mind about him, I feel sure, and you will never wilfully step on him nor otherwise kill him. Instead of injuring one, if you find him in a place where he is likely to be trod upon, pick him up carefully and put him on the grass or out of harm's way," said Mr. Mann.

Mr. Mann continued. "You will be surprised when I tell you that except for our little friend Slowly-Lowly the farmer would not be able to plough his land; the trees and grass and flowers would not be able to grow because the earth would be so hard and solid. The

earthworm has no legs, no feet, nothing but his funny little wriggly body, but with this little body, in the one end of which is a queer little mouth, he keeps all of the soil broken or ploughed up as it were. The top earth in which grass and plants take root and grow, and which is full of nourishment for them, has been prepared by earthworms at one time or another; all of the top earth has passed through the bodies of the earthworms, and been thrown up by them in the form of worm-casts."

"But Daddy," said Tom, his eyes wide in astonishment. "I never heard of such a thing. How can a few worms prepare the soil of a whole field? And just think of the millions of acres all over the world in which things grow. How can a few worms prepare all of that soil?"

"That is just what they do Tom, and that is just why the earthworms should not be killed because boys and girls happen to think they are not pretty to look at. There are millions and millions of these worms working below the surface of the earth all the time. The body of the worm is wonderfully fitted for the work it has to do and the life it leads. You must have noticed that a worm's body is very elastic. If you have watched one crawling you have seen him stretch out full length, then shorten himself again. He makes this movement by means of the rings which surround his body; there are between one and two hundred rings that make up an earthworm's body. Another queer thing is that the rings are furnished with bristles, which give him a good hold on the ground as he goes along. Between the rings there are strong muscles, and he moves by pushing out one ring, drawing the next close to it, then the next and the next and when he gets to the last ring he begins all over again. You see it is a slow process, but our little friend can cover a great deal of ground at that.

"Slowly-Lowly can crawl backwards or forwards equally well. At one end he has a mouth, but he has no eyes, no ears and no power of smelling. It is thought that he cannot taste anything, but he does feel; we know this to be so because we can see his nerves. He crawls always with one particular side of his body next to the ground and on this side of his body a large nerve runs all the length of his body from his head to the tip of his tail. Because of this large nerve in his body, Slowly-Lowly can feel everything over which he crawls, and it warns him if he comes to anything that is likely to do him harm, such as broken glass, or sharp stones, and he can draw back and away in time. From this large nerve there are smaller nerves branching out from it at each ring; so you see my children, our little friend is quite a sensitive little creature and suffers when he is hurt, just as you or I would suffer, though perhaps not as keenly. An interesting thing about Slowly-Lowly is that he can grow a new tail if by accident he loses a part of his tail. His nerves are so keen that he can feel the slightest movement on the ground near him, even the tread of a bird."

"Daddy, please tell us how the earthworm makes the soil ready for things to grow in," asked Virginia.

"Now let me see," said Mr. Mann, "if I can make it clear to you. You must know that an earthworm has a head which ends in a sharp tip; and below this tip is his mouth which instead of opening crosswise, opens up and down, the long way. I shall tell you here what a well known writer said about this; she says—'When he eats he draws the upper and lower edges of his mouth together making his head short and thick by doing so: using the edges of his mouth for cropping, like lips. His food passes down a long throat into a sort of crop; next into a gizzard, where it is ground up. The worm swallows little stones which go into the gizzard and do instead of teeth. Then his food passes out of the gizzard into another passage, and after the worm has kept back what he needs to keep him alive, the rest is thrown up at the mouth of his hole in the shape of beautiful, fine, rich black mould, for grass and flowers to grow in. This is his helpful work for us.' That is how the writer explains it. The earthworm also eats decaying leaves and turns them into mould faster than they would decay naturally. Another helpful task the earthworm performs is to drain the land by making holes; these holes let in the air beneath the soil and are channels for the rain. He has a way of dragging seeds of trees and plants into his hole, the seeds sprout and grow; so you see he is a planter as well as a tiller of the soil. In countries all over the world where things grow, except in very dry countries like the sandy deserts of Arabia, the soil for growing things has been prepared by the worms in this way.

"Now I am sure that you would like to know what kind of a house our friend Slowly-Lowly builds for himself, for even though he lives under the ground he has a home; and let me tell you he builds a snug and cozy house; it is very dry, he sees to that for he does not like to live in wet soil, although he likes some moisture and suffers very much if he is travelling along a dusty road where it is entirely dry. You may be able to render help to your little friend some time, when you see him in dusty surroundings, by sprinkling him with water and covering him with light earth. It is said that the worm cannot live many hours in a room without moisture.

"Slowly-Lowly burrows his home two, three or four feet down in the earth, almost in a straight line. Every little way he leaves lumps sticking out on the sides of the runway, these lumps act as rests for his bristles as he climbs up and down; the walls are made smooth by

a slimy fluid which oozes from his body. At the very bottom of his burrow Slowly-Lowly makes his sleeping room which is fashioned with great care, and lined prettily with tiny stones or seeds to make it dry. He has the cleverest way of drawing a leaf into his hole, and at the top of his burrow he will line a place with leaves, for he often sits up there at the entrance of his hole for a change of air. He never goes far from his home, and often when he sits with part of his body out of his hole to get the warmth of the sun, he will keep the tip of his tail in the mouth of the hole so that he can dart down quickly if he feels anything coming."

"Daddy," asked Tom, "how does the earthworm carry leaves and stones to work with when he has no feet, and he cannot see?"

"Tom, that would be an interesting thing for us to see if we could. Our little friend uses that queer mouth of his; he has no tongue nor teeth, and when he wants to draw stones, we are told that he uses his mouth with a sucking motion, and in that way he can draw quite good size stones. Once a stone weighing nearly two ounces was found drawn across the entrance to a worm's hole. He will close the opening of his house with small stones if he cannot find the leaves he wants. It is a pretty way he has of using leaves to stop his hole; he fits them in, one behind another and fills the cracks with earth. In the winter he lies coiled up down in his warm little bed-room, and not until the earth feels the warmth from the sun in springtime does he climb to the top.

"In the matter of eating, our friend Slowly-Lowly does what no other creature can do; he digests his food before he eats it. Doesn't that sound funny? You see he likes to eat decaying leaves, and when he must eat fresh leaves, which he cannot do with much comfort, for you will remember he has no tongue and no teeth, he sends out from his mouth a fluid which makes the fresh leaf turn black and decay; this fluid makes the leaf soft and partly digests it before he swallows it. Part of this food is for his nourishment, and the balance is thrown out of his body and forms a part of the fine, dark rich soil that is good for growing things."

"Why Daddy, I think this story is wonderful; one of the finest you've ever told us," said Tom. "It certainly makes a feller think, and makes him know that it is true that the littlest thing may be of the most use."

"Before we say good night," replied Mr. Mann, "I want to tell you of the experiments Mr. Darwin made with some earthworms which show that though the worm has no eyes he knows the difference between light and darkness; this is by means of his brain. The earthworm does not like much light, he works mostly at night. Mr. Darwin kept the worms in pots and he found that if he threw a strong light on the head of a worm he would quickly draw back in his hole, but if the light was thrown on his tail he took no notice of it. Mr. Darwin tried him with noises too, and found that he paid no attention to the loudest noises, even a shrill whistle, but when the pot was put on a piano which was played upon, the vibration or movement of the wood caused the worm to dart quickly into his hole. If you move or strike the earth above the home of an earthworm he will not come out; but because the mole is his enemy and digs under Slowly-Lowly's home, by digging under his home you will always cause him to come out of his home in a jiffy.

"Now Kiddies, I think that from this little friend of ours we can learn something. For one thing we learn that some of the most important work in the world is done by the quietest workers, who make no noise, no fuss, nor do they boast of what they do. It is a good thing to show kindness and consideration to every one who comes our way, be they humans or animals or crawling things, for we can never know the real value of any one by their appearance. Now good night and sweet dream to you." And with happy faces Tom and Virginia went to the land of dreams. I wonder if they dreamed of Slowly-Lowly?

TEACHERS' PAGE

MRS. GLASSBROOK, PRINCIPAL OF TENNYSON SCHOOL SPEAKS FOR HUMANE EDUCATION. We feel very grateful to Mrs. Glassbrook for this splendid letter because she so well understands the subject.

Dear Miss Latham:—

My conscience troubles me. You would need to be a country school teacher to know the uncomfortable feeling of being forced to let things go undone which you know should be done. No matter what happens this evening I am going to take time out to write you a personal letter.

We have been far more active than talkative out here, and I feel repaid for the extra effort expended.

There isn't a mean child in my room, but there are a few misguided ones, grown boys, who unlike the grown girl cannot be reached through the appeal to the tender emotions. All such attempts are labeled "sob-stuff."

Of course a teacher can induce a boy to practice kindness in the class room and on the playground, but it is the hours out of school that are the important ones. It is during these hours that he enters into the family plans of running off the female cat or dog by harsh

methods, of destroying nests and shooting birds in order to save the cherry, strawberry, and lettuce crops from them, of getting even with the balky horse who refuses to pull the plow, of "fixing" the old cow who breaks her chain and leads them a merry chase just before milking time, of poisoning the neighbor's dog who makes nightly raids upon their rabbit hutches, of "doing for" the cat who is on a strict diet of baby chicks, etc.

In most cases the view point of the parent as well as that of the boy must be changed. So many children agree with us merely to honor us, and then revert to type as soon as they are under the home influence. Lip service has no place in humane education. ONLY A SENSE OF FAIR PLAY DEVELOPED TO SUCH A DEGREE THAT IT HAS BECOME A HABIT WILL INSURE KINDNESS TO EVERY LIVING CREATURE FOR ALL TIME.

I have tried to develop friendly discussion (and it is discussed at the supper table, too) on questions like the following:—"Why will a busy farmer tinker patiently for hours with a balky Ford, but still cruelly beat a horse the moment he balks, without even trying to see what the trouble is?"

"Why do the chicken raisers dump all their dead baby chicks in an adjoining field if they do not wish the stray cats to acquire a taste for chicken?"

"No man leaves his valuables in a rickety bank. If your rabbits are valuable why not build strong hutches?"

"IS IT BETTER TO HAVE THE BIRDS EAT A FEW OF THE CHERRIES, OR TO HAVE WORMS NESTLE IN ALL OF THEM?"

I have made a big item of the Seagulls saving the Kern County farmer from the mice. We have watched the Seagulls follow the tractors here, and have noted the blackbirds working for the farmer in back of the plow just as much as the horse works for him in front of it. We have talked about the shipping and slaughtering of animals for food, the need to change the present deplorable conditions.

Let me assure you that we thoroughly enjoy the Kind Deeds Messenger. It is considered quite an honor to be chosen to read it to the class. I usually award the honor to some fifth or sixth grade boy even though he isn't as entertaining a reader as a girl might be. It makes the fellows feel that it is real "HE MAN" stuff and what it lacks in elocution it gains in force.

Being a very busy teacher, I have insisted that the KIND DEEDS CLUB be more than a passing fad. We agreed not to recite "The Voice of the Voiceless" unless we actually believe it away down deep in our hearts. We also struck off the names of those who had done any unkind thing to a play-mate on the school grounds or going to or from school. There are no longer any spiteful "You can't play" remarks to be heard. Practically every one of the thirty children have qualified and deserve their buttons.

With best wishes to you in your wonderful work, I remain,

Your sincere helper,

(Mrs.) TILLIE H. GLASSBROOK.

KIND DEEDS CLUB CODE OF HONOR

WM. F. H. WENTZEL

1. I will seek to govern my life by a keen appreciation of the RIGHTS AND FEELINGS OF OTHERS.
2. I will seek to keep alive within me that spark of human greatness called SYMPATHY to the end that I may be considerate and merciful in all my acts.
3. I will give ear to the cry of pain or distress, and will give up my play, my game, and, if possible, my work, to come to the rescue and to render the service needed.
4. I will always remember the law of kindness: "ANYTHING WHICH GIVES PAIN TO ANOTHER SHOULD NOT BE PLEASURE TO ME."
5. I will protect the weak and helpless and speak for those who cannot speak for themselves.
6. I will ever seek to change sadness to happiness and to bring joy into the lives of the unfortunate.
7. Though others may scoff, scorn, or abuse, I will be courageous in resisting all acts of abuse or cruelty to any living creature.
8. I WILL BE A FRIEND TO THOSE WHO NEED A FRIEND and stay by the task until it is finished.
9. I will sacrifice pleasure or gain if thereby I can prevent unwarranted pain or suffering of any living creature.
10. I will listen to the voice of conscience and apply the GOLDEN RULE in dealing with every living creature.
11. I will be helpful every day and keep my life filled with deeds of kindness and acts of love.
12. I will place HUMANE CONDUCT above selfish desires, to the end that my life may add to the happiness and advancement of the community and of the age in which I live.

We think upwards of several thousand children have won their buttons. Do they all know the symbol of the Kind Deeds Messenger with the outspread wings? He stands on a very high rock, far above the earth but not so far that he cannot see what is going on. When he sees that a boy or girl has done a worthwhile deed he is so happy he takes his bugle and he blows a loud blast, so that the stars which many people think are inhabited may know and feel glad.



The Latham Foundation for the Promotion of Humane Education, Inc.
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www.latham.org