

THE
LITTLE
FORESTERS
CLARENCE HAWKES





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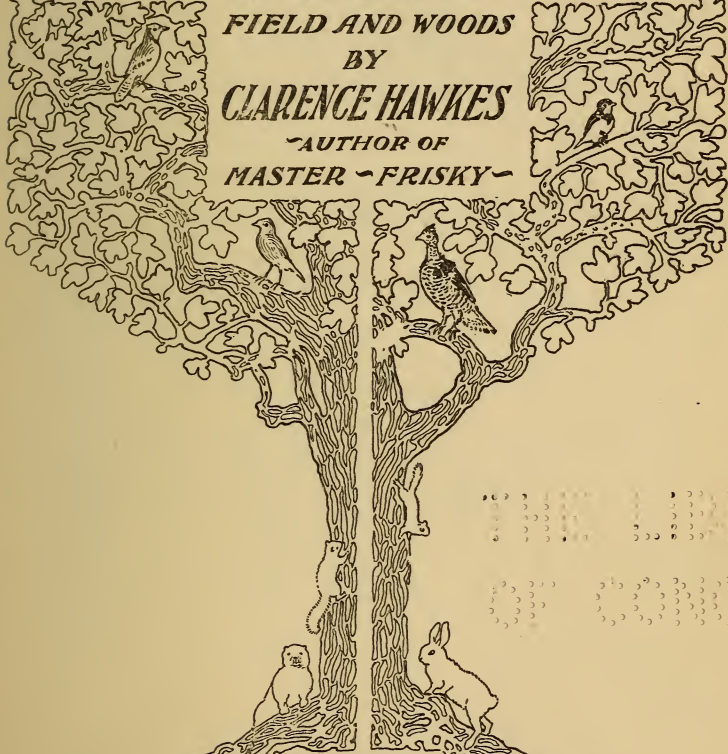


THE POUNDING CAME FROM AN OLD APPLE-TREE.



THE LITTLE FORESTERS

A STORY OF
FIELD AND WOODS
BY
CLARENCE HAWKES
~AUTHOR OF
MASTER ~FRISKY~



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THE LITTLE FORESTERS.

CHAPTER I.

GRANDMA'S WINTER VISITORS.

NOT all children are as fortunate in living near to their grandparents as we were, for it is not often that one can go to his grandmother's at any time of day in ten or fifteen minutes, but this was the fact in our case and we thought ourselves very lucky indeed.

When we were tired of playing at home and longed for something different, we would go in and say, "Mother, may we go up to grandma's?" To which mother would usually reply, "Yes, dears, if you will be good and do just as grandmother tells you, and will start for home before dark." Then there was a shout of joy

and a clatter of small feet down the garden path and we were gone.

The walk over to grandmother's was a never-ending source of delight. First, it led out through our own garden and into the orchard. What child who is country born does not recall the old orchard with delight? There are its straight rows of quaint trees, each different from the other and each having some peculiar limb, or hiding place under the roots that the other does not possess. If it is autumn there is the fruit, bright red and yellow, loading the limbs down even to breaking. If it is springtime, how sweet the air is with the scent of apple-blossoms, and how pleasant is the drowsy droning of the bees as they gather honey! Down through the old orchard winds the path to grandmother's, until it is lost to sight in the beech woods.

Here in the springtime are green, mossy knolls, where hepatica and partridge-berry love to hide, and tender young ferns and blood-root. Further on, beyond the woods, is a meadow where a little brook sings joyously

all day long. What a temptation to sit long upon the plank bridge, dangling one's feet over the cool water, watching the minnows play hide-and-seek in its eddies or the gleam of sunlight upon the ever-changing ripples. But we must not loiter too long, for up through another orchard, as delightful even as our own, we can see the pleasant old farmhouse under the big elms. Although we cannot see her yet, we know that grandmother is standing there on the porch waiting to welcome us with a smile on her face and a cheery word. Then we know there will be an invitation to come in and see what grandmother has been baking. It may be gingerbread or it may be cakes, but it is sure to be something good.

When I go way back into the dim corners of my memory to those things that are almost forgotten, I am sure to see a kindly old woman with a cap and spectacles, and the sweetest kind of a smile. That is my grandmother, and a dearer old lady never lived, for although her years were many, yet her heart was always young and full of sweet sympathy for children.

It was from her that we learned that most important lesson of being kind to animals, and particularly to birds and squirrels, of which she was very fond. In the winter time, when the storms came and the winds blew, and these little creatures were cold and hungry, it was her special delight to befriend them. "In the summer," she would say, "they can take care of themselves, but in the winter, when we are comfortably housed, we should think of them out in the cold."

With these kind thoughts in her mind, grandmother would scatter grains of buckwheat and bread crumbs for the sparrows and the chickadees, and I would watch through the window while they hopped about on the snow picking up their breakfast. Then there was always a piece of meat nailed to a convenient post that the birds knew well. Many of them made their breakfast upon this half-frozen meat. There were chickadees and sparrows, woodpeckers and grosbeaks, snowbirds, and even an old crow came when very hungry, but he did not often venture so near the house. One



CHARLES COPELAND

AN OLD COCK PARTRIDGE WITH BIG BLACK RUFFS AND VERY POMPOUS MANNERS.

night, just at dusk, I saw a curious looking white owl standing upon the post, making a late supper.

But the strangest of all grandmother's feathered visitors, and one who is usually very wary, was an old cock partridge with big black ruffs and very pompous manners. This fine fellow would strut around with all the dignity of a turkey-cock, but he would fly away with a great noise at the slightest sound. Grandma said it was unusual for a partridge to venture so near the house and that there was a good reason for his coming. Several years before she had found him, one day, by the roadside, stunned and nearly dead. She had carried him home in her hands and had cared for him, keeping him in a hencoop until he was well, when she had let him go. He had always remembered this kindness and was occasionally seen near the house. Grandma said she knew him by the way he flew, one of his wings having been injured when she found him.

But the cutest of all her winter pets was a pair of gray squirrels that I named Frisk and

Frolic, from the manner in which they frisked and frolicked about, chasing each other up and down trees and along the top of the wall. Sometimes they would go scurrying up the big maple in front of the house until it made me dizzy to look at them, and then I would ask grandma if they would not fall, but they never did.

The squirrels did not like the same things to eat that the birds did. Grandma always placed their breakfast upon the back porch so that I could watch them eat. It was great fun to see them stand upon their hind legs and turn a nut about in their forepaws and all the time keep their sharp teeth biting away at the shuck until the sweet meat was in sight, when they would eat it with great zest. Corn they were also fond of, and Frisk, the larger of the two squirrels, could carry off a whole ear at a time. This he always did when they started for the woods. Grandma said that he was taking it home for dinner, and of course grandma knew.

One evening late in the autumn, our parents

being away on a visit, we children were sitting about a fire in the open grate while grandmother told us stories. It was quite cold for the time of year, and a hard hailstorm had come up. It was so cosy, though, in the warm room, and so pleasant to sit inside and hear the storm beating against the window-panes, that we were quite content with our lot. The stories had been discontinued for a few moments that we might better enjoy the warmth and firelight, when in a lull of the storm we heard a sharp blow against the window glass. "What is that?" we children asked in astonishment, for it was strange enough that anything should be moving in such a storm. "I think it was a bird," replied grandmother; "the poor thing has probably become bewildered by the storm, and, attracted by the light, sought shelter in the warm room."

It seemed so out of place that anything should be out in the storm, and we asked so many questions about the birds: what they did during storms, what kind of a bird this one was, and was he hurt? that finally, to satisfy

our anxious questions, grandma lighted the lantern and went out-of-doors to see what she could find. Presently she returned bringing a small, feathered object in her hand.

It was a poor little sparrow who had not known the danger in the window glass and had dashed his head against the hard surface. Thus what had seemed to be an escape from the storm and a refuge had brought him low. He lay feebly fluttering in grandmother's hand, and we children all gathered around and lavished childish pity upon the poor little bird.

When, a few moments after coming inside, with a feeble gasp and flutter the sparrow died, my little sister cried as though her heart would break, and my own sympathies were moved more than I cared to show, being a boy. I went to the kitchen for a drink of water that I might cover up my feelings. It was well enough for a girl to cry, but it would never do for a boy.

Grandmother wrapped the dead sparrow in a newspaper and put him upon the mantle-piece for the night, and the next day I dug his

grave in the garden, and we buried him with all solemnity.

It was a small affair, this death of a sparrow, and something that happens in every storm, but it has lingered in my mind ever since, and somehow, even to this very day, I cannot shake off the pathos of this little tragedy. First will come the picture of the storm beating outside and the small bird fleeing before the sharp blows. Then, on the other hand, is the picture of the warm room, cosy in the glow of firelight. The storm-tossed bird sees the warmth and light and flies toward it, only to dash out his life against the window glass.

It is well that every child should learn early in life this lesson of the dead sparrow — then will he pity and protect the dumb creatures. Then will he see how man was set above the creatures of the fields and woods, not to destroy them, but to protect and encourage them, and be mindful of their coming and going. And why should he not, since we are told that not a sparrow falleth to the ground unnoticed by our heavenly Father?

CHAPTER II.

THE TRYSTING TREE.

THE trysting tree was an ancient oak, standing in the centre of the forest, where the friendly birds, squirrels, and smaller creatures of the woods were in the habit of meeting each day. These meetings were held at about sunrise and sunset, to gossip and talk over the happenings of the day before, or relate the adventures of the night that had just passed, for living as they do in a world that is hostile to them, where they have the snares of larger animals and birds, as well as those of man, to avoid, it is not strange that many a thrilling adventure was related under the old trysting tree to an expectant group, each one of whom was silently thankful that it had not been he.

Of the company that met at the oak I best remember the following :

There was Nimrod, the crow, as black as a coal, who always sat in a watchful attitude upon the topmost bough of the oak, balancing himself nicely, and looking in every direction at once.

He was the sentinel, and his vigilance delivered the little people from many a danger. Nimrod was a natural sentinel, for his croaking made him none the less watchful, and he could carry on a flirtation with a saucy jay, winking and blinking with one of his bright eyes, while he scanned the landscape with the other. But there was not very much to fear at this time of day; the only enemy who would be likely to be about was Sparrowhawk, whose coming and going no one could account for. He was hated and feared by all the birds, as well as by the squirrels, for he not only killed to satisfy his hunger, but also for malice. He took a particular delight in robbing birds' nests, eating the eggs, and killing the young birds. So that all the birds were very careful, when building their nests, that Sparrowhawk was not around.

Of the animals, cats, weasels, and foxes were the most to be feared, and it took the combined vigilance of all to scent these dangers.

It was very strange, though, how quickly these little folks of the woods would completely disappear at a sound of warning from any one of their number. No matter how merrily they had been chattering away a minute before, at the warning note the woods would suddenly become as still as death. Nimrod would rise high in air and fly away, Ruff-grouse would follow his lead on silent wings, while the jays and the squirrels would hide in the treetop. The chipmunk would slip into his hole at the foot of the tree, and the rabbit would squat under a bush, and being just the color of the ground, it took the sharpest eyes to discover him; while Frisk and Frolic and their cousin Redder had a way of hiding that baffled all inquiry.

Each of these little creatures is possessed of an instinct that tells him just what is the best thing to do in time of danger, else how could

they exist in a world in which they have so many enemies.

The great sun that always brings so much gladness into the world was just mounting up over the eastern hills. His warm beams, falling upon the treetops, made bright patches of sunlight in the aisles of the sweet, green woods. Although the sun was very early in his coming, he was not ahead of the little people of the woods, who are very thrifty and up betimes. For more than half an hour they had been stirring, and by the time he was quarter of an hour high they had all breakfasted and were ready for the morning meeting at the trysting tree.

The squirrels had been away to a distant orchard for sweet apples ; the birds had found their usual number of worms and bugs by the roadside or in the mould beneath dead leaves and ferns, while Bob, the cotton-tail, had made a fine breakfast of birch twigs and wintergreen leaves, of which he was very fond.

Nimrod, who had made his meal from the cornfield, and had afterwards taken a bath at the

brook, was as usual the first to arrive at the tree. He at once proceeded to call the others with a series of loud "caws," for which he was famous. Then there was such a pattering of small feet, for the squirrels came running in the treetops and the rabbits on the ground, each chattering and scolding away in his own language, all of which was understood by each member of this great family.

The last to arrive at the trysting tree was Chucky, who was so fat that he could scarcely waddle, and for that reason was usually late. "Hello, Chucky, hello," cried all the little folks in chorus, for Chucky was quite a favorite with them, and he amused them with his clumsy ways.

"Well, Chucky, how are beans?" asked Nimrod, when the fat, lazy woodchuck had seated himself at the foot of the tree and Nimrod had declared the meeting open for discussion.

"Firstrate, Nim, firstrate," replied Chucky, with a grunt of deep satisfaction; "the only trouble is I have eaten so many that I can hardly walk."

"You are getting pretty free with the farmer's beans, and I am afraid he will get after you again, one of these fine mornings, with his thunderstick," said the crow. "That was a very close shave that you had the other morning, and if I had n't happened along he would have got you then."

"Tell us about it, Nimrod, tell us about it!" cried all the Little Foresters.

"Well," said the old crow, straightening himself with dignity, "it is n't very much of a story, but I do think that it adds another feather to the glory of the crow family. It was this way:

"Chucky was down in the bean-patch getting his breakfast and I was sitting upon the top of the old maple in the mowing, when I happened to see the farmer coming down the road with the thunderstick over his arm.

"Whom is he after now?" I thought to myself, and then I looked down to the bean-patch and saw Chucky, and the meaning of the farmer's early walk was plain.

"How could I warn poor Chucky, that was

the question. I knew that he was such a stupid fellow that he would not see or scent danger, and it looked very much as though his hide would be drying on the barn in another hour." At this point Nimrod looked seriously down at Chucky, whose hair stood up at the thought.

"Well," continued the crow, "if I was to fly down and tell him, I would get in range myself and be peppered for my pains. You people all know I do not like to have my feathers ruffled with big shot. Fortunately I thought of that member of our family who dropped the stones into the pitcher and raised the water until he could drink, so I set my wits to work.

"Then I had a bright idea. I flopped down to the ground and picked up a big pebble; then I rose high in the air and went sailing over the place where Chucky was eating beans. I knew I was out of reach of the thunderstick, and so I was not afraid. When I got just above Chucky I dropped the stone. He at once raised up on his hind legs to see what had disturbed him and saw the farmer and

started for his hole. 'Bang! whang!' went the thunderstick, but Chucky was so far away that it did no harm, and I tell you it did n't take him very long to get into his hole."

Chucky felt very much like a hero when Nimrod had finished his story, and he grinned broadly, while the Little Foresters crowded round to tell him they were glad the farmer did n't get him.

"Oh, well," said Chucky, in his easy-going way, "I guess" — but what he would have said we do not know, for at a warning note from Nimrod there was a whirring of wings and a patter of small feet, but none too soon, for with a scream a large hawk swooped into the top of the tree after his own morning breakfast which he was late in getting.

The smaller birds and the squirrels fled away into the thickest treetops, and of a sudden the forest became as still as death. Chatterbox, the red squirrel, was not three feet away in a hole in the tree, but Redtail did not see him, and he could not have got him if he had, a fact the squirrel well knew, but he kept very still

nevertheless. Redtail glared savagely about him. The tree had been so full of fur and feathers a few moments ago, and where had it all gone?

Then he caught sight of Bob, the rabbit, squatting under a bunch of brakes, and darted down at him, and then a race began which would have been very comical had it not been a matter of life and death to one poor cottontail.

Bob sprang from point to point, keeping in the underbrush all of the time and dodging like a bounding ball. Again and again the great bird swooped for him and opened his terrible talons, and poor Bob barely escaped. Once he even got a claw full of the rabbit's fuzzy fur, and left a bad wound upon his back, but Bob did not care for wounds as long as his good, long legs were left with which to double and twist.

Then Nimrod came to Bob's assistance. He darted at the hawk and pecked at him savagely, and all of the time he kept up a most deafening cawing, partly to distract the hawk, and



BOB SPRANG FROM POINT TO POINT.

partly to call his friends whom he knew were not far distant.

Then Bob made a desperate spurt through an open place where he barely escaped from the talons of the hawk, and dove under a tangle of deep brambles and vines and was safe.

"Caw, caw," cried Nimrod, derisively, "caw, caw." The hawk clenched his talons in fury and screamed back at Nimrod, and was about to fly at the brave crow, when he noticed several of Nimrod's friends coming through the woods, so he beat a hasty retreat and was soon lost in the distance.

Bob then came out of the bramble and thanked Nimrod for the service that he had done him, and then scampered away to the swamp where he lived, feeling that he had had excitement enough for one day, and thanking good fortune that he had escaped.

CHAPTER III.

A LIFE OF FEAR.

It is hard for us human beings, who live under the protection of the State and its laws, to realize the constant fear in which the Little People of the Forest live.

No act of their lives, from the first days of responsibility to that of their violent death (for these wild creatures rarely die of old age) but is done guardedly.

The very first law that the wild creature is taught is that of self-preservation; in fact, his whole life resolves itself into the problem of just living and keeping clear of all his enemies.

Watch a woodchuck as he gets his breakfast upon the young clover, and see with what caution the meal proceeds. He nibbles away at the tender heads for a few moments, and then rears cautiously upon his haunches and

looks about in all directions. He also sniffs the air suspiciously from the windward side, and takes even more care in the opposite direction.

What need has he to be so cautious, you may ask. His pelt is worthless, and he cannot eat a dollar's worth of clover in a year.

Well, in the first place there is a long gun that hangs in the kitchen over the fireplace up at the farmhouse. Chucky has often heard it roar on a summer's morning, and he carries many a small pellet in his tough hide that came from its grim barrel. It is only because the gun is old and rusty that Chucky is alive at all to whistle his defiance to the clumsy hunter.

Then there is Grip, the farm dog. He and Chucky have been sworn enemies ever since that day when Grip tried to pull the woodchuck from the wall and got a savage bite in the nose for his pains. Grip was a puppy then, or that bite would have been Chucky's last.

Besides the farmer and the dog, there is sly Lord Reynard, who wishes to catch Chucky

alive and carry him home to his den for the young foxes to torment and finally tear to bits.

Occasionally he finds the dirt in the mouth of his hole disturbed, and then he knows a trap is buried there, and if he steps upon the loose dirt that he will be caught, so he uses the back door or seeks another hole until the trap is removed.

One of these summer mornings, when he is sleeping peacefully in his snug hole, a turtle, scorching and smelling hideously, will come scurrying in, trying vainly to get away from the burning cotton tied to the back part of his shell. This is a great peril for Chucky, — even if he is not suffocated by smoke, there is danger that his nest, which is lined with hay and leaves, will be set afire, and he be obliged to run straight into the open mouth of Grip, or if he escapes the dog there are eager boys ready to give chase with clubs, and poor Chucky with his short legs and fat body has small chance in such a match.

But Chucky is no more in danger than the other Little Foresters ; in fact, he is full as safe

as any of them, and is supposed to live a luxurious life, free from care and in the midst of plenty.

Whistle at the rabbit who is hopping peacefully along the woodland path, and see with what a startled air he rears upon his hind legs to listen. His ears are erect, his eyes large with fright, and his nostrils distended to catch the scent; turning this way and that he tries to look in all directions at once, and when he does at last catch the scent,—that these little creatures fear above all others,—how he scurries away upon those nimble legs in which alone is safety!

Although he flees along the pathway like an arrow, yet he goes with caution. At the slightest sound he will squat under a bush and keep so still that even the eye of a woodsman is often deceived. The rabbit, by a kind provision of nature, is always the color of the earth, so in the autumn he is brown like the fallen leaves, but in winter he is white as snow.

“Who are the rabbits’ enemies?” I hear the young reader ask.

Well, the domestic cat is crouching by the pathway just ahead of him waiting his coming. Redtail, the hawk, so far up in the sky that he is almost invisible to the eye of man, is watching poor Bob, and if he gets out in the open he is down upon him. Grip, the farm dog, loves to give him a chase when he gets a chance. There is not much danger from Grip, who is not very sure on the scent or fleet of foot, but there is danger when fleeing from the dog that the cotton-tail will run into a snare, or be taken unawares by some other enemy.

At night when he goes to sleep in his hole or a hollow tree, he knows not how soon the ferret may disturb him, and fleeing from this danger he will run into an open bag at the mouth of his hole. It matters not that it is against the law to hunt him with a ferret, for no one is by to see but the pale moon and the soft stars, when he is taken from the bag and his neck broken, and they tell no tales.

CHAPTER IV.

THE GALLOPING HESSIAN.

THE Galloping Hessian was a red-crested woodpecker who lived for a long time in our orchard, and in whom I came to take a lively interest.

You may wonder a little at the name I gave him, but it was one that pleased my childish fancy, and when I have explained its true significance I am sure that you will agree with me in thinking it most appropriate.

Now all of the members of the woodpecker family, not only the red-crested woodpecker, but also his cousin, partridge woodpecker, and their more stylish cousin, the pilliated woodpecker, have a peculiar motion in flying that gives the impression of a galloping horse. When they first spring from the tree to fly, they drop down fifteen or twenty feet, but

quickly rise to about the height from which they started and then across the fields they go, rising and falling in their flight, for all the world like a galloping horse. So upon a bright spring morning, when the sunbeams played upon his brilliant red crest, and set off his shiny black coat to good advantage, it was very easy to imagine that my woodpecker was a galloping Hessian.

The first I ever saw of him was one warm April morning when I heard a great whacking out in the orchard, and I went to see what it was all about.

I soon discovered that the pounding came from an old apple-tree, and creeping cautiously along, I got a fine look at him before he saw me.

He was standing upon a decayed limb from which the bark had been peeled by wind and weather, whacking away at it like the merry little woodchopper that he is.

With his sharp claws dug into the wood, he stood bracing himself with his tail, which was spread out fan-shaped. This gave him a good purchase so that he could ply his short, sharp

bill with terrible strokes. The chips came down in showers, and the sharp rat-a-tat-tat of his blows rang out upon the morning air with a great noise. So fast he struck that the eye could not follow the motion of his head, which seemed all the time to be in one place, while the blows were so near together that it sounded like the long roll upon a drum, done by a very skilful drummer boy.

Why was he working away so frantically, I wondered ; but even while I asked myself the question, came the answer. For he stopped whacking and began examining the wood curiously, cocking his head first upon one side and then on the other. Then he gave two or three sharp whacks, and thrusting his bill deep into the wood drew out a fat worm which he ate with great relish.

He had been after his breakfast. Who would have imagined that a bird would find his breakfast in a dry, dead limb, and how did he know that the worm was there? Why did he try the tree where it was dead? While I was still trying to solve the mystery, he flew away and

I saw him no more that day, nor for several days.

But after a few days he came back and I saw him frequently at the old apple-tree ; we could even hear his merry rat-a-tat-tat from the house when he was getting his breakfast or supper.

“ Whack, whack, ping, ping,
Other birds may chirp or sing ;
But my one song is the merry stroke
With which I pierce the elm or oak ;
Away with chirping and with singing,
While I set the echoes ringing.”

This was what the Galloping Hessian always seemed to be saying when he perched upon a dry limb and plied his short, strong bill.

But more was going on in the old apple-tree than I dreamed of these spring days, for it must be a hungry bird indeed that would chop away for half a day at a time, although I did not stop to consider the fact.

About a month after the first appearance of my little friend in the old apple-tree I saw him come flying, galloping as usual, across the fields and light upon this particular tree. I

looked again, but he was not there. I was wondering where he could have disappeared to, when of a sudden he appeared upon the dead limb, and even while I watched him he disappeared in the most peculiar manner. My astonishment was still greater when I discovered his head sticking out of a hole in the tree a few feet further up and his bright eyes seemed to be watching me.

He had made him a house in the old apple-tree and come to live with us all the summer through.

The next day I climbed up to investigate. It was a very tall apple-tree and my hair stood up as I looked down to the ground.

There, just under the dead limb, the Galloping Hessian had built himself and Mrs. Hessian the cutest house that you ever saw, proof against both the wind and rain, and almost anything that crawls, creeps, or flies. He had chopped a round hole about three inches in diameter in towards the centre of the tree for three or four inches, then it suddenly ran straight down for six inches more, and there

at the bottom was the nest made of hair and bits of fuzz, very neat and comfortable

One morning early in May, when the apple-blossoms were sweet upon the half-leaved trees, and the air seemed mild and warm, there came up a terrible wind-storm accompanied by hail and lightning. The sky grew suddenly dark, the wind howled frightfully, and the hailstones fell like bullets. The thunder rolled in one continuous cannonade, and the lightning was so bright that I dared not look out of the window, but hid in the further corner of the room.

Just before the storm came up I had seen Mr. and Mrs. Hessian flying home to their snug house. Something in the air or the sky had told them that it was coming. But the storm departed with the same haste that it had shown in coming, and the sun was soon shining brightly, as though it had never gone under the clouds.

Then, full of boyish curiosity as to what had been doing outside, I went out-of-doors. Finally my wanderings led me to the old orchard, and then it was a natural thing to go to the

ancient apple-tree, for it was one of my favorite trees.

I could hardly believe my eyes when I beheld it stretched upon the ground with many of its rotten limbs broken in the fall; but my first thought was of the Galloping Hessian and his wife. I soon discovered them galloping wildly about the orchard, now lighting upon this tree and now that, and never staying long in a place, and always returning to their ruined home.

I clambered into the top of the tree in search of the woodpeckers' nest. Just at the point where they had pierced the tree it had split in falling, and there upon the ground was the carefully shaped nest, with the broken eggs near by. No happening of after years has left a deeper impression upon my mind than has this tragedy of the Galloping Hessian. His home had seemed so secure from all danger, and here, in the twinkling of an eye, the whole fabric had fallen to earth, his dream and mine alike had vanished.

While I sat upon the trunk of the fallen tree,

the woodpeckers galloped about the orchard for the last time as though it was hard to leave; they hovered a moment over the remains of their home, then galloped away over the fields, and were soon lost to sight. I stood up that I might see them as long as possible, but finally the rhythmic rise and fall of the red crests was lost to sight, and they were gone never to return to the scene of their sorrow.

I wept bitter tears in the empty nest, and tried vainly to piece the broken eggs together, but the dream was ended and I had awakened to one of the stern realities of nature.

CHAPTER V.

CHUCKY'S LAST BREAKFAST.

It was a warm summer morning early in July, and the pale white streak that denotes the coming of daylight was just growing in the East. The sun would not be up for half an hour, but the birds and the squirrels were already stirring, for these little folks are very enterprising, and many of them are through breakfast when the sun comes up.

Chucky was asleep down in his hole, dreaming of sweet clover and tender new beans. It was cool and pleasant underground during these hot days, and that was why he ate breakfast very early in the morning and supper late in the evening, for he was a lazy fellow, and hated to bestir himself when it was hot.

Presently he woke up, and although his nest was several feet under ground and very dark,

something told him that it was beginning to be light. There is a way animals have of telling certain things that they cannot hear, see, or smell. Birds and animals can foretell the coming of great storms or earthquakes, and man is often warned by them.

When the miners who are digging deep down in the earth see the rats all leaving the mine, they hurry to get above the ground, for they know there is soon to be a terrible cave-in or explosion, and that the rats have scented danger. We call this instinct, but it seems like a higher intelligence that we do not possess. If any of Chucky's friends had asked him "how he knew it was day when he could not see the light," he would have grunted and said, "he just knew and that was all."

Chucky stretched himself, rolled about in his hole, to get the cramps out of his joints, and thoroughly wake himself. What a fat, sleepy woodchuck he was getting to be! How he enjoyed this living in the clover, fattening himself at the farmer's expense! As he thought of the fine row of beans he had stripped the



"CAW, CAW," CRIED NIMROD.

morning before for breakfast, he grinned and chuckled.

How lucky he was to have discovered this deserted hole two years before, and then to have grown up in such luxury as this! He would stay here and eat beans and clover, and occasionally a turnip, as long as he lived.

With these pleasant thoughts Chucky stretched himself again and then crawled lazily out of his hole. The sun still wanted fifteen minutes of being up, and the air was deliciously fragrant. Chucky sniffed it with keen enjoyment. First on the windward side and then in the opposite direction. It was more difficult to discover a foe when the wind was blowing his scent away from you, but finally he decided that the coast was clear and started gayly for the bean patch.

"Caw, caw," cried Nimrod, from far above him. "It is a fine morning. I am going down to the river for a plunge, you had better come along and wash your greasy face."

"Good luck to you," replied Chucky, with a shrill whistle that rang out loud and clear

on the morning air. "I prefer beans to brooks."

Chucky could hear Cock-robin singing in the big maple by the road, where he had built his nest this year. How pleasant the song he was singing! It must be fine to sing like that for one's self whenever one wanted. Then for a vain moment Chucky wished that he was a bird, and could sing, but only for a moment.

"Wheh-h-h-h," he cried with a long-drawn whistle. "I would much rather be a woodchuck, then one can have a hole to go into when he is frightened," and he trudged on after his breakfast. But he did wash his face some as he went, for the grass was soaking wet with dew. It was great fun to bring down showers of these bright drops, and smell the fragrance of the flowers as he stirred them.

Soon he arrived at the bean patch, and began his meal with all the zest of a boy who had done the chores and driven the cattle to pasture before breakfast.

Chucky's teeth were sharp, and the pods of the new string beans were very tender, and the

way he stripped the hills did him credit as a hungry woodchuck. Far away by the brook he could hear Nimrod's lusty "caw, caw," and at the same time there was the tinkle of a cow bell up the road. The sun had now risen in all his glory, and his coming had been heralded by the Little Foresters, with song and chatter; the locust, too, was singing in the grass; it would be a warm day, when he sang so early.

Nimrod flew up from the brook-side, and perched upon an old oak in the pasture, that he might sun himself after his bath, and admire the glitter of his feathers, for he was very vain. From his high perch he could see Chucky in the bean patch, and he envied him his breakfast. Then looking over in the mowing next to the bean patch he saw something that made him quake with fear, for there, crouching behind the wall, thunderstick in hand, was the farmer. Nimrod fairly held his breath and his eyes grew big as he strained them to see what would happen next. The farmer peeped cautiously over the wall, but drew back quickly and raised the terrible

thunderstick ; then Nimrod knew that Chucky was eating his last breakfast. He could not fly above him and warn him as he had done before, for the thunderstick would speak long before he could get there ; besides, he would put himself in range, and one crow was worth several woodchucks. But he could do one thing, so he raised his head, swelled out his breast, and sounded forth his well-known note of warning. " Danger, danger, danger," it seemed to say, and the soft morning winds wafted the sound far across the fields. All the Little Foresters heard it, and hastened to shrink away into wall or treetop. Even Chucky heard it, busy as he was munching beans, and stopping, reared cautiously upon his hind legs and sniffed the air. This was the farmer's opportunity — a stream of fire leaped from the thunderstick, and its roar echoed over hill and valley. Chucky's hide was tough and he carried many small pellets in it already, but the distance was short, and the farmer had aimed with care.

Nimrod saw his friend give a big jump, tumble over and over in the beans, and then



CHARLES LOPELAND

CHUCKY REARED CAUTIOUSLY UPON HIS HIND LEGS.

lie quite still. The farmer went up and poked poor Chucky with his foot. He was quite dead, so he lifted him by the hind leg and carried him away to the house.

Nimrod flew slowly toward the trysting tree, calling the Little Foresters as he went. There upon the topmost branch of the oak he sat, silent and sad. Soon they came flocking from field and forest, bush and brake, till all were assembled. "Good morning, Nimrod," they cried, but the crow made no answer.

When the tree had become fairly alive with fur and feathers, Nimrod cleared his throat and asked, "Friends, are we all here?"

Then a hush fell on the little company, and they looked at each other with eyes full of fear, for all had heard the thunderstick. Then grave old Bob, the cottontail, replied from his place at the foot of the tree, "No, my friend, we are not all here." All looked down at Bob, and saw that Chucky's place by his side was vacant.

"Where is Chucky?" they cried in chorus.

"That is the question," replied the old crow,

with great deliberation, "where is Chucky?" Then he told in a few broken words what he had seen, and all went away into the woods to think it over and each to grieve after his own fashion.

Chucky had been a silent little fellow, but they all liked him, they had always greeted him warmly when he waddled into the morning circle and took his place at the foot of the tree.

Ah, well, it was the way they all went, the way of the forest, where no creature ever dies of old age. But their children would take their places, and the world would go on just the same.

CHAPTER VI.

HOW COCK-ROBIN SAVED HIS FAMILY.

FROM the morning of our first acquaintance Cock-robin has ever been the cheeriest of birds, and as the bird family are noted for their good spirits, this is a very strong statement.

It was the first of April, the morning sun was sending its bright rays into my chamber window, to shame me into wakefulness, but presently I was awakened by a perfect flood of the most bewitching bird-song.

I started up, rubbed my eyes, and listened, but there was no mistaking the sound: Cheery, cheery, cheery, chirrup, chirrup, chirrup, and in the clearest, strongest notes that I had ever heard from a robin.

It may be that the song seemed the sweeter and clearer because it was the first robin song

of the year; but aside from that there was always a peculiar tenderness in the singing of Cock-robin that I have never heard equalled.

I went to the window, and pulling the curtain aside a little, looked cautiously out, not wishing to disturb so welcome a friend, although I did want a glimpse of the performer.

There he was upon the old elm, not ten feet from my window, and I stood very still lest I might disturb him. He was standing erect, with his red breast swelled to its utmost, and singing as though he would burst if the song were stopped; but no one wished to stop it.

He was a fine specimen of the American robin. His ruffs were very marked, and his entire plumage was rich and warm in tone. All of this was in direct contradiction of the rule that the dullest colored birds are the sweetest singers, for he still poured out that delicious song. Presently he flew away to look for his breakfast, and it was as though a bit of heaven had departed. Then it was that I noticed a peculiar thing about him, by which I could always tell him from his fellows. When he

started from the elm, I thought that he was going to the cedar, but not so, for he turned and went ten feet to the west of it. "Ah, he is going to the driveway," I said, but this guess was too previous, for he swung still more to the west and fluttered down into the garden. "How queerly he flies," I thought; "perhaps one of his wings is shorter than the other." This I afterwards learned was the case, for he always flew tacking a little to the right, and his destiny was as hard to determine as to tell what a cross-eyed man is looking at.

Cock-robin hung about the buildings for several days after his first appearance. As he was so sweet a singer you may be sure that we encouraged him by throwing out bread crumbs and other dainties, and by not frightening him. After about a week he disappeared for several days, but finally one morning I heard him again. On going to the window I discovered that he was not alone, but perched upon the branch of the elm near him was a smaller robin, whom I guessed was a female. This

guess proved to be the right one, for Cock-robin had been away courting, and had now brought home his wife, and together they were looking over the country and deciding where to build.

We called the new-comer Brownie, from the dull color of her plumage, and in time grew to think quite as much of her as of Cock-robin himself. They finally decided to build in the elm, and late in April set to work upon the nest, and for about a week there was great activity in the robin family. They were continually flying to and fro; bringing straw and mud, and also bits of twine which I supplied to help along the good work. In about a week the house in the elm was ready for occupancy, and Brownie took possession and proceeded to lay five blue eggs. For the next few days Cock-robin sang and sang, and from the sweetness of his song I knew that Brownie was setting, and that he was singing, not for me, but for his little mate upon the nest.

One afternoon early in May there came up a violent wind storm, and the great elm bent

and writhed and thrashed its long arms upon the roof of the house. When the winds had stopped blowing, and the rain and hail had ceased, so that small sounds could be heard, I discovered a great commotion in the family of Cock-robin. Cock-robin and Brownie were flying to and fro, crying, "Quit, quit, quit," so I went out to investigate. The reason for their cries was not far distant, for there in the yard was the mud-house that they had builded with so much pains, and the eggs were all broken but two. I knew the robins would not use these eggs again, so I carried them into the house for a keepsake.

But the robin is a cheery fellow, always ready to forget his grief, so Cock-robin and Brownie soon ceased their cries, and the very next day began building again in the elm in a more secure spot.

Again the little mud-house was re-fashioned and more eggs were laid, and again Cock-robin sang for Brownie, but he could not help the rest of us hearing.

After the young birds came he was very

busy getting worms for them, so he did not have so much time for singing.

One morning he was flying home to the house with an angleworm, when Sparrowhawk spied him. Now of all the birds that fly, Cock-robin most hated and feared Sparrowhawk, who is the cruellest and most vicious of all the hawks. Sparrowhawk kept very quiet until he saw where the robin went with the worm, and then followed as swift and as sure as death. Cock-robin and Brownie fought bravely, but they had to keep just out of his way to avoid being killed themselves, so finally they were driven from the nest, and Sparrowhawk proceeded to eat up the nestlings before their very eyes. I arrived upon the scene just in time to see Sparrowhawk fly away, closely pursued by the two robins.

Again despair reigned in the family of these much afflicted birds. We people, possessed of higher intelligence and less pluck, would probably have given up at this point, but not so the robins. It was a long time before I could find their third nest, but finally I happened



COCK-ROBIN AND BROWNIE FOUGHT BRAVELY.

upon it in the stump of an old apple-tree. With one more mishap, narrowly averted by Cock-robin's pluck and presence of mind, a family was finally reared.

It was nearly the middle of July when the family was hatched, and even then they had a narrow escape of which I was a distant witness.

I had been down in the meadows one morning trout-fishing, and was returning to the house, when I stopped to rest at a favorite seat under a maple in the pasture. I had been seated but a minute when I heard the distressed "quit, quit, quit" of a robin. At first I could not locate the cries, but finally I decided that they came from the old stump where Cock-robin lived, although it was nearly forty rods away. Usually I could not have heard a robin at that distance, but the morning was very clear, and what little breeze there was blew in my direction.

To make sure I stood up, and by straining my sight could just see a robin flying wildly about the old stump, but no cause for the commotion could I see. But it was very evident

from the bird's rapid flight that something was the matter, so I resorted to the use of a small opera-glass that I frequently carry for the study of birds. With the aid of the glass I could see the robin quite plainly. It was Brownie, and something was clearly the matter. There was also another robin coming like the flight of an arrow from the woods nearby, and by the circular manner of its flight I knew that the second bird was Cock-robin. It was very strange. What could it all mean? Then I fell to examining the old stump closely through my glass, and when I finally discovered the cause of all this commotion my astonishment was so great that the glass nearly fell from my hand.

There upon the stump of the apple-tree, wriggling and writhing every minute nearer and nearer to the nest of young birds, was the hideous form of a huge, black snake, who was known among the Little Foresters as Black Lightning.

I was so far away from the scene of this tragedy that I could do nothing, for the snake would reach the nest long before I could reach

the tree. I could merely stand where I was and see how it all ended. My sympathy was all that I could give the birds this time.

Up, up crept the hideous writhing form of the snake, with Brownie darting at it and the snake striking at her every time she came near enough for a blow. Every second brought him nearer to the nest, and I could see no possible escape for the young birds. True, Cock-robin was coming like a brave knight-errant to their rescue, but what could he do against the ugly snake?

Black Lightning had now wriggled his way up to within two or three feet of the nest. If Cock-robin is to do anything it must be done quickly, and as though in answer to my thought he shot into the circle swept by my glass. Straight up to the nest he flew, and hovered a moment over it almost within reach of the snake. He then drew back two or three rods, where both he and Brownie circled about watching the snake intently. He has given up the fight, I thought, and I was disappointed, for I had expected to see so valiant a bird make

a brave stand for his nest and his young. Then the snake wriggled a foot or two nearer the nest and raised his ugly head for his prize, but instead of making a meal of the fledgelings, he suddenly began to wriggle about as though discomfited by something, and then to my great astonishment he began to descend in haste, when a few feet from the ground he let go his hold and tumbled into the grass.

I did not wait to see more, but made all haste across lots to the old stump to discover if possible how Cock-robin had foiled his enemy.

When I reached the tree nothing was to be seen of the snake, and Cock-robin and his mate were twittering softly about the nest.

"How in the world did you do it?" I asked, involuntarily speaking aloud, and as though in answer to my query, Cock-robin lifted something from the nest and dropped it upon the ground at the foot of the tree.

I stooped to examine it. It was a spray of three or four very bright green leaves of some plant that I was not familiar with, having a very rank odor. I picked the leaves up to

examine them more closely, but the sap from the broken end of the branch made my skin burn, and my eyes began to smart and water from looking at it, while a nausea like seasickness seized me. With a shudder I flung the poisonous plant away, and none too soon, for in two hours my hand was swollen badly and my eyes were nearly closed with inflammation.

I searched all my books upon botany to identify the plant, but have never been able to do so. I am confident that it is not generally found in the temperate zone, but was some poisonous tropical plant, the seed of which had, by some strange chance, been dropped in our soil. But even so, it is still a mystery how Cock-robin knew where it was growing, and by what instinct he knew that it was poisonous to the snake.

I had often read of like incidents in tropical countries, but had been doubtful of their truth, but here was a demonstration of it at my very door.

After all, was it any more wonderful than a

thousand things that we see and hear in the animal and plant life about us every day? Life without intelligence living intelligently, and small creatures without reason showing a deeper intelligence in many things than man.

I am still pondering over these things, even as the poet Bryant wondered as he saw the wild goose taking its unerring flight through the trackless heavens without a compass, yet guided by some instinct or intelligence across a continent to the very inlet or bay, or even the nesting place, that it has left six months before.

NOTE. The author has frequently seen it stated that the leaves of the white ash dropped upon a snake have a paralyzing effect. It is also said that some ground birds protect their nests by partially covering them with white ash leaves.

CHAPTER VII.

FRISK AND FROLIC.

FRISK and Frolic were a beautiful pair of gray squirrels who lived in an old sugar orchard, where they had the most ideal home that a pair of squirrels ever possessed.

In the first place the grove in which they lived is what is called "first growth" and very tall, and a gray squirrel will not demean himself by living in small trees. He likes to be up in the world, where he can look down upon his fellow-creatures and get a good view of what is going on. And besides being tall trees, the old maples were full of sweet seeds in the early autumn. If you had gone into the woods any morning in October, and had sat very still under one of these great trees, you would soon have heard tiny bits of something falling, and if you were a woodsman you

would at once know that the squirrels were at work.

Then a little further on in the woods there was a hickory grove, and here in the autumn was a feast that did the heart of a squirrel good just to look upon, for there among the leaves were walnuts, and what squirrel does not know the taste of a shagbark? But they did not usually eat them at once, but stored them away in the nest until winter came. Then when the winds howled outside, and the snow was deep upon the ground, and it was impossible to gather mast, thanks to his forethought the squirrel could sit comfortably in his hole, nibbling away at the sweet meat of the walnut.

Still further on in the woods there was an occasional chestnut, and Frisk always made it a point to pick out a fine tree of these nuts and mark it for his own. Then some night, just at dusk, when something told him that there was to be a hard frost, he would go and drop down a bushel or two of burrs, the largest upon the tree, for a squirrel is very particular



FRISK AND FROLIC.

about his nuts, and always has the best that the tree affords.

Then in the morning he would go to his tree and find that all had happened just as he expected, for there upon the ground would be his chestnut burrs all nicely opened by the frost.

Some of my little readers may ask, How did Frisk know that there was to be a frost that night? I shall have to answer that I do not understand how he knew, or how all the Little Foresters know a great many things that they do know. But it seems to be given them to understand many things that man does not, so that they may take advantage of them.

There was also a fine apple orchard near the sugar camp, where Frisk and Frolic occasionally went for sweet apples; but they did not like to venture so near the house. Besides, the apple orchard belonged to their noisy Cousin Redder, who delighted above all things to tease the gray cousins, and play pranks upon them.

If Cousin Redder saw the gray squirrels in

his apple orchard he would straightway set up such a chattering and scolding that they were soon glad to leave, although each usually carried away a sweet apple to the maple woods, where they could eat it in quiet.

For all Cousin Redder is so noisy a chap, he is not a provident squirrel, as he never lays up any store for the winter, and often gets very hungry during the cold months. One winter he got so starved out that he would have died, had not Frolic taken pity on him and dropped down a few nuts each morning when he came to the foot of their tree to beg for his breakfast. This was very kind of the Grayers, and Cousin Redder was never so saucy after that, and did not object to their coming into his orchard the following summer.

It was a pleasant sight to see Frisk and Frolic playing on an autumn morning in the tops of the great maples. Back and forth they would go, running in the very tops of the trees, leaping from limb to limb as easily and as gracefully as a bird moves in the air. They rarely lose their hold, for if they cannot

catch by their feet they will grasp the limb with their teeth. If they do happen to fall, they spread out as flat as possible, and come down through the air almost as slowly as a leaf, and the alighting does not seem to bother them at all. For sheer sport I have often seen them jump from the top of a tall tree to the base of another tree, forty or fifty feet away. I do not think if he were put to it that a squirrel would hesitate to jump from the top of a church steeple, although it makes us shudder to think of such a thing.

But God has made these little fellows for running and jumping, and he taught them how to do it when he put the first pair in the tree-tops.

The happiest morning in all the year for the squirrel family is that when the baby squirrels come. Then Frisk and Frolic cease their chattering and playing and go soberly about their business, for they have more important matters to attend to. The babies are such helpless little mites that it takes all of Frolic's time to cuddle them in the nest and

keep them warm, and Frisk is very busy providing breakfast and supper for his family. But as the summer days come and go the baby squirrels grow strong until they can roll and tumble about the nest. Finally they even go away into the tree-tops to learn of their parents the art of running and jumping, which is a squirrel's greatest delight.

But a squirrel's life is not all joy, for they have their trials and tribulations as well as all things that live, and they must be ever on the lookout or in some unguarded moment something will do them harm. There is Redtail, the great hawk, who lives in the sky. There is nothing that he likes better for breakfast than a fat squirrel, and there is no accounting for his coming and going.

CHAPTER VIII.

BILLY WILSON'S BOX TRAP.

ONE rainy day while Billy Wilson was playing in the garret, where there were so many wonderful things and always something new, he found a queer box that he had never seen before. It had a sort of door, or cover, that lifted up by a string running to the back of the box, where a stick was stuck through a hole inside. For a while he amused himself by lifting the door and letting it down with a loud bang.

Finally he took the box downstairs to his grandfather to ask what it was, for grandfather knew everything and was always ready to answer questions. Billy had always claimed that a grandfather was the next best thing in the world to a Shetland pony.

"Grandpa," he cried, all excitement, run-

ning into the old man's room with the strange house under his arm, "I have just found the queerest kind of a house with a funny door that is not like a door at all. What do you think it is, grandpa?"

Grandpa took his spectacles from his pocket and put them on, for his eyesight was poor and he could not tell a wheelbarrow from a wagon without his specs.

"Why, Willie," he said, "you have found the old box trap. I have caught many a squirrel in it in my day. It is one that I made when I was a boy." Then he showed Willie how to pass the string over the end of the box and catch the small stick at the end of the string in a slit in the spindle. They then fastened a part of an ear of corn to the spindle inside the little house, and the trap was baited and set. "Now, Willie," said grandpa, "you take a stick and touch the corn and see what will happen." Willie did as he was told, and to his great astonishment the door of the box dropped suddenly and caught the stick.

That afternoon when it had stopped raining,

Billy took the funny little house under his arm and started for the orchard where he had decided would be the best place to catch a squirrel.

He found a smooth stone upon the top of the wall where the trap would rest firmly, and here he placed it with the door pointing towards the woods. He carefully baited it with an ear of corn, then sat down at a distance to see what happened, for Billy expected that a squirrel would come along and be caught at once.

He amused himself for a long time munching apples and watching the trap, but as no squirrel appeared, he finally went home, where he found his particular friend, Frank Snow, waiting for him. Frank had come over to see the new swing that Billy's father had put up for him the day before in the big elm. It was the best swing in the neighborhood, and the boys were all eager to try it. So Billy and Frank amused themselves for a long time with the swing, and when they were tired of swinging they went to the barn where the mows

were filled with new hay. What country boy does not like to play upon a new haymow? The hay is so fragrant, the mow so soft and springy, and it is such fun to jump from the big beams. Frank and Billy had such a fine play that afternoon that Billy forgot all about his box trap, nor did he remember it even in the evening.

That night when Billy came to the supper table, to his great delight he found a crisp new mince pie looking smilingly up at him, and his mouth watered at the thought of its delicious contents of raisins, currants, and preserves.

Billy never knew where his first piece of pie went to, it disappeared so quickly, and he passed his plate for another.

"I am afraid it will not be good for you," said his mother. "It is very rich and may give you bad dreams."

"Oh, no, it won't, mother," cried Billy; "I know it won't, will it, pa?" Billy knew that his father was more apt to indulge him than

his mother, so he always appealed to him at such times.

Billy held up his plate so beseechingly and his father put in a plea for him, so that he got a second piece of mince pie.

That night when he lay in his little bed watching the moon through the window, he thought of his box trap and wondered how he could have so long forgotten it. "I hope I'll have a squirrel in the morning," he said to himself, and with these words he fell asleep.

The next thing Billy remembered he was walking in a beautiful wood. It was summer time, birds were singing and everything was more beautiful than he had ever seen it before.

He walked on for a long time through the shady avenues, admiring the flowers and listening to the bird songs. Presently he strolled under a great oak, where to his astonishment he found the cutest little house that he had ever seen in all his life.

There were four or five windows and one door, which was open wide. Billy went in and sat down in a little chair which fitted his size

so well that he thought it must be made for him.

Upon the floor there was a fine carpet, and at the further end of the house was a table with dishes on it, but they were covered over with a spread, so that Billy could not see what was there. He went and lifted up the spread and peeked under, and what he saw made him shout with delight, for the table was covered with goodies, pies, cakes, and doughnuts, and in the middle of the table was a big basket of candy.

Then Billy remembered that he was terribly hungry. Why, it seemed to him that he had never been so hungry before in all his life, so he sat down and began to eat. Pies and cake disappeared as though by magic, until there was nothing left but the basket of candy.

Then Billy reached for that, but he no sooner touched the handle of the basket than there was a loud bang that made him jump up and look around; to his great astonishment he found that the door by which he had entered had shut. This did not trouble him much, though,

at first. When he wanted to go out he would open it, for who ever heard of a door that would shut and not open, so he sat down again and began eating the candy, but it did not taste as good as he had expected, so he stopped and went to examine the door.

He looked it over from top to bottom, but could find no knob or latch. Then he pushed upon it, gently at first, and then with all his might, but it would not give an inch. It was very strange; Billy began to grow uneasy and turned his attention to the windows. These he found to his surprise were covered with iron bars. It was queer he had not noticed it before, but he had been so greedy that he had seen little except the pies and cakes.

Then he began to get uneasy, and walked up and down, trying first the door and then a window, but both were quite tight. There was the basket of candy which he had hardly touched, but he had no appetite for it, or for anything else. He could not stay still. It was so lonesome and so quiet in the little house. Perhaps the door would open in a few

minutes and he would go home to his folks. At the thought of home and parents, Billy's lip quivered, — he might never see them again. Perhaps it was a bear's house into which he had walked, and they would soon be home and eat him. At the thought of such possibilities he began walking up and down very fast, striking and kicking at the door and shouting for help.

“Papa, papa; mother, mother,” he cried, “come and get me, I am caught in a terrible house and cannot get out.”

The more he cried and pounded the more frightened he became. He shook the bars of the windows and bit them with his teeth, until at last he fell down exhausted.

Then he heard a noise like the sound of a great army marching. Tramp, tramp, tramp, it went, and the ground shook with each step. Billy climbed up quickly to one of the windows and peeked out, but what he saw made him nearly lose his hold and fall to the floor, for coming through the woods was a giant as tall as the tallest tree, and every time he

stepped, the ground trembled. Presently he began to sing, and the sound of his voice was like the heaviest thunder.

“ I am the giant who lives in the woods,
Far up the mountain side.
When the people hear me they hasten away,
And all in their houses hide.

“ I live upon cattle, on cattle and corn,
I eat up a heifer each day.
When I am thirsty I drink in the stream,
I'll drink up the river some day.”

Here the song ceased, but Billy could hear the echoes of it rolling away over the hills like distant thunder. The tread of the giant was growing louder, Billy's hair stood up and his teeth knocked together.

He dared not peek out of the window lest he should see the giant's terrible face and die of fright, so he crouched down in a corner and waited.

Tramp, tramp, tramp, came the great feet of the giant, right up to the little house, and then to his terror Billy felt the house lifted up and set in the top of a tree. Then the door

was raised a very little and Billy could not help looking up.

The giant's face was covered with whiskers, but Billy could see two eyes like great red lanterns, and a double row of teeth that were so large they made cold shivers run down his back, and his breath nearly left him he was so frightened.

"Oho," roared the giant, "I have got you at last, you little rogue, and ain't you cunning? I'll take you home and the children shall have you to play with.

"You did not know what a box trap was, did you? You thought it was a little house," and the giant laughed until the woods rang. He then lifted the house upon his shoulders and Billy felt himself borne swiftly away over the tree-tops to an unknown land.

The giant took such long steps that it jounced the little house on his shoulder, and Billy tumbled about in a most uncomfortable manner, but he did not mind this, for his mind was filled with awful forebodings as to what the giant would do with him when he reached home.

He had read of giants who even ate boys, and he thought perhaps this might be one of the hungry kind. By-and-by he could hear water splashing every time the giant stepped, and he thought they must be crossing a river, which was the case. After they had crossed, the giant began climbing a very steep mountain, and here he occasionally stopped to rest. Once he stopped to get himself a cane which he made from a small tree about a foot through and twenty feet long; this he dug into the ground to help himself along as he climbed the mountain.

By-and-by he stopped in front of a great hole or cave in the side of the mountain, and thumped upon a tree trunk with his cane until the woods rang with the blows. "Mehitable," he thundered in his terrible voice, "I am here, come out and see what I have caught in the box trap." Pretty soon a giantess, nearly as large as the giant, came out bringing the baby in her arms. The giant baby was crying, and the noise he made was as loud as the bellowing

of a bull. It made Billy's ears ache to hear him, but the mother did not seem to mind it.

Then the giant opened the door of the box trap and the giantess peeped in. Her face did not scare Billy as the giant's did, for it was not all whiskers, but it was enough to terrify a small boy.

"Take him out, Thunderbolt," said the giantess, "and let me see him." Then the giant reached in his great hand and took Billy out, nearly smothering him in so doing. Billy was awfully frightened to have the giant touch him, for his hand was so strong that he was afraid he would crush him before he thought, even if he did not mean to do him harm.

"My, ain't he pretty?" said the giantess; "see how he trembles. I guess he is scared to death. But won't he be a cute little thing for the baby to play with? You don't suppose that he would bite him, do you, Thunderbolt?"

"He had better not," roared Thunderbolt, in tones like the deepest thunder; "if he does, I will drop him into the soup kettle some fine morning."

Presently the baby reached out his hand, and the giantess gave him Billy to hold. The baby was as strong as an ordinary man, and he held Billy so tight that he nearly squeezed his breath out. He would have kicked the baby if he had dared. Then the little giant put Billy's head in his mouth and almost smothered him, but the giantess came to the rescue and put him back in the little house.

Then the giant and his family all went into the cave and had dinner. When they had finished, they brought out some for Billy — a whole ham, half a bushel of potatoes, and a pie as big as a washtub. Billy was so tired and scared that he was not hungry, but he did not dare to refuse to eat, so he tried two or three potatoes and a bit of the ham.

The giant family watched while he was eating, and the baby kept reaching for him through the windows of the house. After the giant family had got tired of handling him, during which Billy thought that all of his bones would be broken, they left him in the box trap and went in for a nap. Soon he heard them all

snoring, making a noise like the howling of the wind.

Although he was very tired, Billy could not sleep. What would become of him in this awful land? He could not get out of the box trap, and even if he did, he could never find his way back home, or get across the deep river the giant had waded. If he ran away they would pursue him and bring him back, then he would be put in the soup kettle, or worse, they might eat him alive. His hair stood up with fright as he recalled these words in "Jack the Giant Killer": "Fe, fi, fo, fum, I smell the blood of an Englishman; be he alive or be he dead, I'll grind his bones to make me bread."

These giants must eat boys as well as those in the days of Jack, and that would probably be his end.

Then he thought of his folks, but could get little comfort. They never could find him in this horrible country, and even if they did, his father could do nothing with the giant, who would eat them all.

Billy crawled away into one corner of the little house and began to cry softly. He did not dare to cry aloud, for he was afraid of waking the giant family. But the baby heard him and came creeping out to see what the noise was. Billy at once stopped crying when he saw him looking at him, and sat up straight. Then the baby began to talk to him, but he could not understand.

When the giant baby had looked at Billy for awhile, he began tumbling the little house about to amuse himself. Over and over it went ; and Billy rolled about inside, bumping his head in a most unpleasant manner. Further and further along the mountainside the baby rolled the little house, and Billy saw to his horror that they were nearing a precipice, the bottom of which he could hardly see. He screamed for help, but his voice sounded like a mere squeak after that of the giants who were now sleeping and did not hear him. Nearer and nearer to the precipice came the little house until it was on the brink. Billy shut his eyes and stopped screaming. Then the baby gave

it a push and Billy felt himself falling. Down, down he went, at last he struck with a terrific bang that brought his teeth together with a snap.

Then he sat up and rubbed his eyes, and to his great astonishment found himself sitting on the floor beside his own bed, with the moonlight streaming in at the window, just as when he fell asleep.

He rubbed his eyes again and pinched himself to make sure that he was not still asleep, but it hurt, so he knew he was awake.

Then he got up and wiped the sweat from his forehead and peeked out of the window. There in the yard was the great elm and the new swing that his father had made for him the day before. There was no dream about that, he was safe at home in his own room and it was still night. The box trap and the giants had all been a bad dream, and with a sigh of relief he got back into bed, where he slept soundly until morning.

When he did awake it was broad daylight. The morning sun was streaming in at the bed-

room window, and the robin and oriole were singing as though their throats would split.

Billy dressed hurriedly and went down to breakfast. At the table he was so quiet and thoughtful his mother thought he must be sick, but on seeing his rosy cheeks she concluded he was quite well.

As soon as breakfast was over, Billy put on his cap, and telling his mother he was going to the orchard, was off, running as fast as his legs could carry him.

While Billy is on his way to the orchard, let us return to his box trap and see what has been happening there.

Early in the afternoon of the previous day, Frisk, the gray squirrel who lived in the sugar orchard, near the apple orchard, said "good-by" to Frolic and his baby squirrels, and started for the orchard in search of sweet apples for his family. Frolic left the babies just long enough to go with him to the edge of the maple grove. "Now take good care of yourself," she said, as he dashed away towards the wall where Billy's box trap was set. Frisk chat-

tered back gayly to his mate as he jumped from stone to stone and finally disappeared in the distance, and Frolic went back to the baby squirrels in the tree.

Frisk was running so rapidly along the wall that he did not notice the little house until he was almost upon it. Then he stopped suddenly, almost in front of the door.

What a cute little house it was, just large enough for a squirrel, and there was a fine ear of corn inside.

It was very strange, he thought, as he cocked his head upon one side and peeked into the door, that any one should have left their house in this way on the wall, and also that they left the ear of corn inside. Frisk had heard of traps, but as he was a young squirrel had never seen one. He did not think this could be a trap, it was more like a squirrel house.

Perhaps it was one that some good person had built especially for his family. He stepped one paw into the house and then stopped, but the ear of corn was so tempting that he could not resist the temptation to go in. They had



WHAT A CUTE LITTLE HOUSE IT WAS.

not had any corn since the winter supply gave out two months ago. How good it would taste ; but he would not eat it himself, he would carry it home to his Frolic.

So he took hold of the ear and pulled gently, but it seemed to be fastened and he pulled harder, then the door of the little house came down with a bang, and Frisk knew that it was a trap and he was caught. He never would see Frolic or the baby squirrels again.

We have seen how Billy felt when he thought he was caught in a box trap, and squirrels feel much as folks do in like places, so we will not dwell upon the terrors of the poor gray squirrel that night in the box trap, but will pass on to the morning when Billy went out to the orchard to see his box trap.

As he neared the old apple-tree his heart beat fast with excitement. But when he saw that the trap had been sprung, his face fell, he had hoped there would be nothing in the trap, for he intended to carry it home and put it away in the garret.

Billy tiptoed up to the trap and peeked in,

and there in one corner, trembling with fear, and with eyes big with fright, he beheld a beautiful gray squirrel. The inside of the trap was strewn with bits of wood that the squirrel had gnawed from its sides in his efforts to escape, and his jaws were bloody from gnawing.

"Ain't he a beauty," thought Billy. "How I would like to keep him in a cage and have him to look at." Then he thought of his own experience the night before, and wavered. But it was only for a moment, his better self conquered. Then with a quick motion, as though he dared not trust himself to consider, he lifted the door of the trap. With a grateful chatter and a patter of small feet upon the wall, Frisk was gone to the maple grove, and he did not waste many moments in getting home to Frolic and his baby squirrels.

Billy shouldered the box trap and trotted home with it, feeling very happy and glad that he had let the squirrel go.

"Ho, ho," said grandpa, when he saw Billy coming; "so you are tired of trapping, are you?"

"No," said Billy; "I caught a gray squirrel, but I thought it was too bad to keep him in a cage when he wanted to be free, so I let him go."

"Well, I guess that is the best way," said grandpa, trying hard not to laugh at the boy's sober, disappointed face. "You put up the trap and come into the woodshed and I will make you a new kite;" and grandpa made the tallest kite that Billy had ever seen.

CHAPTER IX.

THE END OF BLACK LIGHTNING.

BLACK LIGHTNING was a terrible black snake that inhabited the woods where the Little Foresters dwelt. Each spring he would make his appearance in May or June, and then he would prowl about the woods and along the sunny roadway until late in October, when he would den up and sleep until spring.

Of all who dwelt in the forest, Black Lightning was most feared by the Little Foresters next to Sneak, the weasel. He was so cunning and so full of tricks with which to entrap them. He was always lying in wait by the pathways that they best loved to use, and his coming was so still that no one was safe from him.

He was not even contented with gliding about upon the ground, doing what mischief

he could there, but even took to the tree-tops when he was uncommonly hungry. Here he would lie in the foliage, coiled upon a branch in such a way that no one could see him until an unsuspecting squirrel or bird came his way, when his ugly head would dart out and grab the unfortunate one. When he had squeezed the life out of it, he would drop the victim to the ground and crawl down and eat it at his leisure.

Black Lightning was not even bold and daring like Sparrowhawk, but he would steal about, poking his head under old stumps and in hollow logs, that he might find a nest of baby rabbits, or some young birds to devour. If the mother and father were gone, he would at once fall upon the helpless ones and eat them. Once Bob caught him just as he was about to make a breakfast upon his baby rabbits; and a severe drubbing he gave him, striking him again and again with his hind paws — with which the rabbit fights — until the old coward was glad to glide away in the grass and nurse his wounds.

Like Sneak, Black Lightning had no friends in the forest, so that when he was run over by a wagon and his back nearly broken, no one was sorry and they all said it was a pity that he did not die.

It was the latter part of June, and so pleasant in the woods that the birds and squirrels were always singing and chattering about it. I imagine they were afraid that man, who is so busy with farming and building, would not notice how sweet the air was and how fair the flowers, so they were continually telling him, lest he should forget.

Black Lightning had been out for at least two weeks, and as he was always very hungry when he first appeared, he had been especially annoying to the birds and squirrels. No morning had passed at the trysting tree without some account of his terrible doings. He had found Brownbird's nest hidden in the grass by a pathway, and had devoured three fledgelings that were just hatched. He had robbed nests of eggs by the dozen, and Cock-robin's own family had narrowly escaped being devoured.

He had even been in the tree-tops, searching for nests and young birds. The birds and the squirrels considered that the trees belonged to them. Black Lightning was bad enough when he kept to the ground, but when he even came into the trees it was too much to bear, and so with good reason the indignation against the snake grew, until one morning Nimrod called a meeting especially to consider the case, and see if something could not be done to rid the forest of this monster.

Either Redtail or Danger, the great white owl, might have killed the snake for them, but both were enemies of the birds and squirrels, so help was not likely to come from that quarter, unless the owl or the hawk should find him some day asleep and carry him off of their own accord.

One would never have guessed from the brightness of the sun, or the fragrance of June roses, that the Little Foresters were so sorely tried by the ravenous snake. Nor would he have guessed it, had he seen the birds and squirrels as they assembled at the old oak, for

they sang and chattered in their old merry manner.

Finally Nimrod came sailing over the tops of the trees in that majestic way he had, and lighted on his usual perch, which was the top-most bough of the tree.

Then, after the morning salutations had been exchanged, in a few well chosen words, he explained the particular business before the meeting, and asked if any one had any plan for the entrapping or the killing of Black Lightning.

Frisk, the gray squirrel, thought that Bob, the old rabbit, might be appointed by the chairman to do the job, at which Bob looked anxious and thought that some one else might be found who could do it better.

It was one thing to attack the snake when he was about to devour his family, but quite another to go after him and slay him when there was no family to inspire one.

"Of course, no bird can attempt it," said Cock-robin, to which the thrush, the jay, the

sparrow, the bobolink, the phœbe, and a score of others all assented with chirp and twitter.

“ I don’t see how a squirrel can do it, either,” exclaimed Redder, who always gave his opinion whether it was asked or not.

This time, however, his opinion was echoed by Grayer, Chipmunk, and their sleepy cousin, Flyer ; so that settled it as far as the squirrel family was concerned.

The old crow looked down at his followers and chuckled. It amused him very much to see how willing each one was that some one else should attack the snake, and how reluctant each was to do it himself. It was a fine study of the willingness of people to put others in positions where they would not want to be themselves.

“ Well,” said Nimrod at last, “ I do not see but what we shall have to get the field mouse to kill Black Lightning for us. Friend Fieldmouse is not present this morning and so cannot object ;” and the old crow chuckled again and looked down scornfully at his followers, who felt ashamed.

"I move that we hear from our wise chairman upon the subject. His words are always full of wisdom," said Bob, the cottontail, from his position at the foot of the tree.

"Good! Good!" cried all the little people, with chirrup and chatter.

Nimrod straightened himself and looked down in a dignified manner at bird, squirrel, and rabbit. It greatly flattered and pleased him to be well spoken of, for he was the most vain of them all, a fact that the wise rabbit well knew, and he also knew that if anything was to be gotten from Nimrod, that this was the quickest and best way to get it, and he had a suspicion that Nimrod had some plan for ridding the woods of Black Lightning.

"Well," said Nimrod, at length, when he had admired the plumage of his wing, which glistened in the sunlight and greatly pleased him, "I suppose that the crow family is famed for its sagacity. It is not anything that I take any particular credit to myself for, but merely the advantage of being well born. I indeed

have a plan, which I will disclose if you will all be attentive and not interrupt me."

"Good! Good!" cried all the birds and squirrels in chorus. "Tell us, Nimrod; tell us."

The old crow gave a long caw to clear his throat and began.

"Many, many years ago, long before the memory of any one now living, unless it is our friend Turtle, who lives down at the brookside, my great-great-grandfather lived in these woods, and I dare say he has perched many a time upon this very branch where I am now standing. He was a large, strong crow, and a fine flyer. But his greatest quality was his wisdom. It is often said in the crow family that I am like him." Here Nimrod paused to chuckle and admire his plumage.

"Well, my great-great-grandfather took it into his head to travel. He wanted to know what was in the world and to make himself acquainted with all countries. So he decided to start out, and in order not to be flying

around in a great circle and finally come back where he started from, he decided to always travel towards the setting sun. He thought that when he was ready to come back he could travel towards the rising sun and that would bring him safe back. It is a very wise plan and one that none but the crow would have thought of.

“There was a great meeting of the crows to wish him a fine journey and good luck, and he set out. For days and months he travelled over hills and valleys like these where we live, flying by day and roosting in the top of a fir-tree by night. This was the safest way to do ; besides, he did not want to travel at night, for he had come upon this journey to see the country, which he could not do at night.

“Finally the hills and valleys ceased and the forest disappeared and he came to great plains that stretched out as far as eye could reach. He did not like this country as well as the wooded country, for it was hard to find a tree in which to roost at night, but there was lots of grain, and the plains were very fertile. By-

and-by he came to a great river where he stopped for a bath, for the water had been so muddy for several days that he could not bathe. Then he flew on greatly refreshed.

“Then there were more plains that lasted for weeks and weeks, and finally they grew sandy and barren with nothing but sage brush and prickly plants. Finally, one morning when he had gotten very tired of the plains, he saw a mountain like those mountains he had known at home, only it was very much higher and was covered with snow.

“Up, up, he mounted nearly to the sun, before he crossed it. But there on the mountain top were pines and spruces again, and he felt more at home. Then he travelled for days over the mountains and finally dropped down into the land of sunshine that ends by the great water which there is no crossing, so the bird folks told him who live in the land of sunshine.

“Here it was that my great-great-grandfather made the acquaintance of that remarkable

bird, the Road Runner, of which I am going to tell you."

The Little Foresters all looked at each other with great astonishment, but as they had promised not to interrupt Nimrod, they said nothing.

"Well," continued Nimrod, "the Road Runner is one of the most remarkable birds in the world. I think I may say that he ranks next to the crow, and my ancestor found out many strange things from him, among others how to kill snakes."

At this statement by Nimrod there was such a chirping and twittering in the old trysting tree that the crow was obliged to cease his story for several minutes, but when quiet had at last been restored, he continued.

"The one great enemy of the Road Runner is the rattlesnake, who is always creeping about in the grass searching for the Road Runner's nest that he may devour the eggs or young birds; or if he can find a young Road Runner in the grass where he is just learning to fly, he will at once fall upon him and mangle

him, and finally swallow him without the slightest regret."

"The hateful thing," cried all the Little Foresters in chorus.

"He is just like Black Lightning," said Cock-robin.

"Well," continued Nimrod, "the Road Runner does not take his injuries quietly as we do, but he at once sets to work to avenge himself.

"He searches about in the grass and along the sunny banks by the creek until he finds the snake and then he follows him, never losing sight of him by day or night, until at last the snake lies down in a sunny spot to sleep, for all snakes are great sleepers. They all sleep through the winter and many of them sleep half the summer time as well.

"When the Road Runner sees the rattlesnake fall asleep, he knows that his hour has come. Then he and Mrs. Road Runner set to work to gather the spines from the prickly pear-tree, which are very sharp. They have to use great care in gathering them or they will wound

themselves, but they do not mind an occasional scratch when they think of their young dead birds, and the revenge that they are going to heap upon the snake.

“When they have gathered a good pile of the spines, they go up to the sleeping snake very carefully and build a fence about him, using the spines for building material. So while the snake sleeps, he is all the time being surrounded by this terrible wall.

“Finally their work is done, and Mr. and Mrs. Road Runner wait for the awakening of the snake.

“When the snake does awake, he stretches himself and looks about him. To his great astonishment he finds a wall some three or four inches high encompassing him on every side, and a little distance away he sees the Road Runners watching him. He is very angry. It is their doing; he will teach them better manners, and he coils himself for a spring, hissing and sounding his rattlers in an ominous way.

“But the Road Runners do not fear him.

This makes him more angry still, and he lashes with his tail, which strikes something sharp, and the snake turns and strikes viciously at the pile. To his great astonishment the innocent looking sticks bite back. He strikes again, and a dozen sharp spines fasten in his head. Then great anger possesses him and he strikes again and again, while the Road Runners draw back to a safe distance. Around and around the rattler goes, striking and squirming, until at last he is filled with spines and bleeding from a score of places. Then in blind fury he bites himself and dies, the victim of his own poison."

"Good! Good!" cried all the birds and squirrels in chorus.

"It serves him right," said Bob from his seat at the foot of the tree. "If any one carries a deadly poison about as the rattlesnake does he is quite sure to fall a victim to it himself sooner or later."

"Now," continued Nimrod, "if you will all stop talking, I will tell you the details of my plan.

"I want you all to do just as I tell you, and to remember that our success depends upon your carrying out my orders perfectly.

"Firstly, we have no prickly pear-tree, and we will have to use something else. Secondly, the bite of the black snake is not poisonous and he cannot finish himself, so we will have to poison our brambles to make our plan a certain success.

"I want you all to set to work gathering brambles. Find the sharpest and the longest ones that you can. Go to the blackberry, the raspberry, the thorn-apple, and the nettle; and some of you, like friend Thresher, whom the law protects, can get those sharp thorns from the hedge up at the farmhouse. When you have gathered your thorns, then find the most deadly poisons that you know. I do not need to tell you what they are. You all know the nightshade and the poison hemlock, the ivy and the dogwood. Break the bark or the pulp of the plant or shrub with great care lest you get poisoned yourself, and then wet the points of your brambles or spines with this poison.

When you have once poisoned them, you must use the greatest care not to scratch yourself.

“When everything is ready we will watch for this destroyer of our homes and our happiness, and serve him in such manner as he deserves.” And without further words Nimrod dismissed the company and they all went away, bent upon one errand — the destruction of Black Lightning.

For several days there was great activity in the woods; gathering spines and searching for poisonous plants occupied all of the time that was not spent in looking for food and attending to the young, who need a great deal of attention at this time of year.

After about a week, Nimrod announced at the trysting tree that everything was in readiness, and told all to be on the watch for Black Lightning.

For several days no one could discover him asleep, for he was very crafty and had kept the place of his napping a secret. But one sunny afternoon early in July, he decided to take his nap out in the open upon a sandbank

that pleased him, where he could bask in the warm sun and enjoy himself. If anything disturbed him he had a hole near by where he could go. But what could harm him? Was he not master of the forest? Were they not all afraid of him, and did they not all flee when he approached?

It was with these feelings that the old black snake stretched out on the sandbank and went to sleep.

An hour later Cock-robin, who was always on the watch and had a grudge of his own to pay off, discovered the snake asleep and hastened to tell Nimrod, who at once summoned the rest of the company by a signal that had been agreed upon. Soon they were all at work carrying the brambles and spines that had been made so deadly with poisonous sap. They worked with a will, and in two hours there was a pile of bristling points about the ugly black snake, and no opening on any side through which to escape.

When their work had been completed, they sat about upon trees, and those of the company

who could not fly sat at a safe distance on the ground, for they knew that when the snake awoke he would be very angry, and secretly they were all afraid of Black Lightning.

At last their patience was rewarded, for the snake began to move and then to stretch, as snakes are apt to do after a nap, and then he awoke. When he looked about at the bristling pile that surrounded him, he thought he was dreaming, but when he looked up in the trees and saw the birds and squirrels looking down at him, he knew that it was no dream. But the full peril of his situation did not at once appear to him.

"Who has done this?" he hissed, raising his head angrily and glaring about him.

"We all had a hand in it," replied Nimrod from his perch a few feet above the snake, "but I think I may say the plan was mine and the rest of the company helped me to carry it out."

"You will all pay for it," hissed the snake, snapping his jaws together in a manner that made the smaller birds and squirrels quake.

"I will kill an extra bird and an extra squirrel every day this summer to pay for this. I will teach you who is the stronger when I get out of this tangle."

"When you get out of that tangle," repeated Nimrod mockingly, "we will all invite you to breakfast."

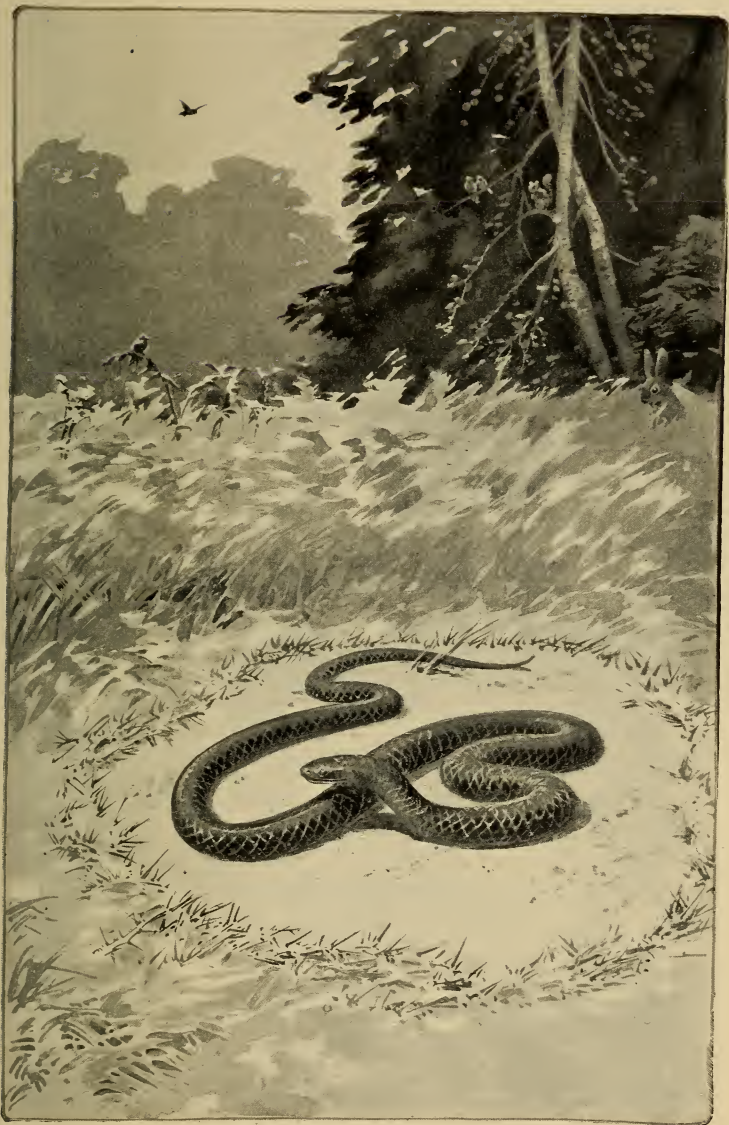
At these words the snake lowered his head, and a feeling of uneasiness came over him, for he well knew the cunning of the crow, and feared him and the confident way in which he spoke.

"Why have you done this?" he asked at length, feeling that perhaps the best course was to parley.

"Why have you hunted us by day and night, robbing our nests and eating our young?" asked Nimrod.

"Partly for breakfast and partly for sport," said the snake.

"We are not as cruel as you," replied Nimrod; "we have not entrapped you for sport, but because we had to. You have come into our forest like a thief, creeping upon your



"WHO HAS DONE THIS?" HE HISSED.

belly like a sneak, robbing and killing merely for sport, and now that we may live and enjoy the forest which is ours by right, we have destroyed you."

"Destroyed me," hissed the snake, snapping his jaws furiously; "we will see about that," and he began striking at the pile of brambles about him. But at the first blow his head was filled with brambles and spines.

Nimrod cawed derisively, and the birds chirped and twittered, but some of the more timid flew away in fright.

Black Lightning's eyes flashed fire, and his tongue darted out like a flame. He writhed with agony, and for once lost his self-control and again attacked his barriers.

Faster and faster he struck, hissing and snapping his jaws and all the time lashing with his tail. The brambles flew in every direction, but he was fast filling with the deadly points. Over and over he went, moving so fast that the Little Foresters could scarcely see him. Finally his wriggling and thrashing ceased,

and then they saw him filled with the deadly points and swollen to twice his usual size.

At last, after terrible convulsions, he stretched himself out upon the sandbank and died, an object too hideous to look upon.

Then the birds and the squirrels went quietly away, feeling well satisfied with the success of Nimrod's plan and their own hard work. But they had no feeling of revenge in the death of the snake, for they had destroyed him, as Nimrod had said, merely that they might live themselves.

CHAPTER X.

A TERRIBLE RIDE.

THE hawk and the weasel are rival marauders, each carrying on his work of theft and murder in his own peculiar manner, and each doing terrible execution in field and forest.

Of the two, I have the most respect for the hawk. He is more open and above board in his thieving and murdering, and rarely kills when he is not hungry, but of all the four-footed creatures that inhabit New England, the weasel is the most despicable.

He will destroy a whole coop of chickens, by biting a small hole in the neck of each and sucking their blood, when he might make his entire meal on one chicken. He kills two squirrels for every one that he eats, and all his other operations are carried on with the same cruelty and disregard for the lives of his fellow-

foresters. He is a destroyer, cruel and cunning and more to be feared by the Little Foresters than any other creature.

Even his looks are enough to make one shudder. His long, slim body with its gliding movement, his restless head turned this way and that, his hungry eyes, all suggest cunning, cruelty, and daring.

Sparrowhawk is quite as cruel, but he lacks the cunning of the weasel; he always carries on his work of destruction openly and with a fearlessness that is at least not cowardly.

Ever since the day when Redtail had mistaken Sneak, the weasel, for a chipmunk, and had nearly caught him in the open, there had been war between them, although they dwelt so far apart there was little chance of their meeting. Sneak would not be caught in the open again, and Redtail lived so high up in the air that he was quite out of the domain of the weasel, but each kept the grudge in his heart and bided his time.

It was a hot afternoon in August. The locust was singing shrilly in the weeds by the

roadside. From up in the pasture came the musical tinkle of a cow-bell. A light breeze occasionally rustled the leaves, making a pleasant sound. But when this muffled murmur died away, it was as still as night time.

It was too hot for the birds to sing or the squirrels to chatter. In fact, the birds were away in the deep woods moulting and chirping softly to themselves. Suddenly there was a rustle, and a few frightened "chirps" from Chatterbox, the chipmunk, a patter of small feet in the ferns, and a moment later he was seen running for a big maple at the top of his speed. A few feet behind him, gliding along with that easy motion, his cruel, hungry eyes fixed intently upon the little squirrel, was Sneak, the free-booter and destroyer.

Chatterbox scurried up the tree, with the weasel in hot pursuit. Up, up, they went, the squirrel running for his life, and the weasel pursuing. I saw that it was hopeless for the squirrel, he would soon be at the top of the tree and at the mercy of the weasel, but I did not know all of the squirrel's prowess.

Presently he stood upon the topmost branch of the tree, with the weasel but a few feet away. "Poor little fellow," I thought, and my hatred for Sneak doubled. But even as I looked, the chipmunk sprang from the limb, although it was fifty or sixty feet high, spread himself out flat like a turnover, and floated gracefully down through the air, landing at my feet.

"Bravo," I cried. "Well done, little chap." He did not wait to hear my compliments, but was off running for all he was worth. He evidently had not seen me before and had been greatly frightened by landing so near what he supposed another enemy.

My astonishment had scarcely left me, when I was treated to another surprise, for Redtail, the old henhawk, sailed majestically into the very tree that Chatterbox had just left and perched upon the limb that the squirrel had occupied.

He did not see me under the tree, and I stood very still, wishing to observe him.

He was a magnificent bird, measuring, as I afterwards discovered, over five feet from tip to



WITH A WILD SCREAM THE HAWK ROSE SWIFTLY IN THE AIR.

tip. His plumage shone like burnished silver in the sunlight, and his tail was a rich deep red. I had forgotten all about Sneak when a white spot upon a limb, not over a yard from the hawk, reminded me of him. It was Sneak, without a doubt, for I could see the eager restless motion of the head, and his slim figure.

Then to my great astonishment the slender form shot like a white streak through the air, and landed upon the back of the hawk, and the weasel's head was buried in the feathers of the great bird just where the neck joins the body. Then the meaning of it all flashed upon me. "Greek had met Greek" and the old score would be settled.

With a wild scream the hawk rose swiftly in the air. Higher and higher it went, but I could see by the quick hard strokes of its wings the agony of the flight.

Presently the hawk set its wings for a plunge downward, and made a swoop, the swiftness of which no other bird can equal. Almost down to the tree he came, but as he turned in

the air to ascend again I could see the weasel still clinging to his neck.

Up, up, he went again, growing smaller and smaller, until he looked like a mere speck in the sky. I feared that I should lose sight of him and not see the end of this terrible struggle. But soon he began to descend again, and this time more rapidly than before, but he did not have his usual control of himself, his flight was ragged and uncertain. Once he lost the set of his wings, and went over and over in the air, but with a great effort he balanced himself and came down like a falling star.

When about fifty feet from the ground he turned over on his back and beat furiously with his wings, writhing and shaking himself. Then he flopped down upon the ground and went over and over. Here was Sneak's chance to escape from his perilous position and I thought he would take it. But not so; it was to be a fight to the finish, and he still clung to the neck of the hawk with a grip like death.

With a despairing scream the hawk rose

again, going almost straight up. It was to be his last flight, and he had determined not to perish alone. If death was to come it should come to both.

When about forty rods up his great wings collapsed and without a struggle he fell to earth like a stone.

I went to the spot where they had fallen, and there upon the ground was the magnificent hawk with his wings spread, and a stream of blood flowing from a hole in his neck that his enemy had made, and close beside him was the battered body of the weasel.

They had fought the fight to a finish, but it had been a drawn battle, for both were dead.

CHAPTER XI.

THE GOOD GREEN WOOD.

WHENEVER I pass along the city street and see its pale children trying to play ball or marbles in some vacant lot where there is hardly room to turn about, I always fall to pitying them, and to wishing that every child that comes into the world could spend its first twelve years in the country. Then no matter what he may do or where he may go in after years, he has these country memories to fall back on when the heart grows sick for the sweet green things and the sound of running water.

It matters not if I am on the noisy streets of a great city, and the air is stifling with heat, for I have but to fall a-dreaming to be a boy once more upon the old farm. Then the rude rumble of the heavy teams is changed to the

murmur of summer breezes in leafy tree-tops, and the shrill cries of newsboys become bird notes, exquisitely tender and joyful. I could shut my eyes in the most barren desert and smell the sweet scent of half-dead leaves dripping from an autumn rain; or it might be the aromatic scent of the pine and the balsam, if fancy willed it.

If I had my way, I should not only have all children born in the country, but would have them educated in its ways, and particularly in woodcraft. I would show them where to look for the arbutus and the anemone, and teach them to tell each wild flower or shrub from its neighbor, by both smell and sight.

I would show them where the wintergreen and the partridge-berry grow, and we would sit together upon some mossy knoll under a fragrant spruce and eat youngsters.

Then as we sat there, munching and enjoying the freshness and beauty of all things about us, we would learn to distinguish the different bird notes.

We would learn to tell the sweet "cheery,

cheery ” of the bluebird, and not to mistake it for the “cheery, cheery ” of the robin, which is louder and more abrupt.

We would always know robin’s plain “cheer-up, cheer-up,” but his other note is quite like that of the bluebird.

The chickadee we would always know by his one sweet little song that never varies, and the phœbe, too, we could not mistake, for his song is ever the same—just two plaintive notes.

The woodpecker’s short, sharp “snip, snip,” or his queer cackle we would never forget when once we had found him out; then by degrees we would learn to tell all these little creatures by their song or their note of alarm, which are quite different.

Two other birds there are that we never could mistake—the whip-poor-will’s wild, unearthly note, and the sad call of the cuckoo, denoting rain. He is a much better prophet than men think him, for his note of warning is always followed by storm. The quail is a merry fellow, whistling upon the bar-post, but



THE QUAIL IS A MERRY FELLOW.

he, too, is given to watching the wind and the weather.

Squirrels all sound very much alike, but you can always tell by the chattering and scolding that it is a squirrel; and then later on you will learn to tell the sharp bark of the red squirrel from the chirp of the chipmunk, who is not so noisy.

Besides knowing the birds by their song or plumage we would know their nesting places and their mode of life, not to rob or torment them, but that we might become acquainted with these little feathered friends and love them. Besides the ways of the birds, we would come to know all the little creatures of the wood, and their haunts and manners and customs.

From knowing the inhabitants of the woods it would be an easy and natural step to know the plants and flowers, and all the friendly trees that give us shade, fruit, and nuts, or if need be lay down their lives to keep us warm in the winter time.

I would also teach my young people to know

the points of the compass from the trees, who tell all observing folks which is north, so they never need get lost in the woods. Here are some of the plainest ways to tell the points of compass in the forest: All plant life, including the giant trees, love the sun and lean towards him for comfort and warmth. He is their father and friend. So if you will observe carefully what a woodsman calls the lean of the timber, you will see that the majority of the trees in any woods lean to the south. Then if you will go around to the north side of the tree, you will find it covered with moss, while there is none on the south side. What is the reason for this? you may ask. Moss grows in the shade or where the sun strikes least, and that would be on the north side of the trees. There is one more easy way of telling the points of compass, and many smaller signs which it is harder to read.

A very old man once told me that the topmost point of the hemlock, as a rule, points to the northwest.

Besides knowing the forest in a general way,

we should know it in detail, and where its treasures are, — where the first youngsters are found, and where the sweet arbutus first thrusts its fragrant flowers through last year's mold; where the delicious strawberry grows along the sunny slopes of the pasture land and the first blueberries ripen. Then in midsummer we would take our pails and go among the pines at the edge of the woods for blackberries, observing at the same time where the chestnuts hang the thickest and the walnuts promise well.

In yonder thicket is a hemlock whose springy boughs will make the finest kind of bows, and this ironwood, if cut and peeled and allowed to season, will make a fish-pole that would do the heart of a boy good.

In short, the marvels and the pleasures of the woods are so many that I can only mention a few of the most common. How well the poet Whittier knew these charms of nature, and how truly he has depicted the boy's delight in them in his "Barefoot Boy," to whose world of wonder and mystery I refer you.

“ O for boyhood’s time of June,
Crowding years in one brief moon,
When all things I heard or saw,
Me, their master, waited for.
I was rich in flowers and trees,
Humming-birds and honey bees ;
For my sport the squirrel played,
Plied the snouted mole his spade ;
For my taste the blackberry cone
Purpled over hedge and stone ;
Laughed the brook for my delight
Through the day and through the night,
Whispering at the garden wall,
Talked with me from fall to fall ;
Mine the sand-rimmed pickerel pond,
Mine the walnut slopes beyond,
Mine on bending orchard trees,
Apples of Hesperides.
Still as my horizon grew,
Larger grew my riches too ;
All the world I saw or knew
Seemed a complex Chinese toy
Fashioned for a barefoot boy.”

CHAPTER XII.

A NIGHT WITH RUFF GROUSE.

It was Christmas eve and the great red sun was fast sinking behind the western hills, leaving a trail of fire as red as the pathway of a comet.

Out of the east the shadow folk were trooping, driving the children of the sun before them over hill and valley and far away. It was pleasant, though, to think, as one saw the sunlight and gladness retreating, that away on the other side of the world the children of the sun were driving the shadow people who were fleeing in terror before their bright faces.

It was bitter cold and the wind howled dismally in the tree-tops, making the great branches to groan and writhe, as though they were possessed of feeling and it hurt them to be so violently handled.

It seemed to Ruff Grouse, as he swayed to and fro in the tree-top where he was getting his supper, that the night had never looked so cheerless and uninviting. The wind rocked him so violently that he could hardly keep his perch, and occasionally when it got more boisterous than usual, showers of snow rattled down upon him. But Ruff was a hardy fellow and it was not these things that bothered him; he was having considerable difficulty in finding his supper. Mast had not been so scarce in the whole course of his existence, and the buds had been kept back by the extreme cold so that there was very little nourishment in them, and beside all this the birch in which he was hard at work had been cropped by Ruff and his friends and by two or three red squirrels, until there was very little supper to be had, bad as it was.

The cold numbed his toes so that he could hardly hold on, and presently the wind grew so violent that Ruff gave up the task and flew into the top of a hemlock to shelter himself and get warm, and in the meantime to think of some new place to find supper. The lengthening

shadows told him that he must be quick about it or else trust to the moon, which was not always a safe thing to do, as the moon was fickle, and budding by moonlight exposed one to the peril of being picked up by an owl, and Danger, the great white owl who terrorized all the Little Foresters, had long had his eye on Ruff, following him persistently.

But cold and hunger bred recklessness in Ruff that night, so at last he started off on a hazardous enterprise, which was no more or less than to get his supper off a fine greening tree almost under the farmer's nose and within easy reach of the thunderstick. So he went sailing away over the tree-tops, flying as only a partridge can fly to the orchard. The pale white stars were just pricking through the steely blue sky and the night would soon be on.

Presently he plumped down in the greening tree and fell to work on the delicious buds, stopping frequently, though, to listen and to watch every changing light and shadow about the house. The tree was so near the buildings

that it had not been touched by any of Ruff's friends, even the saucy red squirrel had shunned it, and the buds were very plenty. How sweet they were after the dry birch buds, and how lucky he had been to think of it. Ruff's crop, that had been so empty, was filling fast, but it was dangerous work, and more than once he stopped and was about to take wing, but lingered a minute longer to get just a few more buds. So intent he was on supper that he did not hear the shed window lifted carefully or see the thunderstick thrust out. But a sense of impending danger made him look up and he saw at once his peril. With a quick spring like the flight of an arrow he was off, flying low in hopes to put some friendly bush or fence between him and the marksman. But what bird, however strong of wing, can fly like the hailstones from the thunderstick that are propelled by lightning.

There was a bright flash, a deafening roar, and a rush of the sharp pellets about Ruff. The force of the charge carried him several feet out of his course, and at first he thought he must

fall, but with a great effort he nerved himself, stifled the pain, and flew on, for this was the only safe thing to do. When the smoke cleared away, the farmer saw a few feathers flying in the breeze, while the old partridge was sailing for the woods forty rods away.

"I snum," he growled, giving the old gun a shake, "ef I hain't missed him again. I believe this rusty ole gun would n't kill a partridge ef his head wuz stuck in the end on 't, the blamed old thing," and he shut the window with a bang.

But he would have thought better of the gun had he seen the partridge plump down into a snowbank as soon as he reached the woods, and wriggle out of sight in the snow, leaving a trail of blood behind him.

Poor Ruff snuggled as far down into the snow as possible and then lay still, trying hard to forget the ache in his leg and the sharp pain in his wing. It was humiliating to have several of one's tail-feathers shot away, and the beauty of that splendid fan upon which he so prided himself for the time being spoiled, but that was

nothing to the possibility of a broken leg or wing. The tail-feathers would grow again, and at the best they were merely ornamental, but a leg or a wing was quite another matter, and a partridge that could not fly might as well give up to the first fox that happened along.

At the thought of a fox, Ruff remembered the blood spots that he had left upon the snow, and he knew that it was very dangerous for him to be lying where he was, with so plain a scent to tell of his whereabouts, so with a great effort he wriggled out of the snow and flew up into a tree-top. His wing was not broken, though it hurt him terribly to fly.

But it was so cold in the tree-top that he was numbed in a few minutes, and the wind cut him like a knife.

He never could spend the night in the tree, he would have to find a new spot in which to burrow, and be careful not to leave a scent upon the snow. So he picked out a spot where it was drifted and the snow looked soft, and plunged down in it with all his might. The force of his flight carried him in out of sight,

and the wind filled up the hole and smoothed it over, and no one would have guessed that a live partridge lay buried in the drift.

It was quite warm down there, and Ruff would have been comfortable had it not been for his wounded leg and wing; but the cold snow felt soothing to them, drawing out the fever and quieting the pain, so that he soon fell asleep and dreamed of spring and of drumming on the old log to call some lady partridge about and begin the spring courting.

How long he slept Ruff did not know, but suddenly he awoke with the same sensation of danger that he had felt just before the farmer shot him. He lay very still and listened, for nothing is ever gained by hasty action in a time of danger. He could hear a sound above him like something digging and then an occasional sniff.

Ruff's feathers stood up with fright and his eyes grew big with terror: it was Sir Reynard, and he was after him.

The crafty old fox was hungry to-night. He had searched the laurel swamp for a rabbit,

but having found none was on his way home to the spruces, when he scented the blood spots from Ruff's first plunge in the snow, and then by circling round and round, he found his second plunge and was now digging stealthily for him.

There was one hope of escape. Ruff had taken the precaution to burrow several feet in the snow towards a shallow place; he now hoped to reach this place in the drift before the fox reached him. He began quietly burrowing away from the sound of the fox's digging. He could not dig very fast lest the fox might hear him, and all the time Sir Reynard was getting nearer and nearer to him. It was a fearful moment for Ruff, but his quick wit and strong nerve did not forsake him. At last he could feel the snow giving above him, but the fox was almost upon him; he could hear his eager sniffing and frantic digging. With a quick motion he brushed the snow away and with a whir of his wings rose in air, but he was not quicker than the lithe fox that sprang at him as he rose. There was a snap of the



THE PARTRIDGE BROKE AWAY AND WHIRRED OVER THE TREE-TOPS.

hungry jaws and Sir Reynard's teeth closed upon Ruff's toes, but not strongly enough to hold him, and the partridge broke away and whirred over the tree-tops into the darkness.

"I'll have you yet," snarled the fox, and the wind repeated his threat, "I'll have you yet; I'll have you yet," until it seemed to the partridge that the night was filled with terror. He flew for several minutes and then alighted in the top of a spruce to consider where to spend the night.

He had barely settled in the tree-top when he noticed a great white object in the branches above him, and a moment later he became aware of two big, yellow eyes looking hungrily down upon him. It was Danger, the white owl, the terror of the forest at night. It was lucky for Ruff that the top of the spruce was very thick and that there were several brushy limbs between him and the owl.

"Who, who," cried Danger, startled by Ruff's precipitate flight into the spruce. It took him a moment to collect his wits, and then he dove for the partridge, but Ruff, real-

izing his danger, slipped out between the friendly branches of the spruce and was off, with the owl in hot pursuit. Ordinarily Danger would have been no match for him in flight, but to-night, with his crippled wing, it was a race for life and death, Danger having the advantage, as he could see better than Ruff by night. He flew with a steady flop, flop, the sound of which made Ruff anxious, to say the least. But the partridge with all his native cunning made sudden turns to the right and left, and each time the owl would fly by the turning point, losing a few feet in the race.

At last by turning, twisting, and dodging, Ruff drew away from his pursuer till he could no longer hear the monotonous flop, flop of his wings. Then he plunged into the top of another spruce to listen, and he heard the owl go by a few rods away, the sound of his wings dying away in the distance. For several minutes Ruff waited in anxious suspense for the return of the owl; but hearing nothing, he concluded that he had eluded his pursuer, which was the case.

He was tired and cold. The wind rocked the tree so violently that he could not sleep, even had his wounds permitted. He wondered whether it was better to stay in the tree-top all night and freeze to death, or to risk another dive in the snow with a chance of being picked up by a fox. Surely the same one that had disturbed him before would not do it again that night, for his flight from the owl had carried him several miles from home.

After debating the question pro and con, Ruff decided that he would rather be eaten up at once than to freeze by degrees, so he plunged down into the snow, and again the friendly winds blew the hole full and screened him from all prying eyes.

Once safely tucked in his snow bed, where the cold drew the pain from his wound and the warm blanket shielded him from the wind and cold, he fell asleep and slept soundly until morning.

When he awoke and wriggled painfully out of the snow, the sun was shining brightly, and there was no evidence of the terrible experiences

of the night before. Near at hand was a birch, upon the buds of which Ruff got a hasty breakfast. He then took his bearings by the sun and the looks of the forest, for he was several miles from home, and as he had come in the night, did not at once know what direction to take; but presently he rose above the tree-tops, and sailed away. To you and me there would have been very little to go by, but not so with Ruff. He had been born in the forest, and had always lived there. He knew all of its winding avenues and devious turnings. Straight away he flew to the east, and after half an hour's flight arrived at the old birch where he had tried to get his supper the night before.

Presently Bob, the old cotton-tail who lived in the laurel swamp near by, came hopping along under the spruces.

"Hello, Ruff," he cried, as soon as he caught sight of the partridge. "I say, old fellow, what is the matter with your tail? It looks as though some one had mistaken you for a goose and had tried to pick you. But," on seeing

the partridge's woe-begone look, he said, "say, old chap, you have n't been shot at, have you?"

Then Ruff flew down upon the snow beside Bob, and told him all of his experiences of the night before, to the great astonishment of the rabbit.

"What ever possessed you to venture so near to the house?" asked Bob, in genuine surprise. "We consider you the most cautious of us all."

"I was hungry," said Ruff, "and one will do almost anything if he is hungry."

"Sir Reynard is a bad one," said Bob, when Ruff came to that portion of his story; "you and I both owe him a grudge, and we'll pay him off some day, you see if we don't;" and they did.

When Ruff had finished his story, and both the rabbit and the partridge had heaped vials of wrath upon the fox and the owl, Bob hopped away to tell the news to Mrs. Rabbit, and Ruff went into the deep woods to rest after the terrible exertions of the night before.

CHAPTER XIII.

BOB'S REVENGE.

BOB was the old cotton-tail who sat at the foot of the trysting tree during the morning and evening meetings. He was a prime favorite with the birds and squirrels, and was greatly respected by the other rabbits that lived in the community; but most of them lived way back in a large swamp several miles from the beautiful grove that the Little Forsters inhabited.

Bob's home was in the spruces down by the swale. It was not as swampy as he would have liked, but there was a little laurel, some birches, and a thick growth of spruces that made a fine cover for a rabbit to hide in.

Bob was a very clever rabbit and his wisdom and foresight were often praised among the birds and squirrels.

He knew every old log in the forest and all the best places to hole, but he rarely did that when pursued, for it was more dangerous than staying outside. He preferred to stay above ground, dodging about in the spruces and hiding in brambles and tangles of laurel where he was comparatively safe from his enemies.

He would often sit for an hour at a time upon the end of an old log, planning what he would do if certain dangers came upon him, and there was no part of the woods where he had not some hiding place or way of escape. As he sat upon the log with his ears cocked, and his bright, restless eyes looking in every direction, he made a very pretty picture. He always seemed to be either listening or looking for something, and with good reason, for it was only by keeping a strict lookout, and by having those tall ears always cocked, that Bob escaped his many enemies. Of all the small creatures of the woods the rabbit is the most beset with enemies, and his one refuge in peril is in his long, nimble legs.

It may seem strange to my little reader that

anything should want to harm so pretty a creature as a rabbit, but the wild animals prey upon one another, and man preys upon them all.

There was Redtail, who was always on the lookout that he might spy Bob in the open, and swoop down upon him. Danger, the great white owl, had the same ambition as the hawk, but he did his thieving and killing by night instead of by day. The farmhouse cat was always watching for him by the path, and Sir Reynard, the sly fox who lived in the ledges over in the pasture, had sworn that the young foxes should sup on rabbit some night, and Bob was the particular cotton-tail on whom he had his eye. Many a brisk race for life the fox had given the rabbit through the spruces, but thus far Bob had always eluded his enemy.

Even at night when the rabbit went to sleep in a hollow log or in one of the holes that he inhabited, he was not at all sure but that when he awoke he might find a weazel hanging upon his neck, sucking his life blood; or men might come with a hound and a ferret that would



HE WOULD SIT FOR AN HOUR AT A TIME ON AN OLD LOG.



rush into the hole and scare him forth where he would be caught in a bag. So was it any wonder that Bob's ears and nose twitched nervously and that his eyes seemed to be looking in all directions at once?

Sir Reynard and Bob had never been friends, and for two years past open war had existed between them, and this was the way it came about.

Bob was getting his breakfast one morning upon the bark of a yellow birch when the fox happened along.

"Good morning, Friend Rabbit," said the fox in his most gracious manner; "may I come and help you gnaw that birch?"

"You may have it all," replied the rabbit, hopping to the other side of a clump of bushes and watching the old fox closely, for he well knew that foxes did not gnaw birches, and Sir Reynard had some other motive than to gnaw the birch.

"Why do you always keep a bush between us?" asked the fox, trying to smile and at the

same time not to have his teeth show ; but Bob could see them plainly.

“ Because your beauty dazzles me and I cannot bear to look upon it all at once,” replied the rabbit.

“ Ah,” said the fox, smiling in spite of himself, for he was quite vain, “ let me come into this opening so that you can get a good look at me.” Then he stepped a little to one side that he might clear a low bush, and bounded towards the cotton-tail ; but Bob had been watching him and was off before the fox had made his second spring. He was no match for Sir Reynard, running in the open, but here he could dodge and turn, winding out and in among the spruces where it was hard to go ; beside, his hole was not far away, and all the time he was drawing nearer to it. Presently he shot down into his burrow, and Sir Reynard was left standing at the mouth, panting and licking his chops at the thought of what a good breakfast the rabbit would have made.

“ That was a fine run we had,” said Bob, looking up at the fox and smiling ; “ it will

start the blood and help your appetite." At this taunt and the thought of his empty stomach, the fox snapped his teeth together like a steel trap and snarled, "You had better not anger me too much, for we shall have a settling one of these days. I shall not always let you off so easy."

"Little you had to do about it," retorted the rabbit; "I let myself off."

"Oh, I could have caught you if I had wanted to," replied the fox, "but I saw that you were poor and thought I'd wait until you got fat."

"You had better not wait in these parts," said the rabbit; "I heard the farmer complaining the other day that you had been catching his hens, and he said that your hide would be drying upon the barn within a week."

"Did he?" asked the fox, feigning indifference; "he will have to catch me before he can skin me. I do not leave my hide upon a bush every morning to be had for the taking."

"I, too, heard him complaining. He said the rabbits had been eating his parsnips, and he knew the thief, and that he would come

soon with the hound and ferret to rid the woods of him."

"I wish you would take yourself away from my hole," said the rabbit; "your beauty dazzles me and hurts my eyes. I have no further use for you."

"Nor I for you," replied the fox. "Good morning," and he was gone. A few moments later, Bob heard him bark a short distance away. It was very strange, for a fox rarely barks in the daytime. But after a moment's thought it was plain to the rabbit. Sir Reynard had wished him to think he had gone, and so had barked. He was, doubtless, at that very moment crouching behind the stump at the mouth of the hole, waiting for him to appear.

Bob stayed in his hole all day and well on into the evening. Then he went to his front door to listen, and after sitting there for several minutes and not hearing anything, he ventured forth; but he had not taken half a dozen hops when he heard a noise behind him. Looking

about he saw the fox sitting in front of his hole, grinning and showing a fine set of teeth.

"Good evening, Friend Rabbit," said the fox in his most gracious manner; "you see I think so much of you that I have been hanging around all day. I could not bear to leave you so long alone."

The cotton-tail squatted low to the ground with his legs well under him, ready for a spring.

"Did n't you get hungry?" he asked carelessly, as though the fact that a fox was hungry was of small account to him, but he was quivering in every nerve. He had often thought of such a predicament as this and had laid his plans well, but now he was face to face with the peril he was not so sure of his speed and steadiness, for it was a very dangerous thing that he was about to do, and any deviation from the right path by even six inches would end disastrously. He had often practised the run. It was just fifteen jumps ahead, two sharp to the right and then one long jump through something, and that was where the

danger lay. Bob did not wait for the fox to make the first move, for his nerve was getting unsteady, but with a sudden movement quick as a flash he bounded away with the fox after him only two jumps behind and gaining a little at each jump. By the time they reached the little spruce, half of the distance between them had been gained by the fox. He was sure of his supper this time. Then the rabbit gave two quick jumps to the right. Here there were alder bushes and it was a little dark, but Sir Reynard's jaws were almost upon him. Then Bob cleared a low alder bush with the fox barely six feet behind him, but midway in the bush the fox stopped and was hurled back as though by an unseen hand.

There was a half-stifled howl of pain from Sir Reynard as he lay quivering upon the grass with the blood streaming down his face from an ugly gash in the forehead. It was several moments before he knew quite what had happened, but when he finally aroused himself the rabbit was gone, and peering cautiously into

the bush from which he had just been so violently flung, he discovered a barbed wire fence.

Then he knew how completely he had been trapped by the cotton-tail, and from that hour he laid plans for Bob's destruction, and never by night or day did he lose sight of his purpose.

If it had not been for the birds and the squirrels, all of whom loved Bob and hated Sir Reynard, it is very probable that the rabbit would have fallen prey to some one of the many devices that the crafty old fox employed to catch him. But these little friends were always on the lookout for Bob, and if they spied the fox lying in wait for him they always warned him.

Every morning Cock-robin would fly over to Bob's hole. He would always go early, before breakfast, that he might warn the rabbit if Sir Reynard was waiting for him behind the stump.

Bob would come cautiously up to the mouth of his hole, Cock-robin would be sitting upon the top of a birch a few rods away, and if he

said, "Cheery, cheery," Bob would know that the coast was clear and come hopping out. But if Cock-robin gave his note of alarm, "Quit, quit, quit," Bob would know that the fox was waiting for him, and go back for another nap. Sir Reynard would glare up savagely at the robin when he heard him give the warning note, but the bird was well out of his way and did not fear him; although he did fear that the fox might find a young robin by the path some day and eat it up for revenge. But this he would do anyway, so it did not matter.

Thus the days went on, with Sir Reynard planning trick after trick, and Bob dodging and avoiding his traps as best he might. But this being always hunted and feeling that he must not be off his guard for even a moment, began to tell on the cotton-tail. He got nervous, grew poor, and was very wild, so that sometimes even his friends could not get near him to speak a word of encouragement. But with each day's failure, Sir Reynard's wrath grew and he redoubled his efforts. His temper was not improved by having Mrs. Fox laugh and

poke fun at him, saying that his cunning had forsaken him when a cotton-tail could outwit him.

At last growing desperate with being hunted so long, Bob decided to take matters into his own hands and try a little stratagem himself. This conclusion was greatly strengthened by his finding something in the path one day that he thought might aid him in carrying out his plan. It was not skilfully placed, but Bob at once told his friends, that they might be on their guard. At the same time he took Cock-robin and several other birds into his confidence and they covered this something that Bob had found with leaves, making it look as though the leaves had fallen from a bare limb just above the path.

Bob then adopted a new mode of life. He got up very early every morning, while the stars were still shining, and went forth into the woods. He would then make a circuit of the spruces, taking care to leave a good trail in the dew, and finally come around to the place where he had buried something in the leaves, when

he would run, and with a great spring, jump over the spot where the leaves had fallen so thickly on the ground. Then he would make a circuit of the maple grove, coming back and jumping over exactly the same spot again, after which he would take a short turn down the road and another into the pasture; but this was Sir Reynard's domain, so he went very cautiously, pausing every few moments to listen, take bearings, and see where he could fly to if pursued. Here he always kept in the shadow of a bush and near cover. Some of the birds and squirrels who saw him on these morning runs warned him against leaving so many fresh tracks in the morning dew. Bob only chuckled at their warnings and went on his way, hopping carefully along, always keeping his wits about him.

Sir Reynard at once noticed the fresh tracks in the wet grass, and smiled a broad smile, for he thought that his enemy was getting careless and felt sure that his patience would soon be rewarded by a rabbit breakfast.

Finding the fresh rabbit tracks for several

days in succession, Sir Reynard decided to be up the next morning betimes, and lay in wait for the unwary cotton-tail.

So the next morning he arose before day-break. "Where are you going so early?" asked Mrs. Fox.

"I am going to have one more try at that old bobtail, and unless I am mistaken you and the children will dine on rabbit to-day;" so he set off through the woods with a light heart and with great assurance.

When he came to the edge of the maple grove he sniffed the air cautiously. There was the scent of rabbit not far away. Presently he struck the track. It was very fresh, — his enemy was not a dozen rods away; so Sir Reynard followed the trail boldly and swiftly, feeling that his hour of triumph was near at hand. A few rods further on he caught sight of the cotton-tail hopping leisurely along, and he quickened his pace, but was careful to go very quietly. So keeping close to the ground and stepping as light as a cat, he crept swiftly on. Then he heard a little note of alarm from a

brown bird in the thicket, but he did not mind it. Brownny had seen him and called down to Bob of his coming, but the rabbit did not hurry, for he was near to the spot where he always made the big jump. He was playing a game of life and death and understood the risk that he ran.

Presently he heard a twig snap in the thicket not more than three rods away. Then he knew that he must be moving, so he hopped quickly to the spot where the dead leaves lay thickly upon the ground, gave his long spring, hopped into some small spruces and squatted.

Sir Reynard caught sight of him through the thicket as he made the big jump. "Ah, ha, my fine fellow," he thought, "you are playing leap frog, and little you know of my whereabouts, but I will teach you." He hoped to catch the rabbit at his play and take him before he knew what had happened. There was no need of caution, now was the time to act boldly, so he moved swiftly into the open, going with head up, following by body scent and not sniffing the track. Had he been less

reckless and kept his nose to the trail he might have scented danger. Along the path he came to the place where the ground was strewn with leaves, but he scented something in the thicket just beyond, his nostrils dilated, and his yellow eyes gleamed with a terrible fire.

Suddenly he sprang into the air with a half-stifled yelp of pain. There was a rustle in the leaves, the rattle of a chain, and Sir Reynard was snapping and biting furiously at a trap which was firmly fastened upon his forepaw, just above the joint.

At first he thought to soon wrench himself free, but the jaws of the trap set tighter and tighter as he struggled. Then the horror of the situation came upon him and he lay down in the leaves trembling and whining. Then a rustle in the thicket caught his attention and he looked up to see old Bob squatting under the spruces looking at him.

"Ah, this is your doing, villain," he snarled, shaking his aching paw and glaring at the rabbit with a wild fury in his cruel, yellow eyes. "Let me but get this hateful trap off my paw

and I will strew your white fur all over the woods."

"When you get that trap off your paw," repeated Bob with great coolness, "I will not mind your doing it. But I do not expect you will get off."

"You and I have long had an account to settle, and now we will settle it. I did not bear you any ill will at first, and would not have harmed you in this way had you not hunted me night and day, and made my life a burden. What I have done, I have done in self-defence, so your blood is upon your own head."

"You have ruined me," snarled Sir Reynard, snapping at the trap and glaring at Bob. "Mrs. Fox and the children will avenge my death."

"On the contrary they will know nothing about it," said Bob; "they will simply discover your hide upon the shed up at the farmhouse, and conclude you were killed with the thunderstick, as will be the case, for even now I hear the farmer coming."

Sir Reynard saw that Bob had spoken truly,

for while he was still speaking Grip's sharp bark rang out, and they could hear the farmer calling him to heel.

"Good-by," said the rabbit; "it is nothing that I could help. I simply had to save myself," and he hopped away through the thicket.

A few moments later the terrible roar of the thunderstick rang out on the morning air, and Bob knew that his enemy was dead, and that now he could again enjoy the sweet fields and the green woods as he had done in the good old days before Sir Reynard came his way.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE LAST MEETING.

SUMMER had come and gone, and with it the flowers and fruit that are a part of that delightful season. The delicious autumn, too, was nearly spent, and a feeling of wistfulness was on all the Little Foresters, a longing for the joy that had gone, and a wish that they might in some way turn back the "wheel of time" and live those delightful days over again.

Birds that had been fledglings in May and June were now as large as their parents, flying about with all the importance of grown-ups. Squirrels that had been bits of fuzz when the summer came, now frisked in the branches of the trees and scolded and chattered away in a manner that made the woods ring, and their parents very proud of them.

October had come and gone, the nuts had fallen, and the winter's store had been laid up. It was nearing the time of separation, when the birds, the squirrels, and the rabbits would hold the last meeting of the season at the old trysting tree where farewells were said, for some would fly away to their winter homes, while others would go into the deep woods or den up for the winter.

They had become such good friends during the summer days that it was always hard to part in the autumn; besides, no one could tell what might happen before they met again.

The night of the fifteenth of November was very cold, and when the Little Foresters awoke upon the sixteenth, they discovered that there had been a light flurry of snow during the night, and that settled it as far as most of them were concerned. When the sun rose over the eastern hills Nimrod came flying to the trysting tree, sounding the call for the last meeting.

At the sound of Nimrod's familiar call the Little Foresters came flying, running, and

jumping to the trysting tree, for all knew that it was to be the last meeting, and none wished to be late.

But all did not respond to the call, for some had already said "Farewell" and started South. Even a month ago blithe Bobolink had said "Good-by," and had flown away to the rice fields of the Carolinas. It was sad to have him go, and all the other birds missed the wonderful song that he always poured out so unstintingly. What a gay fellow he was, so good natured and ready to look upon the bright side of life, and always singing.

Scarlet Tanager and Oriole, two more sweet singers, had also said good-by to stern New England and flown away to Maryland or Virginia, I know not which, for sometimes they wintered in one place and sometimes in the other, and this particular year they did not tell where they were going.

But Cock-robin was still here, and when the sun was warm he poured out such a flood of melody that one would have thought that summer was just coming in instead of going out.

This morning he brought quite a flock of his fellow robins, who had come in the night before from the North, and who were all going southward as fast as their wings could carry them.

"Friends," said Nimrod, when all had assembled, and beaks and noses had been counted, "we are assembled for the last time this year, and as chairman of this company, and one in whom I think I may say you all have confidence," here Nimrod stopped to admire the glitter of his wing in the sunlight, and all the birds and squirrels cried, "Yes, yes; go on, Nimrod."

"As chairman of this company," repeated the old crow, "I shall in a few brief words sum up the summer's work, count over those things for which we ought to be truly grateful, and say a word of farewell to you all. But before I say these words I am going to tell you of a discovery I made the other day. It is something that concerns us all."

"Nimrod is always making discoveries," said Cock-robin. "What is it, Nimrod?"

"Well," continued the crow, "you know we have not seen Danger, the big white owl, for several days. We used to see him often enough, and always when we did not want to, but of late I think no one has seen him. Well, night before last I was awakened from a sound sleep by hearing him hoot. There is no mistaking his hoot, for no other owl makes such hideous noises.

"I kept very still and listened, and could not locate the sound for a long time, but finally I decided it came from up towards the farmhouse. I thought it very strange, but went to sleep and dreamed upon it.

"The next morning I saw all of the people at the farmhouse go off down the road, and when they were out of sight I flew up and looked about. For a long time I could discover nothing out of the ordinary, but presently I saw a cage swinging in the big elm, and inside, winking and blinking with his two yellow eyes, was Danger, the great white owl, the terror of the woods. I was so astonished that I nearly fell off the limb of the tree upon which



HE CLUTCHED THE BARS FIERCELY WITH HIS CLAWS.

I was sitting, but, of course, Danger did not see me, as it was broad daylight.

"After watching him for a while I gave a derisive caw. 'Who, who,' asked Danger, looking up, but he could not see me, for the sun was very bright. 'Who, who,' he repeated, winking harder than ever, and trying to get a glimpse of me with his big yellow eyes.

"'It is your friend Nimrod,' I said, going close to the cage. 'What a fine house you have here; when did you move in?'

"'Friend Nimrod,' he screeched, coming up to the bars and clutching them fiercely with his claws. "You are no friend of mine. I would like to wring your silly neck, but it would not be worth my while; you are a noisy fool, but not worth killing.' Then he went to sleep on his perch and I could not get another word out of him, so finally flew away and left him in his gilded cage. It is a good place for him, and I trust that he has done the last of his thieving in these woods. He is too handsome for them to ever let him go, and when they tire

of his silly hooting and blinking they will stuff him, and he will look as wise as ever and be quite as useful."

"Good, good," cried all the Little Foresters. "We shall not have to fear him any more."

"No, he will not trouble us any more," said Nimrod; "and I think, my friends, that on the whole we have a great deal to be thankful for and a very pleasant year to look forward to."

"You will remember how Redtail and Sneak, our two worst enemies, perished together in that last desperate struggle. Our friend Bob, who sits at the foot of this tree, disposed of Sir Reynard for us in a very clever manner. I myself planned the destruction of Black Lightning, although you all helped me bravely. Now that many of our enemies are dead, the forest that is our home will be freer, greener, and pleasanter than ever."

"Now as the sun is getting high and I know that many of you are anxious to be off, let me wish you all a pleasant winter, and a safe return to the green hills and the peaceful valleys that we love so well, and this is my advice to you:

Remember your wits, never leave them behind, for you may need them when you least expect, for shot fly faster than birds, and man is very cunning. Good-by, my friends, good-by."

"Hi-ho for the Cumberland mountains," cried Cock-robin, leading his friends in a swift flight across the meadows.

"Jersey is the place for me," cried the brown thresher, following Cock-robin's lead.

"I'll build me a nest in a cave by the sea on the coast of Virginia," twittered the barnswallow, and he skimmed away over the fields, flying just above the stubble.

"Wheh, wheh," piped the jay, "what is their hurry? I shall stay on until the corn is in, and then I guess Long Island is good enough for me. If you don't get too far South you don't have so far to fly back."

"Good-by," sang the bluebird, in his pleasant "cheery, cheery." "I know a river called the Shenandoah where the fields are ever green and the sun is always shining. I'll away to the valley of the Shenandoah."

"Well, Chip," said Nimrod to the little squir-

rel as he frisked down the old oak, "I don't see but you and I and a few friends will have the forest all to ourselves this winter."

"Oh, no," cried several voices. "I shall always be here," said Ruff Grouse from a thicket near by. "And I," tapped the woodpecker from a dead limb. "I may stay myself for a time," piped the jay.

"Chick-er-dee, dee, dee," came from the thicket; "Chicker-dee-dee-dee, I shall be here, and so will Snowbird and Grosbeak and you, yourself, Nimrod; you will not desert us."

"No," said the old crow, "I shall not desert you. I'll stay in the deep woods and you will occasionally see me when the weather is fine, but it made me feel lonesome for a moment, having them all fly away; but I see that we shall still be a goodly company to hold the woods for them until they all come back."

With these words he flew away to the cornfield where there were still some kernels to be found upon the ground for his breakfast. The old trysting tree was vacant, no sound was heard in its branches, save the sighing and

moaning of the cold November wind and the rustle of withered leaves.

Gone were the birds and the squirrels, gone were the leaves and the acorns, and the only thing to do was to wait patiently for that first sweet whisper of springtime.

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