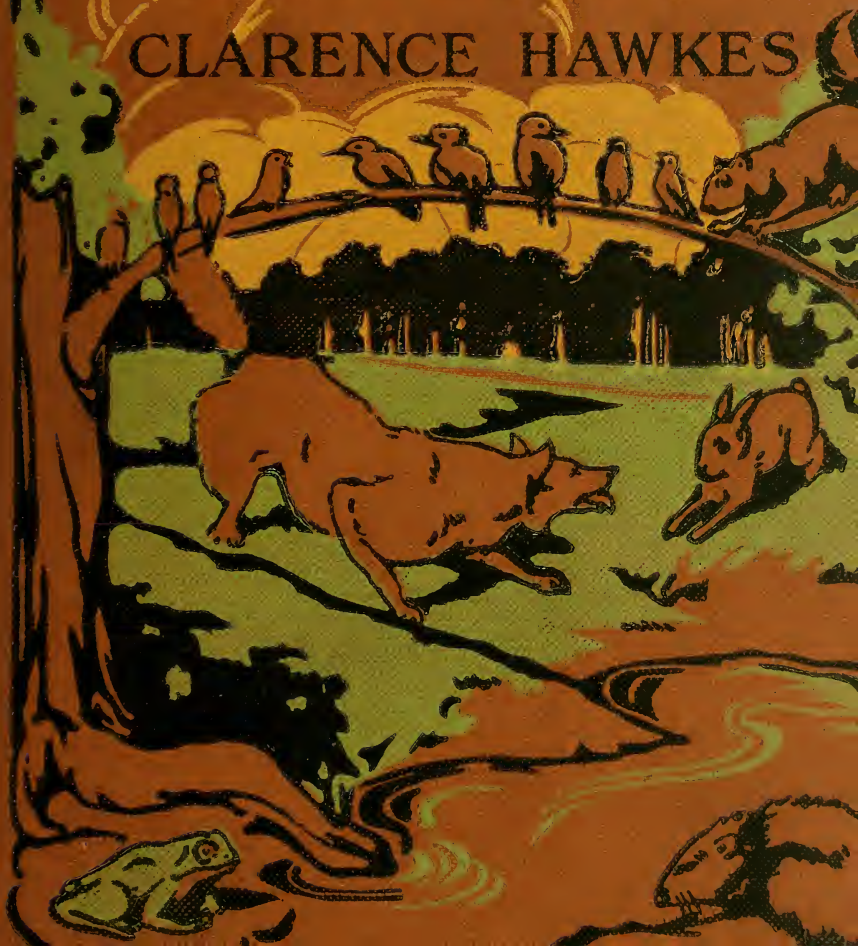




# WOOD & WATER FRIENDS

CLARENCE HAWKES





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THE POUNDING CAME FROM AN OLD APPLE-TREE.



WOOD AND  
WATER FRIENDS

by  
CLARENCE  
HAWKES.

Illustrated by  
CHARLES COPELAND

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## The Woods and the Waters

THERE are two phases of Nature that are always calling to the heart of youth. This is especially true of the strong, courageous heart of a boy. These two aspects of Mother Nature which have laid such a magic spell upon the human heart are the woods and the waters.

It matters not what the season, their charm is always the same, a spell that calls us from books and study, from play or work, but in turn teaches us greater wisdom than was ever propounded by sages, unless they were woods and water wise.

It may be that the call comes in the springtime when the new life is springing in the aisles of the ancient forest, for it is then that the voice is the loudest.

Along the brookside the cowslips hold up their yellow chalices to catch the first warm sunbeams, and by the lakeside the reeds and water grasses have put on their pale, ethereal green. In either place the voice of birds and batrachia will be calling.

But even though it is in somber winter and the ancient forest is nude and leafless ; even though the brook is icebound and the lake is sleeping neath its palace of ice, yet the voices are still calling faintly to

the heart of youth ; saying to the stout-hearted, " Put on snowshoes and skis and come out of your overheated houses. Put on skates and sweaters and come forth to Mother Nature and she will still tell you of the woods and the waters, of these two living haunts of nature that never sleep, but are always wide-awake, breathing and throbbing with life."

It is to the stout-hearted that Nature reveals herself. Seek and ye shall find. Knock and it will be opened unto you.

I hold it the greatest privilege of my life that I was born in the country, amid the green growing things ; with the birds, the squirrels and the rabbits for playfellows, and the fields and the forests for my playground.

Each spring I watched, with never-tiring zest, for the coming of the birds. That day when the first bluebird perched upon treetop or bar-post and greeted me with his sweet little " Cheerily, Cheerily," was a red letter day and carried sunshine through the many bleak, stormy days that often followed it. I called the bluebird my hope bird. I afterwards learned that the bluebird and the blue flower are symbols of Hope in mythology. But the bluebird was not alone for long, for the grackles followed fast while the robin, the song sparrow and the meadow lark soon made the spring vocal and gladness again filled the land.

Their nest building, and the joys and sorrows of



the household were to me very personal affairs. I guarded them from harm as I would my best friends. For the birds are our friends and they mean much to us, both for their song and beauty and for their great aid in keeping down the insects that destroy crops.

We always went up to the maple grove in the pasture on Sunday afternoon in the summer time to read or lie idly upon the green moss listening to the woods sounds, or watching the wild, shy life.

In the autumn time we came to the friendly forest again for nuts, and many a pleasant October afternoon we spent gathering the spoils of chestnut, walnut, or beechnut.

Nor was the ancient woods without interest in the winter, for it was then that I went with the logging teams to the deep woods to watch the hauling and the piling of the great logs and finally I rode out on the top of a high load on its way to the sawmill. In this way I learned to read the book of Nature in the winter time and devoured its pages with all the excitement of a thrilling romance.

The birds, the squirrels, the rabbits and the foxes could not write, but they could all make their mark. These marks they made in the new snow, whenever and wherever they went and these signs told me the incidents of their lives from the beginning to its exciting and often tragic end.

The waters were not less fascinating than the

woods and each season had its particular charm. The first day of the open season for trout was as important a day in the annals of the waters as was the coming of the bluebird in the chronicle of the birds. Then it was that I got out an ironwood fish-pole, for I did not own a bamboo rod and with plenty of worms dug in the garden and with a generous lunch started for the rarest day's sport that life has ever afforded me.

The half nude forest just touched with green, the first arbutus, the white shadbush, the first springing cowslips and the noisy kingfisher, I can recall them all just as though it were but yesterday.

How hungry I was when the lunch hour came and with what pride I brought home the catch at night and laid them all out on the doorstep and gloated over the specks of gold upon their beautifully mottled backs and sides. No miser ever gloated over gold with more satisfaction.

In the summer time we boys often went to the old mill-pond for a day's pickerel fishing. Our boat was a water-soaked old tub, which leaked like a sieve, but we thought her the finest boat ever manned, and the day upon the pond was a cup brimming over with boyish pleasure.

In the late autumn we came to the same fascinating mill-pond for skating, and in the winter to fish through the ice for the pickerel that had eluded us in the summer time.

So the streams and the lakes too had their charms and each season brought new joys that were eagerly waited for and pounced upon with boyish shouts of delight.

It is a wonderful thing for the boys and girls of to-day that so many beautiful animal stories and other Nature books have been written. It is also fortunate that teachers and librarians use them so freely in their class rooms and in the children's rooms of the great city libraries.

The average wide-awake child of to-day knows more of the birds and wild-flowers than their parents do, because they have had advantages along these lines which their fathers and mothers did not.

The bird calendar and the herbarium in the public schools have taught them these priceless things and no sordid circumstances of after life can wholly obliterate these beautiful uplifting pictures of field and forest and of the little furred and feathered friends who make these haunts beautiful and wonderful.

So, young people, go often to the woods and the waters and learn from Nature's great book. Learn by heart the four-part story of spring, summer, autumn and winter. Then when you are older, if the circumstances of your life take you away into the city you will have something infinitely precious to feed your heart and brain upon when the din and the grind of the city are heavy upon you.

Out of the woods and the waters cometh perfect

peace ; peace and understanding which will make you strong when you need strength and wise when you need wisdom.

This is God's world that we live in. With His hands He fashioned it ; the woods and the waters. He made it for an inspiration and delight. So let us be mindful of its beauty and its wonder and hold them in our hearts as a sacred precious thing that shall make us rich as Kings and fill our souls with peace and understanding.

CLARENCE HAWKES.

*Hadley, Mass.,  
July 24th, 1917.*

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# Wood and Water Friends

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## 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 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



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



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 hail-storm 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 mantelpiece 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?

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### 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 any 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 corn-field, 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 hadn'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 isn'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 didn'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 didn'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 the time he kept up a most deafening cawing, partly to distract the hawk, and 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.

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### 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 start-

led 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 cottontail 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.

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### 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 pileated 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 wood-chopper 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 won-

dered ; 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 toward 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.

### 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 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 Nim-

rod'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 tree-top. 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 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



CHUCKY REARED CAUTIOUSLY UPON HIS HIND LEGS.





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.

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### 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 newcomer 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 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 near by, 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 astonish-

ment 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 watch-

ing 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 sea-sickness



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.

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### 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 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 treetops.

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 treetops 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.

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### 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, running 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 toward the woods. He carefully baited it with an ear of corn, then sat down at a distance to see what happened, for Billy ex-

pected 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 treetops 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.

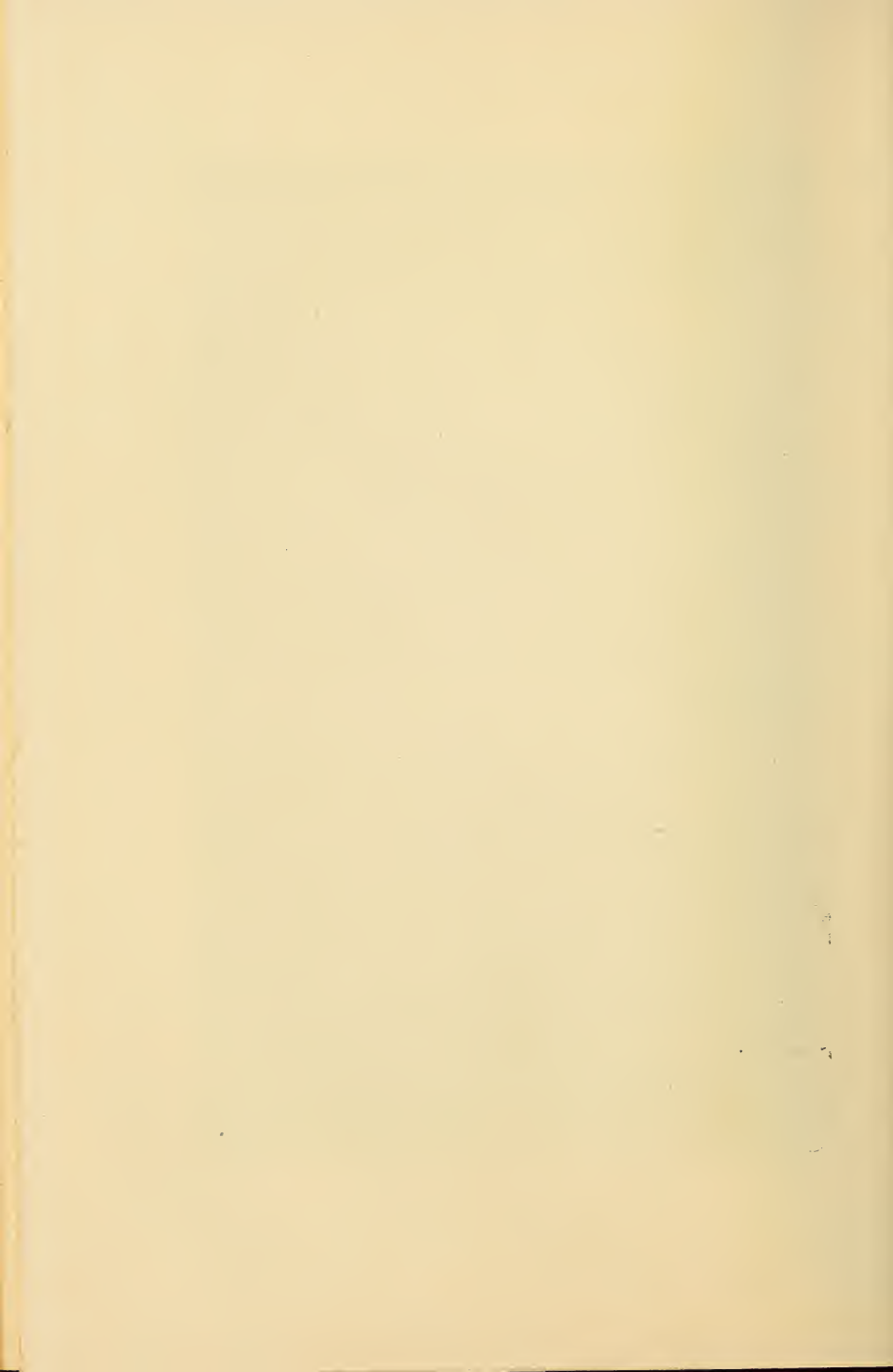
Billy crawled away into one corner of the little house and began to cry softly. He did not dare to cry aloud, for he was afraid of waking the giant family. But the baby heard him and came creeping out to see what the noise was. Billy at once stopped crying when he saw him looking at him, and sat up straight.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





WHAT A CUTE LITTLE HOUSE IT WAS.



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 bedroom win-

dow, 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 toward the wall where Billy's box trap was set. Frisk chattered 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 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.

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### 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 treetops 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 rabbit; 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 treetops, 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 topmost 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 phoebe, 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 Field-mouse 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 toward the setting sun. He thought that when he was ready to come back he could travel toward 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 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.

### 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 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.

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### 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 treetops, and the shrill cries of news-boys 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 "cheerily, cheerily" of the bluebird, and not to mistake it for the "cheery, cheery" of the robin, which is louder and more abrupt.

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 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 toward 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 north-west.

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 mid-summer 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.”

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### 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 re-

treating, 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 treetops, 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 treetop 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 treetops, 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 wouldn'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.



CHARLES COPELAND.

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



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 treetop. His wing was not broken, though it hurt him terribly to fly.

But it was so cold in the treetop 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 toward 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 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 treetops 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 treetop 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, realizing 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 treetop 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 treetops, 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 ave-

nues 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 cottontail 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-be-gone look, he said, "say, old chap, you haven'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.

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### Bob's Revenge

BOB was the old cottontail 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 Foresters 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 cottontail 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 weasel hanging upon his neck, sucking his life blood; or men might come with a hound and a ferret that would 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 toward the cottontail; 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; besides, 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 cottontail squatted low to the ground with his legs well under him, ready for a spring.

“Didn’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 cottontail, 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 cottontail. 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 cottontail 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 cottontail.

So the next morning he arose before daybreak. "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 cottontail 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. Brownie 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.

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### 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 For-

esters, 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 fledgelings 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."

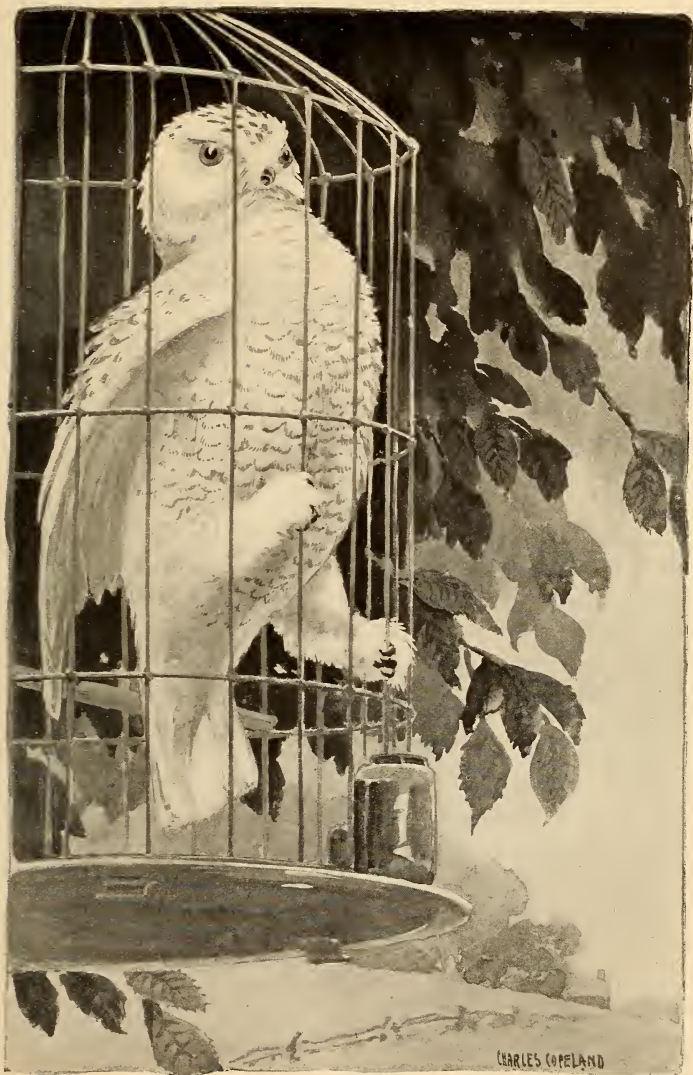
"As chairman of this company," repeated the old crow, "I shall in a few brief words sum up the summer's work, count over those things for which we ought to be truly grateful, and say a word of farewell to you all. But before I say these words I am going to tell you of a discovery I made the other day.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



HE CLUTCHED THE BARS FIERCELY WITH HIS CLAWS.



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 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 thrasher, 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 squirrel 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; "Chick-er-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 corn-field 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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### A Teacher of Woodcraft

NO day that I have spent roaming the woods with old Ben Wilson will ever be quite forgotten. Although, as he flourished nearly twenty years ago, some of those memories are rather dim. He was never known as Mr. Benjamin Wilson, for his full name did not fit him, so he was simply Old Ben to all the boys whom he fancied, for ten miles around.

He was not an important personage, either, so you may wonder just what his hold upon your affections was. If I remember rightly, he was not in favor with the elders in the prim little New England



town where we lived, for many of them called him "a lazy good-for-nothing," but never anything worse than that.

His great sin seemed to be that he loved nature and the wonders of the fields and woods, more than most of his prosaic neighbors, and so took more time to admire them.

It was a very common sight to see Old Ben walking home with one arm full of hickory saplings and the other filled with springy hemlock boughs. The hickories he would carefully peel, some rainy day, and then he would hang them up in the barn, with a weight on the end of each. There in the course of time they became the choicest kind of trout poles. It was considered as much of an honor, by us boys, to be the possessor of one of Old Ben's hickory rods, as it was in after years to own one of Spalding's best fly rods. The hemlock boughs were made into bows, strips of woodchuck hide being used for the strings. One of these bows made a boy of ten as near the counterpart of an Apache Indian as he was likely to ever get.

Then there was always an assortment of popguns made from the hollow elder, for boys who were too small to use the bows; so was it any wonder that we all loved Old Ben?

He did not like to take small boys with him into the woods. "They air allus hollerin' and skeerin' things," he would say. "A boy has gut ter be old

enough ter hold his tongue before he can go with me." I was about ten years old when, one May afternoon, I made my first pilgrimage with Old Ben to the shrine of nature, and I saw more in that brief afternoon than I had ever seen before in my life.

"Eyes ain't good for nothin' in the woods, without you know how to use um," my guide would say. "Most folks go thunderin' through the woods, like it was Washington street, an' don't see nothin', while the rabbit sits under a bush a laughin' behind his paw, an' winkin' at the squirrel above him in the tree. There ain't one person in ten that can see anything in the woods, while really one can see more there than anywhere else."

On this particular afternoon we took the cow-path leading down through the lane to the pasture, after which we struck off into the deep woods.

We had scarcely turned from the path into the alder bushes that skirted the woods when a small brown bird fluttered out of the grass at our feet, and flew into a bush near by, where she fluttered about, twittering in an excited manner.

"Now, Harry," said Old Ben seriously, "what do you think of that?"

"What?" I asked, for I had seen nothing unusual.

"Why is that 'ere brown bird floppin' up out of the grass in that way and then perchin' on that bush an' not flyin' off? Put your wits to work, boy, an' tell me what you think on it."

"I don't think anything of it," I said after a moment's thought. "'Tain't anything but just a brown bird, and they are always flying around in the bushes."

"Eyes, yet they see not, ears, yet they hear not," repeated Old Ben mournfully. "But I don't blame you, boy; it's our first trip together, an' I'll teach you to see things, in time.

"Wal, that there brown bird came out from under that bit of a bush by the path an' ten ter one there is where her nest is."

"Why, what makes you think so?" I asked in astonishment.

"Wal," replied Old Ben, thoughtfully, "she warn't there for nuthin', birds and squirrels don't do things for nuthin'. She wouldn't be feedin' there this time o' day, for 'tain't neither breakfast time nor supper time, besides, don't you see she don't want to go away? She's waitin' to see what you an' I are goin' to do about her nest. Uv course I may be mistaken, for a feller ain't never quite sure in the woods, but let's see."

We knelt down by the bush and poked away the grass, and there, sure enough, was the nest with five speckled eggs in it. It was a very cosy house, lined with hair and sheltered from the wind and rain by the bush.

"Ain't it a pretty home for Mr. and Mrs. Brownie?" asked Old Ben, poking the grass back as it had been before.

"Let me take one of the eggs home to keep," I said, reaching for it. But to my astonishment my companion caught me by the wrist. "No, you don't," he said decidedly. "This ain't no nest robbin' expedition, not ef I know it. If you hev come with me ter rob birds' nests, I am goin' home. Ef you take that egg home it means one less bird to sing to us and hop about an' look pretty. Think uv that."

I had never thought of it before in just that light, and the more I considered, the more I became sure that I had no right to take this little unhatched bird's life in that way.

"Come on," said my companion, "we hev disturbed Mrs. Brownie long enough; she is gettin' nervous, let's be movin'." So we parted the alder bushes and walked on, leaving the little house undisturbed and the heart of the brown bird glad that we had not taken any of her eggs.

Old Ben glided along as easily in the cover as I could go in the open, and he rarely made any noise. "Light-foot," we boys called him, but with me the case was quite different. Every dry twig that I stepped on snapped like a parlor match, and I was always stepping on one end of a long stick and having the other end fly up with a big noise.

"Harry," said my companion severely, after one of these missteps, "you make as much racket in the woods as a rhinoceros would in a tin shop. Enny-

body'd think your feet were pile drivers; why don't you let them down easy, like the earth was eggs, an' you wuz afraid uv breakin' on um."

Presently a brown streak shot across the path and was lost to sight in the weeds and underbrush.

"What's that?" I asked excitedly.

"Rabbit," replied my guide in an undertone. "Allus when you see a brown streak an' can't quite make it out, it's a rabbit, that is, ef it is on the ground; but in winter it would be a white streak."

"What, the same rabbit?" I asked.

"Yes," said Old Ben seriously. "He has got two coats. A brown one that he wears in the summer and a white one in winter."

"Where did he go to?" I asked.

"Are you a bat, that you can't see in the day-time?" Ben asked, looking scornfully down at me. "He is in just as plain sight at this very minute as I be. Use your eyes, boy."

I looked along the path where I had last seen the cottontail, while Ben grinned broadly.

"I can't see him," I said at last in a whisper. "I don't believe he is in sight."

"See that old log about twenty feet ahead? Wal, just let your eye run along it to where it runs into the bush." I did as I was told, and there, squatting under the bush, in plain sight, but as still as though he had been made of brown marble instead of quivering nerves and muscles, was the cottontail. His

color blended perfectly with that of some last year's dead leaves, and the gray brown of the rotten log. He kept so still that I almost thought he had turned to stone, but if you looked carefully, you could see his nose and ears twitch slightly.

"What makes him keep so still?" I asked.

"That is the way he hides," said Ben. "He knows better than we do that he is just the color of the ground, and if he does not catch your eye by some movement that ten to one you will not see him at all. There he goes."

I looked, but was too late, for he had already disappeared.

"Did you ever hear how 'twas the rabbit lost his tail?" said my companion as we proceeded on our walk.

"No," I replied. "How was it?"

"Wal," said Ben in his queer drawl, "it was this 'ere way.

"Once, many years ago, a rabbit and a turtle lived in the same swamp. The rabbit was terrible proud an' put on airs. He had a fine long tail in them days, an' he carried it over his back like a squirrel. It used to make the turtle awful jealous to see him an' so he thought he'd fix him. One mornin' when he met the rabbit he says, 'Hallo! I wonder if you want to run a race with me to-day?' At this the rabbit snickered and leaped over a bush, just to show what he could do.

“‘I run a race with you?’ he said, scornfully, ‘why, if I didn’t have but one leg I could beat you, you old snail.’

“‘I dare you to try it,’ said the turtle hotly.

“‘Name the distance, the starting place, and the forfeit,’ returned the rabbit, proudly, ‘and we will see about your fine boasting.’

“‘Well,’ said the turtle, ‘we will run through the pasture to the mowing, through the farmer’s turnip patch, twice and back again.’

“‘Agreed,’ said the rabbit.

“‘And this will be the forfeit,’ said the turtle. ‘If you win, you may bite my tail off, and if I win I shall bite your tail off.’

“The rabbit laughed loudly at this. ‘Why, friend Turtle,’ he cried, ‘you can’t steer yourself in the water without a tail. How queer you will look,’ and without more ado, he was off, running like the wind.

“The turtle waddled after him, smiling broadly, for he well knew if he lost the race that he could draw his tail into his shell and the rabbit could not bite it off, although he tried a week. But this was not the whole of his plan. It took him a long time to go through the pasture to the mowing and when he got there he saw the rabbit busily eating turnips in the farmer’s lot. This was what he had expected, so he went quietly on his way, taking care not to disturb the cottontail.

“Well, Mr. Turtle just made his short legs wiggle, and before the rabbit knew it he had lost the race. He came flying back through the pasture as though the dogs were after him, but it warn’t no use, for there was the turtle waitin’ for him at the brook.

“The rabbit teased terrible not to have his tail nipped off, but he had plagued the turtle so much in the past that it warn’t no use, so the turtle nipped off his tail at one bite. And rabbits hain’t ever had tails since.”

“Is that a real true story?” I asked when Old Ben had finished, for I had never heard anything of the kind, and was suspicious that Ben had made it up for the occasion.

“Mebbe it is, an’ mebbe it ain’t,” answered the old man. “There’s lots uv lies that air true in this world, an’ vicy verse. Mebbe it war an allgory, or mebbe, more properly speaking, it wuz a tail.”

While Ben had been telling me the story of how the rabbit lost his tail, we had been sitting on an old moss-covered log, just such as abound in the forest, he whittling and I chewing gum, that he had previously dug for me with the large pocketknife that he always carried.

“Wal,” he said, when the story was finished, “I’ve got this cane done an’ I guess we had better be moving, for I have gut several things to show you.”

The cane which Ben had made for me was cut



from a maple sapling. He had cut rings about it on the lower end and peeled off the bark between the cuts so it gave it a striped effect, while at the top he had made a whistle.

“That cane ain’t good for much ter walk with, but it looks sort uv pretty, an’ you can blow the whistle when we git out of the woods.

“Now, if I can, I am a goin’ to show you one of the sights uv these here woods, an’ that is a cock partridge, drummin’. But it is mighty hard to get near um, an’ you are such a heavy stepper maybe we can’t do it. I heared one a drummin’ a long ways off when we wuz a sittin’ on the log. I guess I know where his log is. Now you follow me. We can go along fast enough until we get within ten or fifteen rods uv the log, an’ then we will have to be careful.”

We trudged along for several moments before we heard anything that sounded to me like a cock partridge drumming, but finally I heard it: slow at first but soon growing faster and faster, until it was one long roll like thunder.

“I s’pose even you could hear that,” whispered Old Ben when it had ceased. “Now we’ll stop and stand perfectly still until he begins again, and then we will go as far as we can while he is drummin’. You see he is making so much noise then that he can’t hear us; but he will listen between times, so be careful.”

We waited some time for the old cock to drum and I was afraid he had stopped, when he began again. The moment he started to drum we began to creep up on him, and had made twenty or thirty feet by the time he had ceased.

This we did several times, each time drawing nearer and nearer to the log, until the drumming sounded almost like thunder. Each time when the partridge stopped we would crouch behind a tree trunk, and wait patiently for him to begin again.

As we got nearer to him, Old Ben kept motioning me to be quiet and not to step on dry twigs or rolling stones.

"You see he is almost the same as on the ground, an' gets the sound easy," he whispered.

By this time I was all excitement, and my heart was beating like a trip-hammer.

When he began again, we hurried a few steps forward to the top of a little rise, and lay flat upon the ground, and hardly dared to draw breath until he began again.

At the first beat of the partridge's wings Ben clutched me by the shoulder, and we both stood up and peered between two trees into a little ravine that the rising ground had hidden from us before.

There upon an old log in a little opening was Mr. Partridge, looking as proud as though he owned the whole woods. He stood erect, like a soldier on dress parade and his ruffs were distended. Slowly

his wings rose, until they were as high as his back, and then they descended like lightning, but faster and faster they fell until the eye could no longer see them and he looked like a great round bunch of feathers about the size of a half-bushel basket.

As the martial roll of the cock neared the close we dropped to the ground and lay still, not daring to move or breathe. It was a long time before he drummed again, and I began to fear that he had got tired of it and gone off. But presently there came the first loud thump of his wings.

We stood up again and had a splendid sight of this wary bird, sounding his drum call,—a sight which few people ever see.

As he neared the finish we again dropped to the ground.

“My,” I exclaimed, drawing a deep breath and speaking aloud in the excitement of the moment, “ain’t he a bouncer when he is drumming.” The words had scarcely died upon my lips, when there was a roar of wings beyond the old log, and we caught a glimpse of the cock, speeding away like an express train.

“There, you hev done it,” said Ben in disgust. “You will hev ter learn not to go a shoutin’ around when you are in the woods with me or I’ll leave you to home,” and the old man looked grimly down at me.

“I didn’t mean ter,” I said, this time speaking in a whisper.

Ben laughed. "It won't do no good ter be a whispering now, an' you might as well talk out loud. He's more'n a mile away by this time,"

"Won't he come back?" I asked, greatly disappointed with the news.

"Come back? I guess not," said Ben scornfully. "He is the shyest bird there is, an' when he knows there are two great lubbers like us a snookin' round his log he won't come back until he knows the coast is clear. He won't drum any more here to-day, an' mebbe not to-morrow, for they are terrible suspicious."

"What makes him?" I asked.

"Wal," said Ben, "lots of things, includin' you an' me. Besides men, there are hawks, owls, weasels, cats, foxes, wildcats; them air a few of the things that make him wary.

"Now I hev gut just one thing more to show you an' then we will go home. Mebbe I can't find what I want. I discovered um the other day, an' mebbe their ma has moved them."

"Moved what?" I asked.

"Wait an' you will see," said Ben, and he led the way through the woods, going at his long lope that I could scarcely follow.

"We hain't gut to be careful now, for we will hev ter skeer the ma away effore we can see um. See that old black stump ahead?" asked Ben when we had gone some distance.

"Yes," I replied.

"Wal," said my guide, "you keep your eyes on that an' let me know if you see anything."

I stumbled along, not looking where I was stepping, for my eyes were riveted on the stump.

Presently a rabbit hopped out from under the stump and along the path a few steps, and then stood still, just as the other had done. But as we came nearer the rabbit sprang into the bushes and was gone.

"That's their ma," said Ben; "ef she hain't moved them they are under this stump."

Ben put his arm in a hole near the ground, and after feeling about for a moment, brought out the cutest little white pink-nosed chap you ever saw. The only thing that would tell you it was a rabbit was its long ears. Its eyes were not open yet, and its little pink nose twitched as I held it, while it made a tiny noise, half way between a grunt and a squeak.

"My, ain't he pretty," I said, devouring the baby rabbit with my eyes; "let's take him home."

"Not much," said Ben, giving me one of his severe looks. "How do you think you would like it when we get home to find that a big animal from one of the planets had been at the house and carried off the baby? It's bad enough for us to be poking about scarin' um without stealing the babies into the bargain. The mother will probably move um, now they have been disturbed the second time. I

found um the other day and thought you would like to see um. But it won't do you any good to come here again, for the ma will move um to-night."

We fished out two more baby rabbits, and after admiring them to our hearts' content, put them back and started for home.

"I guess that is sights enough for one day," said Ben. "We hev been pretty fortunate. We might hev tried a whole season before we saw that partridge drum. I was more than forty years old before I ever saw one drumming. And that is only the second or third litter of rabbits that I have ever discovered, so you see you are lucky to-day."

I thanked Old Ben the best I knew how to, but he only said, "Tut, tut, I don't want no thanks, but I wanted you to know that these things aren't hangin' on every bush in the woods. You hev to be patient and careful and love all the little animals and at last you may find out something of um and how they live. Some day we will go again an' mebbe see more strange things, who knows."

By this time we had got out into the pasture again, and we soon turned into a cow-path that led to the bars.

"Always makes me feel rested and good-natured to be out in the woods," continued Ben. "I think it is because we get nearer to God in the woods than anywhere else. God is strength and rest for us all."

### Old Ringtail's Waterloo

WHEN Old Ben first brought Ringtail to me, he was a fuzzy bit of a coon kitten about the size of a chipmunk, or perhaps a little larger. He was of a dirty gray color, rotund in shape, and as near as we could estimate, about three weeks old. He probably had his eyes open to the bright light and the strange world some three or four days when I got him.

Ben said that coon kittens were slower in getting their eyes open than any other kind of kittens, as some of them were blind for nearly three weeks, while domestic kittens and puppies got their sight in about ten days. My new pet was not shapely, but resembled a ball of fuzz more than a would-be coon.

He did not make any sound when he was small except to grunt contentedly when he was full, and to cry when hungry, very much as kittens or puppies would.

We had a hard time teaching him to drink milk, and in fact he nearly starved before he learned.

Several times we despaired of getting him to drink, and he might have gone the way of many a wild thing that man undertakes to domesticate, had we not hit upon the plan of giving him his milk from a small oil can, squirting it into his mouth.

Ben took me to the woods one day, and showed me where he had found the burrow of the coons. It was under the roots of a big birch that overhung a

brook. The bank had shelved off into the water, leaving a small cave under the roots of the tree, and here the coons had made themselves a fine burrow, lining it with dry grass and leaves. It was sheltered, warm and dry, and near to the water, of which a coon is fond. He is a clumsy sort of a fisherman also, and this is one reason why he likes to be near a brook. He is no match for the otter in this sport, and he does not live in the water as the otter does, but he likes to paddle in it and occasionally knock a sleepy sucker out of the water with his paw. This was to be seen from the fishbones that were scattered around the burrow. The burrow must have been an old one, for there were last year's corn-cobs and other evidences of long occupancy. But this snug home was now quite vacant, and had been for some time. "It was because I took one of the babies," explained Ben. "These wild critters will rarely stay in a burrow after it has been robbed, and birds do not like to build in a tree where they have had bad luck the year before. If they do they will change the position of the nest."

When Ringtail got large enough to enjoy the outside world, I made a wire-netting fence around the big maple in the yard, about twenty feet from the trunk, and let him play in the tree or run in his little yard, as best pleased him.

He soon made a burrow of his own under the root of the tree, and was very much at home.



Even while small he would climb to great heights in the tree, and I fully expected to see him come tumbling down and dash his brains out on a root, for the coon is a clumsy fellow compared with a squirrel, and, while a good climber, he is not built for that exclusively, as the squirrel is. But I do not know that my new pet would have been hurt had he fallen, for he was very fat, and his fur would have acted as a cushion.

We did not call him Ringtail at first, as the rings about his tail and eyes were not plain enough then to suggest the name, but they came out early in the summer, and by the fall were very marked.

This history may, like ancient Gaul, be divided into three parts, that of Little Ringtail, the baby coon, Young Ringtail, the mischief-maker, and old Ringtail, the renegade and thief.

It was on sweet corn that Ringtail first made his start toward being the monster coon that he finally became. He would eat several ears in a day, gnawing the kernels off, and sucking out all the sweetness in the cob. He did not like the corn as well boiled as raw, so we threw his into the yard, when it came from the garden, usually with the husk on, for it was fun to see him husk it. He would hold the ear down with his paw, and starting the husk at the top would strip it off with a sudden jerk of his head.

Ringtail was also fond of fish. In fact fish was

one of his passions, and we got a head for him as regularly as we bought fish.

I do not know whether he could distinguish between mackerel and shad heads, and trout, or whether he preferred trout as coming from his native brook, but I took it very hard of him, when one day he fished a fine string of brook trout out of a pail where I had left them in some water and carried them under the house. They were still on the string, and he held the end of the willow switch in his mouth, and of course the fish came along. No amount of coaxing would prevail upon him to bring out the trout, but he did return the stringer after he had eaten them. Perhaps it was an invitation to go to the brook and get more for him. But this was when he got to be Ringtail the mischief-maker, and had the full run of the premises.

He was on good terms with most of the domestic animals. A dog, a cat, some kittens, some chickens, and a coon frequently took their breakfast from the same dish, without quarreling more than one would expect.

Ringtail always took pains to eat on the opposite side of the plate from the dog, and they occasionally exchanged snarls, and showed teeth, and once I rescued the coon, when he was still young, from a premature grave; but these things always happen, and on the whole he took very good care of himself. He was very jealous, though, of an old woodchuck

that we had partly tamed, who used to come to the door for a crust of bread. If the coon was about when Chucky appeared he usually sent him back into his hole at the top of his speed. The woodchuck always gave a whistle of defiance as he dove into his burrow, and once underground he wheeled about and invited Mr. Coon to come and see what a good set of teeth he had, but the coon always refused the invitation.

Early in August I cut a large hole in the wire netting that framed the coon's yard, and let him run where he pleased, at the same time leaving his yard and burrow to flee to in time of peril.

From the very first day that I gave him the run of the premises began the history of Ringtail the mischief-maker. When we went into the garden that forenoon to pick corn, we found that some one had been there before us, and helped himself in a peculiar manner. There were several stalks partly down, as though they had been recently bent to the ground. The ears on these stalks were either partly or wholly eaten. Besides this, a few stalks had been lopped over just for fun. At first we did not think who the marauder was, but the second day we caught him in the act. He would rear on his hind legs, and, catching a stalk under his forearm, press it to the ground, and hold it down while he ate the ear, much as a boy would hold down a bush while picking the fruit.

After that nothing was quite safe from that prying,

pointed nose and those inquisitive paws, and although he made all kinds of trouble, he was so ingenious, and so full of pranks and capers, that it afforded us considerable amusement, as well as annoyance.

Besides picking corn when he pleased, he poked about the roots of the beets to see how they grew, occasionally gnawing into one to discover if it was ripe. Some of the squashes he nipped from their stems just for fun, and later on in the season he gnawed holes in the sides of many pumpkins, and scooped out the seeds with his paw and ate them, leaving the entire pumpkin to rot or dry up. Occasionally he robbed a hen's nest, breaking a hole in the end of each egg, and sucking it as neatly as a boy could have done. Once he investigated a beehive, and went away much wiser: he was not badly stung, for his thick fur made that impossible, but two or three bees got in their work on his nose, and for a day or two it was a sorry sight. But he seemed to know what to do for it as well as I would, for he went at once to the side of the road and stuck his nose into the mud, repeating the operation until it was daubed with a fine mud poultice. When the poultice got dry and crumbled off he renewed it, and soon had the fever reduced.

Ringtail was a genuine sport, his two kinds of game being fish and small birds, which he would sometimes eat up, nest and all.

It was about Thanksgiving time that he had his first taste of chicken. It was purely an accident, for we had feared letting him taste even chicken bones. But after the chickens were killed for the Thanksgiving pie, he found their heads near the chopping block, and ate them, and poked about in the chips for more heads.

A few days after Ringtail brought a hen and laid her on the front doorstep. Her head was nipped off as clean as one would have done it with an axe. By his manner he seemed to say, "Here is another for the pot; I have fixed her just as you did the others."

We did not want any more of Ring's help, and so put a collar on him and tied him up. It was a hard trial for him being halter-broken, and he nearly strangled during several fits of pulling, but finally learned that it was useless.

About this time there came on a very cold snap and a hard snowstorm. The snow came in the night, and when we went to feed Ring the next morning he was gone, leaving an empty collar.

We saw nothing of him for two months, and thought he had returned to his native woods, and found shelter in a hollow tree, when one warm day on going into the cellar, who should we see sitting on the potato bin but Ring, looking sleepy and stupid. We let him alone, and the next day he was gone, but investigation revealed him rolled up in a ball in a ditch leading from the cellar to the outside

world. The cellar being on a side hill was drained by this ditch. Ring had slipped his collar and crawled into the outer end of the ditch the night of the cold spell and the snowstorm. In the morning he had probably found the entrance blocked by snow, and had concluded it was time to hibernate, and had gone to sleep. The warm winter thaw had awakened him and he had come into the cellar to investigate. When Ringtail appeared in the spring, about the middle of March, he was not the sleek, well-groomed coon that had curled up for his long nap in the autumn. He was lean and lank, and his coat was dull and rusty.

He was a little shy at first, and it took him a day or two to get fully waked up, but after a little he remembered that we were his friends and showed us the same confidence he had the year before.

There was no sweet corn or garden stuff for Ringtail in the early spring, but he did very well on some sweet winter apples. He was also partial to turnips, and he remembered the fish-cart, and got his usual fish head. He also ate ground fish which we used for fertilizer, and its odor clung to him for days afterwards.

But the summer season, with new sweet corn and sweet apples, was his time for growth, and during the second summer he nearly doubled in size. He had also gotten to be quite a scrapper, and it was a good dog that cared to take a bout with him.

It was early in September of the second year that

Ringtail made his first depredation on the henhouse, and it was his love for chicken, together with his extravagant wastefulness in killing, that finally led to his downfall.

I am confident that he knew the chickens were not intended for him, and he had no right with them, for the night that he killed a rooster and two hens he took to the woods, and was never seen about the premises by day again. I occasionally saw him in the fields, but he took good care not to let me get in reach, and paid little heed to my calling. He seemed always to be watching me out of one eye, and his countenance plainly said, "I know it would not be well for me to have you catch me, so we will live apart hereafter."

Two nights after his first thieving, he visited the henhouse again, this time killing four fowls, only one of which he carried away.

I had raised a fancy strain of Wyandottes, intending to show them at the fair, which was to be in a week or two. But this last stroke of Ringtail's spoiled my coop, as it left me only two or three ragged pullets and a rooster that was off color. If he had been content with killing ordinary hens, it would not have been so bad, but when he picked out thoroughbreds, it was too much to bear.

That noon Ben happened along, and I told him my grief.

"The ole rascal," he said, sympathetically. "I

thought it would come to this all along ; you can't keep lambs and lions in the same cage, not without you keep puttin' in fresh lambs. I'll bring over a trap to-night and we'll catch him."

Accordingly we set the trap, with all of Old Ben's trapper's ingenuity, but no coon could we catch. Nearly every morning we found evidences that the coon had been about ; sometimes he killed a chicken, more frequently he was satisfied with less flagrant mischief, but he never got into our trap.

He was so used to the premises that anything out of the ordinary attracted his attention, and put him on his guard. It may be only my imagination, but it seemed to me that he purposely tormented us, and defied us to catch him.

We put up with being robbed and tormented in this way for about a month, then Ben went to a neighboring village for a celebrated coon dog, and we planned a hunt that should either end the career of this marauder, or else scare him out of the country.

The dog was a beautiful black and tan fox hound, who was equally good as a coon dog, which is not usually the case. I remember well fondling his ears and petting him before we started out.

It was about the first of October. Corn was cut and in the shock. The apples were picked, and nearly all the fall work well along.

We went at once to the corn-field, as the most likely place in which to get track of the coon.



"If you want to know whether a coon has been in a corn-field or not," said Ben, "just go round it with the dog, keep him on a string while you do it, and then you will be sure of it."

At the further side of the field the hound got excited, and we let him go.

He at once took the trail and went off into the pasture, barking at every jump. Ben and I followed as fast as we could.

In less than three minutes the dog was barking up a tree in the pasture near by. We went to the spot and found him at the foot of the big maple.

"Might as well have treed him up a meetin' house steeple," said Ben when he saw the tree. "We might climb the steeple or chop the church down, but this tree is out of the question. He has beat us to-night, and we might as well go home."

The big maple, as it was called, was a landmark for half a mile around. It was five or six feet at the butt, and ran up sixty feet without a limb.

After considering for a moment, I saw the wisdom of Ben's conclusions, and reluctantly turned my steps homeward. I had wanted to try a pair of climbers that Ben had gotten the year before from a lumberman, but this tree was too much for a beginner.

The next night we struck the trail as before, but after the dog had been running five minutes the wary coon holed in a ledge where it was impossible to get him.

"Done us again," said Ben, after making a thorough examination of the ledge; "might as well try to dig John Bull out of Giberalter."

The third night Ringtail was treed again in the big maple.

Ben said that we might possibly shoot him in the daytime if I would watch the tree for the rest of the night. So, lantern in hand, I took my position at the foot of the tree, and Ben went home, the dog soon following.

I was very sleepy, but was determined to stick it out, and not fall asleep. For a while the hooting and screeching of a large owl kept me awake, but presently I began to doze. Then I thought I heard something scratching, as though descending the tree.

I looked up and was horrified to see a monstrous black shape that I took to be a bear slowly descending. My first thought was of flight, but when I tried to rise my knees knocked together so that I could not stand. So there I sat while the bear descended on the further side of the tree. Then I awoke just in time to see the black-ringed brush of a coon disappearing on the outer edge of the light that my lantern shed into the gloom.

There was no use watching an empty tree, so I went home. Ben made all kind of fun of me the next day when he came to shoot the coon.

"I guess that old Ringtail has about sized us up,"



I SAW THE BLACK-RINGED BRUSH OF A COON.



he said. "I never see nothin' like him for a coon. Might as well try to catch a firefly ; but we will get him yet. You know the old sayin', the deer that goes too often to the lick finally meets the hunter."

By the time that we had treed and holed the coon half a dozen times, and always in some inaccessible place, Ringtail got tired of our little game, and took matters into his own hands, in a way that startled even so experienced a woodsman as Ben.

We had found the track in the corn-field as usual, and the dog had been running about five minutes, when we heard a terrific snarling down in the meadow.

We made all haste to the spot, feeling sure that the coon had at last been brought to bay. The hound had evidently been at the ditch on the edge of the swamp, so we went along beside it, poking away the swale with a stick. "Mighty curious where that dog has gone so sudden," said Ben. "I should think we'd hear something of him." There was about a foot of water in the ditch, and some of the way it was completely covered with grass.

We had explored four or five rods, when we suddenly came upon the hound lying in the bottom of the ditch, kicking and gasping in the last agonies of drowning.

"Gosh all hemlock," ejaculated Ben, at the sight of the kicking dog, "ef that don't beat me ! I'll bet

that coon has done for the dog." We pulled the sleek hound out of the water, and a moment later he died before our very eyes.

There was a savage bite in the back of his neck, but it was not enough to cause death.

Of course we were not certain how it happened, but Ben said that the coon was probably hard pressed and jumped into the ditch and the hound after him.

The coon had then apparently caught the dog by the nape of the neck and thrust him under water. Or he might have fallen into the ditch with the coon on top of him. The only fact that we were sure of was the dead dog before us.

We made a sorry spectacle as we carried the hound home between us on a pole, which we stuck through his collar.

This ended our coon hunting for about a week, but Ben finally got Danny, a big coon dog owned by a neighbor, and we began again.

"Mebbe old Ringtail will eat up Danny," said Ben the first night that we started out with the new dog, "but he will hev a big mouthful if he does."

I do not know whether the coon thought he had gone too far and that we would make it hot for him, but for several nights he lay low, and we could not start him at all.

Night after night we tried, but could not get track of him. Danny soon got disgusted with the whole performance, and finally concluded that we were

merely taking some evening walks, and did not scour the country as thoroughly as he should have done.

To break the monotony of coon hunting without getting any coons, we built a camp-fire each night and roasted some sweet corn that had been sown for fodder and was just getting ripe. This and some fall apples made a very pleasant camp-fire supper.

One night when we had been hunting with Danny for about a week, we struck into the sugar orchard, where there was a fine growth of old maples and no underbrush.

We had gone but a few rods when we were startled by a furious onset from Danny, and answering snarls that were so fast and furious that my hair fairly stood on end with fright.

Ben hurried forward, and, fearing to be left in the dark, I followed.

Not five rods away we came upon the scene of the battle, and it made a spectral picture in the tall aisles of the maple forest.

There at the foot of a great tree, with his back against the trunk, standing well forward on his toes, the fur raised, his teeth bared and gleaming white by the lantern light, was Ringtail, the renegade, taken unawares and at last brought to bay.

Over against him, but three or four feet away, was Danny, with hackles up and fangs bared. Every

now and then he advanced on the coon and although he was twice the size of his wild antagonist, he dared not walk into that grinning muzzle.

I thought that Ringtail cast a reproachful look at me as he sat there on his guard, fighting his last fight, but it was probably only my conscience. But I could see the dog collar around his neck that I had placed there, and I could not help thinking how pretty he had been as a kitten, and a dozen of his comical pranks flashed through my mind in those brief seconds.

"Shake him up, Danny," cried Ben, swinging the club in his hand to attract the coon's attention, and Danny advanced a step nearer and the big coon slunk back closer to the tree.

Then suddenly the coon's head shot out and his teeth clicked like a steel trap. Danny drew back and licked his chops, from which the blood was trickling.

"Go it, Ringtail!" I shouted, forgetting for the moment which side I was on. "You can lick him, give him another."

But his star paled and went out almost as I spoke, for Danny suddenly sprang forward, and with a cleverness and intelligence that I have never seen equaled, caught the coon's long tail, that lay upon the ground, in his teeth. With a sudden spring backward he brought the coon sprawling on his back and off his guard, with his throat open to the attack.



Even then the old renegade died game, for he left several long scratches on the hound's belly, and bit him in the cheek as he closed upon his throat.

But it had been Danny's stratagem rather than his pluck that won the battle.

Danny was jubilant, and danced about us as we walked home. Ben also was elated, for he was a philosopher and knew that we could not keep our chickens if the coon was allowed to live, but my own feelings were a sorry mixture of triumph and regret.

I had hunted Ringtail relentlessly, but at the last moment would have been glad to have seen him escape up the tree.

If he had been some one's else pet, it would have been different. But I finally steeled my heart with the thought of the dead hound that Ringtail had killed, and of the coonskin cap and mittens that I would wear the coming winter.

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### Books in Running Brooks

ONE Saturday afternoon in midsummer, when the air was sweet with the breath of new-mown hay, and the roadways and lanes were gay with buttercups and golden-rod, Old Ben came strolling into the yard, carrying two of his famous ironwood fishing poles on his shoulder.

Each of these home-made rods was rigged with

the celebrated horse-hair line that Old Ben alone knew how to make, and with hook and sinkers.

"Hello, Harry," cried my friend cheerily, as soon as I appeared, "let's go fishing."

I needed no second invitation, and rushed to the shed for a fork with which to dig worms.

"Where are you goin' to dig um?" asked Ben, when I returned with the fork.

"In the sink drain," I replied; "there are lots of fine ones there."

"That's not the place at all," said the old fisherman promptly; "worms from the drain will be soft and light colored. What we want is the black tough fellows that won't break when you put them on."

We soon found a place by the roadside where the worms were black and tough, and filled our boxes.

"You hain't got no breathing places in the top of your bait-box, Harry," said Ben; "your worms will all smother."

I had not thought of this, but he soon remedied the difficulty by punching holes in the tin box with a nail and a stone. He then made me the proudest boy in town by presenting me with the extra pole he had brought along, and we at once started for the sweet little meadow brook that had always been my delight.

Old Ben went at a long lope and I trotted by his side.

"There is a wise old chap named Shakespeare," he said. "I dunno much about him, but I heard one thing that he said once, that I hev allus remembered: 'There's books in runnin' brooks, sermons in stones, an' good in everything.' Now, that's mighty true. Brooks are like people, they begin small and grow a little every day of their journey. Sometimes they run through the alder bushes where it is dark, and then they murmur like they were sorrowful. Then they run down pebbly slopes, where it is sunny, an' you can fairly hear um laugh."

My heart beat like a trip-hammer as we neared the brook, but Ben, as he would say, "was as cool as a cucumber." He showed me how to loop the worm on, so it would look natural, then told me to go ahead and he would follow behind an' ketch the little ones that I left.

I threw into the first likely hole, and was waiting for a bite when I heard Old Ben talking. "Hello, you ole green-back, you had better let that hook alone or you'll be pricked, it ain't intended for you, anyway."

"Who are you talking to?" I asked.

"An old green bull-frog," he answered. "He looks so comical, settin' under a lily-pad, winking and blinking. Know what becomes of frogs in the winter, Harry?"

"No," I said, "what does?"

"Why they jest freeze up, stiff as pokers. I often

find um under the mould when I am settin' mink traps. Snakes does the same way. I found one once when I was choppin'. He was in a hollow birch, frozen stiff as a hickory. I carried him home and set him up in the corner, an' in half an hour he was crawling round on the floor lively as you please. I didn't want no snakes for ev'ry-day company, so I put him outdoors and let him friz up again, an' sleep until spring. Pull him in, Harry, pull him in."

I had been interested in Ben's story of the snake and had not noticed that my line was zigzagging around the pool. I twitched upon the pole with all my might and the trout went several rods back into the meadow.

Ben laughed. "Any one would think you wuz throwin' apples on a stick by the way you twitch. Jest give your wrist a turn like this," and with an easy motion Ben hooked a fine trout and lifted him out upon the grass.

I went back into the meadow to look for my trout, but could not find it. "Right by that leetle willow bush," shouted Ben; "you allus want to mark a thing down by some bush or brake an' then you can find it."

I looked where he indicated and found my trout.

I wondered more and more as the afternoon went by how Old Ben could see so many things that were hidden from me. The woodcock borings and the mink tracks in the mud, the frogs and the lizards,

and the beautiful bunches of lily-pads and water grass. Nothing escaped his notice, and in everything he found beauty.

"It's jest hevin' on your woodsman's specks," he said. "You will hev a fine pair in a few years if you keep on an' sorter take notice of things."

In the big pool by the old log I discovered a fine large trout, headed up stream, lazily fanning the water with his fins. Cautiously I approached him, but no allurements would cause him to bite.

Old Ben got several kinds of bait for me, including a grasshopper, a cricket, and a grub, but the old trout was wary. Finally Ben chuckled and said, "I guess we'll fix him now; I'll go up stream and rile the water, an' you stay here. When the muddy water floats down by you a spell, throw in your worm an' let it go down with it."

I did as instructed, and to my great astonishment the cunning fish took my bait with a suddenness that nearly twitched the pole away from me, and a second later I landed him fairly.

"Now, Harry," said my friend, when I had done dancing about, "why did he bite when I riled the water?" This question was too much for me and I had to give it up.

"Wal," said Ben, "it is this way. That ole trout probably knew what a hook and line was as well as you or I, but when he saw the rile coming down stream he thought to himself, 'The bank has caved

in, and here comes a fine worm that has fallen in with it. I'll take it.'

"Don't you see how natural that was? You can't fool these little beauties very often, an' the only way to do it is in one of nater's own ways."

Just where the little brook gurgled through the wall between the mowing and the pasture and then hid in the spruce woods we were treated to one of those pleasant surprises that makes the study of woodcraft so fascinating.

I was in the lead and was blundering along in my accustomed fashion, when, just as I mounted a stone wall, a mother partridge, closely followed by ten or a dozen chicks came scurrying out from under the spruces. The small partridges looked for all the world like brown Leghorn chickens just hatched, and the old partridge ruffled her wings, very much as a hen would do. But instead of clucking she cried "quit, quit, quit," and seemed in great distress.

With the instinct of a young savage I gave chase, and then the mother partridge acted very strangely.

She fluttered down upon the ground in front of me almost within hand's reach, and then I saw that one of her legs was injured, for she limped and fluttered along in a painful manner. Again and again I reached for her, but in some unaccountable manner she would slip under a bush or into a brake and just elude my grasp.

As I dove under a low spruce after her I heard Old Ben shout, "Go it, Harry, I will bet on the partridge."

He proved to be a good prophet, for the next time I reached for the wary mother she shot out from the underbrush with a roar of wings and the speed of a rifle bullet. Then there was a flash of fleeting wings and feathers, the friendly arms of the Forest closed behind her and she was gone. I peered into the treetops and under the low hanging branches, but no partridge was to be seen. Then I heard smothered laughter from Old Ben, and looking around saw him sitting upon a knoll, holding his sides and chuckling.

"You orter hed salt, Harry, you orter hed salt," said the old man, when he had laughed sufficiently at my expense.

"What for?" I asked, considerably nettled that he should be laughing at me.

"Why, to put on her tail; then you could have caught her, Harry."

"Well," I replied, "I almost got her without any salt. Didn't you see me nearly get my hand on her? Didn't you notice how lame she was? One of her legs was almost broken."

At this Ben laughed again, but I could see nothing to laugh at. "You are dead easy, Harry," he said, when his mirth had subsided. "It reminds me of the old proverb, 'Big head, little wit,' but I chased a

lame mother partridge myself once when I was a boy, and I suppose I ought not to laugh at you."

"Why, wasn't she lame?" I asked, at last beginning to get a little light upon the mystery.

"Acted sorter done up when she lit out for unknown parts, didn't she?" asked my tormentor provokingly. "Went about sixty miles an hour, as near as I could cacklerlate. All she wanted was to get you away from her chicks so they could hide, and that was why she fluttered along and made such a fuss." My eyes opened wide with astonishment. "You see," continued my tormentor, "there was more brains in her little butternut head than there was in your great curly pate, an' she fooled you completely, and that's the way 'tis half the time in the woods. When man, who thinks that God gave him all the brains there was on hand at the time, undertakes to outwit a fox, or a partridge, or even a crow, he finds out his mistake, an' gits some of the conceit taken out of him."

"Where do you suppose all the young partridges have gone?" I asked as we made our way back to the spot where we had first seen them.

"They hev hid," said Ben. "When the mother went away she said, 'Now you hide and stay hid until I come back,' and they would if she was gone half a day."

We poked about in the grass and weeds, but could see nothing of them. Just as we had given up the



search Old Ben pointed to a yellow brake near my feet. I looked down and saw one of the chicks with his head tucked under the brake, but with his body in plain sight. I reached down quickly and closed my hand over him, but only pressed my own empty palm, for at the same instant there was a rustle in the grass and the young partridge had gone as though the ground had opened and swallowed him.

Ben answered my look of astonishment with a chuckle. "Might as well try to catch a humming-bird," he said. "They are quick as greased lightning, and the cunningest bird in the forest. They are one of the things you cannot tame. Wild they are born and wild they die."

We went back to the meadow and hid behind the wall where there was a convenient peep-hole that permitted us to see without being seen.

After about fifteen minutes the old partridge came sailing back over the treetops and alighted on the ground near where we had last seen her brood.

She had departed with a roar of wings, but she came back as noiseless as a swallow.

After reconnoitering for a moment, seeing that the coast was clear, she began calling in a low cr-re-kk, cr-re-ekk. Then one by one the chicks came up out of the grass and brakes, but from just where I could not tell. I saw the exact hiding-place of only one, and he came from a bunch of grass. When she had satisfied herself that all were there, she led them

away into the deep woods, bristling and calling to them as she went.

When the purple shadows began to steal from bush and brake, and the swallows flew low o'er the meadow lands, we wound up our fishing tackle and started for home, which by this time was nearly a mile away.

I had nine small brook trout on a willow switch, while the count revealed nineteen upon Old Ben's forked stick.

"I don't see what made them bite your hook so much better than they did mine," I said ruefully, feasting my eyes upon Ben's fine string of speckled beauties.

"Wal, Harry," he said soothingly, "I reckon it is this way. You see the big fellers are wary and don't bite in a hurry. When you come along they sorter think it over, and by the time I get along, they are ready to bite.

"Here is something I found in the brook," and Ben took a small object about the size of a silver dollar from his pocket and placed it in my hand.

It was a cute little baby turtle, with a beautifully marked shell and an inquisitive head which he poked out at me.

"Where did you find him?" I asked. "I didn't see anything that looked like a turtle."

"No, probably not," said Ben. "You would have thought he was a small stone, or a brown leaf, any-

thing but a turtle. But just where I found him there was the print of one of your bare feet, an' I reckon you nearly stepped on him. Did you ever hear how the turtle got his shell, Harry?"

"No," I said, all excitement, for I thought I scented one of Old Ben's home-made woodcraft stories; "tell me."

"It ain't much of a story," said my companion, "but it was this way. Once, years and years ago, long before Christopher Columbus discovered America, or George chopped down the cherry tree, there lived a turtle, way off in the island of Madagascar, or some such place, I don't remember just where, it was so long ago.

"The turtle didn't have any shell then, only a sorter tough hide, and he was a terrible awkward lookin' feller, all legs an' tail an' loose jinted.

"He used to like to bask in the sunshine on the bank, just as he does now, but sometimes the flies would bite him, or his back would get blistered by the heat.

"He got to thinkin' it over one day, an' thought what a fine thing it would be to have a little house that one could carry around all the time to keep the sun and the flies off, and to go into when an enemy came along. The more he thought about it the better he liked it. But he couldn't seem ter find anything that would do for a house.

"Wal, one day Mr. Turtle was under a cocoanut

tree taking a nap, when down fell a large cocoanut that struck on a rock an' broke in two.

"The turtle woke up and looked around, and there was his house all ready for him.

"Why, he nearly laughed out loud when he saw it. He set to work and gnawed out the meat and made holes in the sides of the cocoanut shell for his legs, head and tail, and the house was ready. But how in the world was he to keep it on, especially the lower half? The roof would stay on all right, if he was careful, but the under side was another matter.

"Wal, the turtle thought very hard, and then he remembered the gum-stickum tree. So he went and nipped off some bark and got some gum stickum and smeared both parts of the shell over inside and the house was ready for him.

"First he laid on his back in the top part of the house and it stuck nicely, then he laid on his belly in the bottom part, and the shell fitted together fine, and after a few weeks it grew together and you could not see where it had been cracked.

"Then he polished it up by rubbing on rocks in the river, and the water helped to make it smooth and get off the fuzz, 'til you would not know that it had been made out of a cocoanut shell at all.

"Finally he got his friend, the lobster, who was a kind of artist, to paint the shell over green and mottled, and the house was done.

"Here we are at the gate, Harry. Keep the

little turtle a few days in a tub of water and watch him, but take him back to the brook in a week or so, for that is his home, and we all love our home."

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### The Mischief-Maker

THE Mischief-Maker sat on the limb of an old apple-tree barking and scolding away as though the whole world had been turned upside down, and there was no one in the world to right it but himself. It was little he could do to put things right, for he was a mischief-maker, and more than likely to turn things wrong side out himself.

If I were to enumerate all the wicked pranks that he had done since the daffodils awoke from their winter sleep, the mere mention of each would fill the entire length of this story, and tire you to death. A few of the most flagrant of his pranks will serve to show you the turn of his mind and his ingenuity in small deviltry.

The first bluebird had barely got here, "shifting his light load of song from post to post," as Lowell says, when the Mischief-Maker discovered a pair of gray squirrels living in an isolated first-growth maple, that was old and hollow, and afforded them a fine shelter. Their winter's store was nearly gone, but there were still some choice hickory nuts left, and a good supply of chestnuts; not to mention

three ears of corn which were tucked away at the bottom of the store in the autumn, and had not yet been eaten.

Usually the Mischief-Maker would have set up a terrible barking and scolding on discovering a pair of gray squirrels, but thinking that this would alarm them and set them on their guard he stole quietly away, and with more forethought than he usually showed, thought out a plan for their undoing.

Every day thereafter he took up a position in the top of a butternut tree near the house, where he could watch the maple. One day when he saw the two gray-coated cousins go away for a day's visit in the deep woods, he called two of his red imps, and the three red squirrels proceeded to the big maple. Then the Mischief-Maker scurried up to the hole in the maple, which was the home of the grayers, and dropped down the remainder of their winter store, while his two companions proceeded to hide it in every conceivable crack and cranny. There was no system in their mischief either, and a great deal of the hard-earned store they were never able to find again, so that it did no one any good.

When the grayers returned, late in the afternoon, they were heart-broken to find their store entirely gone, but there was great glee in the apple orchard, where three red squirrels made merry over their joke.

The arbutus had pushed up through the dead leaves and grass and was gladdening the pasture

land with its sweet, shy beauty when the Mischief-Maker discovered the remains of Chippy's winter store at the root of an old beech. Then this heartless freebooter robbed him just as cruelly as he had done the grayers.

For a while after this he could rob no more, as the winter store was all gone, and bird-nesting time had not yet come. But as soon as the birds began their building his sharp eyes were upon them. You must not imagine though that he had been unemployed during these two or three weeks.

He had been carrying corn from the garret and scattering it about in the near-by fields, that he might dine on it when hungry.

He did not really need the corn, as there were plenty of last year's butternuts under the tree near the house, and up in the orchard were rotten apples, from which he delighted in gnawing the seeds. But the corn was carefully hung up in the garret, being kept for seed, and thus gave an added relish to steal it. The people who lived in the large farmhouse were always good to the red Mischief-Maker, but that made no difference, as he had no conscience to which one could appeal.

Although he kept rather quiet during nest-building time, yet his bright eyes were taking in all that was going on in the trees, and many a nest he marked for his own.

He never disturbed a nest while the male bird was

about, for he was afraid of having his eyes pecked out. Secretly he was a great coward, which fact he well concealed by making a loud noise on all occasions. When the female bird had been left alone he would steal quietly up, and frighten her from the nest, then he would eat the eggs and beat a hasty retreat, so when the male bird came flying swiftly back, alarmed by the cries of his mate, he could find no one to charge with robbing his nest. Or if he did see the Mischief-Maker the next day sitting on the wall, scolding as usual, that small scalawag had such an innocent look, and was so abused when Robin accused him of the theft, that he concluded it was some other thief, and begged the Mischief-Maker's pardon, while that rogue snickered behind his paw.

Best of all, the red squirrel loved quietly to slip up when both birds were away from the nest and do his wicked work. If he was not hungry, he would merely bite into the eggs, or drop them down to the ground to break them.

Once he had stolen up very quietly to investigate a large, strange-looking nest that his prying eyes had discovered in the top of a hemlock. It was not until he was almost at the brim of the nest that he discovered two big winking, blinking eyes looking at him. These eyes reminded him of those of the cat into whose paws he had rushed one day while fleeing from a boy with a sling shot. He had es-



caped from the cat by dodging and twisting, but he never forgot the look of those eyes.

This time he was too frightened to run. So he merely loosed his hold on the limb, and fell to the ground. This alone saved his life, for the owl came flopping after him, almost as soon as he struck the ground. But the fall aroused him, and he escaped under the roots of the tree, where he stayed for half a day.

The Mischief-Maker had been thinking while he had been sitting in the old sweet-apple tree.

It had been a long time since his teeth had cracked a nut, and they fairly ached for something hard to crunch. The old nuts had been softened by the wet, until they no longer had that hard, crisp feel that he loved. He must have something to crack.

Then a very wicked thought, probably the worst one that he had ever entertained, came into his head, and he made the orchard fairly ring with scolding and barking. It would be such sport. His tail twitched, his head bobbed, and his bright eyes snapped. But the old birds might peck him, for they would be terribly angry. "Chatter—chee—chirr-rr-r—." "Let them," and with a whisk of his tail and a flash of red along the trunk of the apple tree, he was gone on his wicked errand.

A moment later he might have been seen running along the stone wall, by the highway. Directly opposite a big maple, a few rods down the road, he

stopped and peered up into its branches, cocking his head on one side and then on the other. He could see the nest plainly from where he sat. The male bird was not at home, for he would have been singing at this time of day, had he been there. He did not think the female was at home either, for he could usually see her head above the top of the nest from his perch on the wall.

A moment the Mischief-Maker hesitated, and then flashed across the road in a series of quick jumps and scurried up the tree. "Was it this limb or the one above?" A tree never looks the same up in the branches as it does from the ground. "O yes, there it is!" And in another second he was standing over the nest, looking straight down into the open mouths of four small robins, who heard the noise, and thought that their parents had returned with worms or grubs.

The Mischief-Maker singled out the largest of the young robins, and dragged him over the edge of the nest. The poor little fellow wriggled and squirmed but made no sound. Then this hard-hearted marauder cracked his skull with his sharp teeth, just as he would crack a nut, and ate his brain. He dropped the little, brainless, dead robin to the ground, and reached for another.

Where were the old birds? Would nothing stay this wanton murderer?

Away up in the sky, almost in the sun it seemed,

was a motionless silver speck. It was so high up that it looked like a speck of dust, and one would have to gaze long to see it.

The second fledgeling was dragged to the side of the nest and brained like the first, and then dropped quivering to the ground.

The silver speck in the sky was growing larger, though it seemed to be motionless. But it was not motionless. The fact that it grew steadily larger should tell you that. It was coming straight down for the tree, and no runaway train ever coasted down the side of a mountain on gleaming rails as swiftly as these silver-gray wings bore this wild coaster down through space to its quarry.

Like the fall of a meteor, making a beautiful oblique line against the warm summer sky it came.

It was no avenging power, or spurred knight, that was coming to the rescue. It was merely an accident that the hawk saw the squirrel cross the road, and later located him on the limb by the nest.

Just as the third fledgeling was dragged to the edge of the nest to be butchered, there was a rush of air like a sudden gust of wind. Then two broad wings struck the maple leaves like the fall of hailstones. The twigs parted obedient to the terrible rush, and steely talons were wrapped about the murderer caught in the act.

There was a frightened chirp and a squeak or two, and the Mischief-Maker hung limp in the strong

claws of the hawk. His red coat dripped blood as he was borne away to a maple stub in the pasture, where the same fate was meted out to him that a moment before he was inflicting upon the fledgelings.

Thus goes the life in the busy fields and woods.

If a snake or a squirrel rob the bird's nest, yet the eyes of the hawk or the owl are upon them. There is nothing so small or insignificant that something else does not prey upon it, and nothing so strong or fleet of foot, that it does not have its enemies, and live eternally upon guard.

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### A Tender Mother

OLD BEN discovered it. He always discovered everything that was going on in the field and woods, and never seemed to be looking for anything out of the ordinary either. But somehow his eyes could single out fur and feathers among the brakes and bushes, when mine saw nothing but the bare leaves.

Sometimes I would think I had stolen a march on him, and would whisper excitedly, "Ben, see that chipmunk."

Then he would look ruefully down at me, and, pursing up his mouth, would say in his quizzical manner:

"Harry, I can't make out whether you are first cousin to the bat or the owl, but it is certin' one of

um. Why that chippy and I hev been winking back and forth to each other for half an hour. Mor'n five minutes ago, he asked me, with a little jerk of his head, is he stone blind, an' I replied with a shake, only partly."

It was just so when we were on the mill pond. Ben could see fish down in the pickerel grass and lily-pads, when I saw only green stuff and dancing ripples.

"Don't see any bull-frogs, do you, over in that bunch of lily-pads?" he would sometimes say, just to try me.

Then I would strain my eyes, and perhaps after five minutes would discover a couple of old green fathers of the pond, tucked in under the pads, but Ben had seen them at the first glance.

The particular thing that Ben discovered this time interested me more than anything we had ever seen together before, for it was nothing more or less than a litter of foxes.

He had seen one of the old foxes go into the burrow on the side of a hill, late in March, and had guessed the truth.

He said nothing to me about it, though, until about the first of May, when he had seen the mother fox with three little ones playing about the hole on a sunny afternoon. When he had made sure that his first surmise was correct, he took me to watch this most interesting family.

We had to be very careful, for the fox is wary, and his powers of perception are of the keenest; there are few wild things that can scent man further than a fox. Many a pleasant afternoon we had to give up a visit to the burrow because the wind was in the wrong direction. If the old fox should scent us too often she would either move her family, or else not bring them out except by moonlight.

The burrow was on a side hill, and we used to observe it from across a little valley. We would come out on the top of the opposite hill, keeping in the spruces as long as we could, then crawl on our hands and knees to a pyramid-shaped spruce that stood alone out in the pasture, a few rods nearer the burrow. We always kept this spruce between us and the burrow, and so got a very good position, where we could see and not be seen. Then if the wind was all right, there was little danger of our being discovered.

Another thing that helped us was a good sized brook that ran through the valley between us and the foxes, and its murmuring covered up any noise we might accidentally make.

We had an old army field-glass, that I usually used, but Ben said he could see well enough with his naked eye. The little foxes could just waddle about when we first saw them, and Ben said their mother brought them out more to get a sun-bath and a whiff of fresh air than to exercise, for they were too

small to do much but roll and tumble about. But it was surprising how their activity grew from day to day. In a month after our first visit to them, they would play like kittens. They were lighter colored than the mother, being a sort of reddish yellow, and having no black, not even on the tip of the tail.

When they were hungry their wild mother would lie down upon the grass and the three lively youngsters would stretch out in a row, and get their dinner or supper.

One day the mother went down to the river and caught a frog which she carried back to the mouth of the burrow. Soon the three imps appeared, and she gave them the frog to play with.

Then they rolled and tumbled over each other, all scrambling for the poor frog. When he got away from them, the mother went after him and brought him back, and they tossed and tumbled and mauled him about until life left him, but after that he had no attraction for them.

Later on she brought them more frogs, mice, small snakes, and occasionally a bird, all of whom fared hard in the clutches of the young foxes. After a week or two at this fierce play they became veritable little savages, and would tear anything that came in their way to bits in short order.

About this time began a sort of lesson or drill in getting into the hole in a hurry at any suspicious noise, or at least that was what we supposed it meant.

The old fox would leave the youngsters playing about the burrow and go off into the bushes. They would be tumbling about, frisking and frolicking like kittens, when suddenly the old fox would appear. Then these young reynards would put for the hole as though all the hounds in the county were after them. Again and again they repeated this operation, until the slightest rustle in the grass caused them to disappear as though by magic.

After this the mother would leave them for an hour at a time and go away to hunt. We rarely saw the male fox. Only once or twice he came around toward dark and entered the burrow.

He was a large fellow, of a deeper and richer red than usual, with dark markings. Ben said he was probably a cross-fox. One afternoon about the first of June, when the small foxes had got to be quite scrappers, we heard the mother coughing and sneezing, at which Ben said, "Distemper. It is rather late in the spring to have it, but that is what is the matter." We had been having a long rainy spell, and the month was cold, which probably accounted for it.

The next time we saw them the old fox looked quite sick. Her brush was down and she had a dejected air, and came several times to the river to drink, which Ben said meant that she had fever, but the small foxes were nowhere to be seen.

"They are probably sick too," said Ben, which proved to be the case.





SHE GAVE THEM THE FROG TO PLAY WITH.



We were quite anxious to know how it fared with the fox family, so we went the next afternoon. For half an hour we could see nothing of either the small foxes or their mother, but finally she came out, bringing one of the little ones in her mouth.

She placed him on the pile of dirt at the mouth of the burrow. He did not seem inclined to run about, but curled up in a small bunch and lay quiet. Then she began licking him, and walking uneasily about him, and finally laid down in front of him, and tried to get him to nurse, but he did not care for any dinner, at which the mother seemed worried. Then she took him in her mouth, and paced up and down, much as a mother would walk about with a child, trying to hush it to sleep. Every now and again she would lay the little fox down and lick it, and mother it.

When she had mothered it for half an hour in this way she took it back into the hole, and we saw no more of her that day.

The next day we went to the fox family again, in whose fortunes we now felt a deep concern.

Again the mother fox brought out a sick little one, but we could not tell whether it was the one we had seen the day before or not. This time it hung limp from her jaws, and when she laid it on the ground it remained quiet, a pathetic little bunch of fur.

The distress of this wild mother over the sickness of its little one was pitiful to see, and, thought-

less boy that I was, it made a deep impression on me.

She would trot around it, and lick it, and poke it gently with her nose. Then she would go off a short distance and stand and watch it, as though she thought it was feigning sickness, and would be all right if she was not so anxious. But she could not remain long away, and each time she would return and fall to caressing it. Finally as a last resort she shook it gently in her mouth, and then fearing that she had been too rough, licked and mothered it, as though asking forgiveness.

But seeing that all these remedies did no good she brought it to the brook and laying it down on the grass, dipped her paw in the water and gently sprinkled its head. Not getting water fast enough this way, she filled her mouth, and let it drip upon the little fox.

Finally, seeing that all effort was useless, she lifted it gently and dropped it into the brook. This we took to mean that she at last understood it was dead.

The next afternoon she brought out another little kit-fox and went through the same operations with him that she had done with the first, for he too was dead. This time it did not take so long for her to satisfy herself about it. This baby she did not put in the brook, but hid it in a hole between two stones, where she probably thought it would be safer than out in plain sight.

We stayed later than usual that afternoon, and so, by a mere accident, saw the departure of the fox family from their ill-fated burrow.

It was just getting dusk, and a star or two had pricked through the sky to see what we were doing so late under the spreading spruce.

I had put up the field-glass when Ben called my attention to the burrow. The male fox was coming out, carrying the remaining little fox in his mouth.

It was alive, for it kicked and squirmed, protesting violently against being carried in that way.

The old fox evidently had a good plan in his head, for he looked cautiously about, then he trotted off into the bushes, still carrying the youngster, and we never saw either again.

A few minutes after the mother fox came out, and trotted dejectedly after her lord.

"Wal, I guess that is the end of this story," said Ben as she disappeared in the bushes. "They wouldn't have taken the little fox without they were going somewhere to stay. They probably know of another burrow that they are going to for a change. Perhaps they think this one is hoodooed."

As we tramped home in the pleasant twilight, Ben regaled me with many incidents of fox-hunting, which he had been very fond of when a young man. Some of these experiences I have remembered and will record for you, but many of them I have forgotten.

"Foxes is mighty interesting," said the old man, talking in his usual quiet vein. "They are more interesting, and harder to find out about than almost any other animal in New England.

"There ain't no other animal in these parts that does as much hard thinking and planning as a fox. Why, the didos that a fox will go through to throw a dog off his track would do credit to a Sioux Injun. Sometimes he will make several small circles and snarl the track up, and then give a big jump on to a rock, or an old log. While the dog is trying to unravel the snarl in the track, the scent on the rock gets cold and the dog can't follow it at all.

"Then he will keep crossing a brook, or if it is winter he will run in a sled road, and step in the horses' tracks. When he sees a convenient stone wall by the roadside he will run upon it for a few rods and then jump off at some unexpected angle.

"Sometimes he will back-track until he gets within twenty or thirty rods of the dog. Then he will give a big jump, to one side, and the dog will follow the double track until it suddenly ends. After searching a while he finally concludes that the fox has taken wings and flown away over the treetops.

"Cutest thing I ever saw in my life, though, an' one I wouldn't have believed if I hadn't seen it, happened before my own dog, Bugle. (Called him that because he had such a fine ringing voice.)

"One day he started a fox and ran him into a cow

pasture. I see the fox a comin' with the dog a good long piece behind.

"In about the middle of the pasture there was a sheep feedin', a sort of cosset that ran with the cows. Wal, when that fox saw the sheep, he just put for her. I thought he was mad. They goes mad sometimes, but he had no intention of harmin' the cosset. When he got alongside he just jumped on her back, and rode across the pasture. Then he hopped off and went on his way, rejoicing that he had made a break in his track of fifty rods.

"The perplexed howls that old Bugle gave when he came out into the pasture and found the fox track suddenly turned into a sheep track was enough to make a horse laugh.

"I could have taken him over to the other side of the lot and put him on the track, but I says to myself, 'That fox deserves to live. He is smart as folks. And even if we did start him again, he would play some new dido on us. We had better let him alone.'

"Speakin' of foxes reminds me, Harry. Did you ever hear how 'twas the fox got his brush?"

"No," I replied. "How was it?"

"Wal," said Ben, "it was this 'ere way :

"Years and years ago ——"

"How many years ago?" I interrupted, in my eagerness to be sure of the time.

"Wal," replied my companion, "I wasn't never much of a hand for dates, but I should say about

half way between Noah and George Washington, maybe a leetle nearer George's time, but right along there somewhere, there lived an Englishman, or maybe he was a Frenchman, or perhaps a German living in Patagonia, I don't just recollect which, but this man had a dog—a mighty intelligent, reddish-yaller purp, he was, with a pointed nose and a long slim tail.

“The man was a chimbley-sweep, and the dog finally got so he used to help his master sweep chimbleys. He would take a short brush in his mouth, and climb up the chimbley—there was a sorter steps in the chimbley in them days—and he would sweep it as slick as a pin. Besides that, he used to do lots of other things, like watering the flowers in the garden, and dust the furniture in the house holdin' the brush in his mouth.”

“How did he water the flowers?” I asked.

“Why,” replied Ben, “his master would fill the waterin' pot and he would take the handle in his mouth and go about with the pot just like folks.

“Finally the dog got to thinking one day that it would be a great saving if he had a brush hitched to himself, he had to use one so much. He couldn't very well have it hitched to his paw, so finally he thought of his tail.

“So he went to the upholsterer, and had him soak his tail in the glue-pot, and then stick it full of hairs until he had the finest kind of a brush.



“Wal, when it got dry he went to sweeping a chimbley and was surprised to see how fine it worked. He would just start and go up the chimbley and wag his tail all the way, and when he got to the top the chimbley was swept. It worked just as well in the garden, for all he had to do was to dip his brush in the watering-pot and go between two rows wagging his tail, and they were both watered. In the house it was just as convenient, for he would back up to a chair and wag his tail a spell and it was dusted better than his mistress would have done it; but there was one drawback,—the poor dog’s tail got awful tired, wagging all the time, and when night came it was nearly ready to drop off.

“Wal, things went from bad to worse, until finally they told him to go and stand by the cradle and keep the flies off the baby with his fine brush. He did as he was told, but he was gettin’ mighty mad. That night he tried to pull out the hairs in his tail, but it wasn’t no use, that upholsterer had done a good job. So when all the family was asleep the dog ran away and became a fox and lived in the woods all the rest of his days.

“Here is your doorstep, Harry, an’ supper is waiting. Good-night.”

“Is that a true story, Ben?” I shouted after him, as he disappeared down the walk. He was too far away to hear my question, but the stars were all winking at me, and the moon fairly grinned as she

looked over the eastern hills; so I concluded that it was just one of Old Ben's quaint stories of the Wood Folks.

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### An Autumn Ramble

ON the bright day in November when Old Ben and I took our autumn ramble, the gay garments of the trees were trailing in the dust, brought low by frost and rain. There was occasionally a rock maple that was more hardy or better sheltered than its fellows that still wore the crimson robes, but most of the garb of the woods rustled under our feet with a pleasant sound. It was great fun to scuff one's feet as we sauntered along, and hear the pleasant rustle, like turning the tissue paper pages of nature's great book.

Down in this gray-brown carpet there were still leaves of the most flaming crimson, or of the brightest yellow, and their brilliancy was even more noticeable for the somberness of their fellows.

But you must not imagine that the day was gloomy, for nature had poured out a draught of summer sun that had been overlooked in the fulness of summertime, and the yellow golden sunbeams were full of life and warmth.

The blue-jay in his dazzling livery was flying from the corn-field to the deep woods and back again, all

the time keeping up his noisy call. Squirrels were chattering as though this had been the one day in all the year, as indeed it was for them. They had chipped gleefully when the warm spring winds melted the snow so they could get at last year's beechnuts, and they had chattered like magpies when the summer brought sweet apples and a score of other dainties, but now the golden autumn had brought nuts, and they fairly shouted their joy from the treetops. When they were not busy with the nuts, either getting their breakfast or laying in a store for winter, they chased each other to and fro in the trees like boys playing tag.

"Let's see if we can discover a grayer," said Ben as we struck into a tall first-growth sugar orchard; "this is just the country for them. They are about as fond of maple seeds as they are of nuts."

We seated ourselves at the foot of a large maple, and made what Old Ben called a still hunt for a grayer.

"Now, listen," said the old woodsman, "an' let me know if you hear anything suspicious."

I listened with all my ears and heard many things, but did not know what they all meant. There was always the soft falling of the leaves, and the gentle stirring of the nearly naked branches, as they responded to the light touch of the wind. Then there was the distant calling of crows. There were no red squirrels here in the tall maples, and Ben told me

that if we saw a red squirrel we might as well stop looking for the grayer. He does not like to inhabit the same grove that the noisy, mischievous redder does, for that mischief-maker is always playing pranks upon him.

After a few moments of quiet, listening to the many tongues of the woods, Ben said, "Harry, there is a grayer in that big spreading maple with the birch near by it."

"Have you seen him?" I asked excitedly.

"No," replied Ben, "but I know he is there."

"I don't see how you know it if you haven't seen him," I replied.

"Wal, he just sent down a letter sayin' he wuz up there in the top of the maple. I guess you don't know how to read squirrel letters.

"Now you just watch where the sunlight falls through that big crotch and tell me what you see."

I did as told, and, in a few seconds, saw a maple seed float down at the identical spot Ben had indicated.

"See it, Harry," said my friend excitedly. "That maple seed didn't hev enny seed in it, it was nothin' only the husk or pod, or whatever you call it. Let's see if we can get a glimpse of him."

So we crept forward like Indians, all the time watching the falling maple seeds, and after considerable shifting of our position we discovered him away



GETTING AN EARLY SUPPER IN THE TOP OF A MAPLE.



in the tip top of the tree, nicely balanced upon the end of a branch, with his gray brush waving to and fro in the breeze.

“How would you like to be getting an early supper in the top of a maple ninety feet from the ground?” asked Ben, poking me in the ribs. “Wouldn’t you want feet like a fly so you could hold on?”

After we had seen the grayers get their afternoon meal in the tops of the first-growth maple, we struck off through the woods, and soon came out on a sunny south slope where there were chestnut and beech with occasional scrub spruces in the underbrush, while out in the open pasture there were two big walnut trees which were known to the boys and the squirrels for miles around.

“I never see nuts uv enny kind,” said Ben as we began poking under the dead leaves for beechnuts, “but it reminds me uv one time when I went beech-nuttin’ when I wuz a boy. Me an’ Zeek went, and the nuts wuz awful plenty that fall, I never see no such time for nuttin’. They were as thick as spatter on the ground, and besides the wind had blown down a large limb that was chuck full on um, an’ we gut our bags and baskets full, an’ there wuz plenty more to pick. We hated to go home as long as it was light an’ there was still nuts to pick, but we didn’t hev nuthin’ to put them in. Finally, Zeek, who was older than I, said, ‘Ben, I’ll tell you what we’ll do. You just take off your shirt, an’ we’ll tie up the end

of the sleeves an' the neck, and it will make a fine bag!'

" 'Let's take yours, Zeek,' I said; 'it will hold more than mine.'

" 'No,' said Zeek, 'mine is new; besides we don't want one that will hold more than a peck or two, an' yours is just right.'

"I thought I would be cold, but Zeek poohed at me and said I would never do for an Injun scout, or a pirate, so I finally consented. That about the Injun scout an' the pirate had great weight with me for that was what I had my mind on, them days. Wal, I stripped off my shirt, an' we tied up the sleeves and the neck with string, and it made a fine bag. It was terrible cold, an' my teeth chattered as though I had the ague, but Zeek said I never could bear torture if the Injuns ever got me, if I was so silly about bein' cold, so I tried not to mind, an' hurried around pickin' up nuts to keep warm.

"Wal, we picked my shirt full, an' just as it was gettin' dark, we stole into the garret with our nuts, not wishin' the folks to see the nuts in my shirt, but I was half froze by that time.

"We found a bag an' emptied the shirt as soon as possible, an' I put it on, but such a shirt as it was I never want to put on agin. You see them beech-nut burrs had stuck in the woolen until it was completely lined with pricklers as sharp as needles, that scratched me like nettles, particularly when I moved.



“ ‘My shirt is all full of prickers, Zeek,’ I said ; ‘it will kill me if I don’t take it off.’

“ ‘Keep it on, Bennie,’ he said, ‘an’ don’t say nothin’ for the world ; if you do we both get a good lickin’.’

“Several times during the evening I was tempted to make a confession and take a licking rather than wear the shirt another minute, but every few minutes I caught Zeek’s eye, and it always said, ‘Don’t you do it, Ben, don’t you do it!’

“You better believe I was glad when it came bed-time, an’ I got off that shirt. It irritated my skin so that mother thought I had the chicken-pox, but Zeek and I knew better.”

Old Ben and I filled the salt bags that we had brought along for the purpose, with beechnuts, and some sacks with chestnuts, in the burr.

The woods were full of squirrels that afternoon, reddeners, grayers, and chipmunks, and the reddeners and chippies chattered away in a merry manner, but the grayers went soberly about their work, keeping as much out of the way as possible.

“Squirrels is like folks,” said Old Ben as we plodded home. “There is the redder. He is a noisy scatterbrain, never laying up anything in a systematic way. Sometimes you will find an apple in the crotch of a tree, or a few nuts under a stone, but he does not lay up any regular store, and the consequence is that he often nearly starves in the

winter. On the other hand the grayer and the chipmunk lay up a regular store, just as a thrifty man does, and then in the winter, when the wind howls and the snow falls, the grayer can sit in his hole in the tree and eat his nuts and read the paper."

"Squirrels don't have papers, Ben," I said, in surprise.

"That's so, they don't, Harry, excuse me," said the old man, "I forgot; but they hev all gone to school though. They all learn in the school uv life, where they learn to take care of themselves, and not be eaten up by larger creatures, or killed by man.

"It is sorter queer, but there ain't no other critter so universally feared by all animals as man. He is worse than hawks, an' weasels and foxes all put together.

"When I wuz a boy, I was jest like all boys, a sort uv wild Injun: wanted to kill ev'rything that I saw, but as I git older I don't care so much about killin', but I like ter let things live an' watch um, an' see what they are thinkin' about. If you kill an animal that is the end on it, an' you can't find out anything more about it.

"There are only four things that I make a pint of killin' when I get a chance, an' those are weasels, hawks, rats, and snakes.

"I s'pose the Almighty has got some use for them too, although I hain't found it out yet.

"A hawk ain't so bad either, if you get on the

right side on him. I had one when I was a boy, kept him for a pet. I got him out of the top of a beech when he was little, an' brought him up by hand. He thought as much of me as he would have of his own mother if he had known her. You hev heern tell of falconers. Why that hawk was a dandy falcon. He would sit upon my shoulder when I went after the cows, an' when he spied something, you ought to see him put after it. He went after snakes an' mice mostly. Why, that hawk would skin a snake quicker than you could say Jack Robinson. He'd hold his head down an' start the skin at his neck, an' then keep rippin' with his claw until the snake was skinned neat as a pin, an' wouldn't hev knowed hisself if he had looked in a lookin'-glass.

"But finally my hawk went bad. He got to catching chickens, an' my brother Zeek shot him.

"I was sorry to lose him, but we had to keep the chickens."

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### The Plovers' Field-Day

ONE afternoon late in November, when the fall winds blew fresh over the fields, and the wind-clouds played tag across the blue-gray sky, Old Ben took me to see what he styled the "plovers' field-day."

The gaiety that we had noted in the attire of

nature, when we took our autumn ramble, had been replaced by a sober gray garb. The leaves danced a hornpipe along each pathway. All nature seemed to mourn the gay dead summer.

Ben and I drove three or four miles with my father's team, and then walked about a mile "cross lots," to a great barren stretch of June grass mowing, known as the plains. This sterile land, which only grew June grass and brakes, was cut up like a checker-board, with stone walls, dividing it into lots of five or ten acres. These lots were dotted with stone heaps, but even then there were plenty of stones left scattered about.

We had hardly arrived at the plains when a plover rose from the nearest stone-heap, and flew away to a distant leafless maple. "He is just a sentry," said Ben, "but the plover don't pay much attention to men during their field-day, for all they are so shy the rest of the time. He'll tell them that we are coming, but they will not mind us if we are careful. Wiggle-wings, I call um, see how his wings wiggle, especially when he rises."

We could now see plover flying over the fields, in small companies of three, five or seven, while some groups were even larger. They would fly steadily across the field, and when they reached the limit of the plains would turn in a broad sweep and fly back again. They flew as regularly and steadily as a flock of geese, until they reached the turning point. They

usually flew abreast or nearly so, and never straggled along, Indian file, as crows are fond of doing. When they reached the turning point, one end of the line would slow up, slightly, while the outside plover struck a bit faster, and the line would turn, as cleverly as the maneuvers of a squadron.

Sometimes they would fly fast, as though trying their wings, but usually the pace was slow and measured, and their turns were in broad sweeps, for there was plenty of room in the upper air.

"Near as I can make out," said Ben, "an' I hev watched um here for several years, this performance is a sorter annual muster, or parade, partly to renew old acquaintance, but more especially to learn the young birds to fly properly, and to gee and haw, a sort of getting ready for the long flight south. See those three plover coming this way. See how much stronger the bird in the middle flies. The other two don't half know how to use their wings. That is an old bird in the middle, and he is teaching the others to fly. Sorter putting them through their paces." We walked nearly across the plains, and as far as the eye could reach in every direction there were plover going through the same maneuvers. It was for all the world like a large body of soldiers, broken up into small squads, with a captain or experienced private breaking in the raw recruits.

Later on in the afternoon, the small squads seemed to be combining, for fifteen or twenty would fly

across the fields in a company, but with the same regularity and in the same measured manner. "That's probably a whole regiment," said Ben, as a large flock came in sight. "Looks kinder as though they were gettin' ready to break camp." We soon saw other large companies, wheeling and circling in the same manner, and it was certain that the formation of regiments had begun.

When the sun was about half an hour high, with a continuous whistling of wings, a regiment rose in unison, to about the same height. We did not hear any one say "Fall in," but there were the ranks, a little ragged, but symmetrical.

Then probably some old plover who had led the van before, gave the command, "Forward, fly," for with a steady, even stroke they swept away into the blue-gray distance. The space where they had formed had barely cleared, when a second company rose in the same manner, formed, wheeled and swept after the first. So it went on for fifteen minutes. There seemed to be millions of them, and our eyes ached with watching.

At last the solid ranks passed, and then came a few stragglers, bringing up the rear, and the parade was over.

"Due southeast," said Ben, as we saw the last company fade away. "They are headed straight for New York city, but it probably means Jersey or Delaware.

"Mighty cur'us, though, how well they know the heavens. I wonder whether it is because they are up so high, that they can see everything for half a State and can keep their course by the lakes and rivers. That would look reasonable, only lots of birds fly by night, and hit it just as well. Seems to be a sort of instinct, or maybe every one of them has got a compass in his head, or his gizzard.

"Geese fly in a harrow shape, with one strong-winged old gander to fly at the point and break the wind. When he gets tired, he says 'next gent,' and some other gander takes his place. It is a great sight, though, to see a large flock of geese swing through the sky. They do it so strong and steady.

"Speakin' of flocks reminds me of a time when I was a boy an' we hed a great flight of pigeons. One morning we got up and found something was the matter with the sun. Just shining sorter dimmed, a good deal of the time it was dark enough for candles. Looked as though the sun was a goin' out. But there wan't nothin' the matter with the sun. It was just a flight of pigeons, that completely covered the heavens as far as we could see. It was just so off an' on for hours, and when they had all gone, we felt as relieved as though it had been a two-days' rain, and the sun had just appeared. That was a flight worth seein', but it hain't never happened since, and that was sixty years ago."

### The Great Circus Cat

THE fitful gleam of two score lanterns, following at regular intervals, a few rods apart, was trailing along a country road. The moon and stars were hidden by a soft spring haze, that enveloped the travelers, wrapping all things in its gray mantle.

By the light of each lantern one could see revolving wheels, and the massive outlines of circus vans. Here and there a light, stronger than the rest, revealed the outline of the driver sitting wrapped in his great oilskin coat, guiding the team through the dense darkness.

Even had it not been for the lanterns, one would have guessed that a large caravan was passing, from the snapping and creaking of the axles, and a score of other small sounds that always attend the moving of heavy freight.

Most of the drivers were alert, watching the bushes by the roadside that they might guide their teams as near between the two dark outlines as possible.

Others in the middle of the procession dozed, feeling quite sure that the horses, so long accustomed to the life, would trail after the lantern in front of them, and keep the road.

Two or three of the drivers neither watched the team which they were supposed to drive, or the road, but were wholly engrossed with black bottles on the seat beside them.



Such was the condition of Big Ireland, as he was called by the hands, the driver of the great van, containing the panther and jaguar.

Presently the teams in the distance began rumbling over a short iron bridge. One could have guessed this, for the sounds of the heavy wheels on the plank came nearer and nearer, giving the impression that the bridge was traveling toward one, for there was nothing in this dense darkness by which to gauge the movements of the team.

When the van carrying the big cats struck the bridge, which was narrow, the team had hauled over to the left, and the shutters of the cage barely cleared the strong iron pillar that stood guard at the corner of the bridge.

Although his faculties were numbed by drink, Big Ireland felt that something was wrong, and instinctively pulled upon the right rein, or what would have been the right rein had they not been crossed. At the same time he spoke sharply to the horses. Then there was a grating, grinding sound, and the drunken driver reached for his whip. Twice it fell upon the frightened horses, and the grating and grinding gave place to cracking and breaking. Then there was a hideous din, in which the squealing and kicking of horses, the breaking of strong wood and ripping of bars, and the snarling of frightened, infuriated cats could be distinctly heard.

When the drivers from the teams ahead and behind

hurried to the scene, they found one horse down, his legs through the latticework in the side of the bridge. The two left wheels of the wagon had gone through an opening between the railing and the floor of the bridge, and were wedged in clear to the hub, while the forward side of the van had been literally gutted.

Their first thought was of Chieftain, the great circus cat, but the flash of their lanterns into the cage showed that he was gone.

When the van driven by Big Ireland struck the bridge, Chieftain the panther was lying curled up in one corner of the cage asleep. His first instinct on being so rudely awakened was to slink away into the furthest corner from the commotion. But when he heard the tearing of the bars that had so long stifled him, he raised his head and sniffed the air eagerly. He could not see that the side of the cage had been ripped open, but something told him that it was so. For a breath of freedom blew through the open bars that only a wild creature, for years held captive, could have discerned.

He stretched his great paw forward and felt the opening. Then cautiously slipped through to the railing of the bridge, where one great spring carried him into the darkness, and night folded her arms about him, as though to protect this wild creature from pursuit, while the fields and the meadows cried, "Come, you are ours, we will feed and water you."

At first the panther, so long cramped in his cage,

crept cautiously through the darkness. His eyes, so long used to artificial light, winked and blinked strangely. But by degrees the pupils dilated to their utmost and drank in whatever light the gloom contained, and with cat-like stealth he crept along the pasture.

Now and then the great cat would stop to roll like a kitten upon the grass, or stretch its limbs. Once it gave two or three great bounds, just to feel those sturdy limbs spurn the green earth.

After about two hours, a gray streak appeared in the east, and birds began to twitter in the treetops. Then the panther entered a wood. As it had been captured when a kitten, it had never seen anything like this before, but it was fresh and cool, and besides it was dark and there were plenty of places to hide, so the great cat was well pleased with his new discovery, and thereafter kept to the woods.

It was about a week after the accident on the bridge, and the escape of Chieftain from the van, that Stubby Daggit was going for the cows, just as he had done for the last six or seven years.

There would seem to be little relation between Stubby and the cows, and the great circus cat, for that dread animal had escaped some twenty-five miles from the village where Stubby lived. Though the woods had been scoured for days, nothing could be found of him. So every one had concluded that the panther by some inborn instinct was working his

way northward toward the wilderness that its kind had frequented ever since the days of the red man.

Stubby was not handsome. You will guess this when I tell you that his other nickname was "Freckles"; but he had an honest countenance, and any boy in the village would tell you that he was clear grit, from the top of his tow-head, to the bottom of his bare brown feet.

The cows gave him considerable trouble this night, for he had to go to the further end of the pasture, into a maple grove for them. They acted rather strangely, too, he thought; for they started uneasily every time he struck at the weeds by the side of the path with his birch rod.

Just at the edge of the woods was a spreading maple that overhung the path, and here they jammed up in a bunch, refusing to go under the tree.

"Whey, there, what are you doing?" cried Stubby, switching the hind cows with his birch. These pressed forward, and the cows ahead broke into a trot, going under the maple at a good pace.

Then a long, lithe figure dropped from the tree, like a thunderbolt from a cloudless sky, and with a snarl that froze the blood in Stubby's veins, dug its claws in the sides of the foremost cow, while its teeth were buried in her neck. Stubby's first thought was of the escaped panther.

With a frenzied bellow of pain and fright, the old

cow broke into a keen gallop, and almost before Stubby knew what had happened the herd was ten rods away, going for the barn like stampeded steers.

Then Stubby thought of his own safety, and he started for the barn as though the panther had been upon his trail instead of the old cow's back. He was taking a short cut home, parallel to the path the cows were following, so he could still hear their wild bellows and rapid hoof-beats, all of which lent energy to his sturdy legs. Over knolls and stones he bounded, as though running the race for life.

Half-way to the barn he mounted a stone wall, and gave one frightened glance backwards, to see if the panther had left the cows, for his own trail.

Then he saw a very strange thing, that both amazed and delighted him. The cows, in their headlong rush for the barn, had reached the same stone wall that he stood upon, and were about to pass through a pair of bars, which had been left down, with the exception of the top bar, that the cows passed under easily.

As they swept through the barway like a whirlwind, the top bar caught the great cat under the chin, and brushed him off the old cow's back as though he had been a fly, while the herd galloped on with new energy.

Stubby waited to see no more, but jumping from the wall, made the sprint of his life to the house.

A moment later he burst into the dining-room,

where the family were at supper, and, wild-eyed and speechless, sank exhausted on the floor.

As soon as he could speak, he gasped out his story to an amazed family circle.

Stubby's father at once went to the barn, where the lacerated sides of old Crinklehorn told plainly that his story was only too true.

There was great excitement in the village that evening when Stubby's adventure was related at the country store, and a hunt was planned for the next day that should rid the neighborhood of this furious beast.

Old shotguns that had not been fired for years were pressed into service, heavily loaded with buck-shot or slugs.

To his father's astonishment, Stubby declared his intention to go with the hunting party.

"Gracious, boy!" exclaimed his father. "Didn't you get panther enough last night to last you twenty-four hours?" But secretly he was pleased with his son's pluck.

"Don't go, Herbert," pleaded his mother; "you will be eaten alive."

"I guess there won't nothin' happen to him if he sticks close to me," put in the boy's father. "I've got the old shotgun loaded with four slugs in each barrel, and I guess there won't no panther eat us up. Better let him go, mother." So Herbert's mother gave her unwilling consent.

"Guess I'll take along my pocket rifle," said Stubby. "I'll feel safer with it."

"Might as well try to shoot a rhinoceros with a popgun, as a panther with that thing," said his father. But the boy slipped the little .22-caliber rifle under his coat and went with the hunting party.

They had planned to beat the woods where the panther had appeared the night before, just as they do in India for tigers. So the party was strung out in a long line, each man two or three rods from his neighbor, and in this way they swept the woods from end to end. It was a new experience for most of them, and each man went with his gun cocked, and his heart in his mouth. The timid hunters insisted in making a great shouting, and the courageous said it was to frighten the panther away, for fear that they would see him.

As for Stubby, his nerves tingled so that he doubted if he could even hit the tree containing the panther, let alone hitting the beast if he should see him.

The forenoon was very hot, and it was hard work beating through the underbrush, so by noon they were a tired and disgusted lot.

A council was then held, and it was decided to divide the party into two parts and one beat the neighboring woods while the remainder worked the maple grove still more.

A hasty lunch was eaten, and they set to work again.

By the middle of the afternoon the maple grove had been beaten from end to end, and the panther certainly was not there. So while others of the party went into a little swampy run near by, Stubby sat under a big hemlock resting.

They had barely gotten out of sight when the boy noticed a movement in the branches of another large hemlock near the one under which he sat. Then one of the green tufted boughs sprung down as though a heavy weight were upon it, opening a gap between it and the branch above, and what Stubby saw in the opening made his tongue cleave to the roof of his mouth, and his heart pound away at his ribs as though it would break through them. For there, upon a large limb of the hemlock, with his hind legs well under him and resting against the trunk of the tree, was the great circus cat.

His tail was switching horribly, his fangs were bared as though for a snarl, and his eyes seemed to be measuring the distance between him and the boy.

The moment his eyes met those of the panther, Stubby's gaze was held as though by some will stronger than his own. He could not move, he could not cry out, all he could do was to sit there and wait until the panther should spring.

Cold sweat stood upon his brow, and he felt sick and faint. He thought of his mother's prophecy, that he would be eaten alive. It looked as though it would be fulfilled.





CHARLES COPELAND.

THE PANTHER BENT LOWER ON THE LIMB.



He felt that his only safety lay in looking directly at the panther; perhaps some one would discover them before it was too late.

Seconds seemed like minutes, and the quarter of a minute that elapsed an hour.

Then Stubby thought of his little pocket rifle that lay upon the grass beside him, and felt for it with one hand, still keeping his eye on the panther.

But as his arm went down for the rifle, the panther bent lower on the limb. He was going to spring.

Then with a quick motion Stubby raised the rifle to the level of his eye, and pressed the trigger. Then in a frenzy of fright he pitched the little rifle into the bush, and sprang to his feet. His nimble legs had saved him the night before, and might now.

Then the body of the great cat shot like a black streak through the air, and fell heavily at his feet.

Stubby's legs sank under his weight, and it grew very dark.

The next thing he remembered, his father was bending over him, fanning him with his palm-leaf hat, while some one else was sprinkling brook-water in his face, from a wet handkerchief. He was not mortally wounded, as he at first thought, or even scratched, only his head was light, and things looked strange.

After a few moments he was able to sit up and tell his story.

"You say you fired at him with the popgun, did you?" asked Stubby's father.

"Yes," replied the boy; "I aimed right between his eyes, just as I have read about in books."

"Made a mighty big sight of noise for a twenty-two," remarked some one in the crowd.

"Wal, the panther's dead," said Stubby's father, "and I don't see but the boy's bullet did it."

"Look at this here wound," said another. "Bullet went in just behind the shoulder, square through the heart, and came out the other side. Don't look like a twenty-two either. That warn't no popgun that did that."

"Where is old Ben Wilson, from over to Edgewood?" asked some one in the party. "He knows all about such things; he can tell what kind of a bullet made the hole."

A shout went around for Ben, but he was nowhere to be found.

Then one of the Basset boys said, "I vum!" and slapped his side.

"I have it," he cried. "I just saw Ben myself, sorter skulking off through the woods toward home, and if I ain't mightily mistaken Ole Kentucky was still a smokin'. Anyhow I saw Ben lift the hammer, and throw away the cap, an' he wouldn't have done that if it had been a good one."

Here then was the secret of the mystery. Ben had happened along just in time to see Stubby's

plight, and had rescued him by a lucky shot with his famous hunting rifle that he called "Ole Kentucky."

To make sure that this was the case, a committee was at once sent to interview Ben. But, to their great astonishment, that quiet old man would say nothing about it, either one way or the other.

"We want to give you a vote of thanks and the skin," said the chairman. "Now tell us, did you kill the panther?"

"Can't say as I did," replied Ben. "I hain't seen no dead panther. 'Twould be mighty hard to say. There ain't nothin' sure in this world, 'ceptin' death and taxes. But you folks just go back an' ask Stubby about it. He got the panther's eye and I didn't.

"Mebbe he winked at him. You just ask Stubby."

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### Signs in the Snow

OLD BEN and I were tramping along in the deep snow, "going Injun file," as he expressed it, on our way to the woods.

He was ahead, and as he was a sort of pathfinder, and prophet of the woods, in my eyes, I was stepping in his tracks, although they were rather too far apart for comfort. I wished to be considered a pathfinder and a woodsman myself, so I would not have admitted that the steps were too long for me, if I had

fallen by the way. Even though the stride was long, it was easier going in this way because Ben's big boot made a good track in which I could follow lightly.

"When there is snow on the ground," said Ben, as we crunched along, "there ain't a four-footed creature in the woods or out of it, for that matter, but tells you all his business whenever he goes anywhere.

"It is as interestin' to poke around the woods in the winter and see what our four-footed friends are doin', as it is to stay at home and read stories about them, and rather more so. For out here in the woods you can see for yourself, and besides, a great many things that you read in books are not more than half true. But a track never lies, and the best way is to see for yourself.

"Now, Harry," continued Ben in his accustomed way of drawing me out, "what would you say could be learned from tracks?"

"Why, that something had been along," I replied.

Ben whistled. "Is that all? Scratch your head, boy, and try again."

"If you knew the different kinds of tracks, you could tell whether it was a fox or a rabbit, but I should think that was all," I said.

"I am afeered you will hev to rub up them woodsman's specks a bit," said Ben, "if you are going to get on in finding out about the wild things. There

are four or five things that every track tells you as soon as you clap eyes on it. If you know how to read tracks, it doesn't matter whether it's a rabbit's tracks or a fox's, it is all the same.

"You can tell which way the animal was going, how long ago he passed, if he was in a hurry, if he was a large or small creature of the kind, and many times you will detect peculiarities in the particular animal that others of his kind don't have."

I opened my eyes wide with astonishment. I had not believed it was possible to learn so many things merely from a track, but *I knew it must be true*, for Ben had said so, and it made me all eagerness to find out about it so that I might confound the rest of the boys with my knowledge.

"Wal, we don't want to be in a hurry," continued my companion. "There ain't ever anything gained by being in a hurry in the woods. Ten to one you won't see what you are after if you are in a hurry. I suppose the science of tracks was carried further by the Indians than any other people. They depended upon it to find out all about their enemies, as well as the animals they hunted. The tracks of folks are harder to read than those of animals, because they are shod alike, while the wild creatures leave their naked footprints. Besides, men all travel something alike, while the wild things have a different way of traveling. The rabbit hops, the fox trots when he is not in a hurry, and the cat tribe jump.

“I think we had better begin by learning the different tracks, and then we will observe each particularly.

“See that T shaped track under this laurel bush, with four paw-prints in a bunch. That is a rabbit track, and there ain't no other animal in the woods that makes that kind of a track. The gray rabbits and the white ones make the same kind of a track, only the gray rabbit's track is smaller. He usually lives in the spruces at the edge of the woods, while the white rabbit likes the laurel swamp and lives near it. You see when the rabbit hops, and one fore paw comes just behind the other, just as a horse's forward hoofs go when he gallops, that gives us the two paw-prints that make the shank of the T. Then his hind paws he spreads out, making the top of the T. So you see the shank of the T always points in the direction the rabbit is going. If the jumps are far apart the rabbit is in a hurry, or if the hind paw-prints are well up to the forward ones that means the same thing, but the track usually is a perfect T.

“The track of a fox is even and measured without he is in a hurry, and even then it is about the same, for he is an easy-going fellow, and particular about his gait. His track is often taken for that of a small dog or a large cat, but there are certain signs about it that a woodsman always knows. The footprint is depressed more at the front than that of a dog or cat, showing that the fox stands well up, on his toes,



and touches the ground lightly. The pads of the paw are not as noticeable as in the track of a dog, the foot being furred ; and last of all, the track usually makes off straight across the country, as though the fox was goin' somewhere, which is the case. A young fox will play like a kitten, but an old fox goes methodically about his business with a good plan in his crafty head.

“Occasionally you will see a scraggly track, near some bush or stone. Each footprint has four strokes leading out from a center. It looks so much like the tracks the hens make about the yard after the first snow that you will readily guess what made it. It is a partridge. Maybe there is a blur in the snow where his wings struck when he started to fly.

“There are also the prints of small mischievous feet on the tops of the walls and fences, where some red squirrel has warmed himself, by taking a morning run.

“The grayser is scarcely ever seen in the winter, but Chippy occasionally comes out of his hole to see how the winter is gettin' along, and if there are any signs of spring.

“Sometimes you will see a wee bit of a track running out from under a stone, going a few feet, and returnin' to the hole it came from. Some inquisitive mouse has been forth, to see what was doin' in the world outside.

“But most of the wild things keep as close as

possible in the winter, staying in sheltered places, among spruces or pines, while some come to the house and share the outbuildings with man. If you encourage them to come you can have a fine little managerie all winter long."

"I should think lots of them would freeze, and starve in the winter," I said. "Do they all get through safely?"

"More than you would think, Harry," replied my friend; "but it ain't all pie an' cake in the woods either, for if the rabbit is hungry, so is the fox and the owl, and they both have their eye on the cottontail. Mebbe it happens when he and a score of his friends are playing tag in the moonlight. I hev often seen um, racin' an' chasin', hevin' the finest kind of games. Then a swift lithe figure would flash through the underbrush, and before they knew, it was right among them. Then there was a race for blood. Out an' in they would rush, pell-mell, till them wicked jaws closed upon the soft fur, then a cry for all the world like that of a baby would startle the woods with heart-breaking pathos, an' then all would be quiet, without you heard the crunchin' of bones in the thicket near by.

"It is mighty strange how much the cry of a rabbit sounds like that of a baby. Fust time I heard it I spent more'n half an hour lookin' for the baby that I thought some one had been mean enough to leave in the woods."

“What was it that got the rabbit that time?” I asked.

“Why, Reynard. He hunts all winter long, and many a bloody trail he leaves in the woods. Sometimes it is strewn with partridge feathers, or mebbe it is the white fur of the cottontail. Mebbe he is sittin’ by his own doorway, under a bunch of laurel, watchin’ the moonlight on the snow and thinking what he would do if it was gone.

“The wind sings a weird song in the leafless forest and the snow and the silver moonlight give things a sickly, ghastly look, but the rabbit does not mind that, for the laurel swamp is his home. Then a feathered form, swift and silent as death, swoops down out of the top of a spruce, where it had been completely hidden by the dark plumes. Before the rabbit has time to even look up and see what makes the shadow on the snow, the talons of an owl are buried in his neck. Then the night woods are again startled by that piteous cry. The struggle is short and desperate, but the owl has too good a hold, and he is too hungry to let his prey off easily, so in a few seconds he flies away with his supper.

“Perhaps the next night, when the stars prick through the steely sky, to see what man is about, there is a tawny gray bunch on the upper side of a fallen tree trunk. The tree does not lie upon the ground but is held up some six or eight feet, by the limbs on the under side of the trunk. What is it, do

you suppose? It matches so well with the gray of the tree trunk, and the general sober tint of the leafless brown woods, that it attracts little attention; it is probably a burl, or almost anything without life.

"But don't be too sure that this motionless bunch has not got life. If you look carefully you will see two square-topped ears lying close to the head, and two burning eyes, that devour the rabbit path which runs under the fallen tree trunk. It is a wildcat and he too is looking for supper.

"Now he crouches lower to the log if possible, and his eyes burn even more fiercely. You did not hear anything, but he did; it is coming this way. Underneath that gray bunch of soft fur are quivering muscles, and cushioned in those velvet paws are the worst set of claws in the woods. As slight as the forearm is, one blow of that paw would kill the strongest foxhound that ever followed scent.

"There is a patter in the snow, and Mr. Cotton-tail comes hopping along, his ears erect. He is on his way to visit a neighbor. Then the muscles in the gray bunch tighten, and the cat springs.

"There is no outcry this time, for the rabbit's back is broken at the first bite."

We had stopped to rest at a pile of cord-wood, which made a convenient seat, while Ben told me of what was doing in the woods of a winter's night. Presently he caught my expression, which must have been solemn, and began laughing.

“Sorter hard life, ain’t it, Harry?” he said cheerfully, “but that ain’t all. For some fine morning men will come with hounds, and then the woods will be filled with the baying of dogs and the roar of shot-guns.

“But don’t you think for a moment, boy, that the rabbit don’t hev a good time in his way, but it ain’t the way of folks. I hain’t a doubt but what he takes as much sport playing tag in the woods as you do in the schoolyard, while as for being gobbled up by a cat or an owl only a few of them go that way, when we think of all there are in the woods. Besides, it is their life. They are born to it. It is as much their game to match their cunning agin that of the fox or the hawk, as it is man’s to battle for bread, or boy’s to play football. Life is a battle whatever way you consider it. It ain’t allus strength that wins either, but wit goes a mighty long ways. Why, there is the partridge, he ain’t no match for hawks or owls in a fight, but he has got wits, and they keep him out of the way of his enemies, and I rather imagine that he enjoys slipping out of one side of a cover when the owl comes flopping in at the other.

“Then there is the fox, swift and sly as he is, yet many a time he goes without his supper, because his prey has either wings or wits.

“So after all, Harry, you see the Maker of the sparrow and the hawk has given each powers that

the other does not possess, and in the struggle for existence, that always has raged in the woods, and always will, they are pretty evenly matched, for the race is not always to the swift or the battle to the strong."

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### Signs of the Seasons

A HAPPY, barefooted boy was spanking along a country road, doing what Old Ben called observing the signs of the times.

"Allus be a lookin' out for what's coming," that wise old man had told him. "If spring is here, summer is coming. If autumn is with us, look out for winter. An' I don't mean by that not to enjoy the season that we have to the full, for this particular season will never come again. There will never be another summer or winter just like this one, so enjoy it while it lasts. But what I mean is, be on the lookout for the changes. Learn to forestall the wind and the weather, and let no season steal a march on you. If some morning winter comes howling down upon you, be able to tell him: 'You didn't fool me, old chap, I have seen you coming for days, and you made yesterday so fine just to try and fool me.'"

So this barefooted boy, as he scampered along the country road, was observing the oncoming spring.

Spring always made him feel glad. Just as the

flowers under the sod felt its touch, so did the boy's heart. Something of the bird-song that thrilled the woods was in his voice.

The particular thing that he was enjoying now was the delicious fragrance of swamp pink, that came stealing mysteriously out of the woods. He never could understand how it was that a plant could give away so much of itself in odor, and still seem to have just as much left, but Ben had told him that it was just so with folks. That the more kindness any one gave the more he had to give.

This boy would not have believed it if you had told him a year before that there was so much to enjoy in simply walking to school, but his walks and talks with Ben had taught him many things, some of them more valuable than the lessons he learned in the schoolhouse.

Now, if he saw a robin flying across the road with a worm in his mouth, he at once pictured the nest and the little ones with mouths outstretched, ready for breakfast, and somehow the nest-robbing instinct had gone out of him. He had always remembered what Ben had told him. "For every egg that you take from the nest there will be one less bird to sing to you the coming summer."

This morning he had seen some queer little tracks by the brookside, and had followed them down into the swale, to be rewarded by finding a muskrat's house. On the way back to the road he had

snapped a pebble into a ripple, and a beauty of a trout had jumped for it as he had hoped.

By the roadside he had stopped for checkerberries and partridge berries, while a spruce had yielded up gum enough for both him and his fellows.

A squirrel had winked at him as he passed under the tree on which it sat, and this had made him feel like one of the Wood Folks.

A flicker had been sounding his lively rat-a-tat-tat on a dead limb and it was always pleasant to hear this merry woodchopper.

So you see this morning walk was full of wonders, and the boy had been able to enjoy them because of Old Ben's training.

Presently he left the woods behind and came out into open mowings, where there was an apple orchard on one side of the road, and corn stubble on the other. They were ploughing the stubble to-day, and the earth looked mellow and inviting. A score of birds had taken the ploughman at his word, and were helping themselves in a bounteous manner. Prominent among them were robins and purple grackles.

Then high and clear above all the other sounds of oncoming spring that filled the morning the boy heard a sound new to his ears.

Strong, steady, and full.

"Honk, honk, honk!"

He looked in the treetops and across the fields,





"HONK, HONK, HONK!"



first in this direction and then in that, but nothing could he see that should make such a strange sound.

But still the sound went on, steady and measured as before, "Honk, honk, honk!"

It seemed to be coming nearer. Then he got upon the wall, and his eager eyes swept the sky in every direction. Away to the south, he saw a long procession of something that looked about the size of a flock of sparrows. They were up very high, and coming directly toward him.

But while he watched, the birds grew steadily larger, and he saw that the procession was wedge-shaped, the two sides of the wedge trailing out far behind.

On, on the flock came, flying strong and steady. Their flight was as straight as an arrow, and reminded one of the furrow that an ocean liner might leave on the deep. They were probably steering by some lake or river miles away, and did not care to make even slight turns. When they cared to change their course they would haul a point to the east or west, and the casual observer on the green earth below would not notice the difference.

On, on they came, like the wind, sweeping the heavens in matchless flight, all the time pealing the slogan of lake or river. "Honk, honk, honk!" Their heads were thrust forward like race horses, and their legs were held well back under them to

escape the rush of wind. "Ninety miles an hour!" thought the boy. Why, the first hoarse cry that signaled the start upon this flight might have been given last evening, upon the banks of the Chattahoochee, or along the marshy sedges of some lagoon in the Everglades of Florida. The fastest express train would have barely reached Washington, while this tireless squadron was swinging over the hills and valleys of Massachusetts at a rate that would cross the entire State from south to north, in less than an hour. The express train would puff, roar, and hiss, and every few score miles, would stop to rest its heated bearings and oil its joints. But this magnificent machine neither puffed nor paused. There was no hissing or snorting, only that steady stroke of tireless wings, and the wild cry of "Honk, honk, honk!"

The slogan of the waterfowls grew fainter and fainter as they swept on, until it was lost in the distance. But the boy still watched the threadlike line that hung for a few seconds on the northern horizon, and then vanished altogether. When it had entirely disappeared, he heaved a deep sigh and rubbed his eyes, which were tired with straining after the flying harrow. Then he slowly got down from the wall, and trudged on to school, but there was a serious look on his face, and he felt something almost akin to reverence for the beauties and mysteries of nature; something of that awe which the mariner feels as he

guides his bark under the starless sky, across black waters, merely by the chart and compass.

Fragments of the beautiful poem that he had learned to recite the last day of the term before came unbidden to his lips :

Whither 'midst falling dew,  
While glow the heavens with the last steps of day,  
Far, through their rosy depths, dost thou pursue  
Thy solitary way?

Vainly the fowler's eye  
Might mark thy distant flight to do thee wrong,  
As, darkly painted on the crimson sky,  
Thy figure floats along.

\* \* \* \* \*

All day thy wings have fanned,  
At that far height, the cold thin atmosphere,  
Yet stoop not, weary, to the welcome land,  
Though the dark night is near.

\* \* \* \* \*

He who, from zone to zone,  
Guides through the boundless sky thy certain flight,  
In the long way that I must tread alone  
Will lead my steps aright.



## A Twenty-Dollar Coat

WHEN I was a barelegged, freckle-faced boy, going to school at the little brick schoolhouse down in the Hollow (pronounced Holler by the country people), there were many things in earth and air

that interested me. Many a hard nut, aside from those that rattled down from walnut or butternut trees, nature gave me to crack. Some of them came open after I had pounded my fingers many times, but others are mysteries to this day; secrets that the human mind cannot see into or understand.

The mere walking to and from school at morning and evening was like a pleasant book, whose pages I never tired of turning, for there was always some new story told by the changing seasons; or, it was an old story that I had heard before, but in such a gay new dress that I did not recognize it.

Close by the schoolhouse ran a little brook. It was so near that one could almost have thrown a hook into the water from one of the back windows. This stream was the daily companion of the boys and girls, and was really an essential part of the school life. I can hear it now as I write, gurgling and laughing, inviting one to forget Colburn's arithmetic, or how many bones there are in the human body, and just dream of fern-fringed, moss-covered banks, and deep pools where the trout loves to lie.

A few rods above the schoolhouse was the old mill, now fallen into disuse, and covered with clematis and festooned with cobwebs and dust.

But the quaint log dam, built like a child's cob house, still held water enough to make a very respectable pond, large enough for skating and boating. The pond nestled just under a pine woods, and

above the dark plumes of the firs was the ragged blue sky line. It was a restful, dreamy spot, where one could build air-castles and plan what to do when a man. The water was clear and the ice usually transparent, so that I have frequently seen two pine forests and two sky lines, one above, and the other under the ice in the clear water.

There were other creatures, aside from the occupants of the brick schoolhouse, who were interested in the pond. This was made evident by many small tracks in the mud along the bank, and by two large muskrat houses at the upper end. But the pond was chiefly celebrated for a pair of otters that had made it their home for several seasons.

The old mill greatly aided us boys in watching them, as we could enter on the opposite side from the pond, and observe these wary animals through the windows that overlooked the water.

The otters' favorite shore was next to the pine woods, where we afterwards discovered that they had a burrow under the roots of an old tree. They were long, sleek animals, very graceful in the water, but more awkward on land. They were as playful and frolicsome as kittens, and had many romps upon the slippery, sloping banks. Their principal amusement was coasting or sliding, and they seemed to have as much fun in it as any boy possessing the best of sleds. In the summer they slid down the slippery bank into the water. This coast was rather short,

but in the winter they would run down the bank and slide on the ice nearly across the pond. They slid upon their breasts with the fore legs doubled up under them at either side, and the hind legs trailing. As the legs of the otter are set well up on his sides, they are not in the way when he is sliding.

One winter afternoon when we boys were skating on the pond, we discovered a large trout a foot or two below the ice, and all gathered round to admire it ; for what boy will not leave any kind of sport to feast his eyes on a trout. We were standing about, discussing whether trout slept in the winter or not, and how they sustained life, when a black streak shot under us. Where it came from or where it went we never knew. It moved so quickly that we could not tell what it was, but the great trout was gone.

One June morning Billy Bowlegs, a simple farm boy in the neighborhood, shouldered an old shotgun, loaded with large shot, and started after crows which were making sad work in his father's corn.

This was perfectly right and proper, but as ill fortune would have it, Billy blundered upon the otters at play on the bank of the pond, and without a serious thought of what he was doing, raised the gun and fired. He probably would not have gone out of his way to have shot at the otters, for he knew their fur was not good at this time of the year, but there they were, and he had the gun in his hand, and before he realized it the mischief was done. It was neverthe-



less a wicked act, and one that should always be punished.

When the smoke from the old shotgun cleared away, both otters were seen to be hit. One was kicking in his last agony, and the other was quite dead. They had been in line and only a few rods away, and the large shot had done the rest.

Rather shamefacedly Billy carried home the dead otters. At first he thought he would be a hero, but instead, every one called him a fool, and the sheriff threatened him with arrest.

A day or two later it occurred to some one that there might be a litter of young otters somewhere in the bank, and half a dozen boys and men went to look for the burrow. At last they found it under the roots of an old pine, but it was necessary to dig it open from the top to see what it contained. Two little winking, blinking, otter pups were found, one of them too weak to do more than gasp, but the other had strength enough left to whine feebly.

Ned Hawley claimed them, as he had first thought of looking for them, so he put them in his coat pockets and made all haste home.

Milk, fed from a spoon, soon revived the small otter who had cried, but the other one was too far gone, and the next morning was dead. But the remaining otter pup thrived upon clear milk, and later on bread and milk, and took to his new home and friends almost as though he had been a dog. His

sturdiness and self-reliance, and the way that he had of getting out of all difficulties, with his fur whole, soon gained him the name of Trojan, and it is with Trojan that this story has to do.

By midsummer Trojan was as large as a small cat, and as frolicsome as a kitten. His first aversion was for dogs, and when he was but four or five months old, he drove a puppy, twice his size, from the back room where he lived.

His first love was fish, and he would even go to the cat's dish for that dainty, although he well knew the uncertainty of pussy's temper, and the very sharp arguments for her own rights, that she concealed in her velvet paws. Trojan knew all these things; he had learned them by hard bites and scratches, but the smell of that fish was too much for him. Besides, why did they always give the fish heads to the cat, when he was so fond of them?

It was most interesting to watch Trojan's growth and his development of likes and dislikes.

The old cat, whose milk dish he coveted, was tolerated, but dogs he abhorred from his puppyhood. If they were too large for him to attack, he would slink under some bench or friendly shelter, and stand there eying the intruder with beady eyes, not forgetting to show his teeth and growl. His own characteristics were more those of the canine family whom he so hated, than those of the cat whom he rather liked. If, on the other hand, the dog was somewhere

near his size, he at once gave battle, and he was so much more agile than his enemy, that he usually got the better of his canine foe and drove him away discomfited.

He early learned that water was his natural element, and always when too hard pressed would take refuge in a ditch in the meadows at the back of the house. The water was never very deep in the ditch, but it was overgrown with lush grass, and made splendid cover.

By the first autumn Trojan had attained about one-third his full growth, and his coat was sleek and glossy.

The first winter he accidentally learned the art of sliding, and after that he would play at it for an hour at a time with as much zest as a child. He was lying upon the banking at the back of the house. There was a glare of crust and he slipped from his place, and went sliding, tail first, down into the meadow. This so pleased him that he tried it again. He soon discovered that it was pleasanter to go head first, then he could see where he was going. After he had taken the slide he was all eagerness to return to the starting place, and would scramble back at his greatest speed.

He also learned to give himself a good strong shove with his hind legs when he started. This made the slide longer and swifter. He held his forelegs doubled back up under him, and his head just

high enough to clear the glare crust. This was a sport he never tired of, even when he was five or six years old.

No one ever knew just how he learned to fish. But the instinct was so strong within him, that he took to it, as a duck does to water.

Sometimes the boys would come across him on the banks of a stream, when they would throw to him all the dace and red fins upon their stringers. Perhaps he was given the first brook fish, and saw that it was good, or maybe he went into the water and made the discovery all by himself. But this is certain, Trojan was a great fisherman.

He never splashed or floundered about in the water like a dog, but his every movement was as silent and gliding as though the water had been air. He slipped into the stream smoothly and silently, and when he appeared on shore, there was very little ripple or splash.

He would pick up a sucker in a straight-away swim as easily as he would a stick. River dace and perch were also easy for him to take. Quite frequently too, he surprised a large trout that would be sunning standing with his head up stream gently fanning the water with his fins.

I do not know how he managed it, for the trout can move through the water so fast that the eye can scarcely follow him, but it was probably by stealth. Maybe he was lying in the shallow water with his



HE WOULD PICK UP A SUCKER AS EASILY AS HE WOULD A STICK.



nose just showing above the surface, looking for all the world like an old log, when the trick was done.

He always brought his catch on shore and held it between his paws, as a dog would a bone, while he ate it.

The second autumn, the long hairs that sprinkle the pelt of the otter, giving it a ragged appearance before it is plucked, appeared. But the fur was wonderfully soft and luxuriant. A coat that any four-footed creature might well be proud of.

But Trojan was probably all unconscious of how his warm coat was coveted by man. All he knew was that it fitted him well, and was warm and altogether suited to his needs.

When he was fully grown he was a beautiful specimen of our most valuable fur-bearing animal, measuring nearly four feet from tip to tip. Of this two and a half feet was head and body, and sixteen inches tail.

The tail was not so bushy as that of a fox, yet it was well furred, and quite ornamental. His body was round and lithe. His head was rather small and a little flattened. His ears were small and nestled so closely in his fur that you had to look twice to see them. The entrance was guarded by a fur-covered water pad, with which he could close his ear at will, and keep it entirely dry inside. His visage was quite whiskery, especially when he was angry.

Trojan's most memorable battle with dogs was that in which he stood off two, each larger than him-

self, with scarcely a scratch upon his sleek coat, while both dogs were badly chewed.

The otter's cage or den stood in a corner between the main house and the ell. It was a cute little house, three or four feet high with iron bars, and a swing door at the front. At first Trojan had been confined in this house, but finally he was left to go and come as he pleased.

Once dogs came upon him when he was eating a fish head, and though he was not prepared for them, he backed up into a corner near his house, and did battle like his namesakes.

At first he merely contented himself with keeping them at bay, but by degrees his love of battle got the better of him and he went in for blood.

His snake-like head and long neck shot out like a flash, and he nipped a piece out of one of his assailant's ears. Finally they closed upon him, thinking to take his citadel by storm, but he bounded lightly over their backs, leaving his mark as he went, and took refuge in another corner. Then he caught one of his antagonists by the gristle of the nose, and the poor canine's yelps of pain soon brought men to the scene, and the battle was stopped. After this the dogs gave the otter a wide berth.

The fourth year of his domesticated life, Trojan made himself a burrow on the bank of a famous trout stream that ran through the meadow, a quarter of a mile from the house. This burrow was located under



the roots of a water elm, and had two entrances, one above the water and one beneath.

This was a safeguard against having his retreat cut off. If an enemy appeared above the ground he could disappear beneath the water. If the enemy came from the water door, he would flee through the other. But there was no quadruped that swam in New England waters that Trojan feared.

As he grew older the tendency to return to his wild haunts grew upon him, and he made frequent long trips along the water courses in the neighborhood. We boys would occasionally come across him two or three miles from home. He was not companionable at such times, but always slunk away as though he did not want us to see him. But he never quite forgot his little house with the swing door, and the fish head that was usually awaiting him at the hand of his good friends.

There are many stories still told at the brick house of this strangely domesticated wild creature, who in his tamed state is so nearly like a dog. But the most celebrated of all his capers cost me a split bamboo trout rod, and my reputation as the crack boy fisherman of the neighborhood.

An argument arose one day as to which of us boys was the better angler, and it was finally decided to test it by a day's fishing. Each boy was to go when and where he pleased on a certain day, and we would meet at night and compare our catches.

The morning of our fishing contest, I was astir bright and early, and by half-past five was hurrying through the meadows, dragging a home-made hickory fish-pole after me in the grass. It was an ideal day for trout, just a little overcast, and not too warm.

The speckled beauties bit that morning as though I had been the only eager fisherman in the world, and that the only day in which they could bite. By noon I had about forty as pretty trout as ever made a boy's eyes dance.

The stringer upon which I was carrying my fish was rather large, and occasionally a fish tore out at the gills and fell off. To remedy this difficulty I concluded to leave this string in some place, and get it on my return down stream. It was a careless thing to do, but I was at the careless age, so I pulled a handful of brakes and wrapped the trout in them, and thrust them in a hollow log, marking the spot carefully by a little waterfall. There would be no mistaking it when I returned.

I was gone about three hours, stopping for lunch, and took ten or fifteen more trout, and felt sure that the split bamboo was mine, for my catch now numbered over fifty fish.

When I returned to the old log for the first string, my suspicion was at once aroused, for the brakes in which I had wrapped the trout were scattered about, and there was a fish head on the ground near by. I

thrust my arm further and further into the cavity, but could find no fish.

Then I began examining the dirt about the log, and made out the clean-cut footprints of an otter. Trojan, was the word that came instinctively to my lips. Trojan, Trojan, how could you have done such a thing? And as I looked at my remaining string visions of the new rod that had been so bright a few moments before, grew dim.

I found the willow switch on which the fish had been strung, a few rods further down the stream, and there were several fish heads scattered about. Half a mile further down I came upon the otter lying on a rock in the middle of the stream.

When he saw me he slipped into the water, and went swiftly away. When I returned home, he was lying in the further end of his cage, saying plainly by his actions, "I did not steal your fish."

My last meeting with Trojan was so pathetic, that I forgave him the theft of my trout and remembered him only as one of the most engaging domesticated wild animals that I ever knew.

I was hunting woodcock with a boy friend. The birds had come in the night before, and were very plenty. Our old liver-colored pointer Dan was doing good service, and we were having quite a day of it.

We were going through some heavy cover near a brook, when I noticed a queer movement in a clump of willows, and went nearer to investigate.

I could hardly believe my eyes when I beheld Trojan, the pet of the neighborhood, tugging and straining in a trap. This in itself would not have been so bad, but he was in a sorry plight.

He had torn out several of his front teeth on the trap, and had broken his leg so badly that the jagged end of the bone showed through the ragged and torn flesh. His eyes were large with pain, and his whole aspect was most pitiful. He had seen me and had made frantic efforts to attract my attention, probably thinking that I could at once put him right.

But no human skill could have mended that jagged paw, and I knew that Trojan's case was hopeless.

I was just considering what was the best way of putting him out of his misery and wishing there was some one else to do it, when the alder bushes parted, and old Tom Knowland looked in upon me. Tom was a famous trapper, and the trap on Trojan's fore paw was his.

"Hello," he said, not seeing the otter. "Seen anything of one of my traps walking off with a good heavy clog? Must be something big in it."

"You old fool," I replied, forgetting my manners in my sorrow. "You have caught Trojan."

"Trojan, Trojan," repeated Tom, in astonishment. "By Ginger, that's too bad. Too durn bad. I'll let him go."

"It won't do any good," I replied, "he's too done up, you'd better kill him."

Then I hurried away, not wishing to look behind. Through milkweed and brambles I pushed, with a reckless ferocity. The sun still shone brightly, but somehow it looked dim and sorrowful. I did not care if there were more woodcock in the cover, for something had already happened in the alder-bushes yonder, that had put the day out of joint for me.

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### The People of Frog-Hollow

THERE is one event in the calendar of oncoming spring that the country people always heed; and that is the first peeping of the hyla, the smallest and bravest of all the frogs, who pipes in the shrillest of voices, "Spring, Spring, Spring."

When the farm boy hears that first shrill peeping from the meadow land, or the swale, it is a signal to him that one portion of the winter's labor is over, and that is the sugar season. All good sugar makers know that after this faithful sign from the little green folks down in the meadows, that it will be useless to keep out the sap pails any longer. So the woodshod sled goes its rounds through the sugar-bush for the last time, and pails are gathered, washed and put away in readiness for next year, and all because the little green prophets down in the meadow have given the signal.

Frog-Hollow, where these little frog folks lived.

was a strip of lowland bordering a lonely country road, that my bare feet traveled daily during the school terms, and less frequently in summer time.

To my childish fancy Frog-Hollow was peopled with hobgoblins and phantoms, as well as frogs. I had never seen any of these apparitions, but I had seen strange will-o'-the-wisps, and that was almost as bad. When a pillar of fire, like that which guided the Israelites, traveled about the meadows, unaided, such soil was no place for a small boy after dark.

In addition to all this, I was not quite sure but that our own Frog-Hollow and the "Sleepyhollow" in Irving's Sketch Book were not one and the same place. It certainly answered the description nicely. So I might meet the headless André, almost any night, riding upon his black charger, in search of his head.

From all these childish imaginings, you will see that Frog-Hollow was a strange and awesome place and a region to be shunned after dark.

Many a night I have stood upon the little bridge just where the bog was deepest, listening to the old familiar frog song from which the place was named.

This was in the gloaming, while the afterglow still lighted the western sky, but when the first bright star pricked through the dusky sky near the horizon, I fled from the awful mysteries that hung over the swamp.

Down in the swamp by the edge of the road,  
 When the lamps of night appear,  
 When the water is high and the meadows are flowed,  
 A wonderful chorus I hear.  
 O the hylas cry Peep, but the bullfrogs down deep,  
 Shout, Holler, Frog-Holler, Frog-Holler.

O all through the night, of the early Spring,  
 When the buds are beginning to swell,  
 You may hear the frogs and the hylas sing,  
 And a wonderful legend they tell,  
 For the hylas cry Peep, but the bullfrogs down deep,  
 Shout, Holler, Frog-Holler, Frog-Holler.

When the whip-poor-will sings, and the night-hawk  
 on wings,  
 As silent as footsteps of night,  
 Is scouring the skies for small flying things,  
 And the firefly is showing his light,  
 Then the hylas cry Peep, but the bullfrogs down deep,  
 Shout, Holler, Frog-Holler, Frog-Holler.

When the small boy was sent for cowslips he always swung a willow basket across his arm and started for Frog-Hollow.

The sluggish little stream winding in and out among the cat-tails and water grasses, fringed with cranberry vines and mosses and choked with rushes and frog spittle was a famous place for cowslips.

The monotony of picking cowslips was varied by many a pleasant surprise. Sometimes it was an old green bullfrog, sitting beneath a lily pad, still as a statue, contemplating the brook, with his grave frog interest.

At other times he would be sitting on a stone, catching flies, or perhaps he was taking a sun-bath.

He was a dignified, proud old fellow, always dressed in the tastiest manner. How well his green coat matches the green of the bank, and its reflection in the water and his yellow vest also was not easily seen.

He never seemed to be much afraid of the boy, but any sudden motion on his part would send Mr. Frog to the bottom of the pool with a loud splash. You could always follow his course by a long muddy streak that he made in the water, and if you followed this to its end, you would see what looked at first like a small moss-covered stone, or the end of a stick, but if you looked more carefully you would make out Mr. Frog lying on the muddy bottom of the stream in snug hiding.

There was also the grass frog who lived in the grass along the shore, and the beautiful spotted wood frog, who never went to the brook at all, except to spawn.

Both of these were interesting, but the old green bullfrog was the boy's favorite. One summer afternoon the boy was sitting under an old water-elm, down in the pasture by the side of a deep pool. The pasture land was below Frog-Hollow, and here the stream was larger and clearer, and just by the elm the boy had dammed the stream, and he could occasionally catch bullheads here, if the day was not too clear, although they bit much better at night.



But the bullheads had all gone to sleep to-day, and the boy leaned back against the trunk of the tree and dreamed a pleasant day-dream, while the waters flowed musically over the stones at his feet, and the silver-footed moments of the summer afternoon slipped silently by.

What a fine thing it is to be a boy, the youngster thought, as he leaned comfortably against the tree, and looked across the pasture land to a distant herd of feeding cows. He could just hear the tinkle of old Speckle's bell, and it chimed in so nicely with the gurgle of the stream. A frog was croaking softly to himself in a distant pool, and his voice was sleepy and contented. How easy it was to dream, when all the world was dreaming too!

"Hello, what's up?" called a frog almost at the boy's feet. These words had been spoken so plainly, although there was still the husky frog tone, that the boy started.

When he at last made out his questioner in the pads so near that he could have poked him with his foot, the boy saw that the frog was smiling, and chuckling down in his yellow throat.

"What's up?" repeated the old frog in his deep mellow voice. "I thought you did not look quite natural."

"There isn't anything up that I know of," replied the boy sharply, for he thought the frog was making fun of him, and he did not like to be made fun of.

He was reaching for a stick with which to poke this audacious fellow, when he chanced to look at his foot. His toes had suddenly become long and fibrous. In fact they were webbed, which gave them a queer feeling, as though they had all been tied together with a string. And the sole of his foot was shrunken.

Then he glanced down at his leg. It, too, had shrunk, and instead of being covered with his brown overalls, was dressed in a tight-fitting pair of green pants. If the boy had been astonished on seeing his green pants, he was amazed at his yellow vest, which he discovered a moment later.

His astonishment was so great that he barely saved himself from pitching into the pool. But the second that he leaned over the bank showed him a strange face in the water. He looked again to make sure.

But there was no mistaking the reflection. It was that of a great green bullfrog, fat and complacent, and well suited with his dress and deportment.

"Come down," said the frog, whom the boy had first noticed.

"Get wet," croaked the boy, and to his amazement his voice had a frog-like sound. "Get wet, get wet, what fun! get wet, what sport!" The old frog was making fun of him again, so the boy jumped, cleaving the water with the familiar chug.

He went down to the bottom of the pool as he



HE WAS A DIGNIFIED PROUD OLD FELLOW.



had so often seen frogs do, and buried himself in the mud, just letting his head stick out, where he was presently joined by the old frog who had made fun of him.

How cool and sweet the water seemed, after the hot upper air of a summer afternoon. Grasses and lily-pads were growing all about them, but they looked misty and rather indistinct, seen through the water.

The sky too, was a hazy blue, and nearly everything looked as though seen through colored glass.

The boy had not got his frog eyes fully developed, but after a few minutes he saw more clearly.

"Pretty slick, pretty slick," croaked the old frog, who had joined the new arrival at the bottom of the pool.

The boy imagined that the frog referred to his new suit, which really did fit him well. So he croaked back, "Quite good, quite good."

"Your suit matches grass, matches pads, so boys don't see," piped the old frog. "Boys kill," he continued.

The boy-frog now remembered several shameful excursions of his own after frogs and pollywogs, and he blushed, but said nothing.

Presently there was a heavy thud, thud, on the bank, and the old frog croaked, "keep dark, keep still."

The boy-frog peeped out from his screen of mud

and saw a man with a fish-pole and a net. On the end of the line dangled a gang hook, which was decorated with a bit of bright red yarn. The bright color fascinated the boy-frog and made him uneasy. A strange impulse to jump at the thing which the man was dangling above, seized him. The old frog saw his peril and croaked, "Don't bite, don't bite, hook prick, hook prick."

Then the boy-frog remembered. He had often caught frogs himself for the city people at the hotel. What a fool he had been to be so easily deceived.

So the two frogs at the bottom of the pool kept very quiet while the man dangled his bait above them; after a while he went further up stream, and the tramp, tramp, on the bank grew fainter and fainter.

When the man had gotten out of sight the old green bullfrog invited the boy-frog to come out on the bank, and the two sat on an old log and caught flies for an hour.

"It is quite easy for frogs and toads to catch flies," said the old frog, getting confidential as he flicked in fly after fly. "You see nearly all the members of the batrachian family, to which the toads also belong, being first cousins of ours, have their tongues attached to the mouth at the front, and the end back in the throat is free. If a frog had his tongue fastened on the other way and had to run it out whenever he caught a fly he would never get one. Now

all he has to do is to flick it out, and as the tongue is covered with a sticky substance Mr. Fly is caught and held."

"Why is it that you frogs are all born tadpoles and why do you finally lose your tails?" asked the boy-frog.

"Well, I do not know that I can just answer that question," said the old bullfrog, flicking in a fly as he spoke. "I suppose it is more natural for our eggs to hatch in the fish shape. We are so small when we are first hatched that we could not support legs.

"The reason we lose the tail finally is because we have no further use for it, and nature always throws away the things that are useless. When we were small we needed the tail to swim with and to steer by, same as fish do, but now we can do both with our strong legs," and the old frog gave a great leap and a few vigorous strokes by way of illustration. When he reappeared on the log beside the boy-frog he continued:

"I am going on a journey to a place called Frog-Hollow, where there is to be a great frog convention this very night, and if you wish you may go with me. We will meet many members of the frog family, and you may find out some interesting things about us batrachians."

"What fun, what fun," piped the boy-frog, "let's go, let's go."

At the bewitching hour of twilight they swam under the little bridge that crossed the road down in Frog-Hollow and came out into the swamp above.

The boy-frog knew the spot quite well. He had often dangled his legs off the bridge and listened to the frogs in the swale, but to-night the place held new charms for him, and he knew that he should learn something of the mystery that had made the place so fearful to small boys after dark.

The convention was to be held upon a little island midway in the stream.

When the two travelers from the pasture reached the place of meeting, the spring chorus was in full blast, sounding just as the boy-frog had heard it many a time upon the lonely road, only to-night it was much louder than usual.

The island and both banks of the stream were fairly covered with frogs, all piping, croaking, and bellowing away at the top of their voices.

They ranged all the way in size from the tiny cricket frog, or hyla, who is the smallest of all the frogs, up to some green bayou frogs who had come to the convention from a distant lake. The largest of these monster frogs were six or eight inches in length, and their deep voices sounded like the lowing of cattle, in queer contrast to the shrill piccolo notes of the hyla.

Then there was the wood-frog, dressed in his tan suit, croaking softly to himself. The grass-frog, too,



was there, dressed in a suit that matched the grass to a nicety.

The leopard-frog, a queer spotted fellow from the marsh, was also there. He was very vain of his suit that made him so different from his fellows.

The toads were likewise represented, being first cousins to the frogs, and both belonging to the batrachian family. Most conspicuous among these was Bufo, the common hop-toad, who dwells under every boy's front doorstep if he is not disturbed. Bufo was one of the lustiest of the musicians; and although he kept to the bank of the stream, yet he swelled out his throat until he looked as though he had the mumps, and sent forth a high-keyed, rattling note that, heard upon a city street, would have brought the cop around the corner on the run.

It must not be imagined that this wild, weird song was given in darkness, for just above the island the will-o'-the-wisp hung, and the firefly danced in and out, glowing brightly every few seconds.

When the song had echoed across the marsh continuously for half an hour, a mighty bayou frog took a commanding position on the island, and called the convention to order.

"Batrachians, attention," he bellowed in his deep voice, and the song was at once hushed.

"It is now time for me to call to order the annual spring convention of the frogs and toads of many lakes, rivers and streams, who annually meet in this

swale." At these words there were peeps and croaks of approval.

"It gives me great pleasure to again welcome you to our meeting-place," continued the chairman in his deep voice, "and I am sure that much good will come of this meeting.

"It will enable us to again see friends from distant marshes, to report upon doings in our own particular districts, and to devise ways and means for promoting our general good."

"I wish you would not use such big words," croaked an old frog from the bank. "I ain't eddycated."

A chorus of croaks and gulps expressed the uncontrollable mirth of the convention at this confession from the old grandfather. But the chairman continued disdainfully.

"If grandpa don't understand he had better go back to the tadpole state, and learn his lessons over again. I am afraid that when he was a tadpole his brains were in his tail, and when he lost that, he lost his wit."

This retort completely silenced the old frog, so that he did not even croak again, during the entire meeting.

"Now that I have welcomed you," continued the chairman, "and expressed my good will for you all, and the hope that this will be our most successful convention, I call for our secretary's report."

At this request Mr. Wood-Frog hopped forward and in a low croaking voice read the following report:

"Fellow batrachians. Since our last meeting, which was held in this identical spot just a year ago to-night, great prosperity has been ours. It will be remembered that last year was a very wet season, and well suited to the wants and needs of frog folks. In every lake, stream, and I might almost say in every mudpuddle, our spawn was laid and hatched, so that we more than made up for our losses sustained in the great drought of two years ago.

"It is also a matter upon which to congratulate ourselves that some of our enemies are growing fewer. Hawks, owls, minks, and muskrats are all less plenty than they were within my own memory.

"I think that the barbarous custom among men of catching us and serving our hind legs upon their breakfast table is likewise on the decline. My own particular branch of the family have not suffered in that way, but that of our worthy president has suffered grievously at their hands. However, we fare much better here in the United States than in Europe, where our cousins are slaughtered by the thousands. If the curious Frenchmen, who will eat almost anything, could only be persuaded to eat snakes they might confer a lasting benefit upon the whole frog family.

"Another thing upon which we may congratulate

ourselves is, that children are being taught by their elders and in the public schools, kindness and consideration for all living things.

“Men, who were not above stoning frogs in their youth, now discourage their own boys from such practices, and much good will come of it.

“The farmers, also, are finding out what a great benefit we are in the garden and in the fields, where we keep down bugs, grubs and insects that would destroy his crops. So he is glad to see us.

“If there was some way to get rid of our worst enemy, the blue heron, it would be a great help to the frog world. But I rejoice that the heron too is disappearing from our lakes and streams, where he once did such fearful execution.

“But we still have plenty of enemies, and it behooves us to be always on our guard, watchful and wary, for we know not at what moment some of them will appear.

“It may be a pike, who can swallow a half-grown frog whole, or it may be a water snake who is coiled up on a stone in the middle of the stream.

“On the whole, I think it is safe to say that the year we have just passed has been most successful, and I congratulate the frogs of Frog-Hollow upon this fact. With this pleasant assurance I will conclude my report.”

Amid a chorus of peeping, croaking and bellowing that fairly made the swamp ring, the report was ac-

cepted, and the meeting was declared open for general business.

One great green frog moved that all the frog family adopt the regulation suit worn by his branch, namely, the green coat and pants with yellow vest.

Other frogs argued, however, that the suit which each member of the family wore was best suited to his needs.

The wood-frog argued that the green coat and pants would be entirely out of place in the woods upon brown leaves. "My own tan-colored suit blends nicely with autumn leaves," he said, "but the green suit would leave me an easy prey to all my enemies."

So the mover of the green suit motion saw that he had made a mistake and withdrew.

Bufo, the hop-toad, defended his branch of the family from the ridicule of leopard frog, who had charged the toads with being ugly, and too plain dressers, by saying that their plain brown suit was the best calculated to screen them from their enemies. He said that he could lie in a dirt pile all day long and not be discovered.

"What value is a gaudy suit," he asked, "after you have had the life hammered out of you, or been swallowed by a snake?" He further said that the "frogs need not give themselves any airs, as the toads were much more useful, and more highly esteemed by man." He concluded his speech by

saying that leopard frog's brains were all in his heels, so the toads did not mind his croaking. When the discussion of matters pertaining to the numerous family of batrachians, of which the chairman informed the convention that there were nine branches, containing no less than four hundred and forty species, had been concluded, the meeting was adjourned for another year, and games and sports were indulged in until the cool hours of early morning.

Leopard frog, the champion jumper from the marsh, gave an exhibition of his skill. With two or three jumps in which to get under headway, he cleared the stream where it was four feet across, and he jumped it easily where it was a yard across at a standing jump.

Hyla, the cricket frog, the smallest of all the frogs, gave an exhibition of skinning one's self, and then eating the skin. A feat that most of us would not care to perform.

He first started the membranous skin at the corners of his mouth and then with his forefeet pulled the skin covering his head into his mouth. With his strong forked tongue he then forced this portion of his skin down his throat. Then by the most vigorous kicking he kicked himself out of the rest of his suit, and deliberately swallowed the entire covering of his nimble body. The whole performance taking only a few minutes.

Another amusement that made much mirth was a

duet between hyla and one of the great bayou frogs. The hyla peeped away at the top of his voice and the mighty bass bullfrog sounded his deepest notes. The test was to see which could drown out the other. But when the duet had lasted for half an hour and hyla was still peeping lustily, and the deep bass was booming away with might and main, it was declared a draw. The meeting was brought to a close by a fine game of water-tag and hide-and-seek, varied with much rough-and-tumble sport.

When the stars began to fade and a pale streak was appearing in the east and soft white mist began creeping up from the swale, all went their several ways.

The boy-frog and his friend went back to the pasture, and the boy-frog hopped out on the bank under the tree where the stranger had found him.

"How ugly you are becoming," said the bullfrog as he bade the boy-frog good-by. "I really believe you are turning back into a boy again."

The boy-frog looked down at his feet and saw that they were no longer webbed, but were the bruised and scratched feet of a barefooted boy.

He also no longer wore the gray green pants which he had become quite proud of, but instead his old brown overalls.

"I believe I am half afraid of you," said the frog; "guess I had better be going."

Then the old cruel impulse came to the boy and he reached for a stick.

With a splash the frog clove the water and dove to the bottom! and remembering what he had just heard, the boy threw away his stick and looked off across the fields at the setting sun.

How late it was getting. What a long day-dream he had had while the swift summer hours slipped by! He would drive home the cows and that would excuse him for staying so long in the pasture.

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### Blueback, the Frog-Catcher

PROBABLY the most interesting of all the shy water-folks who frequented the old mill-pond, about which so many pleasant boyhood memories cluster, was Blueback, the frog-catcher.

He was the most wary and cunning of them all, and this very fact made him more interesting. It is not the discoveries that come so easy in the woods or waters that are worth trying for, but those that take patience and the ability to watch days, weeks, or even a whole season, for the desired glimpse of nature that we are seeking.

What country-born boy is there who has not a picture of some old mill-pond that stands out distinctly among the brightest and best pictures of boyhood. Why should he not remember it? Did not



the old pond furnish him swimming and boating, fishing and skating, and was not its bright glimmering surface a picture that always pleased and rested his eyes? How many a time I have stood up in the old buggy as we drove to town that I might get the first bright glimpse of the old mill-pond, just seen through a vista of pine woods.

This same pine woods did more to help me in my observations of the frog-catcher than any other thing.

One side of the pond was skirted by a broad pasture, which afforded no cover from which to observe the heron. I never could stalk him from this side of the pond and get near enough to see what he was doing; but on the other side it was different, there was the pine woods which crowded close up to the water, where all the blue-green plumes were mirrored in its depths.

By making a long detour and coming down to the pond through the pine woods, I could usually get a good chance to watch the queer old bird on stilts.

Even then he sometimes got the start of me, and the first intimation that I would have that I had been discovered, I would see him slanting gracefully up into the air, flying easily and swiftly, with his long legs dangling below. His hearing and eyesight were truly remarkable, for the pine woods were carpeted with needles, and the bare feet of a boy made almost no sound, especially when he went with tense

muscles, stepping on the ball of his foot like an Indian, as he crept from tree to tree like a shadow.

The heron always frequented the other side, where he could see and no one could creep on him unawares. Even at the narrowest point the pond was twenty rods across, so it will be seen that the heron's powers of perception were of the keenest.

I was greatly aided in observing this shy bird by an old field-glass, which a local hero, a captain in the Civil War, had loaned me. This glass seemed to bring old Blueback up to within thirty or forty feet of me, where all his antics and his manner of hunting and fishing were plainly seen.

It is not common for the heron family to live a pair in a place, as these two birds who frequented our neighborhood did, for they are gregarious, living in quite large communities which are called heronries.

These heronries are usually located in some dense swamp close to a large body of water or a chain of lakes. The nests are usually in the top of tall trees, like the cypress or cedar, and frequently there will be several nests in a tree. Nearly all the crane family, to which the herons belong, seem to be social birds, enjoying their bird village or colony keenly.

It is probable that my solitary pair of blue heron discovered the old mill-pond as they flew over on their spring migration northward, and, liking it, stayed permanently with us. This is the only way

I can account for the stragglers that are occasionally found upon our New England lakes and rivers.

Blueback, as I have intimated, was a frog-catcher, and also a fisherman of no mean order. If patience were the prime requisite to catch fish, and it is certainly one of the virtues of a fisherman, Blueback should have been the greatest fisherman in the world. But of course his manner of fishing was primitive. He had no rod, hook or line, so he used his long sharp beak and his long legs for all they were worth. He would wade out into the water to where it was about a foot and a half deep and there he would stand until a fish came his way. It might be ten minutes, and it might be half an hour; still he would stand like a statue. Not a muscle moving, and with no thought of trying another position until he had thoroughly tested the one he had. (This is a practice that every boy can imitate with profit.) His long neck would be drawn back so that his head rested between his shoulders. His bright eyes were always fixed upon the water, but as far as one could see he might have been asleep, so still he stood.

At last his patience would be rewarded, and such patience as that always is. His head would shoot out like a flash and go a foot or perhaps a foot and a half under water and a second later he would bring up a chub or a perch, flopping and wriggling; but the unfortunate fish's troubles were soon over, for the frog-catcher always killed his catch as soon as it

was taken. If it was a fish he speared it with his long sharp beak ; but if it was a frog he pounded it upon a rock until life had left it.

I believe that this grave old heron was even more fond of frog-catching than he was of fishing, for I saw him at it more frequently.

He would stalk his frogs among the lily pads along shore where the water was shallow. He would go with the greatest of caution, lifting his feet slowly, and setting them down carefully, without any sound or splash. When he espied Mr. Bullfrog sitting under a lily pad enjoying himself, he would become even more cautious. Foot by foot he would creep forward, and when the right position was reached his head would shoot out, as in the case of the fish, and the frog always came up kicking frantically. I do not think I ever saw the frog-catcher miss this game as he occasionally did a fish.

There was a large flat stone on the pasture side of the pond and the frog-catcher usually hid his catches under the edge of this until he had gotten the desired number, when he would gather them together in his bill in a miraculous manner and fly away with them to the nest, back in the pine woods. I could not imagine how he could hold so many frogs at a time, but an old hunter told me that he laid them upon the ground, letting their legs lie crosswise, and then by biting down upon the legs where they crossed, his bill would act like a pair of tweezers.

If this was the way it was done, it certainly was very clever.

Two remarkable catches I saw the heron make, that I think must have astonished even so experienced a fisherman as he.

One summer afternoon he had been standing at the edge of a little clump of alders that grew almost in the water. He had assumed his accustomed attitude, standing erect with his head drawn back between his shoulders and his long index-bill pointing down toward the water.

I remember that there were two things that impressed me as I watched him. How could he stand so still for so long a time? A boy would have wanted to fidget, but Blueback stood like a statue. The second thing was that nature had given him a coat especially designed for fishing. For his blue back so well matched the water that one could hardly discern him.

At last the head of the old fisherman shot out and down like lightning, but did not immediately come up as it usually did. The water was covered with ripples and the frog-catcher seemed to be straining and tugging away with might and main. Presently he put all his strength into one mighty effort, and a monster eel came to the surface, bringing with him a bunch of grass, lily pads, and other pond growth, as large as a half bushel.

The great eel dropped the bunch of grass, as soon

as he discovered that his hold upon the bottom of the pond had been broken, and gave his entire attention to battle. He thrashed the water and tried all the time to coil about the neck of the heron.

Blueback seemed to appreciate fully that if the eel once wound about his neck that he would have serious difficulty in breathing, if he did not have to give it up altogether. So he buffeted his adversary with his great wings. Each time they fell there was a blue flash and a sound like beating a carpet.

Again and again he struck the eel, until at last it hung limp and apparently lifeless, although he was probably only stunned.

Finally the fierce old fisherman went ashore with his catch and laid it upon the ground, where he speared it several times with his bill. Then, concluding that he had got fish enough for that day, he flew away with it to the nest, the eel dangling as low down as the heron's long legs. The picture reminded me of another lively scene, when a red-tailed hawk, or buzzard, stooped to earth and picked up a five-foot black snake and flew away with it into the blue heavens.

The old heron's second catch that astonished me, and perhaps him as well, was made one afternoon when he had been stalking frogs in the lily pads near shore.

He had been stepping along gingerly, stopping here and there to investigate some bunch of pads or

clump of pickerel weed, when he suddenly stopped and stood very still and seemed to be watching something intently. He would reach his head forward and look with the greatest curiosity at something in the water. He seemed to be of two minds, but finally he took the initiative and shot his head under water, and then began hauling with might and main at something that was clearly beyond his strength. There were many bubbles upon the water, and a slight ripple, but the fish did not come to the surface. Again and again he sought to raise it, curving his long neck and straining away desperately. Finally a great black something, about the size and shape of a half bushel appeared on the surface of the water. It was an enormous turtle. How Mr. Turtle clawed the water, and how the old fisherman gripped his tail and tugged. This queer tug of war was so ludicrous that I laughed, and the spell was broken. The old fisherman let go his hold of the turtle's tail, and Mr. Turtle, nothing loath, sank to the bottom like a stone, while the frog-catcher soared away, over the pine woods where I was hiding, to his distant nest.

Just what the outcome of this strange catch would have been had I not frightened the fisherman, it is hard to say. Certainly the heron could not have carried the turtle away, neither could he have killed him.

He would doubtless have given up and let the

poor turtle go, a wiser and sadder turtle, if not a tailless one.

Once, and only once, we boys scaled the old pine, to see the nest, and that experiment quite satisfied the one who undertook it.

Ned Hubbard and I were sitting under the pine, disputing about the number of young that the heron's nest probably contained. He thought five or perhaps six, but I thought three or four would be the limit. There was no way in which to settle the dispute satisfactorily without seeing the inside of the nest, so Ned agreed to go up.

It was a monster first growth pine, three feet in diameter and running up to a great height.

For the first thirty feet there were no limbs, but after that the top was quite bushy. The nest was up about sixty feet, in a dense whirl of limbs.

Ned was obliged to adopt the Hottentot's manner of climbing large trees. This was to pass a piece of rope of sufficient length about the trunk of the tree, and hold each end in the hand. The rope circled the bowl of the tree on the side opposite the climber, and the boy's arms completed the circle. In order not to lose his hold on the rope, and fall, Ned made a slip-noose in either end, and passed his hand through the loop. In climbing, the boy scrambled up by means of his arms, legs, and the rope, with which he could grip the opposite side of the tree. When he had wriggled up as far as he could without



moving the rope, he would suddenly loosen his grip upon the tree with the rope, and throw up both arms. This would throw the rope up a foot or two higher on the tree, where it was tightened by a skilful pull. The novice could not climb a tree in this manner, but the boy who has learned how can go up a large limbless tree like a cat.

We did not think either of the old herons were at home, but soon discovered that the female was. We could tell her by her greater size. She soon summoned her mate, by rising high in air and circling about. I do not know whether this was a signal agreed upon by them, or whether her flight was agitated and easily understood by the old fisherman down at the mill-pond, but it soon brought him.

As both birds were sailing about the tree in a menacing manner, I called to Ned to desist, but he would see that nest, if it was a possible thing. He was not any more afraid of the herons than he would have been of a pair of crows. This was his boast, when he went up the tree, but he had quite changed his opinion when he came down.

Up thirty or forty feet from the ground there was a long scar on the old tree, where the lightning had struck it, and here the limbs were not so thick. All went well with Ned until he reached this open place, where he was exposed to attack.

Suddenly, without warning, the female bird swooped at him, coming down with great velocity. Ned had

just presence of mind enough left to turn his face to the tree-trunk to protect his eyes and hold on for dear life. The first stroke of the infuriated heron's beak plowed a furrow in Ned's scalp two inches long, cutting clear to the bone. A second later the other heron swooped and speared Ned in the side of the face, both strokes being intended for the eyes, but not reaching their mark.

Ned gave a howl of pain and came down through the open spot, hand over hand, in the most reckless manner, not seeing much choice between falling forty feet or having his face picked to pieces by the angry heron.

In fewer seconds than it takes to tell, he was safe among the closely entwining limbs, where the birds could not get at him. In fact they did not try to, after they saw him descending the tree, but contented themselves with hoarse angry croaks and agitated flights about the tree. There is no doubt that had either of us attempted to scale the tree again that we would have had our eyes picked out long before we reached the nest.

I washed the blood from the two ugly gashes at a little spring near by, and then closed the cuts with balsam, which is a most soothing lotion.

Then we wended our way homeward, wiser and sadder boys, but we had gained no knowledge on the question in dispute, namely, the number of young in the heron's nest. But an old woodsman settled it



NED HAD JUST PRESENCE OF MIND ENOUGH LEFT TO TURN HIS FACE TO THE TREE-TRUNK.



for us later on, by saying that the heron laid from three to five eggs, usually four, and that the young stayed in the nest until they were nearly grown, the old birds feeding them with frogs, fish, crustaceans, and sometimes even mice, when the fishing was not good.

My last meeting with the grave old fisherman, who always reminded me of a boy on stilts, or a daddy-long-legs, was so startling and unexpected, that thoughts of it made my blood tingle for many a day.

It was early in September of as sweet an autumn day as ever made a boy's heart glad. The late blackberries were fairly weighting the bushes down along the edge of the woods. The fruit was dead ripe, and fell to the ground at a slight touch.

I was tramping the glorious sweet-smelling autumn woods in company with an old hunter helping him hunt partridge. But my part was a rather secondary one, although I thought it most important. I carried the game bag and went upon the opposite side of the cover that we were working, so when the dog pointed, I could flush the birds and cause them to fly out on my companion's side. This is a practice that I should not advise any boy to try, even for the most experienced and careful hunters, for it finally cost me my eyesight.

Most of the bevvies of young partridge had not yet separated, and we found them very plenty.

It was not until toward evening when we were wending our way homeward with a heavy game-bag that my surprise came. We were coming down through the pine woods back of the old mill-pond and had nearly reached the water, when my companion suddenly threw up his gun and without seeming to take aim, fired. I could not imagine what he had shot at, as the trees were quite thick overhead. While I was still wondering what had drawn my companion's fire, there was a great flopping overhead, and he cried, "Look out." I jumped one side, just in time to escape being hit by a winged monster that was falling through the boughs just above my head. Then with a hoarse croak, and a great flapping of wings, the old frog-catcher lay upon the ground before me, almost at my feet.

With the boy's impulse to seize upon everything strange, I reached out my hand to touch him, for he seemed harmless enough to my boyish understanding.

"Look out, keep back," cried the old hunter, but the warning was too late, for the heron's head flashed out just as I had seen it so many times before, and the sharp beak went nearly through the palm of my hand.

I drew back to a safe distance and sucked my wound, but could not keep my eyes off the magnificent old fisherman, who was so much beyond my previous conception of him. I had seen him many times before, but had not dreamed what a mighty bird he was.

This is the way he looked as he lay there, his long slight legs thrust out straight behind, and his long wings stretched to their full sweep.

His predominant color as he lay upon his breast, with his great wings spread, was an ashen blue, and I could think of nothing but a fragment of a cloud, that had been sundered from the blue of heaven, and laid upon the brown earth. His breast was white, edged with black, from which extended two long black feathers, the plumes of this vanquished knight. His underside was chestnut color, broadly striped with white. The long pearly gray plumes that I had noticed attached to the breast in the spring and early summer were gone now, but the tall fisherman was sufficiently magnificent without them.

The old hunter's pocket-rule declared that the great frog-catcher was fifty inches in length from the top of his yellow stout bill to the end of his tail, and his blue ethereal pinions, that I had seen so often easily winnowing the upper air, were nearly six feet in sweep.

Altogether, he was one of the most magnificent fallen cloud-kings that I have ever seen.

To-day he greets you gravely, at the door, as you enter the museum of one of our large colleges in a distant city. He has lost none of his stature, and his eye is almost on a level with your own, but that which made him interesting is gone. He is no longer the frog-catcher, the fisherman, the epicurean

who dines upon small crustaceans, and almost anything that would work into the menu of an uncooked shore dinner. He is no longer the tall striding daddy-long-legs, the bird on stilts, or the fragment of a cloud descended to earth. He is now a splendid specimen of the great American Blue Heron, who still stands statuesque, but never strikes.

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### Little Musky's Story

LITTLE MUSKY was born about the first of February, in one of the conical shaped muskrat houses upon the island in the great river. He had been one of a family of nine rats, for the muskrat always has a good large family. His parents lived in a three-story house, about six feet high, and six or seven feet in diameter. The muskrat houses had been built higher than usual the autumn before, for, by some wild instinct, the wary rats expected unusual freshets in the spring; and their prophecies usually came true. By observing these sagacious little creatures, man can often get valuable hints as to the weather, for many months ahead.

When the winter is to be long and cold, they build the rush and reed walls of their houses thicker, both to keep out the cold and to serve them as provender. When there is to be high water in the spring, they build their houses high, so that they will not be drowned out when the freshet comes.



The family of muskrats to which Musky belonged had been very cosy in their nicely constructed house, where they nestled close to their mother's warm fur, and were content. It was several weeks before they were large enough to crawl about, but they grew much faster than other small creatures, so in two months they were exploring the house for themselves.

Before the spring freshet came they were large enough to go outside, and run about in the tunnels that the old muskrats had made in the snow. These tunnels were very winding, and led from point to point, where provender had been stored.

About the middle of April, there were several days of hard rain, and the ice in the river broke up, and the spring flood began.

At first the three conical houses on the island had seemed very secure, for they were on a high point, and several feet above water. But an ice-jam was formed in the river below, and the water rose rapidly. This was something that the rats had not expected, so, like the wisest of us, they were taken unawares. Soon the water came into the lower story of their house, and they went to the second floor. Then that, too, became flooded, and they went to the third, and last. But the water still rose, and the fate of the poor muskrats looked dubious. The water was so deep about their house, that they could not escape by the water-passage, and reach a place

of refuge before their breath and strength would be gone. Finally, the floor of their last refuge became wet, and they huddled up in one corner, frightened and miserable.

Then a lucky accident delivered them from the trap in which they had been caught, for a log came rushing and tumbling about in the current, and stove in the top of their house, and their escape was made more easy.

But where should they flee to, for on every side was water, water, water, and nothing but water. It was not placid and inviting, as they were used to see it, but turbulent and angry, and they feared it with an unknown fear.

Soon a long, queer object began slowly moving across the meadows, toward the island. Occasionally a bright flame would leap from this strange thing, and a thunderous noise would reverberate across the waters. The muskrats did not know what it all meant, but it doubled their fears, which were already great.

Soon the monster drew near the island and its three conical houses, and the old rats became alarmed. They were all out on the top of the house now, and could see the moving object quite plainly. Then the thunderstick spoke again, louder and more terribly than it had before, and one of the old rats, and three of the children rolled, kicking and splashing, into the river, and the water about them

was red with blood. Then a friendly plank came floating by, and the remaining old muskrat, and three of the youngsters swam and climbed upon it. Bang, bang, bang, went the thunderstick again, and the old muskrat, and two of the children on the plank tumbled off, as the others had done from the top of their house; and little Musky was left alone upon the plank, in a hostile and terrible world. But the water was more merciful than man, for the current bore him swiftly away, out of reach of the thunderstick.

On, on, the current swept the friendly plank, and this queer little mariner was borne far away from all familiar things; and never again in his adventurous life did he see any of his own family. Sometimes the plank rushed through narrows with a speed that fairly took his breath away, and then it glided gently along, where the river was broad, and not so turbulent. Once it rushed into a whirlpool, and was sent spinning round and round. The poor rat became quite dizzy, and nearly lost his hold, but he knew intuitively that his only hope was in clinging tight, so he clung.

Several times the plank shot under long bridges, where the swollen waters nearly washed the floor. At another point it shot over a great dam, with the speed of an arrow.

Finally, after several hours, it was carried into back water, and lodged in some bushes, and Musky's

travels ceased for a while, for which he was very glad, for it tired him, and made him so dizzy, that he could hardly tell water from land.

Soon another plank came floating by, and lodged still nearer the shore, so he left the plank that had served him so well, and swam to the second one, and from that to an old log, until, at last, he was on land. Here his first care was to eat some last year's dead water grass, and stop the gnawing at his vitals. Then he crawled into a hole in the bank, and went to sleep.

When he awoke, he was sore and stiff, but a run in the sand soon restored his good feelings. There was plenty of good food, both in the wash along the shore, and in the reeds, and water grasses, so he fared very well, as far as food was concerned, but he was very lonely. He had always had a dozen or more young muskrats for playmates and companions, and it seemed strange to be left all alone. He had no idea where the island in the great river could be found again, and soon gave up looking for it.

The second day he made the acquaintance of a drowned-out skunk, which made it a little less lonesome. The skunk did not have very much to do with him, but it was nice just to have some one to look at, and to know that there were other living things, beside himself, that the flood had pushed from their homes.

After about a week, the water subsided, and the

river went back to its old channel. The sun then came out warm for the time of year, and dried up the sand. The young muskrat found the sand a great delight, and was never tired of playing in it, but he soon learned that his element was the water. On land he was awkward, and did not know just how to make his legs go, but in the water they went all right. So he concluded that he was made for swimming, and kept much to the water.

Two very serious mishaps befell him this first summer, which he might have avoided if he had been in the company of wiser heads, but he was alone in the world, and had to buy all his wisdom.

One morning in midsummer, he was playing on the shore, after having made a fine breakfast on lily bulbs, when he noticed a shadow upon the ground beside him. It had not been there a second before, and he wondered what made it. The next second he found out in a way that astonished him, for there was a great flapping above him, and before he knew what was about to happen, a large fish-hawk had wrapped steely talons about him, and strong wings were bearing him away.

With that instinct of self-preservation, that is strong in all wild creatures, and which tells them to do the right thing at the right time, the young rat drew himself up, and buried his teeth in the hawk's leg.

The old osprey had caught many young muskrats

before, none of them had ever bitten him, but he had taken this one up in the wrong manner. It was so sudden and unexpected, that for a second the hawk loosed his grip, and the poor rat dropped back into the river with a thud, that nearly knocked the breath out of his body, and left him kicking and gasping on the surface of the water. The hawk could easily have taken him again, but the muskrat's teeth had sunk deep into his leg, and he concluded to go after a fish, instead. Fish did not act in that uncivil manner.

So little Musky escaped this time, but he never forgot the lesson. After that, whenever he saw the fish-hawk hovering above the river, he sought a safe shelter, and was very careful not to show himself until the osprey had gone. Musky's second adventure, and one from which he learned a valuable lesson, was with his worst enemy, the mink.

One evening, when he was playing in the shallows of a little brook, which ran into the river, he saw a slim, sleek-looking animal, not much larger than himself, come gliding noiselessly down the brook. His movements were all stealthy, and his head was turned this way and that, inquiringly. His eyes were sharp and beady, and Musky did not like his looks, although he seemed small and harmless.

Presently the stranger caught sight of the muskrat, and fixed his glittering eyes upon him. This made Musky feel uncomfortable, and, deciding to

give the fierce little stranger all the room he wanted, he moved to the other side of the brook, but the mink followed, his eyes getting brighter and brighter. Then Musky concluded the stranger was not to his liking, and fled toward the river, where there was plenty of water, the mink following fast. Out and in among the lily pads they raced, the mink gaining on the rat, and Musky getting more and more frightened. What could this little Fury want of him?

When they reached the river, the mink was but a few feet behind, and he glided after the muskrat like a snake. In his great fright, the muskrat did the only thing that he could have done to save his life. He knew of no burrow in which to take refuge, so he swam for deep water, and dove to the bottom. His lungs were much stronger than those of the mink, so, by a series of dives, he soon winded his pursuer, and escaped, hiding in the lily pads until he was gone.

After this thrilling chase, the muskrat's life went on quite uneventfully, until the fall freeze. When the rivers and streams began to skim over with ice, each morning, and the grass along the bank was covered with hoar-frost, something told the muskrat that snow and cold were coming. He knew by some rare instinct that he would not always be able to make his breakfast at the brookside, as he now did.

So, with prudent forethought, he began building a great mound of reeds, rushes, lily pads, moss, and other plants that grew in swampy places.

Higher and higher he piled this heap of plant life, until it was five or six feet high, and nearly as far across at the base. The inside of this queer haycock he left hollow, and when it was finished he made two channels underground, from the inside of his house, to the brook.

He made these channels quite long, so that his enemy the mink would have a hard time holding his breath if he should undertake to enter at his front door.

This queer house that the muskrat had built was to serve two purposes. First, it was his place of refuge, and shelter, and, secondly, it was his food. Who ever heard of any one eating his house? But this was what the muskrat did, while the winter days went by.

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### The Revenge of the Blue Horde

THE warm South wind is dancing a jig down the aisles of the forest. He has been so long exiled from his beloved fields and woods of New England, that he is making up for all he has lost in the winter months that have passed. His boisterous cousin the North wind has had it all his own way too long. It is time he was taught his place, so the South wind



is pushing him rapidly back toward the poles, and he is so glad that his hour has come again that he whistles a merry tune upon his pipe as he goes.

How sweet the woods are now he has passed. He was fresh from a race through the orchard and had filled his wings with crab-apple scent and scattered it lavishly through the woods. The wild azalea too he has gently swayed in passing. He has brought a whiff of arbutus and wild cherry and the pungent wholesome smell of balsam and pine needles quickened into fragrance by the warm May sunlight.

What an important air the South wind has to-day, as he dances through the forests blowing lustily upon his flageolet. You would really think he owned the whole universe.

What a thrill of life is stirring to-day in the half-grown leaves and the bursting buds, in the groping fronds and the germinating seeds.

Now the South wind has passed, the forest is as still as though enchanted. Not a leaf rustles, not a breath is stirring. Hark, what is that? A song in the top of a spruce, low-keyed and liquid. A wonderful love ditty, now it is repeated, softer and more exquisitely than before. What bird in all the forest sings like that? It is not an oriole or thrush, but quite as sweet as either. Then a bough bends and a wonderful blue coat flashes in the sunlight and the most strident, querulous, rasping voice in the forest cries, " Jay, Jay, Say, Say, Didn't know I could sing

like that, did you? Well, I can, when I am a mind to, but I won't for you. Jay, Jay, Jay!"

He flashes out of the tree and across the fields and is gone. A veritable bluecoat, but altogether a noisy quarrelsome fellow, the spy of the woods, always squawking and calling when you want to listen and many times drowning the sweet songs of other birds with his hideous cries. A gay-garmented rogue, all show and bright feathers, but at heart a saucy shallow fellow.

The song we heard this morning was the jay's spring love song. His one musical attempt, that only his mate on the nest with the warm eggs under her can inspire. You did not suspect him of such sentiment, neither did I until I heard him with my own ears.

But there was one menace that May morning to the feathered folks of the woods. It was a silent, stealthy, gliding danger that was always with them. No matter how fresh and green or inviting a grassy plot or a bunch of brakes might look, this stealthy, creeping danger might be coiled in the sweet green depths.

There was a peculiar enmity between this subtle something and the jay family, for the jays were the spies of the woods. Many a bird's plumage had been saved by the strident squall of the jay. Whenever any of these gay-liveried saucy spies saw the black snake creeping upon its prey, or lying in

ambush along some favorite path, or coiled in the trees, the jay would at once set up a great squalling and alarm the whole forest for a quarter of a mile about. Then birds and squirrels would be upon their guard, and perhaps the black evil would go hungry, thanks to the jay's vigilance. So there was a particular hatred between the jay family and the black snake who made the swamp above the old mill-pond and some of the neighboring woods his headquarters.

Down into the peaceful valley by the old mill-pond the black evil went creeping, his head raised about a foot from the ground. Whenever he stopped to consider the head swayed rhythmically from side to side, in that peculiar motion so common with snakes.

But down in the valley there lived still another crawling, gliding marauder who was feared and hated by all the little water-folks in and about the pond. This danger usually lay coiled up in the lily pads, or on the bank near the water, always silent and always watchful. A danger that young muskrats and frogs were especially fearful of.

The same morning that the black snake left his headquarters in the swamp and went on a journey, a huge dark water-snake crawled out on the bank and took a nap in the warm May sunshine. He was larger even than the black snake of the swamp, and this morning he felt quite contented with the world

in general and his own lot in particular, for he had dined upon a half-grown muskrat.

Up, up, from the swale the black snake came creeping, and the young grass wriggled at his coming, while the terror of the mill-pond slept upon the muddy bank. Finally the sleeping water-snake awoke, raised his head, and looked cautiously about. Something was coming his way, there was a tremor in the grass and this meant a snake. Then a slim head, blacker even than his own, was lifted high above the grass and two eyes glittering and terrible, burning with hatred and glowing with malice, were riveted upon the water-snake.

But what cared he, was he not the terror of the mill-pond? Who was this stranger that dared to invade his kingdom, defy him, and even appear contemptuous of his sway? So he made one or two extra coils in his long powerful form and glared back at his enemy, darting out his tongue with lightning rapidity and returning hate for hate with steady glowing eyes.

The black snake lifted his head still higher above the grass and came on, circling about his rival and seeking to take him off his guard, but the water-snake always turned to meet him squarely, and neither got any advantage from their position. Seeing that this maneuvering was futile, and being angered that any one dared dispute the path with him, the black snake finally sprang his length, at his

rival. Then there was a quick succession of lightning passes, so fast the ugly heads flashed, that the eye could hardly follow them. Their ugly forms writhed and twisted, squirmed and lashed the grass along shore. Over and over they went, until at last the fury from the swamp, who was quicker than his antagonist, got the hold he wanted and then something happened.

The black snake had caught his rival with a firm grip two-thirds of the way toward his tail. Then with a lightning motion the black snake wound his own tail about a small elm that stood upon the bank. With a convulsive contortion he raised his own ugly form in air, and with it, that of the water-snake. Like a long black rope the double length of snake rose and fell, beating the earth, but the third time the black rope made a graceful half-circle, then shot forward with a lightning motion. With a report like the crack of a whip the head of the water-snake rolled into the pond, while his body writhed and twisted in the grass.

Then the black snake unwound his coil from the water-elm and watched the dying contortions of his enemy.

When the wriggling of the water-snake had ceased and it was apparent that he was quite dead, his enemy gloated above him and swelled with pride over his great victory. Then he swam the pond and went into the woods beyond in search of more foes to conquer.

It happened this same morning that a partly fledged jay had fallen from the nest. He was not ready to fly and his parents were in a great dilemma. The old snake heard their cries afar off and knew quite well that some one was in trouble. Trouble for the birds at nesting time usually meant plunder for him, so he hastened in the direction from which the squalling and cries of distress came.

So swiftly and silently the black destroyer came that the first knowledge of his presence that the jay family had was when his ugly head shot like lightning through the ferns and grasses and his terrible jaws closed upon the fledgeling.

The poor victim squawked once or twice, fluttered feebly and was still, the life had been crushed out of it by the destroyer.

Both of the jay parents darted viciously at the snake but he paid little attention to them, and began leisurely swallowing his prize.

Then the male jay rose in the air, high above the treetops and flew rapidly away, calling at the top of his strident voice as he flew :

“Jay, jay, pay, pay, flay, flay.”

Another jay in a distant treetop took up the cry and flung it far on into the woods. Soon another was heard calling and still another and another. The call was answered from across the mill-pond and from far and near the blue-coated rogues came flying, calling as they came, “Jay, jay, pay, pay, flay, flay.”

The outraged father led them hurriedly back to the spot where the deed had been committed and where the grieving mother still watched the greedy snake swallowing her fledgeling. One would not have imagined there were as many jays within ten miles as soon flocked above the snake, all squalling with rage and fear. Each moment the cries grew louder and soon the birds began darting viciously at the snake. There was something ominous in this cry of fury that steadily grew in volume and intensity. The black destroyer had frequently killed young jays and the offense had gone unpunished, but now something very much like fear came over him, and he slunk away into the grass, feeling actually afraid for the first time in his life.

As long as he faced them and struck at them whenever they came too near, he had been comparatively safe, but now he had turned tail and was fleeing, it was different.

At the moment he showed the white feather, the whole angry horde fell upon him like furies. A half dozen darted down at once, picking at as many places in his wriggling black coils. He turned and struck and his motions were so quick that the eye could hardly follow him. Two wounded jays fluttered down into the underbrush but what cared the rest? The horde was aroused and nothing but blood would atone for the murder that the snake had done.

The black fury could not strike in a dozen places

at once and some of them were sure to wound him. Soon his skin had been broken in many places and he was covered with blood, but none of his great strength was gone. A half dozen beaks tore at his tail and he turned writhing with pain to strike at these tormentors. At the same instant a jay struck him fairly in the right eye and that organ lay out on his cheek and was useless. This was the beginning of the end, but his end was terrible, as was his desert. Never punishment fell from heaven upon the guilty more swiftly or surely. In a few seconds more his other eye was gone, and he could only strike blindly and thrash and writhe in convulsions of pain. Slowly and relentlessly they picked and tore at the writhing mass. In five minutes after the battle began, the snake's skin was stripped to ribbons, his entrails dragged upon the ground and he was so torn and pecked that his own mate would not have known him. Thus was justice meted out, and the black destroyer went the way that he had sent so many helpless fledgelings.

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### The Little Fisherman

THE Little Fisherman and I were rivals upon the same stream and that is how I became so well acquainted with his manners, morals and habits of life.

Although he was an expert fisherman, it would hardly be fair to call him an angler, for he did not



angle but merely fished. So while I sought by cunning baits to catch my fish, he took his whenever they came in sight, like the bold fisherman he is.

The first time I saw him was a bright April morning when I was threading my favorite trout stream. It was the first day of the open season for men, but the little fisherman fishes in season and out, and the warden always condones his offense.

Just above my favorite trout hole a graceful water elm spreads its broad branches far over the stream and my rival was perched upon one of its overhanging branches, which was dead and quite free from twigs. This gave him an unobstructed view of the water. He was standing like a statue, with his head bent forward watching the water intently. He was so intent on his game that he did not see me, so I had a good view of him at our first meeting.

He was a plump chunky fellow, with a blue coat and white markings underside, and his head was adorned with a bright bristling crest of blue feathers, which gave him quite a jaunty appearance. His legs were short, and when he plunged into the stream a few seconds after I discovered him, I saw that his wings were also short for his size. His first attempt was a failure and he came up, dashing sprays of bright brook water in every direction, but he had the true fisherman's patience, for he went back to exactly the same spot and fell to watching the water as before. He did not have long to wait, for in a minute

or two he dove again and this time he brought up a minnow about three inches in length, which he swallowed so quickly that I did not know where it had gone until he caught another.

Just after he caught the second minnow and again took his place on the dead limb, he saw me and at once set up such a chattering, sputtering and rattling, that I knew he considered me a trespasser while in his own mind he was the owner and proprietor of the stream.

I was not frightened away by his clamor, neither was he very much afraid of me, for he kept his perch and continued to scold until I was within forty or fifty feet of him. Then he flew away up stream scolding louder and more raspingly, if possible, than before. He was angry and there was no disguising the fact, for he darted viciously at the water as he flew and his whole manner indicated that he was much put out.

I always spent considerable time at the deep hole under the old water-elm, for it was usually good for two or three nice trout if one worked it carefully.

So when the little fisherman came flying back after about half an hour he found me still on his favorite preserve. There was nothing to do except scold, which he did with a vim. But he soon flew away, and I did not see him again that day.

It was nearly two weeks after my first meeting with the little fisherman that I saw his mate. As I

had fished the stream that they inhabited thoroughly for three miles of its length, I am confident that Mrs. Kingfisher had just arrived. She evidently had lingered behind, to enjoy sunnier skies, while her lord went ahead to spy out the country and stake out their claim.

How she managed to find the spot that he had chosen among so many streams and rivers I do not know. This was their first year upon my trout brook, so there must have been some prearrangement. I do not imagine that this particular Kingfisher just happened along and fell in love with Mr. Kingfisher on the spot, but rather that their courtship had ripened before they came to my neighborhood.

Mrs. Kingfisher was marked very much like her mate with one striking exception. Both had the blue and white livery and the bristling topknot, but Mrs. Kingfisher had in addition a broad dull red belt or girdle that gave her a somewhat gay appearance. This is contrary to the general styles prevailing in bird-land, where the males usually wear the bright feathers and the females the more modest dresses.

Very soon after the appearance of the second Kingfisher, both set to work upon their dwelling. If you are not acquainted with the habits of this most interesting bird you never could guess how the new home was made.

It was by a mere accident that I discovered the nest. I was sitting upon a sand-bank a few rods

above where the stream entered the mill-pond, when I noticed a small pile of dirt on the bank near me. It did not look like the work of the creatures whose burrows I knew, so I laid down my pole and examined it carefully.

The hole extended directly back into the sand-bank for about four feet, where it abruptly ended. This was a queer burrow and whose work it was I could not imagine.

There were footprints upon the loose sand that were certainly made by a bird, but I did not at first associate them with the hole. Finally I gave it up and went on fishing, following the stream down to the pond.

Here I discovered the Kingfishers very much engrossed with taking minnows, which were quite plenty in the shallows along the edge of the pond. When they discovered me they set up a great clatter and chatter as usual, but finally flew up stream and alighted upon the sand-bank ; or rather disappeared in it. I watched and waited for some time to see what had become of them and finally my patience was rewarded by seeing a shower of sand thrown from the queer burrow I had discovered. The Kingfishers had entered the hole and were carrying on some sort of excavations, the object of which I did not at once discover. But now I knew whose work the hole in the sand-bank was, it was merely a matter of patience to discover the whole truth.

Mr. and Mrs. Kingfisher had retained the habits of their snake ancestors and were making a hole in the ground for their dwelling-place.

Day by day the pile of sand on the bank increased and the burrow was made longer. After it had gone straight back for about five feet it took a sharp bend, and went about three feet further. Then concluding that this was a safe distance underground, the birds hollowed out a chamber, perhaps a foot in diameter, and the home of the fisherman was ready for his mate. Mrs. Kingfisher took possession and soon shaped the floor of the chamber according to her own ideas of a nest. It was ultimately lined with fish bones, which was the only kind of a lining that would have suited its occupants.

As soon as she had laid her eggs, Mrs. Kingfisher excluded her mate from the nest and began her long and monotonous task of hatching the eggs.

At this point in the housekeeping of Mr. and Mrs. Kingfisher my boyish curiosity got the better of me and I could not longer resist the temptation to know what was going on at the end of this queer burrow, so I invaded the home of the fisher-folks to find out. This was a very unwise thing to do, as it might have broken up the nest, and I should not advise any boy to do likewise; but in this case the life within went on as though nothing had happened. I do not think that any other mother bird would

have been as unwilling to leave her eggs, and as fearless of intrusion as was Mrs. Kingfisher.

I first thrust a withe into the hole until it would go no farther. This gave me the direction of the hole and its length to the bend. Then laying the pole upon the ground outside, I was able to dig down for a foot and a half and strike the tunnel just at the bend. Here I again introduced the stick and got the direction of the remaining three feet of the burrow, so I could dig straight down upon the nest.

A fox burrow can be explored in this manner and it will save a great deal of digging. This burrow will sometimes be forty or fifty feet long with many twists and turns, but by introducing a pole the nest at the end of the tunnel can be discovered merely by digging three or four wells to the depth of the burrow.

I uncovered the nest of the Kingfishers with the greatest care and discovered seven white eggs, but neither Kingfisher happened to be at home. After examining it carefully, I replaced most of the dirt, but by inserting a board, the nest was left so that it could be examined any time with little trouble. This arrangement afterwards averted a tragedy in the Kingfisher family, so I justified my meddling act from this incident.

The second time that I visited the nest Mrs. Kingfisher was on the eggs. Although she scolded and bristled when I lifted the board and let in a ray of



HERE THEY SAT NODDING AND BLINKING.





light she made no attempt to leave the nest. I was lying upon my stomach peering into the hole when the long snakelike head of a weasel was thrust into the chamber containing the nest. This thirsty blood-sucker had evidently entered the burrow before my coming and had just discovered the sitting Kingfisher. I could see his nostrils dilate and his cruel hungry eyes glow at the sight of the prize so near at hand. He moved his head to this side and that, and then sprang upon the Kingfisher's back. I still held the board that had covered the nest in my hand and reaching down knocked him against the side of the nest where I had just room enough to grind the life out of him with my board.

There is scarcely a living thing that I care to kill, but the weasel is one of the exceptions to this rule, and it was with considerable satisfaction that I picked up the dead body of the weasel from the nest that it would have destroyed, merely for a few drops of blood.

The proprietor of the strange nest probably began sitting about the first of June and the young were hatched a little after the middle of the month.

They were as strange a lot of fledgelings as ever made a nest ugly, with short legs, large heads, and not even a sign of fuzz on their bodies. Their mother, who is short-legged and short-winged herself, could not brood them as readily as a bird mother usually does, so they huddled together for warmth

and she hovered over them keeping them warm as best she could.

All the time that his wife had been incubating the eggs Mr. Kingfisher had been catching fish for her, or occasionally he would take his turn for a few minutes on the eggs while she went for an airing.

After the young birds were hatched Mr. Kingfisher redoubled his efforts in fishing, for he now had eight hungry mouths to feed. So whenever he caught a minnow, instead of swallowing it at a single gulp, he would fly away, with the fish flopping in his beak, and deposit it before his numerous family. If it was intended for one of the young birds, either he or the mother bird would predigest the fish before giving it to them. This was done by first swallowing the fish and then when it had become soft and suitable for the crops of the young Kingfishers, it was gulped up and fed to them.

I am afraid that Mr. Kingfisher occasionally went hungry himself during these arduous days of feeding his family. But it is certain that he did nothing but fish all day long.

It must have been a great relief to him when his noisy family was at last driven forth from their underground nest and taught the art of fishing, which they learned much faster than one would have imagined. But they were a family of fishermen and the instinct of swooping for fish was born in them. In the case of this particular family the in-

stinct was supplemented by several lessons in fish-catching. I do not say that the young birds would not have learned of themselves, but they were certainly helped by the example of their elders.

I was lucky enough to see the family the first day that they came into the bright world, which must have been very strange to them, after the life underground. There was not the usual fuss of young birds in learning to fly and although their wings are short, after seeing the old birds flying about calling persistently to them, the young birds tried their own wings. Three flopped up beside their father on the old maple stump where I had so often seen him perched, watching intently for fish. Here they sat nodding and blinking and probably wondering what kind of a game it was going to be.

Then Mr. Kingfisher dove into the water and brought up a minnow and dangled it tantalizingly before them. He did not give it to them at once but preferred to arouse their eagerness for fish and fishing.

When he had plunged into the water several times and always brought up a minnow, one of the young birds a bit more courageous than his brothers and sisters thought he, too, saw great wealth in the waters below merely to be had for the taking. So he struck the stream with a great splash, but soon came up, beating the water into spray and without any fish for his pains. He was not able to fly back to the old

stump, but had to content himself with perching on a low bush along shore, where four of his brothers and sisters were.

If the young Kingfisher saw his fish at all, he probably struck too high to get it, for a fish always looks much nearer to the surface of the water than he really is. Every boy who has used a fish-rod, knows how the butt of his pole will seem to bend just beneath the surface of the water, when he thrusts it into the stream. This is due to light refraction. Of course the young Kingfishers, or their parents, know nothing of light refraction, but every Kingfisher knows that he must strike deep if he would get his fish.

Seeing that his brother was not injured by his plunge, another young Kingfisher soon followed his example. He too came up flapping the water in every direction and making a great fuss about the ducking that he got. But after the fact had been made plain that fish came from the stream and that they could be gotten in some way, if one only knew just how it was done, Mr. and Mrs. Kingfisher caught no more fish for the young birds, for they knew that hunger would be the greatest incentive to the young Kingfishers and that it would drive them to make efforts to catch fish for themselves, that they would not make for mere sport. So combining necessity and fun, and encouraging them by their own example, the old Kingfishers had two or three of the bolder

of their brood fishing for themselves the first morning. Once they had the trick learned they were all eagerness to fish, and wanted to do nothing else for the better part of the day. It, of course, took weeks and months for them to become the expert fishermen that their parents were, but when they understood that they could get a fish, even once in half a dozen plunges, they were eager to try. Perhaps there was a sort of excitement about it too, just as there is about the fishing that the boy does. But certainly there was great rivalry among them in practising this most interesting art.

When this enterprising family, that fished without hook or line, net or snare, was fully grown, it was a gay and noisy assembly. There were certain favorite trees that overhung the stream where they could almost always be found fishing. These perches were especially adapted to their wants, as they afforded a position not too high up from the water, and one that was free from twigs and leaves. Such trees were usually dead, or dying. Sometimes they would perch two or three in a bunch, while I have occasionally seen the entire seven upon the same limb, all intently watching the stream beneath. At such times as this the rivalry ran high, and it was perilous for a minnow to venture into that portion of the pool.

It was not until the flight woodcock were passing and anchor ice had formed along shore, and hoarfrost hung heavy on the water-grasses and flag, that

I saw the last of the Kingfishers. I do not know whether they went singly, or in twos or threes, or as a family party, but certainly the stream was not as interesting as it had been, when this noisy clattering chattering family of little fishermen were gone.

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### The Water Weasel

THE weasel of the waters was really not a weasel at all but a very sleek mink. But his disposition and habits of life so closely resembled those of the weasel that I have given him that name.

The particular member of the family with whom we are concerned, usually haunted a little willow-fringed brook that I have known and loved since childhood. No one could know this sweet little brook and not love it. It was the sunniest, happiest little stream you ever saw, always laughing and singing through the bright day, and gurgling a drowsy lullaby through the starry night.

This terror of the brookside, who was feared and hated by all the small creatures along the water-course, was really very small for so formidable a creature. He did not measure twenty-two inches, tail and all, and when his sleek coat was off he looked much smaller. His body was round and lithe, slightly arched at the shoulders. His head was small, his ears set closely in his fur, and his eyes were bright and beady.

His movements were swift, and darting. He flashed from point to point along the brook, just as a weasel moves on the wall. His head would suddenly appear from behind a stone, and his bright restless eyes would view you for a second, then he would be gone. Then, would suddenly appear, this time ten or fifteen feet further along behind an old log. You never knew just how or when he moved. The first you knew he was watching you from a new position.

Once I saw the mink and his mate moving their family to a new home. They were carrying the babies in their mouths, by the scruff of the neck, just as a cat carries kittens. They moved them several rods down stream to a hole in the bank, under the roots of an overhanging tree. The high water had made their old home untenable, so they had moved out, and rented a new tenement. I think the hole belonged to some of the mole family before the minks came, but they probably dispossessed the former occupants and took possession without as much as saying "by your leave."

When the family of the terror were half grown they were as playful as kittens and would chase one another about with as much zest as young squirrels.

The mud along the bank, near the bright water of my little trout stream, was always dotted with their footprints. So I knew quite well of their pranks, even when I did not see them.

One bright morning the water-weasel started on one of his restless wanderings. He did not know or care where he went, only that he was on the move.

He glided along the stream as silently as a shadow. A very dark shadow he seemed, and his coming was indeed a shadow for many creeping, crawling things that lay in his course. Occasionally he would stop, with his slight paw raised, looking this way and that. Eager, and restless, furtive and watchful. Then he would glide on like a swift-moving black speck. Near a bunch of lily pads he stopped and peered this way and that, searching under all the pads with his beady eyes.

You or I would not have seen anything animate among the green pads, but Mr. Mink did. Suddenly he darted forward. There was a short scuffle in the water. A violent flopping and splashing and then this sleek scamp dragged a great green bull-frog, kicking and croaking, to the bank. The poor frog is kicking for dear life, and his eyes are bulging out with fright; but his relentless enemy has him by the throat, and there is no shaking that grip. The teeth sink deeper and deeper. The frog kicks and flops, gasps and kicks feebly, and is dead.

Does Mr. Mink eat him? O no, he may bite a hole in his throat, but he will soon leave him and look for another victim. His particular sport is in taking the quarry.

Occasionally he catches a tadpole, or opens a



small clam, but best of all he loves to torment frogs. Fish are also to his liking and he occasionally surprises a sleepy sucker, but he is rather too small to be a good fisherman, besides he cannot hold his breath very long under the water. He is much smaller than the muskrat, but the rat will flee for his life, when he sees the glittering eyes of the mink. The hunted rat's refuge then, is in keeping in deep water, for his lungs are much stronger than those of the terror.

Knowing this fact, when the rat builds his house, he makes a long winding tunnel leading to it under water. His particular stratagem is to make the water tunnel so long that the mink will drown while coming through it. If the muskrat has to do battle with his bloodthirsty enemy he always meets him if possible in the water tunnel, where the mink loses his breath and is obliged to go to the surface to breathe, to the great relief of the muskrat. Occasionally, though, he can swim the whole length of the water channel, into the muskrat's house, then he does bloody work.

One morning early in November the water-weasel went upon the last of his bloody excursions along the little stream, and the inhabitants of the water-course were glad that they saw him no more, with the possible exception of the mink family, who probably missed him from their circle. The morning was clear and crisp, and Mr. Mink felt peculiarly

eager for his sport. He had been very peaceable for several days, but now he would make up for it. Many of the frogs had crept under the mould, where they were stupidly sleeping. The small water-snakes too were asleep, but he would find something, somewhere to sate his love of blood. But this morning the hunter was hunted, for he found a dead mouse hanging over a shallow in the brook, and in reaching for it, he set his forefoot in a trap.

He had always been so swift and sure in flight, that it infuriated him to be held in this manner. He bit at the ugly thing, until his teeth bled. But it still held, and from being a terror, this dark-coated hunter became a demon as wild and furious as his size and strength would allow. He broke his front teeth on the trap and fell to tearing his own glossy coat. He bit at everything in reach. Foam and blood were on his muzzle. Then he remembered his last weapon of defense, that he rarely used unless cornered, and emitted an odor that is only surpassed for pungency by that of the skunk. But the trap had no nostrils and held on as before.

For half the forenoon the infuriated mink bit and tore, first at the trap, and then at himself, but his fate did not change. The frog would have smiled to see him in this plight if he had known.

When the little terror had exhausted his strength with wrenching, and his sleek coat had been sadly lacerated by his own teeth, a tall creature, walking

erect, came stalking along the stream. In one hand he carried an empty trap, and in the other a light club. He laughed when he saw the mink, for he knew that his small pelt, that would scarcely cover both a man's palms, was worth four dollars of the fur-trader's good money. Then he raised his club, which descended swiftly, and the song of the little brook was stilled in the Terror's ears, and he swooned away into breathless darkness, and was nothing but a sleek pelt.

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### The Boy With the Dinner-Pail

HOW often since that memorable day when I reluctantly turned my back upon the old district school-house and went away to the city, have I longed for the freedom and the sweet philosophy of the boy with a dinner-pail. His was a joyous lot and his life was as free as the winds that blow.

In those rich days I owned the world, the birds, the squirrels, the fields and all that they contained.

Nor was I content with owning merely the world, for was not the great free blue sky mine with its treasures of stars, some of which still glimmered when I drove the cows to pasture in the dewy fragrant morning.

Half-way down to the old schoolhouse the boy with a dinner-pail sometimes left the traveled road for a shorter way. This was an old discontinued

road so grown with brush, that one would never have guessed that it had been a road at all, had it not been for a half tumbled down stone wall on either side. Beside these walls grew raspberry and blackberry bushes, and many a good meal they furnished the famished boy on his way home from school. Also an occasional scrub apple tree bore delicious fruit, but some of these wild apples were as sour as vinegar.

One memorable morning, early in May the boy turned into the old disused road as usual and was trotting along whistling a merry tune, when from the marsh near by came a strange and ominous sound. It was a deep three syllable booming, that rolled across the lowlands and was lost in the distance.

The boy sprang upon the wall, curious and half fearful. It had sounded as loud as the bellowing of a bull and even more resounding, but he did not think it was a bull. Presently he heard it again and this time he was quite certain it was not an animal.

But no sight or sound with which he was not familiar went unchallenged, so he set his dinner-pail down beside the wall and crept cautiously forward, always keeping some bush or knoll between him and the spot from which the sound had come.

When he had gone a dozen rods into the marsh the strange booming was heard again, this time much plainer. Now the boy was almost afraid to go forward. He had never heard of any creature

that could make such a sound as this. Perhaps he ought to go back, but a strange fascination impelled him to go forward.

He now proceeded with still greater caution going on his belly and stopping every few seconds to listen. So carefully this young woodsman stalked the strange creature that presently the deep booming sounded again, now only three or four rods away.

It could not be a bull, for the marsh was not wooded, and he could see in every direction. So he lay still in the grass and listened. But the marsh was as quiet as though nothing inhabited it.

How strange it seemed. Perhaps it was a hobgoblin, that would swallow him up. He did not like strange noises that could not be explained. As the silence deepened, a wild terror seized the boy. Somebody or something must move or cry out. He could stand it no longer, so with a yell like a wild Indian he sprang to his feet and swung his hat about his head.

But no fourfooted creature appeared. Instead, a great clumsy winged bird, tall and awkward, rose in air with a startled cry, and flopped slowly away.

The boy had a fleeting vision of long dangling yellow legs, and a large body, of brown and buff with light markings.

He had never seen such a bird as this before, but the mystery of the booming noise still troubled him. It surely could not be made by a bird, but try as he

would he could not dispel the idea that the great awkward stranger had been in some way connected with the awful sounds. Mere words could never express the boy's astonishment and disgust on returning to his dinner-pail, to find it bottom side up and a yearling heifer munching complacently at the last mouthful of a saucer pie that had been baked expressly for him.

Nearly every morning after that the boy heard the queer booming sound in the marsh, and each time crept cautiously toward it, only to flush the strange bird; but he never saw him make the sound, although he was quite sure now that the bird made it, as there was no other living thing on the marsh capable of doing it.

One morning, while stalking the bird from a new direction, he discovered the nest, upon which the female was sitting. She was not like most birds that the boy knew, for she did not fly away with a great show of fear, when he approached her, but stuck persistently to the nest, even pecking at the intruder. Finally, when the boy swung his hat to scare her, she ran away into the grass, disclosing her treasures to his inquisitive eyes. It was the poorest kind of a nest, merely a few bunches of coarse grass scratched together in a clumsy manner, with no attempt at lining.

The eggs were large and of a brownish drab, and five in number. It was something to have found the

nest of the "great boomer," as the boy called the strange bird, and he now felt quite well repaid for his persistence.

When the eggs finally hatched, and it always seems like a long time to the boy who is watching, the young birds were all legs and heads, and altogether the ugliest fledgelings that he had ever seen. He was never quite sure just what the old birds fed the little ones, although he found the fragments of a frog about the nest one morning. Probably grasshoppers, grubs, and small crustaceans also found their way to the young bittern's bills. These awkward, helpless fledgelings stayed in the nest six or eight weeks. The boy did not know just when they went, but at the end of eight weeks they were gone, and he occasionally flushed them in the marsh, or along a little stream that flowed near by.

He never expected to have as good a look at the "great boomer" as he finally did, but it came about in this way. One morning near the close of the school year, as he was crossing the marsh, he heard the roar of a shotgun near at hand, and went to see who was out gunning and what the game was.

He soon met Eb Thompson, an old hunter and woodsman, coming across the marsh. In his hand he was carrying a large bird, and the boy saw at once that it was the "great boomer."

"Hello, Eb, what have you got?" cried the boy excitedly.

“An American Bittern, and a big one,” replied the hunter composedly. “I got him out here by Willow Brook, and he is a beauty. I guess it is the male.”

The hunter laid the bittern down on the grass and spread him out to his full length. Then, taking a tape measure from his pocket, he stretched it from the bird's beak to the tip of his tail. It measured twenty-eight inches, which is a large bittern.

His upper side was brownish buff, thickly spotted or freckled with reddish brown and black. His neck was buff, and there was a white line down the throat. There was a patch of gray on the sides of the neck. His whole underside was pale buff striped with brown. His bill was yellow, and his long legs were yellowish green. Altogether he was a gorgeous fellow.

It is no wonder that the boy had been almost afraid of the strange cries on the marsh, when we recall this thrilling description of the sound, as described by Oliver Goldsmith.

“It is impossible for words to give those who have not heard this evening call an adequate idea of its solemnity. It is like the interrupted bellowing of a bull, but hollower and louder and is heard at a mile's distance, as if issuing from some formidable being that resided at the bottom of the waters.” Other sounds there were upon the lonely marsh, besides the booming of the great bittern, that fascinated the boy with the dinner-pail. Most of these sounds



were heard in the early spring, and it is then that nearly all creatures are mating, and planning for the new home that shall be their joy for the coming summer. In the early springtime not only the birds and fourfooted creatures become vocal, telling their joy to the world, but also the bursting buds and the greening grass seem to be whispering a language all their own, and so low and sweet that only the finest ear can hear.

One spring twilight the boy was trudging homeward across the lonely marsh as usual. He had stopped to play with another boy who lived near the schoolhouse, so that when he reached the loneliest part of the marsh, it was already twilight, and soft mist clouds were hanging over the lowlands.

Suddenly the boy stopped to listen and almost held his breath in the intensity of the moment. He had heard an old familiar note and wanted to satisfy himself that his ears had not deceived him.

There it was again, and there was no mistaking it now, beef, beef, beef. It was a strange hoarse cry rather rasping and without the slightest suggestion of music in it. One would have said on hearing it for the first time, that it was made by an animal, rather than a bird. But the boy had heard it before, and knew it was Mr. Woodcock and that somewhere out there on the marsh, he and Mrs. Woodcock were planning a nest.

Then there was a sudden whirr of wings like a

penny whistle with a pea in it, and Mr. Woodcock shot up out of the mist, and went dancing up into the sky, going up in a beautiful spiral, as the eagle does, only the rings in his spiral were much smaller than those in the eagle's. How joyous and full of good spirits his twilight flight was! Just as though his heart was so light that he had to go up. Up, up, he went, two hundred feet, three, four and five, until the boy could just make him out against the dusky sky. Now he is zigzagging across the sky parallel to the earth, and the whistle of his wings is no longer heard. Now he is coming down in a long zigzag coast, light as a bubble. But what is that chattering? Che-at-ter, chatter, chit-chee, chatter chit chee, something like the chatter of chimney swallows, only many times louder and sweeter. Now it is fairly poured from the ecstatic throat, the notes following so closely upon one another, as to be almost one continuous stream. Chatter, chit-chee, chee, chee, cheep, cheep, chit, chee. Here he comes over the boy's head, so near that he could have touched him with the new fishing-pole that he cut yesterday. Now the mist has swallowed him, but out on the marsh you may hear the hoarse cry, more like a bleat than a bird note, "beef, beef, beef."

The boy heaves a deep sigh of satisfaction at the sound, and trudges homeward, feeling that he too must grow like the rest of the world, and be glad like the bird and the young lambs.

But the most interesting thing on the marsh was a family that lived in an old water-elm, near the little footbridge that crossed the brook.

One morning the boy was sitting upon the little bridge breaking off bits of bark, and snapping them into the stream. He did this just to see if there would come that sudden flash of something bright, a swirl in the water and then an eddy to tell where the trout had jumped. This was the small boy's favorite pastime, when he had a minute to spare near the brook.

No trout rose this morning to his sham bait, but presently he heard soft wings winnowing the air above him; and looking up saw a small beautifully marked duck passing directly over his head, and a second later it alighted in the old water-elm just below the bridge.

The boy had never seen a duck alight in a tree before, but he had read of the duck who lives in a tree, and knew at once that this must be the wood duck, or summer duck, as it is also called.

The boy was still more interested in this duck when it disappeared in a hole in a tree, a few minutes later. He could hear an occasional low quack or croak, or murmur in the hollow tree, so knew there must be another duck inside. Soon the second duck came out and flew away to the woods, and the boy saw that she was rather smaller than the first duck, and not so gaily dressed. This was

the female. She had gone to the woods for some of last year's beechnuts, or acorns, or any other kind of nut that she could find. Perhaps if she found nuts scarce, she would pick up some weed seeds on the marsh, before her return. There must be a nest, thought the boy, else the two ducks would have gone together. The male bird had stayed to keep the eggs warm while his mate went for her breakfast. He would climb up to that hole some morning and see.

All through the evening thoughts of what might be in the bottom of the hole in the old water-elm haunted the boy, and he dreamed that night of climbing the tree and falling into the stream for his pains.

The next morning on his way to school, he examined the tree to see if he could climb it. It was dead and almost without limbs and looked like quite a proposition. But the boy was all curiosity to know what was going on in the hollow, which was about twenty feet from the ground, so he got a stone from the bed of the stream, and drummed on the old stub.

"Wake-up, wake-up, wake-up," said a voice in the tree. It was not a quack, but more like a croak, or a whistle. Then the boy saw that the beautiful duck whom he had first seen the day before was sitting on a limb near the hole keeping watch. He looked half asleep himself, and the admonition might as well have been given him.

For answer came a low drowsy murmur in the hollow stub, which plainly said, "Wake-up, yourself. I am all right. What is the matter anyhow?"

The beams of the morning sun fell full upon the little drake who was apparently keeping watch in the tree and the boy thought he had never seen a more beautiful bird. He was a small duck, about eighteen inches from the end of his bill to the tip of his tail. His head and crest were metallic green and purple, which colors refracted the sunlight in many rainbow hues. About his eyes were some white spectacles, and he wore a white necktie. His underside, of which the boy had a good view, was chestnut and white and in front of each shoulder was a black and white crescent. His wings were largely purple and green, like his head, and when he flew the sunlight played upon them gorgeously.

The boy discovered the following day, when he climbed up and peeped into the hole, that the female was not as brilliant as her mate, being brown and gray, and very modest in her appearance.

Each morning the boy shinned up on a pole borrowed from a neighboring fence and peeped into the hollow to see how things were getting on. The first morning he discovered that there were six creamy eggs, about the size of small hens' eggs, only they were more pointed than the hens' eggs, and as near as he could make out, there was a new egg laid each day until there were thirteen or fourteen. Sometimes the

little drake was keeping watch in the tree and would cry "Wake-up, wake-up, wake-up," but when the boy began climbing the tree he would fly away, though he did not seem to be much afraid. The female duck always stayed on the nest after the first morning. When the eggs were all laid they were covered with down which looked as though it came from Mr. Wood Duck's breast.

Frequently the boy would see Mrs. Wood Duck flying away to the woods or just returning and then he would know that her mate had been keeping the eggs warm.

He did not know just when the eggs hatched, for the farmer claimed his fence pole and this broke up the habit of climbing into the tree each morning on the way to school, but finally when he got another pole and climbed up, the eggs were all gone but one and the nest was empty.

How the little ducklings ever got down to the water was another mystery, but an old hunter told the boy that the mother duck usually carried the little ones down to the water in her bill, taking them one at a time, by the wing, or their little red webbed feet.

About a week after the disappearance of the ducks from the old water-elm, the boy discovered the whole family in a large pool further down stream, all swimming about and having the finest kind of a time. Both of the old ducks were with the brood caring for

them, but the ducklings seemed very active, swimming and nibbling away at water-grass and in all ways appearing quite like their elders.

One day the boy discovered a bloodthirsty mink gliding along the bank, intently watching the duck family. He hurried to a neighbor's house and borrowed a gun and kept guard over his precious ducklings for three hours until this fierce water-weasel again appeared when he shot it, and the ducks were rescued from a grave peril.

After school closed the boy did not have occasion to use the unfrequented road across the marsh and through the meadows where the duck family lived, but he occasionally went around that way just to see how they were getting on. As the summer advanced they were seen less and less often on the stream and more frequently along the edge of the woods. Finally in September they lived almost entirely in the woods, only going to the water when they felt the need of a swim and a bath and some water-grass diet, with which to vary their regular breakfast and supper of acorns.

The boy never knew just when Mr. and Mrs. Wood Duck led their handsome family on that long flight southward, but he never saw them after about the first of October.

Probably they went in the night, as so many birds of passage do, when the dusky mantle shields them from curious eyes. Perhaps if he had been standing

at the little bridge just at dusk he might have heard them winnowing by overhead, uttering their soft call notes. But this glimpse of them, if he had been lucky enough to have had it, would have been very fleeting.

But one thing is certain, he never passed the little footbridge and the old hollow water-elm but he thought of the little drake who had watched in the tree and advised his mate of danger.

Even if the old tree was forsaken now, and the marsh lonely and desolate, perhaps they would come back again in the spring, when Whistle-wings, the woodcock, would dance his love dance in the twilight sky, and the hoarse cry of the jacksnipe would be heard in the land.

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### The Tale of a Turtle

IT was a pleasant afternoon in August, with just enough haze to subdue the sunlight and give warm, rich color to the landscape. The day was more like Indian summer than August, so tender was the sky and so hazy was the atmosphere. Bass were not biting, but what cared I as long as the blue sky was above me, the fresh green earth at my feet, and the sweet air in my nostrils.

There were other things to be interested in that summer afternoon besides bass; so I sat under the old birch and trailed my line heedlessly in the water, dreaming a sweet day-dream while the silver-footed



moments slipped noiselessly by, all unconscious of the joys they held. From across the stream came the musical tinkle of a cowbell, reminding me of boyhood and driving cows to pasture through the dew-laden grass where the clover smelled so sweet when you stirred it. I could almost smell it now across the gap of some twenty-five years.

The stream lapped the roots of the old black birch with a low pleasant sound, and the wind sighed softly in the treetop. All was restful and quiet. Each hour seemed cut from the calendar and hung like a golden apple, ripe and ready for plucking.

Then I leaned back against the rough trunk of the tree, rested my rod across my knee, while the winds and the water crooned a pleasant lullaby, and Mother Earth invited me to rest. Somehow it all seemed familiar, like a leaf out of an old dog-eared book. Was it my mother's crooning and the warm human breast I remembered? I know not, but the day and the hour did their work and I slipped into the realm of mystery.

"Having any luck, Mister?" asked an odd little voice at my feet. I looked down in surprise, for I had not imagined any one about, but could see no one who could be addressing me. Then a large round something in the grass on the bank moved, and I saw a green turtle about the size of a milk pan eying me curiously.

"Getting any fish?" asked the queer voice again. I started.

“What, were you speaking?” I asked in astonishment, for I had never heard a turtle talk before. “I wasn’t aware that any one was about.”

“Maybe you don’t consider me any one,” said the turtle ironically, “but there are others who do. Why, there are cooks down in New York who would laugh with glee at the very sight of me. I am considered one of the choicest delicacies ever set upon the table. That is why I have to look out for my shell. I am what you people call a hard-shell, hard outside but soft inside. That is better than being soft outside and hard inside,” and the turtle winked knowingly at me.

“Have you always lived here?” I asked. The deep hole under the old black birch was a favorite fishing spot of mine, and I did not remember ever having seen so fine a specimen of the turtle family there before.

The turtle laughed a dry little laugh and looked very scornfully at me as he replied, “I guess you don’t know much about the turtle family. Why, I have an ancestor in the Isle of Wight who is known to be many hundred years old. Even I have seen seven or eight generations of your race come and go and I am still hale and hearty and sure to outlive you, my fisherman friend. Do you know, I have been having great sport with you this summer, by nipping your worms from the hook when you were fishing with a bob. You thought it was bass, and that made me snicker. I might tell you all about

that big bass that you nearly landed. What a joke it would be if you had merely hooked into my shell!"

I blushed and looked sheepish. That big bass which I had nearly landed had been a favorite yarn of mine and I was thinking of writing up the incident for a sporting paper, but now it would not do.

"Where did you come from if you have not always lived here?" I asked, for I was getting interested in what seemed to be a remarkable turtle.

"Why, I was born at Leyden," he replied. "I was one of several million eggs that my mother left in the sand, but the rest were all gobbled up by an otter."

"How did you get here?" I queried.

"It is a rather long story," said the turtle, "but I will tell you if you wish. You need not bother about your line; you will not get any bites now I am on the bank.

"I was found by a Leyden goldsmith when I was a baby turtle, about as big as a silver dollar, and he kept me for two years in a glass globe and was very proud of me. The customers used to peer in to see me, and I was quite as much of a curiosity as the green parrot in the window. But finally, I got so large that I could not be kept in the globe and then the goldsmith let me go, putting me down among the wharves, where I picked up a good living.

"By the time I was twenty years old, I had grown to be quite a respectable turtle. I was not like the rest of the family, for I was given to wondering what

was doing in the great watery world about me and on the dry, hot land. Most turtles simply eat anything that comes their way and bask in the sun the rest of the time. But I wanted to know more about the world. I used to wonder about the great ships that were always coming and going. So finally one day, when the wharves were pretty well deserted, I climbed up to the gang plank of a ship and went aboard her. I was waddling about on the deck having a fine time, when I fell into a deep hole and went rolling and tumbling clear to the bottom of the ship. I kept pretty quiet for two or three days; in fact, I could do little else, for I could not get out of the hole. But by and by I felt the ship moving and that interested me. Things went on very well for about a month and I was quite happy, for now I was traveling, something that I had always wanted to do. But one day a man came down into the bottom of the ship after something and discovered me.

“‘Hello, my fine fellow,’ he cried, catching me up by the tail. ‘Here is a find. I will take you to the galley and we will have turtle soup for dinner.’

“Cookie was tickled enough when he saw me, and I thought my day had come. I was perched upon a great table awaiting my fate, when a dignified white-haired man wearing a long black coat, entered.

“‘What have you here, Thomas?’ he asked pointing to me.

“‘That’s our dinner,’ replied Cookie with a laugh.

“‘You will have to kill him, won't you?’ asked the man in the black coat.

“‘Why, of course, Elder,’ said the cook. ‘You didn't think I would boil him alive.’

“‘Certainly not,’ replied the grave one, ‘but I do not think it will do. If we spill blood upon this ship, we shall not be prospered. Turtle soup would make our humble rations relish, but we must not risk it. We are on a long and hazardous journey and must have a care.’

“So I escaped.”

“Did you ever learn the name of the ship?” I asked, now being thoroughly interested in the turtle's story.

“Of course,” he replied. “You didn't think I would cross the Atlantic in a ship and not learn her name. It was the Mayflower, and my preserver was Elder Brewster.”

“Impossible,” I gasped. “You do not mean to tell me that you are nearly three hundred years old.”

“Certainly I am,” replied the turtle, “and probably three hundred and twenty-five years would be nearer my age. You know the turtle family is noted for long life.”

“I do not believe it,” I replied ; “you are spinning me a fish story.”

“Just turn me over then, and see what you see,” he rejoined. I did as I was told and saw the letters “E. B.” and the numerals 1628.

"What does that stand for?" I asked, for I did not at first catch the significance of the lettering.

"Elder Brewster, 1628," replied the turtle. "He marked me when he let me go. I was a young turtle then, but now I am getting old. I used to have the name of the goldsmith who kept me in the glass globe at Leyden on my shell, but as my shell grew, it was obliterated."

"How did you get here?" I queried. "This is the Connecticut."

"I came up in an English ship, which was fired on by the Dutch at Hartford, but we took possession of the land and have kept it ever since. I suppose I ought to be a Dutch turtle, but I have always been with the English so much that I call myself English."

"What other adventures have you had?" I asked. "You seem to be the most remarkable turtle I have ever known."

"Well, I got aboard a flat-boat one day and was going to the Sound, but I heard the men talking about letting the ship that they were going to meet take me to New York, and sell me to a restaurant. So I slipped overboard and gave up going to sea. Then about fifty years ago, when they were building the great dam at Holyoke, I got my shell cracked. That laid me up for quite a spell, but it finally grew together and I am quite as good as new."

"I believe you are a monstrous story teller," I



I DROPPED MY POLE AND SPRANG FOR HIM.





said solemnly, when the turtle had concluded his story.

"Well, you are another," he retorted. "Didn't you tell about hooking a big bass, when it was nothing but my shell?"

"Look out, I really believe you have got a bite, and me out of the water too; I shall have to investigate," and he slipped down the bank toward the water.

"Hold on," I cried, "I want to ask you more questions. Did you really—" here the tugging at the pole became so vigorous that I aroused myself and gave the line a slight jerk to hook my fish. Where was the turtle? Had it been a dream? Or was it a waking reality?"

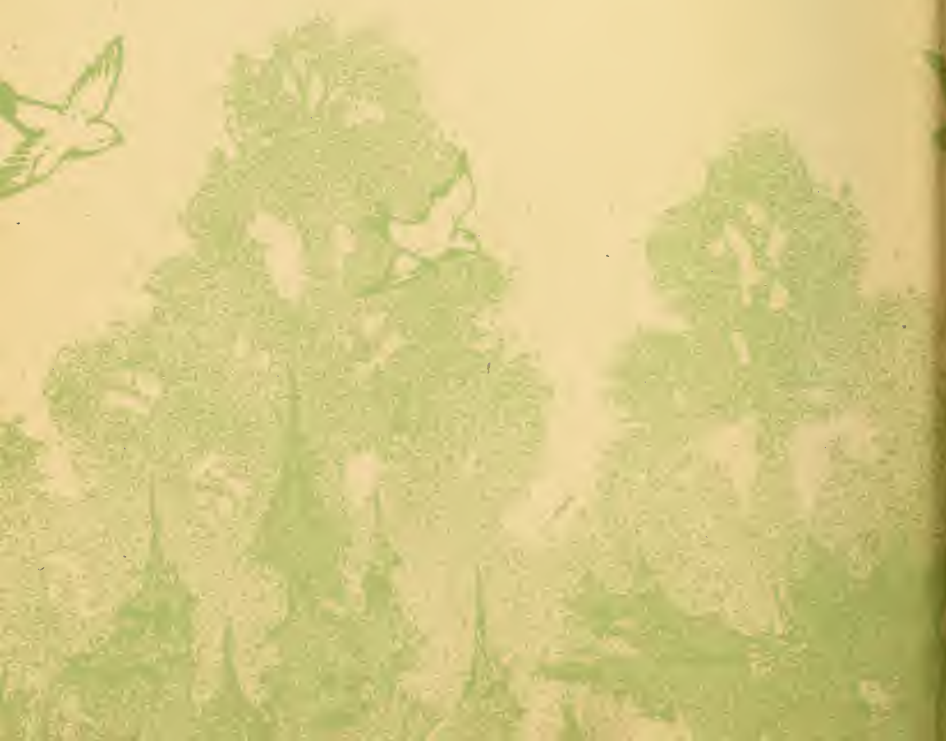
I looked along the bank. The green mottled back of a huge turtle was just slipping into the water. I dropped my pole and sprang for him. A look at the under side of his shell again, and then I would know. But I was too late. Although I waded to the top of my hip boots, and thrust my arm into the water to the elbow, the black shape slipped away into the deep water and only a few bubbles told where this most remarkable turtle had gone.

It was too bad. I should never know. It would always remain a mystery.

THE END

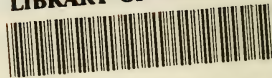








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