

CHAPTER V - THE UNCLE

Agnes Grey deals with the challenges of being a governess to the Bloomfield family, focusing particularly on the problematic behaviors of her charge, Tom Bloomfield, influenced heavily by his uncle, Mr. Robson, and the indulgent nature of his parents. Tom is taught to value excessive drinking and to cruelly mistreat animals, a behavior encouraged by both his father, who prefers gin and water, attributing to his ill temper, and his uncle, who not only abuses his own dogs but also takes pleasure in birds' nest-robbing with the children. Agnes, deeply disturbed by this, attempts to instill a sense of morality in the children, particularly aiming to deter them from birds' nest-robbing, an effort that is often undone by Mr. Robson's influence.

A significant incident occurs when Tom brings a nest of callow nestlings, intending to torture them for sport, a plan that Agnes staunchly opposes. Faced with the dilemma between allowing the cruelty to proceed or taking a drastic step to end it, she chooses to crush the birds with a stone to spare them from further suffering, an act that leads to severe backlash from Tom, Mr. Robson, and subsequently, the Bloomfield parents. Despite the harsh criticism and the strained relationship with Mrs. Bloomfield that ensues, Agnes stands by her decision, grounded in her moral convictions and the teachings of mercy and kindness.

The presence of guests exacerbates her challenges, as she struggles to maintain discipline among her pupils in the face of their rude and disruptive behaviors, which the parents fail to address adequately. Agnes's efforts to correct these behaviors are undermined by the parents' and guests' indulgence, leaving her feeling isolated and ineffectual in her role as a governess. The chapter concludes with Agnes contemplating the end of her tenure with the Bloomfields, reflecting on her struggles to make meaningful progress with the children amidst the undermining influences of their family environment.