

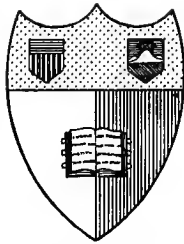


# Neighbours of Field Wood & Stream



Morton Grinnell





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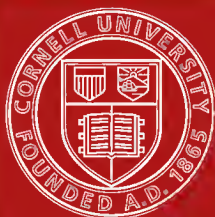
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NEIGHBOURS OF FIELD, WOOD  
AND STREAM







“HOO-HOO HAD LISTENED ATTENTIVELY THROUGH JOHN CROW'S TALE.”

Neighbours of Field  
Wood *and* Stream

or

Through the Year with  
Nature's Children

By

Morton Grinnell

*With Forty-five Illustrations*

SECOND EDITION



New York

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L.

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## PREFACE.

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NOTWITHSTANDING the destroying effect of three hundred years of civilisation and a dense population, an exact enumeration of the birds and quadrupeds still existing about our New England homes would certainly surprise a great many people. Of those who have eyes to see and ears to hear, many are both blind and deaf to those phenomena not directly connected with their ordinary life.

Few of us observe with any care the birds that constantly fly past us in broad daylight, while the birds and other animals of the night and those that live in the seclusion of swamp and forest are known only to those who seek them in their haunts.

Of Ulster County, New York, it is said, for instance, that almost every variety of game that existed there one hundred years ago is found there to-day. This seems hardly credible; but it is to a certain extent true, for deer, bear, and "panthers" are still found, though in diminished numbers. The same statement can be made of certain portions of New England. It seems as though before the complete destruction of the fauna of many of these

regions the increasing westward rush of the new and swelling population had passed by, so that a limited and sufficient number of many species had been left. The too-ready belief that a given animal has ceased to exist protects many a casual survivor, and if, instead of a single survivor, a pair remains, a species may live on for many years protected amid a comparatively dense population.

Look at the Connecticut of to-day. In the eastern and northern sections, the region of deserted farms, one at all skilled in the science of woodcraft is apt to encounter at times the lynx, the fox, the raccoon, the skunk, the hare, the otter, the mink, the weasel, occasionally the red deer, and, of course, the woodchuck, the muskrat and the gray squirrel. Within ten miles of New Haven during the Winter of 1900 I shot as many as nine red and gray foxes, besides a number of minks, skunks and raccoons. The majority of these animals are commonly called vermin and are unprotected by law. Thanks to improved game-laws, game-wardens and private preserves, we can still find almost all the aboriginal game-birds in considerable numbers. Of the birds of song and bright plumage there are not so many as formerly; but it seems in this year of 1901 as if they were on the increase. Perhaps this is due partly to the crusade begun by the Audubon Society against the use of the plumage of wild birds in ladies' hats and partly to the extension of the game-laws in many





"CEDAR BIRDS AT HOME."



states that now specifically protect such birds as the robin, the oriole, the tanager, the meadow-lark, the golden-winged woodpecker, the jay and others.

This volume is intended to make known to the younger generation and to nature-lovers of all ages the habits and home-life of some of these unseen neighbours of ours.

In endowing the birds, beasts and fish with the attributes of human intelligence and speech, I have attempted to give to the subjects of zoology and ornithology a real and living interest. I have sought to make heroes of some of the characters and villains of others.

The photographs reproduced are either from life or from my own specimens placed in their natural surroundings.

I am indebted to Mr. M. W. Filley, of New Haven, for his aid and artistic ideas in photography.

MORTON GRINNELL.

BEAVER BROOK FARM,  
MILFORD, CONN.,  
*September, 1901.*



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# NEIGHBOURS OF FIELD, WOOD AND STREAM.

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## CHAPTER I.

### JANUARY.—PART I.

Cooney the Fox and his Sons, Brush and Brake—Hoo-Hoo the Great Horned Owl—Ruffle the Partridge—Snarley the Lynx.

“COME on, boys; to-night we'll try something new. Deacon Smith Clark's guinea-fowl must be in fine condition, and you're large enough now to try a twenty-mile tramp.”

Thus spoke Cooney the Fox to his two sons, Brush and Brake, in low tones, in order not to disturb their mother, who had been ill for some days. Her trouble was said to be *ptomaine* poisoning. For the first time in her life she had tried shell-fish, having found a dead lobster down at Sawmill Pond, where the salt water, coming in at high tide, had thrown up the queer-looking crustacean.

She had become very ill, and there had been a consultation. Hoo-Hoo the Great Horned Owl,

Snarley the Lynx and John Crow had diagnosed the case as acute intestinal indigestion and, after much discussion, had recommended absolute rest and a simple diet. To see that she had quiet, Cooney, her husband, had agreed to take the boys out for a nighting.

Brush and Brake were overjoyed at the prospect of the promised run and supper at the other end of the line, and though it was bitter cold, with snow eight inches on the level, they were nothing loth to leave their warm bedroom of the day.

The family lived in two apartments some twelve feet beneath the roots of a gigantic pine tree, and, being of the silver-grey family of fox, they were regarded as aristocrats in the neighbourhood. There are very few residences in which the New England fox enjoys more than one fair-sized room, yet here the Cooney family lived with their own separate bedrooms close to, but quite distinct from, each other. Cooney and his wife occupied one room, while the boys, Brush and Brake, had the other. The dining-room was a well ventilated space outside the entrance, where a flat rock overhung the roots of the great pine-tree. When snow had not drifted, the floor of this room was carpeted with fragrant pine-needles, and an evergreen laurel-bush added welcome shade in summer-time and protected the entrance from the cold blasts of January.

All about the dining-room could be seen an artis-

tic arrangement of bones and feathers and hair. During early youth Brush and Brake had passed much of their time in the hole, while Cooney and his wife made extended trips, always bringing back some present for the boys. At first these remembrances consisted of field-mice and rats; but, as the young people grew older and their teeth became stronger, their parents would sometimes bring in a rabbit or a partridge. In this way they were provided with odds and ends of decorative material as well as with food. However, for many months they had both longed for the time when they should be permitted to go out and select their own meals.

On the way down the rocky slope,—for their home was on a high steep ledge,—Brush and Brake followed their father in single file and conversed in whispers only. When they came down to the road, however, they could walk side by side and enjoy the novel sights and sounds together.

“Brother, don’t you hope we shall meet with some exciting adventure?”

“Yes, but I don’t want to get hurt. I heard father telling mother the other day that it’s as much as one’s life is worth to get a meal nowadays,—what’s that?”

“Be quiet, boys,” cautioned Cooney ahead, and with that he gave a little bark, and, after a moment and with the silence of snow, a great shadow ob-

scured the moon and Hoo-Hoo the Great Horned Owl dropped on a limb over their heads.

How large and handsome he looked there, silhouetted against the bright moonlit sky! They could see his eyes sparkle and hear his bill snap and could see the black ear on each side of his head, as he called out:

“Good-evening, Cooney, how are you? Are those your boys? And where are you bound for?”

“I thought of having a guinea-fowl supper, Hoo-Hoo, down at Deacon Smith Clark’s. The boys are not any too strong, you know, and I thought a twenty-mile run, with supper half-way, might help them. But it isn’t as it was when you and I were young, Hoo-Hoo. It’s pretty risky going about nowadays.”

“I should say it was, Cooney; I’ve just come up from the neighbourhood you’re speakin’ of, and I saw Snarley only yesterday. Why, he tells me that Deacon Botsford has Paris-green and strychnine scattered all about. He says that the old man actually kills his own chickens to put strychnine into, to make some of us sick. Now *do* be careful with those boys. You know how your wife was poisoned, and I’m not so sure that it wasn’t done on purpose. She’d grieve terribly if anything came to those boys.”

“Now, boys, do you hear that? Well, I’m not going near Deacon Botsford, Hoo-Hoo, and if



“HOO-HOO THE GREAT HORNED OWL.”





Deacon Clark's killed his guinea-hens and poisoned them, I don't know Deacon Clark; that's all. Where are you going?"

"Up toward Killingworth to see a friend."

"You're not courting, are you, Hoo-Hoo? It's about time, though;"—but Hoo-Hoo was gone.

The moon was past the zenith and shone with cloudless brilliancy all over the snow-bound hills and valleys. The swamps were leafless, and one could see a long distance and detect small objects on the white surface. A few scrub-oaks on the hill-side still held their crimped leaves, which rattled together sadly as Cooney and his boys went by.

Now and then distant noises could be heard, the sounds softened by the crisp, chill air. The crowing of a cock in the warm henhouse in the valley below, or the tinkle-tinkle of a sheep-bell as the old ram, safe in his enclosure, hearing the uncanny cry of Ringtail the Coon or the more infrequent call of Snarley the Lynx pushed the flock closer together.

"Hist, boys! What was that?" and Cooney stopped short and listened. A low, clucking sound could be heard close by.

"It's a partridge in the lower limbs of that cedar-tree, boys; now you just keep still, and you'll see."

With that Cooney trotted back some distance until he came into the shadow of a great chestnut-tree which would cover his advance. Then he began to creep slowly and silently forward toward the cedar.

## 6 NEIGHBOURS OF FIELD,

His boys sat quietly and wondered what it all meant. As Cooney approached the tree he flattened his body so that he was invisible in the darkening shadow. Brush and Brake watched breathlessly!

Suddenly there came the greatest commotion and the whirring of wings among the lower branches of the cedar-tree. Feathers and hair and branches were all mixed up together; but out of it all skimmed Ruffle the Partridge, who flew so close to Brush that the fox made a feeble effort to take him; but Ruffle, untouched, sailed down out of sight into the great, moonlit swamp. Cooney rushed up, panting, and told the boys how near he had been to giving them a delightful supper.

And now they turned off the road and crossed the swamp on the ice and snow until they came to the Hamonnassett River, which they crossed single file on an old rustic bridge. There their father explained to them that this bridge had been built by their arch-enemy, man, in order that he might pass from one side to the other during the fishing season.

Whenever they came to any path or road or bridge Cooney was most careful and ordered Brush and Brake to remain quiet while he went ahead and scented out any possible danger. They had gone a long distance already, and the youngsters were beginning to wonder how many more miles it was to Deacon Smith Clark's. A few moments later, however, they heard a faint noise far off to the left and



“THE MORE INFREQUENT CRY OF SNARLEY THE LYNX.”



high up on the hillside. This, Cooney asserted, was a signal from Snarley the Lynx. Cooney answered at once with his short, snappy bark. Two long yowls told Cooney that he had been right, and ten minutes later all four were sitting under an overhanging ledge and were exchanging plans and ideas for the night's celebration together. At first Snarley complained of feeling out of sorts,—said he had had a pain all day and fearful twitchings. He couldn't account for it, he said, excepting from the fact that the night before he had eaten part of a young turkey which he had found hanging dead outside Silas Green's woodshed, and which he now suspected Silas Green had left there purposely. Luckily, said he, he had supper earlier in the evening and only ate a leg and a piece of the breast ; but he added :

“ It gives me a kind of setback to think that people will stoop so low. The old deacon can't keep his guinea-fowl at home ; they will get into the trees, and I've seen them many times in that apple-tree in the yard. Now, I've never tried guineas, so I don't know ; but if you say they're good to eat, Cooney, I'll tell you what we can do——”

“ Of course they're good to eat,—the best birds next to partridges,” interrupted Cooney.

“ Well, then, you and your boys go down the Clinton turnpike as far as the Saw-mill bridge, then cross the swamp this side of the old cart-path.

That'll bring you out just behind the deacon's buildings. I'll go across lots through the hickory timber, and when you reach the big rock down back of the barn, you give a couple of barks, and I'll answer. Then you come up near the hay-mow. Better leave the boys below; if we're going for the guinea-fowl we had best go alone—at the start, anyway. I propose to get them out of that apple-tree and on the run your way. After that it'll be easy, but we mustn't run any risks with that coon-dog of the deacon. He's almost always in front of the house, toward the road watching. Perhaps the deacon's gone down to the Lodge to-night. In that case it'll be easier, for Carlo 'll be tired waiting and probably asleep; but those guineas are very noisy when startled suddenly. Tell your boys to run like the wind if they hear him—I mean Carlo—and it might be a good plan to take the brook for a mile or so; the scent doesn't lay remarkably keen on running water. You know that as well as I do, Cooney."

"That's all right as far as it goes, Snarley, but you must be careful and mustn't take any more risks than you can help. I'd rather give up the guineas and have our regular chicken-supper than run the chance of getting my boys hurt. My wife would never forgive me."

So they parted, each taking his respective route as laid out by Snarley. They little suspected that Deacon Clark, having become tired of having his



"COONEY THE FOX."





hen-roost pilfered so often, had, after warning the neighbours, set a shot-gun, heavily loaded and so placed as to command the approach to the chicken-house door. The deacon had spent much thought on the subject and had completed his arrangements only that afternoon.

"I'll catch one of you sly fellows some night, muttered he. I shan't lose any more of my pullets without knowing the reason why."

So he had fixed the gun with an attachment to both triggers. Then he ran the fine wire through little brass rings fastened to stakes which were driven into the hard, frozen ground at intervals of ten or twelve feet. He had so arranged it that the lightest pressure would pull the trigger. Then he had piled up some old brush that lay near by, in order to turn the path toward the narrow opening. So interested was he that he didn't stop to think that a fox is a very "knowing animal" and almost always looks before he leaps.

When Cooney and his boys reached their station back of the barn, everything was still. It was bitterly cold. The birch-tree creaked and groaned as it swayed gently to and fro, and now and then the ice on the duck-pond would crack loudly and in a most startling way. No signal coming from Snarley, Cooney determined to prospect a bit.

"Now, boys, you stay where you are," he whispered. "I'm going up the hill to the stable, and

I'll be back shortly. If you hear Snarley signal, be ready for a run. We can catch the guineas in a few minutes, but we won't have supper here; we'll go up to Pine Orchard."

It seemed hours to Brush and Brake before anything was heard. They went to the corn-crib near by, which was disobedience, and they put their paws through and chewed some of the yellow kernels just to pass the time. They could hear the mice and rats scampering about inside. At last Brush said:

"Brother, I don't care what father said, I'm going to look for him. I'm half frozen."

"Oh, Brush, don't do it; you might get into trouble."

"I don't care, I'm not going to stay here and freeze to death."

With that Brush leaped off towards the buildings, leaving his brother behind. Poor little fox! He was young perhaps, but he should have remembered that his parents had lived before him, and that the old Latin proverb, *experientia docet*, was, as his father had often said, a very good motto.

Arrived at the barn, Brush smelled around a while and then started for the hen-house. As he came opposite the wood-pile and was sniffing at the stakes and wondering what the bright brass rings might mean, he was startled by hearing Snarley's low howl from a tree near by. Then he heard his father's answer. But at this instant the deep bass voice of

Carlo, the watch-dog, broke out on the frosty air from the back part of the deacon's house. Brush was nearly paralysed from fear, but not quite so, for he jumped convulsively backward two feet or more, and in so doing his body struck sharply against the wire. There was a fearful report, entirely drowning the little yelp, and Brush rolled over, kicked twice and lay still in the silvery moonlight. And now was bedlam let loose. Carlo barked loudly; the guinea-fowls made the air rattle with their queer voices; the chickens cackled and fluttered, and, a few minutes later, Deacon Smith Clark, with his wife and hired boy, hurried out of the house. They were all dressed in queer costumes. The deacon had a great feather "comfortable" wrapped about his spare figure, and his legs were encased in rubber boots.

But, strange to say, Brush wasn't dead, though for the space of thirty seconds or more he thought that he was. After an interval he discovered that he could open his eyes and even breathe. He felt a queer, stinging sensation, and, staggering to his feet, he found that he *could* walk, but with great pain. For a few seconds longer everything seemed hazy and unreal; but as he heard the voices of the dog, the guinea-hens and the chickens, and most of all, Deacon Clark's deep tones, he turned just long enough to notice his pretty, bushy tail lying disconnected on the ground.

Then memory of events came back to him, and with a tearful sobbing cry, "I deserve it all," he hobbled off toward the woods. Deacon Clark soon came to the spot and saw the blood-stains on the white pathway and then the tail just under the shadow.

"By gracious, I've got him, Maria, and I believe he's a silver-grey, too!"

With that the deacon stopped and drew the bloody tail into the moonlight.

"Well, Maria, I'm dreaming! Here's his tail, and the varmint's escaped, but he wasn't full grown. I know what it was. His folks were giving him a lesson on poaching. He got the lesson all right, but I never saw the likes of this before."

## CHAPTER II.

## JANUARY.—PART II.

Junco the Snow-bird—Chip the Sparrow—Snow-flake the Bunting—  
Shrike the Butcher-bird—Whitehead the Eagle—Brownie the  
Creeper.

A FINE, blinding snowstorm was raging across the hills and valleys. It had not as yet attained the violence of a blizzard, but already six inches had fallen on the level, while the drifts on the lee side of the fences and stone-walls were as many feet in depth. It was one of those packing snows which fill every nook and cranny and make it extremely difficult for the winter denizens of field and forest to pursue their regular avocations. It was accompanied, too, by biting cold, and Junco the Snow-bird was content to remain in the shelter of the woodshed as long as Malty the house-cat would permit. He didn't mind the cold—he was used to it—nor did he care much for the snow, for his wants were small and easily satisfied. Just a few seeds or bits of grain each day kept him contented and happy. But he couldn't endure the wind, for he was so small and light that, with such a north-easter as the present one, he could leave

shelter only at the risk of being hurled away and possibly dashed to pieces.

Junco was a regular visitor at Rockland. He would suddenly appear during the early days of November. He came with quite a retinue of friends and relatives, and excepting for the fact that his advent reminded one that the desolate days of the winter season were at hand, everybody was glad to see him. "He doesn't do any harm to any one," remarked Hoo-Hoo the Great Horned Owl, "and he has no bad habits like Slim the Weasel." Junco was very modest in his dress, too, wearing just plain slate-color, with a little pinkish bill and a couple of white tail-feathers in among the rest. His wife was even more quakerish, with a brown dress and two similar tail-feathers, which called attention to them both as they darted here and there with surprising quickness. Junco usually stayed about Poverty and Scuppo for four months or so, and, at the time when the other birds were returning from the sunny south, he would pack up and suddenly leave for the north. He didn't seem to like much company and only cared for his own family. Occasionally one could find him chatting with Chip the Sparrow, and Chip liked him, but Chip couldn't stand the cold at all and only met Junco for a little while in the autumn and spring; but their habits were similar and their food the same, so that they were quite often thrown together.

Once in the early spring Chip had asked Junco about his past life and as to where he spent his summers. They were engaged at the time busily picking up the grass-seeds which the deacon's wife had just sowed on some bare places about the house.

"What do you do in the summer, Junco?" asked Chip between mouthfuls.

"Why, I go up north and keep house, just as you do here."

"Isn't it very cold up there?"

"No, it's cool and pleasant. I go half-way up the mountain-side in among the moss and pines. Everything grows there as it does here, but it's never very hot. I can't stand heat, you know."

"I love it," ejaculated Chip. "But do you find any company?"

"Yes, company enough. There are Chickadee and Grosbeak and Pinefinch and others; but I don't care much for society, Chip."

"Well, tastes are different, that's a fact. I love to be around with people. Why, half the time I build my house in the wistaria on the veranda, so as to see what's going on. You know Red-breast the Robin and Phœbe the Flycatcher sometimes do the same thing, and that reminds me that Phœbe got into serious trouble that way."

"How was that, Chip?"

"Why, you know Phœbe had been accustomed to build her house on the top of one of those posts of

the piazza, as they call it, and she started in last spring and got everything ready and laid her eggs—five of them. Then what did they do but build a big cage of wire around the porch, and when Phœbe saw she was being shut out, she just went and pecked a little hole in each egg so no one else could use them. Then she went down to the garden-house and started again.”

“I don’t have to do anything of that sort where I live, Chip, and I generally have pretty good luck with my family.”

On the stormy morning described, Junco was hopping about and wondering how long the howling wind would last. He had to keep his eyes open, for Malty was apt to drop in at any moment, and, though he rarely caught any of Junco’s friends, yet he frightened them almost to death. And, even now, suddenly there was a flutter and a cry of alarm, and two whitish-colored birds hurled themselves under the overhanging roof, right down among the newly sawed wood. Junco had betaken himself in haste to the top beam at one corner, and from his perch he was astonished to see Snowflake the Bunting and his mate, panting and frightened, clinging to the old, sawed apple-tree stump. Junco was much surprised, for he had left Snowflake far up north some months before, and Snowflake rarely appeared south of Canada.

“Why, Snowflake, what are you doing so far





“LAST NIGHT I MET SNOWY THE WHITE OWL.”



south, and what's troubling you? You look scared."

"We are, Junco," gasped Snowflake; "that murderer, Shrike the Butcher-bird, is after us," and at this moment Junco noticed the fierce bird sitting on a near-by twig outside. How cruel he looked. His eyes glittered, and his slightly hooked beak seemed sharpened keen to tear his victim to pieces. He was evidently puzzled as to what had become of his intended victims. It didn't seem possible that he could catch or harm so large a bird as Snowflake the Bunting; yet he had been known to kill much larger birds than himself, and he reminded many of Slim the Weasel, for he seemed to delight in killing for the sake of killing. After a moment's survey of the scene, he appeared to give up the chase in perplexity, and gradually Snowflake and Junco recovered their spirits and began to talk.

"What are you doing down here, Snowflake?" asked Junco.

"Why, haven't you heard of the weather up north, Junco? It's terrible. I came down here as fast as I could, and last night I met Snowy the White Owl and North the Hare together. To tell the truth, they were *very* close to each other, and I don't blame Snowy a bit; for he told me afterwards that he was pretty near starvation when he did it, and in this weather North's just as comfortable inside Snowy as out."

"They tell me Shrike's done much damage here-

abouts, Snowflake. I can't understand that unnatural habit of his—look out ! ”

With a flight swift as thought, Shrike, who had been waiting near by, darted in and had seized Snowflake by the throat before he had a chance to escape. Shrike used both beak and claws at first. Poor Snowflake didn't make a sound. His voice was choked away by the cruel bill of Shrike the Butcher-bird. Junco and Snowflake's mate sat by aghast ! Shrike said nothing ; but, as the two birds behind sat startled and staring, he lifted the limp body in his strong beak and flew heavily to the top strand of the barbed wire fence. And there he sat and gloated, gloated over the lifeless form and the trickling blood that rolled out and down the pure white feathers and onto the snow below. Then he seemed to play with the body, swinging it to and fro. Finally he moved sidewise on the wire until he came to a particularly long, sharp point on which he deliberately impaled the lifeless body of his victim. Then he stood and surveyed his work. Snowflake hung there, blown back and forth in the gale, which still kept up its force. Even Shrike had trouble to keep his hold ; but after making sure that his prey was fast, he flew down the wind and was soon lost in the distance.

“ Isn't it dreadful that such birds are allowed to live ? ” groaned Junco. “ What were they ever made for ? ”



“EVERY ONE OF THE VICTIMS WAS SPIKED THROUGH THE NECK.”



Shrike the Butcher-bird had no redeeming qualities. He was bloodthirsty and cruel. When nothing else could be had he would catch beetles and crickets or grasshoppers and stick them to a thorn-bush. He didn't do anything else with them. He just seemed to love to kill things. He hadn't a friend in the world, but he didn't care. He went on spiking and killing or killing and spiking. He had, however, the greatest admiration for the big birds that caught their meals with their talons, like Hoo-Hoo or Red Shoulder or Red Tail, but most of all for Whitehead the Eagle, whom he had once seen in the act of carrying off a new-born lamb at Peck's farm. He had never known Whitehead even to speak to; but he had seen him a number of times, and had tried to scrape an acquaintance with him, but Whitehead had never even deigned to notice him. Shrike had once or twice come close to where Whitehead was sitting and, after busying himself around the old dead tree, as though he had much to do, would come close by and make some remark. Whitehead, who appeared in the vicinity of Rockland only during the winter season, would sit in majestic repose, silent and statuesque. The only evidence of life about his body was his eyes, which, keen and acute, took a mental note of everything below. But no knowledge of Shrike's existence would be given. Not that he was of morose or sullen disposition, for often in other company he

had been known to smile and even laugh in a loud cackling way ; but he despised Shrike. Shrike would never have forced his attention on Whitehead had he known how Whitehead felt toward him ; but to-day when he skimmed down toward Deep Hole with the speed of the wind and elated over his "adventure," as he called it, he thought he saw his opportunity. So as he espied Whitehead, grand, gloomy and peculiar on the old, dead tree, he whirled himself into the wind and alighted close by. He made a few unmusical noises to attract the great bird's attention, but being unsuccessful, he called out boldly :

"Whitehead, I've just killed Snowflake the Bunting, and he's hanging on the fence up there toward Scuppo. You may have him if you want him."

Whitehead gave no answer, though after a pause he slowly turned his great head toward the sound ; but Brown the Creeper, snugly ensconced in a small knot-hole near by, told of it afterwards and said that the pointed feathers on the back of the eagle's head rose a mere trifle and then slowly settled down again. Shrike, however, concluded that Whitehead was a little deaf, and in consequence came up closer, so close that he couldn't help thinking of the difference in the size between himself and the great bird beside him. But he put on a bold front and began again.

"Whitehead, why are you so stuck-up? I'm not



as big as you; but I can catch and kill birds equal to my size as well as you can,—and I hear you're pretty clever, too, when Osprey goes fishing. You just wait till he's caught a good one, and then you follow him up in the sky, and, being bigger and stronger, you make him drop it, and then——”

During this talk Whitehead had merely looked down at Shrike and didn't in any way show that he heard the words at all; but, just as Shrike got this far, he let one of his big claws shoot out like lightning. Whitehead stood for a moment on one foot, and then after one little squeeze and a cackling;—“Get out,” he let go, and Shrike the Butcher-bird fell limp and lifeless to the snowdrift below, and made a little hole that soon was covered by the driving flakes.

Brown the Creeper had seen it all from his little nook. He had no special grievance against Shrike; still he didn't like him, and more than once before he had watched him on his marauding trips. One day in particular, Brownie, as his intimates called him, had been busily prying out some luscious larvæ from the wild-cherry near Tibbals' Bridge, and while so employed he had noticed Shrike near by. Shrike seemed busy, too, and some of his actions puzzled Brownie not a little. He first noticed Shrike on an old fence-post. He was sitting perfectly silent with head on one side as though observing something in the old stubble below him.

Suddenly he darted down and then there was a little commotion in the dry grass and stalks, and Shrike emerged with something heavy in his bill. He carried it over to a hawthorn-bush and disappeared. Seeing nothing further, Brownie continued to hunt for breakfast. But quite soon Shrike was back again, going through the same tactics. This went on for some time until Brownie was perplexed indeed. So, at last, when Shrike had made a third visit to the thorn-bush and then had taken a long flight to the westward, Brownie decided to go over and investigate.

The leaves were off, for it was January, and this made it easier than it would otherwise have been to find the bush. But what made it still easier for Brownie was the peculiar appearance of the bush, which seemed, at a distance, as he approached, to have a new kind of foliage on some of its branches. As Brownie drew nearer he could at last make out what it was—a veritable slaughter-bush that must have been used by Shrike the Butcher-bird for a long time. Brownie had never heard the story of Bluebeard, but here in front of his keen, little eyes was an assortment of bugs, beetles and birds beside mice and even one snub-nosed mole. Most of them had been killed for some time, as one could see by the stiff way in which they swung in the breeze and by the condition of their dress, but the little Creeper at once recognised Fieldmouse, whose body was

not yet cold and whose white belly was still splashed with blood. A relative of Billie the Bluebird, too, hung fresh and limp. Every one of the victims was spiked through the neck, and it seemed that this Bluebeard among birds had been careful to select the longest and sharpest thorns on which to impale his victims. Shocked beyond words, Brownie fled, and it was a long time before his nights were free from dreams of this horrible sight. Thus it happened that on this cold, tempestuous January day, when he saw Whitehead the Eagle, without apparent effort or thought, squeeze the life out of Shrike the Butcher-bird, he could not but feel that justice had been done. His next impulse was to seek out his acquaintances and friends and tell the news. This impulse is common to almost every creature of the human species; but of course Brownie the Creeper desired first to carry the good news and next to have the lesser sensation of telling an important fact to his world for the first time. So in short but hurried flights, for Brownie the Creeper was neither a fast nor a far flier, he started up the brook toward the farm-buildings.

The storm had abated by this time, and Brownie thought that he would meet more birds under the brook's bank or near the woodshed than any where out in the open. Then, too, he knew all about the woodshed, for long ago he had learned that, when Farmer Green brought in the dried and fallen

logs and had split and sawed them, this not only disclosed a lot of half-frozen bugs and larvæ, but shook up those that were only torpid, and the warmth of the woodshed caused these to move about to where they could be seen and readily caught. Facing south, the open part of the shed received the full warmth of the afternoon sun, and it might often be melting and soft inside when around the corner it was freezing hard. Brownie met no one until he had come to the great maple overhanging the farmhouse, and there on the lower limbs he saw Junco and Snowflake's unhappy widow. There, too, on the upper line of the wire-fence Snowflake's pretty body hung and swung. Brownie thought it out in a second and flew at once right over to the maple. His method of coming to a tree and travelling over it was exactly similar to that of Downey the Woodpecker. He flew up suddenly to the trunk and then by little jerky hops climbed straight up the body or limb. He was never known to perch and hop about like Junco the Snowbird, or Chip the Sparrow, or Red-breast the Robin.

He alighted in this way, and, when he came to the cross limbs where the birds were discussing the recent tragedy, he stopped and, looking around the corner of the crotch on which he clung, called out in modest tones :

“ Junco, you are lucky, and so is your friend.”

Junco and Widow Snowflake were surprised but

not frightened at the interruption; for Brownie, besides being well known to them, had a musical little voice.

“What do you mean, Brownie?” answered Junco.

“Why, I’ve just come from Deep Hole, and what’s left of Shrike the Butcher-bird could be put in a snuff-box.”

“Do you mean to say, Brownie, that he’s met with an accident?”

“Quite so, Junco. He tried to get acquainted with Whitehead the Eagle, and Whitehead gave him a squeeze. I’m so rejoiced now that I’ve seen what I’ve seen, for Whitehead just squeezed him once, and he won’t trouble any of us again.”

Junco turned towards the Widow Snowflake and then toward his family, who had been listening breathlessly.

“Well, Brownie, I don’t know, but I hold that every real crime is sure to be punished sooner or later.”

But Mrs. Snowflake was too unhappy to notice, and after a few moments of silence the meeting broke up and Brownie thought that he was glad that he had no mate; for he was sympathetic, and the hopeless, forlorn look in the poor, lonely bird’s eyes made him unhappy for days after.

## CHAPTER III.

FEBRUARY.—PART I.

Brake the Fox—Hoo-Hoo the Great Horned Owl—Plumetail the Skunk.

“THE dearer the experience, the longer it stays,” is an old Connecticut proverb, boys,” remarked Cooney the Fox, some days after the events detailed in the story of the encounter of little Brush with Deacon Smith Clark’s trap-gun.

Cooney, having partaken of a frugal meal of chicken-breast, and a slice of rabbit caught a few weeks before, sat back in his parlour.

“Father, I promise never again to expose what’s left of me to Deacon Smith Clark or any one else, but I do wish you would change the subject. This is the third time since it happened that you’ve given me a lecture, and I’m getting so tired that sometimes I almost wish that that gun had taken away my head instead of my tail,” cried Brush in despair.

“You can’t tell,” answered his father, thinking to emphasise still further his strong ideas of obedience and discipline; “any fox cub that deliberately goes

against the advice of his elders ought to be punished, and I'm glad you've had your lesson ; but I'm sorry you're so disfigured, and I hope it won't affect your future. Another thing you must learn, and that is to control your temper. You can't judge anything aright if anger gets the upper hand."

Brush and Brake had listened attentively to what their father had said, and had promised to try to profit by it. Brush was sore all through, as he expressed it ; but Brake wanted to be off again to the woods and fields to get some exercise if nothing else. So at nightfall, after cleaning up a bit, he started across lots toward a buckwheat stubble where his father had told him he might expect to find a flock of quail. The wind was fresh from the north-west and brought with it many odours to Brake's keen nose. Some of these scents were unknown to him, while others reminded him of various meals given to him long ago by his parents. To save time he crossed Ben Smith's pond on the ice, and as he came out from the shadow of the woods he stopped and looked about him to make sure that all was safe. He was startled by a loud cracking sound across the cold pond, but soon decided that it was simply the thick ice settling. So he walked boldly but noiselessly forward. After traversing three-quarters of the pond, and just as he was wondering as to the direction he must take on the opposite side, a great shadow crossed the moon and

Hoo-Hoo the great horned Owl stood on the snow-covered ice close beside him.

“Well, if it isn't Cooney's boy Brake! What are you doing here, boy?”

After his first fright had passed off, Brake replied:

“I'm trying to look out for myself, Hoo-Hoo, and father told me there was a flock of quail over here somewhere.”

“So there is, lad, but there are not nearly as many in it as there were. Shall I tell you why? Because some of them gave me my supper last night. I caught them roosting down among the bogs. They stayed out too late, and 'twas almost dark when they left the buckwheat field; but the day had just begun for me, so I watched and saw them plainly. They didn't say a word after they had lit, but just put their little tails together in a bunch and went to sleep. I had them marked down exactly. So I dropped right into the middle of them with both feet, and, surely enough, I got two.”

“Hoo-Hoo, but that was clever!”

“But, Brake, if you want something to eat, I can tell you of a good meal.”

“How's that, Hoo-Hoo?”

“Well, I'll tell you. To-night I was coming up that road, you may remember, leading from Poverty to Scuppo, and I wasn't thinking of any-



thing in particular. I'd got up near Nineveh Falls, by the old saw-mill, when I heard the wildest screeching of a hen. So I flew over to where the sound came from, and, though it didn't last long, it came from Widow Mercy Redfield's hen-coop! I couldn't understand it at all, for all I saw was a full-grown pullet kicking on the snow half under one of those juniper bushes. So I waited a minute, all puzzled, and then I discovered the cause very quickly. It was that wretch, Slim the Weasel! Do you know what he'd done? He never was any good, but this time he had just slinked in and grabbed the pullet, and, before I got there, he'd put his head under her wing, pulled her out and drunk his fill of blood, and was just leaving all that nice, white meat and wings and things to go to waste. Well, I was tired, but, at the same time, I was angry, and I hurried after him with a rush, and I don't think he'll waste much more good food. But what I was getting at is this: That pullet isn't cold yet, and if you want to give the old folks a surprise you can trot down there—it's only a matter of four or five miles—and take a nice supper home with you."

"I never cared for Slim, either," observed Brake. "The fact is, I've never seen him, but I've heard father speak just as you do, Hoo-Hoo. He said once: 'Waste not, want not, is the maxim I would preach,' and that if there were many Slims in the

world, others would starve; but I'm obliged to you, and I think I'll go down and get the pullet. You say its on the road between Poverty and Scuppo?"

"Yes, lad, and as I've a call to make that won't take long, I can do that and get down there as soon as you do. I may as well tell you,—I've been getting married. It was some time ago, but I kept it secret, and my mate has a pair of young Hoo-Hoos now, and I promised that I'd bring her a squab tonight, so I've got to visit John Stevens' barn. I'll only take one just to keep my word. My nest's in the big oak tree half-way down toward Poverty, but never mind. If you follow the road I'll find you all right. Mayhap you'll meet Ringtail the Coon on the way. This is just the kind of night he likes to roam about; but how he can work so hard about the spring-holes the way he does to catch a half-frozen frog, is more than I can tell. Good-bye, my boy."

"Good-bye, Hoo-Hoo," and they parted. Brake started down the moonlit road. He felt nervous at first, but the sense of independence and self-reliance was pleasant and made him think that he was important. This was his first trip abroad all by himself, and he tried hard to remember all that had been told him by his father. Absorbed in thought he trotted along. He kept a keen lookout, however, for any danger, and had got down well toward Poverty, and was crossing through a bit of maple swamp

and had just come out on the road under the shadow of a great overhanging ledge, when a slight noise at the right arrested his attention and caused him to stop and listen, and then his nostrils were saluted by the strangest odour. It was decidedly unpleasant and caused him to sneeze quietly. He thought that he had smelled something like it before, far back in the spring when he was very young. He couldn't remember exactly, but while puzzling over it he saw what at first he took to be a large black-and-white cat emerge from the shadow at the roadside and stand in the middle of the highway. He knew it couldn't be a cat, for he was fully three miles from any house. The animal stood for a moment as if listening, and then walked sedately forward. Its beautiful, plume-like tail was raised at a right angle to the body, and Brake thought that he had never seen anything so very black-and-white. Then suddenly he remembered what his father had told him about Plumetail the Skunk! It all flashed over him in a second. He remembered that Plumetail was not a favourite, but at the same time all the wood-folk thought more of him than of Slim the Weasel.

Most of Cooney's associates thought it poor business to eat beetles and grubs and to suck eggs; but that wasn't any worse than Ringtail the Coon with his frogs (though he did eat corn at times) and much better than Slim the Weasel, who was not

respected by any one because of his wasteful habits.

After a moment's reflection Brake concluded to put on a bold front, so with a loud sneeze he stepped out from the cover. Plumetail was so surprised that he stood stock-still and dropped his tail to the level.

"Aren't you Plumetail the Skunk?" called out Brake.

"That's my name, sir. May I ask yours?"

"My name's Brake. I'm a son of Cooney the Fox, of whom you may have heard."

"Indeed! Why, you're nearly as big as your father. Aren't you scared being out so late and so far from home?"

"No, I think I'm old enough to take care of myself."

"Certainly you are, but I was surprised that Cooney had such big sons."

By this time they had come quite close to each other and were getting acquainted. Brake now noticed the peculiar odour much stronger than before, and he felt like getting to windward of his new comrade. Plumetail noticed Brake's embarrassment and remarked :

"I have very few friends outside of my own family. I've about concluded that it's on account of just what you have noticed yourself, but perhaps you don't know that this is my principal defence against

my enemies. If I let even a little of this odour escape, it will make any animal within twenty feet feel sick, so sick that they have to stop. Meanwhile I can get into some hole or other safe place."

"Indeed," exclaimed Brake incredulously, "is it so? It's strange father never told me about it."

"Didn't he?" replied Plumetail in an injured voice; "but I can prove it if you wish."

"No, I thank you very much," hastily cried Brake. "I'll take your word for it; and excuse me, but I'm half ill now, and if you don't mind, I'll hurry along to keep an appointment near Poverty. I am glad to have met you," and, as Plumetail the Skunk gazed after him in surprise, Brake started uneasily down the hill. He felt very little like eating supper now, and felt also that he was not quite sincere when he said "I am glad to have met you," but as the fresh air blew cool in his face, he gradually recovered his equilibrium and was soon quite himself again. Fifteen minutes later and just as he was beginning to wonder where he was,—for the moon had gone down, and it was the deep darkness before dawn in the woods,—he heard with great relief the welcome call of Hoo-Hoo, and a moment later his friend joined him.

"Well, Brake, you did well to find your way. You'll be the equal of your old father some day if you keep on. It's only a step now—rather dark, though, for you, isn't it?"

"Yes, Hoo-Hoo; I was just beginning to get

nervous and to think that I'd got off the track. I met Plumetail the Skunk up the road."

"You did? The varmint! I can't bear those fellows, you know. I ate his father a long time ago, and I didn't get over it for six months. I wanted to bury myself—fact—I remember it well enough; no one would have anything to do with me. I must say that Skunk isn't bad eating; but— Let's change the subject. As you may suppose, Plumetail and I are not on good terms. Here's the place."

With that Hoo-Hoo turned off and up the hill, and Brake could hear the cocks in Widow Redfield's hen-house just beginning to wake up.

Brake was nearly tired out when, two hours later, he staggered into his own home with his load, and the cold, winter sun was just setting the pine-tree tops all a-sparkle with silver.

## CHAPTER IV.

## FEBRUARY.—PART II.

Bunny the Cottontail—Sneak the Ferret—Fieldmouse—Chickadee—Quarrel the Jay—Red-breast the Robin—Golden Eye—Grebe the Pied-billed Dob-chick—Whitehead the Eagle—And Others.

PERHAPS no more innocent little beast exists in all the world than Bunny the New England Cottontail. He is timidity itself, and his one idea seems to be that of self-obliteration. At the same time he is, and always will remain, the game animal of all the others for the farmers' boys. When, over-night, the snow has fallen light and feathery to the depth of three or four inches, and when the morning breaks clear and unclouded, the Peck boy seeks out the Smith boy, who has a mongrel dog, and proposes to go "rabbitin'"—and Bunny has a hard time of it. He does not run far and has a habit of doubling in his tracks in innocent fashion to return to the cover from which he was originally started. Then again his innocence causes him to forget to wonder as to why that box stands tilted in unnatural fashion near the brush-heap, or why those three pine-sticks, newly whittled and notched together to look exactly like the figure 4, are fixed and hold the box up

as it stands. He only sees and smells the fresh slice of Newtown pippin apple so temptingly displayed on the point of the crosspiece, and he begins to nibble it! He is keen, however, with his eyes and ears, and if Cooney the Fox gives him any kind of chance, he can outfoot him to the nearest hole that offers safety, but which may have belonged to Plumetail the Skunk, or Burrow the Woodchuck.

The enemy Bunny fears most of all, however,—more than Cooney the Fox, or Slim the Weasel, or Slick the Mink,—is Sneak the Ferret, and the worst of it is that Sneak doesn't kill Bunny, but just drives him mad with fear; for when Sneak invades Bunny's hole or ledge or home, whatever and wherever it may be, he is muzzled and unable to do any serious damage. For years the New England game laws have said that it is a misdemeanour to hunt Bunny in this way; but, as in every other locality, there are people who call themselves sportsmen, but who still resort to this cruel method of pursuing poor Cotton-tail. It is not hard either. The mongrel dog soon has Bunny in a hole somewhere, and then the man takes Sneak from his bag. Sneak at such times has his jaws securely fastened together by means of a narrow leather strap which passes over the nose and with connecting straps is snugly buckled tight behind the ears. Beside this, Sneak's sharp teeth have all been filed down so that he can do no harm to his owner or to Bunny, in case the muzzle slips or





"HE WASN'T NEARLY AS DESTRUCTIVE AS BURROW THE WOODCHUCK."



breaks. Sneak's sense of smell is very keen, and he is especially fond of Cottontail and his odour. Released from his bag he will at once dive into the hole and the little piteous squeals of Bunny are quite heartrending. Sneak tries to suck the poor rabbit's blood, but being unable to do so finally drives the half-crazed animal from his refuge. Then Bunny in despair plunges out, not into the world again, but into the open mouth of the sack which is held ready to receive him at the mouth of the hole. Sometimes too his wife is taken by this same cruel trickery. His sensations of abject fear during this procedure can be better imagined than described.

But Bunny the Cottontail has a sunny side to his life as well. He lives on the edges of the cedar-forest or swamp, and near dark or dawn he makes long excursions with his mate into the clover-lot or cabbage-field for his meals. He does small damage, and in fact plantain-roots and leaves—a weed, by the way, that the farmers detest most heartily—are his favorite food. He is not nearly so destructive as Burrow the Woodchuck, who makes great holes and piles of dirt and stones all over the middle of the meadow, which are often the cause of laming the horses or breaking the mowing-machine. Bunny often spends his days in "forms," as he calls them, little warm nests of grass and leaves in the middle of a mass of vine or brush. Here he can sleep in security from Cooney or Red Shoulder, or even Hoo-Hoo,

who travels at night. On his excursions he is frequently accompanied by his mate, and in the later season one or two little ones can occasionally be seen scurrying about near by or playing with each other like a pair of kittens.

Fieldmouse, Chickadee and Cottontail were old and fast friends. Fieldmouse had more bad habits than either of the other two. Chickadee, who belonged to an excellent old family, the Titmice, was a very lovable little bird. He cared not for pedigree, and although, as was well known, his family portraits were beautifully carved on the walls in the interior of the Egyptian tombs, which are five thousand years old, yet he did not on that account "put on any airs," as Ruffle the Partridge aptly said, but was friendly and democratic with all. Of course, he had his likes and dislikes and was independent and showed strong character in many ways. For instance, one day Quarrel the Jay said to him :

"Chick, if you'll creep up when Mrs. John Crow is off the nest and pick a hole in her eggs, I'll give you the other half of this chestnut that I've saved up since last year; it's sweet as sugar."

But Chick in his little lisping voice replied :

"Quarrel, I'm very fond of chestnuts, especially when they're opened for me; but that would be a mean trick, and John has always treated me well."

And then Quarrel sneered at him and called him a little black-headed bacillus !



“QUARREL THE JAY.”



One day in February, after a long period of cold weather, the snow lay bright and glistening over meadow and mound. But this morning it had begun to melt, and, though there was still a hard crust on, yet there were places where the old grass and weeds poked their shrivelled heads above the surface. Chickadee had been skipping about picking up odds and ends of seeds, and was now hammering away industriously at a bright blue cedar-berry more in the way of exercise and to pass the time than anything else. The tree on which he perched was a lone cedar in the middle of a large field. In the symmetry of its form, the tree looked like a great Noah's Ark toy. While thus employed Chick heard a familiar, little squeak below, and looking down, his quick eye caught sight of Fieldmouse, who, with head protruding from a small hole at the withered stem of a wild carrot plant, seemed to be calling attention to himself.

"Hello, Fieldmouse, what are you doing so far out in the lot, and how in the world did you get there?" asked Chick.

"Why, don't you know, Chick? I've got tunnels all over the field under the crust. How did you think I got along during the winters?"

"I didn't know, Field; but sometimes after heavy snows I miss you for ten days or more. How do you manage it?"

"Easily enough. I start from the nest. This year

t's under the leaves and cedar-boughs over the flower-bed back of the house—nice eating there; the farmer's wife put in a lot of bulbs and things, and they're fine, juicy and nice-tasting. I don't know whether she was thinking of me at the time,—but it's helped us out amazingly. My family and I have eaten about thirty bulbs already. Then I burrow along this way and that, and every now and again I go through the crust to see where I am."

"You must meet with many adventures, Field."

"No, not many. Sometimes I find an old ear of corn or a sunflower seed or something especially good; but on the average I'd rather be out in the sunshine, although it's warm enough below."

"No danger, I suppose?" queried Chick.

"Yes, there is. That fellow Plumetail the Skunk worries me considerably. He gets my scent when I'm away from home at night, and I tell you it's hard to get back sometimes. I have to do some sharp digging, but I try to have two or three back entrances, and he hasn't done much harm to me. But my brother, living down Nineveh way, tells me that his cousin's wife was caught out and killed one night by Plumetail's chasing her in under a fence-rail that was frozen solidly to the ground, when she thought it was loose, and she found she couldn't get away."

"Is that so, Field? But how's your family?"

"Very well Chick. I have only seven, but they're



strong and healthy. No hair on yet, but they're only a week old."

"I heard you were expecting them," lisped Chick. "I saw Bunny the Cottontail yesterday—no, day before—no it wasn't. When *did* I see Bunny? Yes, now I remember. 'Twas the day John Crow and his crowd were bothering Hoo-Hoo so much—last Tuesday. That's when it was."

"Bunny's a nice fellow. It's a pity he has so little real sense. He's dangerously innocent. He believes everything you tell him. Then he's so timid. If he's startled suddenly, I've seen him just flatten those long ears of his down on his back and lie so quiet that sometimes he gets into trouble, when if he had skipped off with that zigzag run of his no one could catch him. It's hard enough for me to keep him in sight even for a second."

At this moment there was a sudden flutter over their heads, and Fieldmouse disappeared into his little tunnel, and Chick looked up to see what had caused the disturbance. He was surprised to see Red-breast the Robin. Red-breast looked cold and pinched.

"Why, Red-breast, haven't you made a mistake? You're not due here for a month yet."

"I *have* made a mistake, Chick, but I did it with my eyes open. It got to be so mild down in Carolina that I thought we'd have one of those exceptional seasons up north; but since I reached here the day

before yesterday I have nearly been frozen to death, with nothing to eat, either, excepting cedar and sumach berries, and that, coming after the fresh fruits and vegetables I've been having, is hard."

"You don't mean to say they have all those things down there at this season, Red-breast?"

"Well, I may exaggerate a little; but it was warm and sunny, and the worms were out of the ground and there was plenty of seeds and berries. Any news since autumn, Chick?"

"Let me see, nothing remarkable, I think. Yes, Shrike the Butcher-bird was killed one day."

"Do tell me how it was. I'm very glad, by the way."

"Why, he tried to make friends with Whitehead the Eagle. That is, he tried some of his tricks on him and he got his deserts," and Chick repeated the story which he had lately heard from Brown the Creeper,

"Well, Chick, there's an old saying: 'Don't say anything but good about the dead'; but it's pretty hard to follow that proverb when you're talking about Shrike, isn't it?"

"Then a funny accident occurred. One of Cooney the Fox's boys came near being killed—a strange thing too," and Chick chuckled to himself; "he had his tail shot off by Deacon Smith Clark's gun—trap set for Cooney, you know. You remember Deacon Smith Clark, don't you, Red-breast, who



“YOU BUILT YOUR NEST IN HIS CHERRY TREE ONE SPRING.”



lives in that big house down Poverty way? Why, of course you do. You built your house in his cherry-tree one spring, that year when Maltby the cat ate your two boys and you felt so bad and your mate almost broke her heart over it."

"Yes, I remember now," answered Red-breast sadly; "and he had a big black-and-white dog he called Carlo, who used to bark so at night and keep the rest of us awake."

"That's the place. Well, Cooney's boy looks a good deal like Snarley the Lynx now, back of his shoulders, and I don't think he likes to have people ask questions, either."

After a pause Red-breast said:

"Thank you, Chick. I'll probably see you to-morrow; but I must fly about a bit or my wings will stick to my body; I'm wretchedly cold."

The little, lisping good-bye was lost on the breeze.

After a few moments of darting about and inspection of twigs and trunks, Chick was recalled to his surroundings by hearing Fieldmouse again.

"O, Chick!" he called from the little hole in the snow, and Chick flew down closer.

"I forgot to tell you about two strange birds I met the day before yesterday. It was down near Nettleton's pond, and I was fooling about under the snow, when I heard some noises, and I stuck my head out to see what they were about, and the first

thing I saw right close by was a bird sitting on the edge of the pond gabbling away to another in the water. I'd never seen anything like them before. One was a duckish-looking kind of bird, and the other was, to my mind, half duck and half snake. They were talking together and I sat and listened."

" 'How did you ever get in here?' said the duck. Then the other turned quickly and said :

" 'That's just what I was going to say to you.'

" 'Well, I'll tell you, Grebey,' said the duck, calling the other Grebey; 'that fearful southeaster the day before yesterday took me up, and I had to go. I was just starting for shore to get dinner, but I could no more stop at the shore than you can stop breathing for an hour, so I let myself go, and here I am.'

" 'Golden Eye,' said the one called Grebey, 'that's very nearly my experience. You know my little wings can't stand much, and it got to be so rough down in Millpond that I thought I'd move—prospect a little; but when I got up, the wind just took me, and finally I dropped down where I saw water, and here I am.'

" 'I thought you went down south for the season,' said the other.

" 'So I do generally, Golden Eye; but suppose I read the signs wrong, for I stayed for a while around New Jersey, and then I thought I'd start the season early and come up here; but I'm punished, for I met

a lot of birds who advised against it. They said I was going against nature and that I'd get caught in one of those equinoctial gales or something of that kind.'

"With this, Chick, I saw a sort of cloud come down over us, and whereas I didn't know at the time, yet after the cloud had cleared away I could see that it was Whitehead the Eagle. He had darted down all of a sudden and had caught the pretty duck-looking bird that I had heard the other call Golden Eye. But, with no disrespect for the other one, I believe Golden Eye was asleep most of the time while Grebey, as he called him, had been talking, and then Whitehead just sat and ate up the black-and-white duck. Whitehead had trouble swallowing Golden Eye, I thought; but it may have been the name of the other bird that stuck in his throat. Afterward I learned that the half-snake-half-duck bird had a very long name—Pied-billed Dobb-chick—but I believe his intimates called him Dobs or Grebey for short. He acted curiously while Whitehead was tearing Golden Eye to pieces. I could see him far off on the other side of the pool. Why, Chick, he could swim all around, with just his head and perhaps half an inch of neck above the water, and every now and then even his head would go under, and in a minute I could see him again at some other corner of the pond."

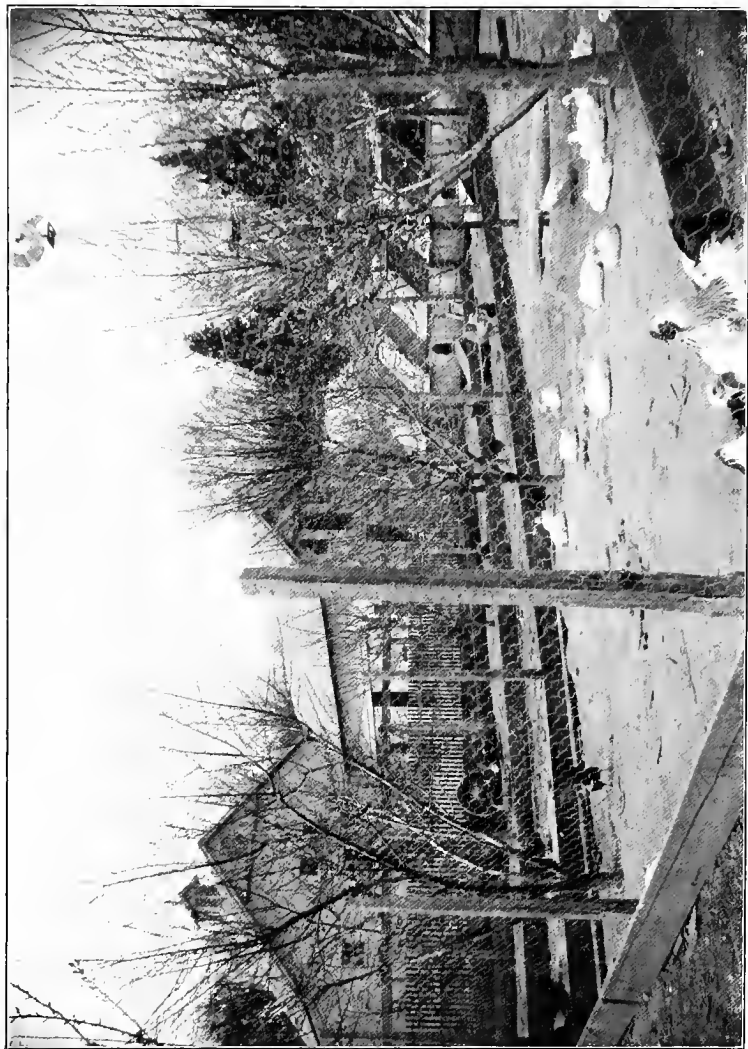
When Chick and Fieldmouse finally parted com-

pany in the late afternoon the February sun had gone down and the gloomy twilight before dark had set in. Already one could hear Hoo-Hoo tuning up his voice for the evening's enjoyment, and ever and anon the uncanny cry of Ringtail or the sharp bark of Cooney would come faint from the forest stillness. The nearer sounds of the farm were pleasanter to hear and spoke of warmth and comfort. The old gobbler kept up a constant rattle that almost drowned the quacking of the ducks who were calling for supper in unmistakable voices. But the soft musical cooing of the doves, safe in their cote, and even the sharp strident tones of the guinea-fowl, were pleasant to hear.

It was milking-time, and for an hour there was a regular pilgrimage from house to barn and barn to house, as the milk-pails were emptied and refilled and the mangers were stacked with hay or the box filled with oats or the trough with the milk and garbage.

At last a contented mixture of munchings, punctuated by occasional grunts and squeals, sounded pleasantly from farm buildings, and night set in over Rockland. The twinkling lights in the windows began to appear, and from time to time the swinging lantern would cast a great, white glow over the path, as the farmer at the behest of his wife travelled out to the shed and, returning with an armful of wood, stamped loudly at the back door to clear his boots of snow and ice.





“THE NEARER SOUNDS WERE PLEASANTER TO HEAR.”



## CHAPTER V.

## MARCH.—PART I.

Webfoot the Black-duck—Swift the Otter—Ringtail the Coon—  
And Others.

DEEP HOLE was one of those so-called fathomless pools in the course of the Hamonnasset River. There are many such small ponds and lakes throughout Connecticut, and the farmers hand down the same traditions in every case, and their sons grow up almost to manhood still believing that no one has ever been able to determine the depth of the water. Deep Hole was one of these pools, but, unlike most of them, it lay in the direct course of the stream that had been dignified by the name of river. Still another fable ran that the temperature of the water never changed. From its source the river was fed by numberless springs or brooks coming directly from the fountain-head.

To a slight degree this story about the temperature of the water was true, but when the mercury stayed about the zero-point for some days, little spikes of ice would shoot out from the pond-side and the brook-side, and often, after a few days of severest weather, there would be a coating of half-inch ice well out from the shore ; but the stream

never closed up completely and could always afford shelter and food to the few ill-advised ducks that had remained in the north. March of this year, however, was a test ; for the winter, having remained open and warm up to this time, now asserted itself with fierce though temporary severity.

Webfoot the Black-duck and his mate sat on an old half-submerged stump near the centre of Deep Hole.

“ I feel more like an icicle than a black-duck,” exclaimed Webfoot, as he sat shivering, and from time to time raised himself on his toes and beat the air with his wings.

“ Well, it’s your own fault for staying up here in Connecticut all winter instead of going down to Maryland as usual. Do you remember Bilberry Creek and that delicious watercress and those lily bulbs down there?” As his mate answered thus, her bills snapped sharply together and it was evident that she was both cold and crabbed. Webfoot groaned internally at the reference to the cress and bulbs. He had persuaded his mate to give the northern winter a trial, and, much against her inclinations, she had yielded. It had been their custom, early in December, to go south with the rest of the birds ; but Webfoot had this year kept strict account of the signs of the seasons and had informed his wife that Halloween had come on a Tuesday and Burrow had stayed out of his hole until nearly

Christmastide. In consequence of this and of many other indications he had concluded that there would be no winter to speak of, and then besides they could be the very first to start housekeeping in the Spring. But now, on the tenth of March, with the thermometer marking but eight degrees above zero in the afternoon, it was discouraging, and there seemed to be some cause for complaint.

Webfoot sat silent and gave himself up to gloomy thoughts. The morning had opened cold and still, but the light breeze from the northwest had freshened and was now reaching the proportions of half a gale, while every moment the temperature was going lower. A number of the bolder birds had already arrived. Among them were Billie the Bluebird and Red-breast the Robin, and as Webfoot and his mate sat there they noticed a few of these birds flying down the wind in a southwesterly direction. There was a general air of desolation about, and as if to make it worse, Swift the Otter came twice to the surface of the water, evidently to take some observations, and then was seen to disappear into his hole on the bank. Webfoot the Black-duck was on his mettle and wanted to brave it out, but he was a diplomatic duck and he dissembled :

“I don't know but what you're right and we had better fly a little further south. It looks to me as though we might get stalled in here for some days, and I'm hungry already.”

“No, sir! I shall stay right here. How silly of you to want to go south now, just as all our friends and relatives are leaving there. The winter’s been bad enough, goodness knows; but we’ve pulled through so far pretty well, though my wing does bother me. It’s lucky that those people up at the club can’t hit anything. You told me yourself, Webfoot, that they can’t hit a barn even unless they get inside and shut all the doors, and you said too that the safest place, when you saw one of them, was to fly right in front of the gun, but, after all, I was hit. I wonder how it *did* come to pass.”

“Miracles will happen,” answered Webfoot sentimentiously and then added, “half an inch more would have made me a widower.”

“I wonder if you would have cared very much.”

So they sat and chattered for an hour, and at last, when a nap was proposed, Webfoot put his head under his left wing but kept his ears on the *qui vive*. He had been standing in about two inches of water but, before he dozed, had failed to notice that a light skim of ice had begun forming about his feet. During his nap, however, the ice had grown stronger and stronger and was gradually welding a chain that would hold him tight and fast. His mate sitting higher on the old stump was free from danger. After more than an hour Webfoot awoke suddenly with a start and a vague premonition of

peril. He called out in frightened tones to his mate: "I'm frozen in; I can't move my feet."

"Try hard. My goodness! if you're fastened in, what shall I do? Why *didn't* we go south!"

With this Webfoot began to flutter and squawk, making a great row. His mate joined him and they made a commotion together. It was not surprising, then, that Ringtail the Coon, who after a busy night lay safely ensconced in a hollow limb up on Pine-tree hill, should have been awakened from his slumbers. At first all was hazy to his mind; but after stretching himself once or twice, he thought that he had been dreaming and was again about to put his head between his front paws and finish his siesta. He had turned around half a dozen times in his commodious apartment, and had just placed his nose toward the opening in order to breathe the delicious air which he thoroughly enjoyed, when his ears, always alert, were once more saluted by the unusual sounds down toward Deep Hole. In an instant he threw off his lethargy and, with ears pricked, listened attentively.

"Well, I've got to investigate *that*, even if it is day-time," and suiting his action to the word he crawled out and began to lower himself, hind end first, to the ground. It was but a little way to Deep Hole, and the path led through the dark aisles of the pine-forest, and his footfall gave forth no sound. As Ringtail proceeded he was more and more puz-

zled by the queer cries which, now less frequent, suddenly ceased. As he came to an opening from which he could see the water of Deep Hole, he suddenly caught sight of Webfoot lying quite still, with wings outstretched, apparently lifeless. At the same moment Webfoot's mate circled over his head uttering plaintive cries.

"Well, I *am* in great luck," barked Ringtail, as with whetted appetite he hurried his steps toward the water. Then suddenly the thought came to him that he couldn't swim, and at a glance he noticed that the ice seemed very thin in the deeper water. However, he observed that a half-fallen maple-tree hung well out over the water and almost directly above the stump on which Webfoot lay imprisoned.

"There's more luck," he thought to himself; "if I am not mistaken I can drop right down on him," and he made hastily for the spot. But there is an old saying about reckoning without your host. Ringtail didn't think of this at the time, but, arriving at the edge of the ice, lost no time in climbing out to the tip of the overhanging tree.

Webfoot, on the other hand, had spent some five minutes in silence and without motion. He had occupied the moments in a hurried retrospection of his past life.

The rest and silent thought seemed to give him strength and courage, however, and a change came, for as has been stated he was not asleep nor in a





“RINGTAIL THE COON.”



state of coma, and as he espied Ringtail the Coon almost over him he made one more despairing effort, and then, all at once, the ice imprisoning his feet gave way and he found himself free!

Ringtail descended and clawed the air, but as he reached the old stump he only grazed Webfoot's wings. Webfoot's strength, however, was almost gone, and the best he could do was to set his wings and glide steadily down toward Beaver Dam, a mile below. His anxious wife joined him in his flight and shortly after was trying to comfort him, but she couldn't help saying finally: "If we'd gone south this couldn't have happened." Webfoot, sore and despondent, wanted to say something strong, but he controlled himself and only gasped: "Yes, dear," and then there was silence.

Next morning it was spring—that is, it was as mild as May. The ice was still there, but was melting fast. Webfoot had completely recovered and was feeling like a new duck, and he wanted to say "I told you so;" but he kept quiet and pretended to be cheerful, and, after they had both eaten some brook-grass and swallowed a bit of sand as a digester, his mate said in a most enticing way:

"I'm sorry, Webby dear, that I was so nasty yesterday," and then they made up and agreed to fly over to Nathan's pond for a kind of picnic.

As may be imagined, Ringtail the Coon was disgusted at the result of this excursion, and sulked

back to his home, but being waked up for all day as he expressed it, he took the longer route through the swamp hoping to pick up something on the way. He had reached the turn of the hill, and as he trotted up the slope he came to a warm, little sunlit spot protected from the wind, and there he sat down. Sleepy as he was, he began to sigh at the prospect of climbing further, and rested there for a moment, quietly making up his mind to take a nap in the tempting spot. It was well that he did so, for his act, though prompted by laziness, saved the lives of two of Nature's little pensioners. This is the way it came about.

A modest little vine of Trailing Arbutus and an unassuming Wintergreen plant had lived and grown up together in the warm sunny nook which was all coolness and shade in summer. At last, wearying over the long winter months and encouraged by a few days of warmth and sunshine, they had ventured out. And then came that dreadful killing frost! The two plants had long been companions, and only the day before Ringtail's coming they had poked their little heads together above the moss and leaves. They were both white and fragrant, and Arbutus had a little fringe of pink about his face. They had come out about noon, apparently happy over their emancipation; but their joy was short-lived, for by evening the weather had changed, and during the night and early the next day the wind came up and

the temperature went down, and during the early afternoon it was evident that the two little ambitious and headstrong adventurers had endangered their lives by their mistake.

As the afternoon wore on they became gradually colder and colder, and their vitality became less and less. Arbutus's roots struggled to send up strength to the leaves and blossom; but soon one of his petals was frozen by the merciless and fickle March air.

Wintergreen also was in grave danger. The wind sent swirling eddies of leaves in and out of their corner, and some of the light and dry ones found a resting-place and partly protected the poor unhappy plants. This may have been their salvation. Ruffle the Partridge had stalked by and had stopped to pick in surprise at Wintergreen's white face. Then, with measured and stately tread, he had sauntered on.

But when at last Ringtail the Coon stopped and looked about for the most comfortable spot for a nap, the poor little enthusiasts were almost moribund. As Ringtail stood keen and alert he noticed the plight of the little wildings and said to himself: "Wintergreen is going to die. His head has turned all brown and hangs like the chestnut blossoms in summer. Summer! how far away it must seem from him, and from Arbutus, too, who is evidently not long for this life unless something is done for him.

“What little simpletons they both are! Why did they select a day like this to poke their heads into? Just because yesterday was mild! Here, you poor little chaps, I’ll see what I can do for you.”

With that Ringtail scraped a few hundred dry leaves together and ended by completely enveloping the little shivering plants. Then, after turning around a dozen times or more in a small ring, he lay down on the bed of leaves and became quite still.

Wintergreen and Arbutus soon had feelings of delicious comfort and returning vitality.

The next day was like spring, and Ringtail didn’t stay long. Before light he had waked and shaken himself and stretched and yawned twice, and then with a parting word he was off:

“You just keep quiet, you young plants, and you’ll be all right; for, if the weather doesn’t change permanently for the better, my name isn’t Ringtail the Coon.”

And so the weather did change, and they were happy again; but Arbutus had lost all the colour from one side of his face, and Wintergreen had a very blue look. But they both felt that it was better so than to die young, and before night-fall the snow-patches on the side hills had half melted away, and the trickling streamlets of the side slopes served to swell the more pretentious tributaries of the river.

## CHAPTER VI.

## MARCH.—PART II.

Gander and Goose—Scaip the English Snipe—Song-sparrow—Slim the Weasel.

THE long lines, two cutting edges of a perfect arrowhead, were silhouetted against the deep blue of a late March sky. It seemed like the skeleton of an immense snow-plough fitted to push all before it—an opening wedge for all that followed. The apex pointed as due north as the compass, and both sides of the unfinished triangle, though preserving an exact alignment, yet kept up a constant series of sounds which, heard below, was easily translated into the migratory conversation of the Canada Goose.

There must have been a hundred and fifty or more birds in this flock, and the precision and direction of their flight were marvellous. It seemed as though some magic hand, far north, were beckoning the great birds on, and the whole mass moved as one. Heard below, it was a musical sound; but up among the birds there could be heard, besides, the more subdued notes of ordinary chatter and gossip. Gander, the leader of the flock, was holding a talk with his wife next behind him. He didn't turn his head the fraction of an inch but, dignified and with a keen sense of his responsibility, gracefully beat the miles out of the air about him:

"Goose," he spoke to his mate, "do you think the yearlings can stand an extra twenty-four hours without stopping?"

"Yes, Gander, all excepting White Cheek perhaps; you know he hasn't entirely recovered from his wound; but he has pluck, and if it's best you had better keep right on. Where are you trying to go?"

"I thought we might make Slave Lake if we kept on, and, as we've got such a company, it would be safer not to stop until we can rest there."

"Well, you keep right on, and I'll send back word from time to time to find out how White Cheek is doing."

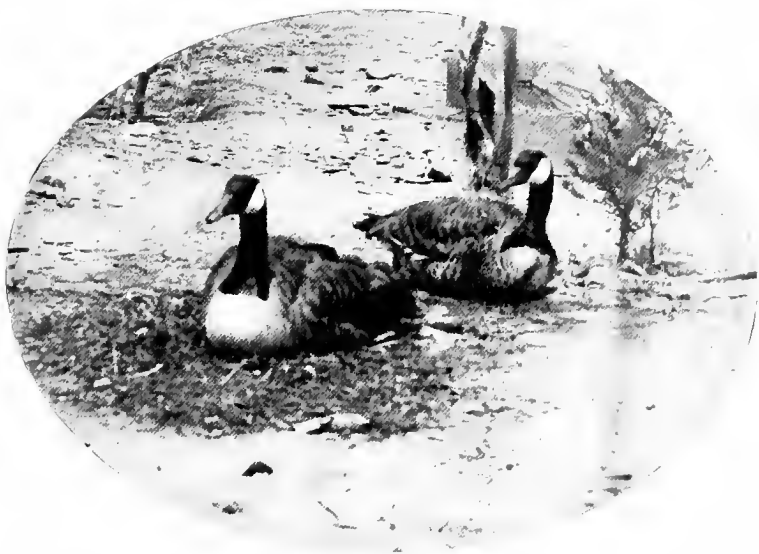
"All right, Goose. Now tune it up; we are just passing over Poverty. Do you remember how they saluted us last year, during that sou'-easter when we had to fly so low that we scarcely topped the trees?"

"Yes, Gander. I remember well enough. I'm thankful no one was hurt."

Then the whole great phalanx made music, and the unbroken lines filled the air with honking cries. Farmer Bartlett called "Whoa!" to his team, as the plough turned over the rich, black mould in the home pasture lot which he "lloed he'd put into corn this year," and he shaded his eyes and followed the birds as they passed steadily northward.

"Say. That *was* a flock, wasn't it?" he called





“GANDER AND GOOSE AT HOME.”



to his wife who had left her breakfast-dishes and rushed to the door.

“ Yes, it was—where do you suppose they go, anyway? ”

“ I don't know; up north somewhere to breed, I've been told,” and he started up his team again as the music died away in the distance.

Scaip the English Snipe had also seen the birds pass over, and he too wondered whither they were bound and how they kept so steady. To his neighbour Song-sparrow, he remarked :

“ Song, how do you suppose they keep so regular? Why, when I fly I go zigzag here and there, and I can't keep straight for the life of me, and I try hard too.”

“ They're very big—and perhaps they have to fly slowly, but how they keep that line beats me,” answered Song.

“ Did you ever see them near by, Song? ”

“ No.”

“ Well, I've had great opportunity for observing them,” began Scaip. “ I spend a good part of the winter down on Currituck Sound,—North Carolina, you know,—and I tell you there's a multitude of water-birds that spend the winter there. There are Swan and Gander besides Canvas and Red-head and Widgeon and Mallard and Webfoot the Black-duck and Creek and many more of the duck family, but the funniest of all is Peter the Coot. He is such a

foolish bird! No cleverness, nor anything. He does no harm, but is of no particular account either—but I was speaking of Gander and his family. Why down there, there are thousands and thousands of Ganders and Geese. I travel along the sedge and grass bordering the water, and Gander leads his family along the shore, mornings and evenings, feeding off a lot of water-grass and other stuff that grow down that way. They can't dive, you know, so they have to feed in shoal water where the bottom is no deeper than their necks will reach. But middays they go far out and swim about and rest and sleep. But talk of running risks up here! I tell you, Song, it's just as bad down there. The grass along shore is five feet or more high, rather more than less I should say, and those sportsmen get out about sunrise, and what do you suppose they do? They bring a lot of wooden ducks and geese and anchor them a little off shore. Song, you'd be surprised to see the naturalness of those wooden dummies. Why, one day as I was running along, picking up what living I could find, I came suddenly on a whole flock, and, wanting to be sociable, I called out: 'Top of the morning to you.' Well, I thought for a moment that I was crazy, for no one answered. There were fifty or sixty Canvas-backs and a few Ganders. Then I thought I had come on a big flock of deaf mutes, but finally I noticed how they bobbed about, kind of light and unnatural, and then, just as I was

puzzling over it, I saw a big flock of canvas-backs flying up the Sound, and all of a sudden I heard what sounded like an old drake Canvas, calling close beside me in the sedge and *on dry ground*. Why, for a minute you could have knocked me over with a feather, but the flock set their wings and came right in to the birds in the water. Then there was a commotion behind me in the grass, and you never heard anything like the noise from those dreadful guns, and then four or five ducks lay on their backs on the water with their flippers going in the air as if they were swimming naturally. Then I saw it all. Those men had put out all those false ducks and geese, looking as natural as you please, and then had drawn their boat up into the grass and just waited—well,—I'm taking up your time, Song?"

"No, Scaip, it's dreadful, but very interesting; go on."

"Well, when they saw a flock of black-ducks they imitated their call exactly, or when they saw Mallards they did the same way. So I said to myself, 'What are we coming to?' and was about to leave when I heard those men begin to 'honk' just like Gander, and looking up I saw two of Gander's friends. Well, sir, the men just called those geese out of the sky. The birds would turn and make as if to come toward the false friends made of wood, and then they would turn off again, and then those sportsmen would honk away as if to say, 'You won't

pass us by, will you?’ And then again the geese would turn, and finally they set their wings, and down they came. I was scared enough by what I’d seen already, but there was something fascinating about it, Song. I don’t know why. Those two geese looked to me as big as a house as they came nearer and nearer. I was all a-tremble watching. They came on and on, and at last they were right over those wooden friends of theirs. Then one of the men said, low and excitedly, ‘You take them,’ and with that the other one jumped up and just as he did so the two birds checked themselves and got all mixed up in the air. Then off went that cannon, and do you know both geese stopped talking and in a second were floating gray and mussed up on the water of the bay. I tell you, Song, if I had been a goose or a duck, I’d have been fooled in the same way.”

“I’m obliged to you, Scaip, for telling me some of your experiences. You travel about so much more than I do that you must pick up a lot of facts. But I must be going on; I’ve got to sing for an hour before lunch.”

Scaip the Snipe, after saying good-bye to Song-sparrow, planned to flit over the fence into the next bog-meadow near the brook, and he had scarcely got fairly on his feet again before he became aware that the brookside was not untenanted; for a rustling sound under one of the great dry bogs told



"SLICK THE MINK APPEARED."





him that some one else was close by, and just as his head-feathers began to rise up, and he was ready to spring away, who should slide out from beneath the bog but Slim the Weasel. Scaip whisked up on to a neighbouring stone in order to be quite ready to fly, but he was soon convinced that all fear of harm from Slim was groundless, for Slim seemed in no hunting or fighting mood. He crawled laboriously out, and, after looking about in a weary kind of way, brought his whole body into view.

“Why, Slim, what on earth is ailing you? You look sick,” cried Scaip.

Scaip had no more sympathy for Slim than had the rest of the stream neighbours, yet he had a little of the milk of human kindness in his nature, and he thought that the poor creature needed pity.

“Yes, Scaip, look at me! I’m just alive; that’s all,” and, as Slim turned to exhibit himself, Scaip noticed that his condition was so different from his usual jaunty appearance that it would cause comment anywhere. Slim continued, “It was a fair enough fight, Scaip, and I got whipped, but I think I had the right on my side.”

“What was it, Slim?” asked Scaip, moving a little further away, for, to tell the truth, neither Scaip the Snipe nor any others of the Rockland birds trusted Slim much further than his nose. But at this time Slim was quite harmless. His fur was all awry, and there were spots where there was no hair.

Then, besides, he had fresh scars all along one side, and his left ear seemed to be more or less gone; for all one could see were a few scabby points on that side. There were also traces of blood about his person. His whole appearance was that of one who had gone through some terrible ordeal. Scaip was not long kept in suspense, for Slim began his story at once:

“I’ll tell you, Scaip,” he spoke in his querulous little voice, which always seemed to have a slight ring of insincerity in it. “Night before last, just at dusk, I was travelling along that narrow path up near Jerry’s Hole, and when I came to the big flat rock I sat down and began to fix up a little for a party some of my kind were going to hold down toward Skunk Hollow—just washing my paws and face, you know—when I heard a gun go off down toward Deep Hole. I stopped cleaning up and stood listening. Being springtime, there wasn’t much shooting going on, and that’s what made me curious. In a minute I saw a shadow down stream, and then, quick as a flash, one of Webfoot’s cousins skimmed by my face. His wings were set, and he acted so unnaturally that I knew something was wrong. He sailed along a bit further, when all of a sudden he turned over and fell with a splash on the edge of the brook. Then I knew that he must have been badly wounded down below; so I stepped down off the rock to go over and get a drink of blood, for



"EYES LIQUID AND BRIGHT, SO WISE AND JUDICIAL."



you know, Scaip, it isn't often I get a chance at any of Webfoot's folks. They're too clever for me. So I didn't waste any time, but got hold of the bird while he was still kicking. I'd just put my teeth in under the wing and was dragging him up to dry land, when right close to me appeared Slick the Mink directly in front. I was surprised; but I've known Slick a long time, and we have never had any words. I've always fought shy of him, for our business and living are just about the same, and I never wanted to quarrel with him, nor with any one else, for that matter."

Scaip had been an interested listener, and as Slim reached this point he thought to himself, "No, you're a slippery little rascal who sneaks up behind and gets the advantage of birds and other creatures." But Scaip was politic enough to hide his feelings. Slim continued: "But Slick, his eyes glittering and his tail moving back and forth like a cat's, said angrily: 'Here, you! drop that! that's mine.' I did drop it for a second, and answered, 'What do you mean, Slick? I got here first.' 'No, you didn't,' said he, 'I've been here waiting for that bird for an hour. You drop it.' Then I lost my temper, too, and answered back, 'You go to grass! I'm going to have my fill first, and you can have what's left.' With that, Scaip, he gave one dart at me and caught me by the back of the neck with those needle teeth of his. Oh! but it hurt, and it fixed me so that I

couldn't get at him. You know, Scaip, Slick's twice as big as I am, anyhow, and he took a mean advantage of me. But I thought he was going to kill me. Why, look at me! When he had me nearly dead, he let go, and then got a fresh hold, and if we hadn't fallen into the water I don't know what would have happened; but when he let go I used all my strength and got away down stream, and I've been hiding under this bog ever since. Come here and look at my ears." Scaip the Snipe was an intelligent bird, and he looked it too, as he sat on the rock with his long bill resting on his greyish breast and his eyes liquid and bright, so wise and judicial.

"Slim, I have learned two or three things through experience. I have always mistrusted you. If you hadn't made that last remark I might have had some sympathy for you; but you're just what I've always heard, a deceitful little sneak, and I must tell you that, though I'm not exactly glad that you got hurt, I'm not very sorry," and with this remark Scaip opened his pointed wings, and Slim the Weasel watched his erratic zigzag flight as he skimmed away toward the lush, green bogs back of Whitney's Pond.

These were the last days of March. The season was late, but, since the twentieth, everything spoke of spring and a renewal of growth in meadow and marsh. The seeds, torpid during the frozen months, were beginning to swell, and the germ-bud was



“RED WING THE BLACKBIRD, SPICK AND SPAN IN HIS NEW  
SPRING COSTUME.”





slowly unfolding like the chick in the shell ready to force its way outward and upward. On warm days the little piping frogs could be heard, a shrill but pleasing chorus, in the half-submerged meadow. If one crept with silent tread close to the edge of the pond-hole and observed keenly, he could even see their little bagpipes showing up above the surface of the water like large translucent marbles, but at a careless sound, the breaking of a twig or an unwitting cough, the little treble chorus would cease at once. It was easy again to start the song, however, for by imitating the short sharp whistle one and another would begin again. But the little orchestra of the swamp didn't seem to mind Red Wing the Blackbird, and sometimes two or three old males, in their velvety black dress and brilliant red shoulderstraps, would sit and with tireless energy let loose their liquid cries which mingled with the voices of the pipers in musical cadence. Billie the Bluebird was about, too, and he seemed to be the guardian of the fields, for although he was almost constantly engaged in his avocation of picking up the early seeds and insects, yet his shrill little cry of alarm, should Sharp Shin the Hawk—cousin of Red Shoulder—appear in the distance, would silence the whole lot, and, as Sharp Shin sailed by, one could scarcely believe that the place had just been resounding with all those joyous greetings to the approaching spring-time.

## CHAPTER VII.

## APRIL.—PART I.

John Crow—Downey the Woodpecker—Cowbunting—White Eye  
the Vireo—And Others.

**J**OHAN CROW—his great-grandfather's name was *Corvus Americanus*—with his head on one side condescendingly viewed the scene spread out in broad panorama below him. He sat on the topmost limb of an old, dead chestnut-tree that had seen nearly a century of changes. Poor old relic! It had remembered how, when the War of 1812 began, the country folk in his own hearing used to say: "This is no joke; we've got to whip those folks again, and maybe they'll whip us this time." An historic old tree was the chestnut, and many legends had been woven in and about its gnarled and knotted branches. Even the elevation on which it stood had been dubbed "Chestnut Hill" in its honour. It was said that under its spreading arms two Pequot braves long ago had fought a duel with tomahawks, in order to decide which should claim the hand of Pecono, the belle of the tribe.

John Crow, perched high above the surrounding country, sharpened his strong beak against the smooth dead branch on which he stood and, now and again leaning forward and half-opening his wings, would make the air resound with his deep sonorous



“JOHN CROW—HIS GREAT-GRANDFATHER'S NAME WAS  
*Corvus Americanus.*”



voice. It was during the early days of April, and John was glad to be alive, for the air was fresh and bracing and filled with the sound of many voices. Red Wing the blackbird, spick and span in his new spring costume, stood on the branches in the alder swale and sent forth his liquid cries. On the top of the Pussy Willow Song-sparrow seemed as though he would never tire of his little song, which climbed up to a top note and then fell all to pieces as it came down again. Out in the forlorn-looking corn-field hundreds of crow blackbirds could be seen, the purple bronze of their plumage glistening bright in the morning sunlight. How sedately they walked about, or now and again flew in a great cloud which circled the field once or twice in order to see if Farmer Hezekiah Plumb had forgotten to take in *all* his corn, and then settled down again.

“I’m not half ashamed of those cousins of mine,” soliloquised John Crow, as he eyed the busy birds below, “and if the farmers would only stop and observe a little, they’d never go creeping along the fences with that horrible-sounding gun. For example, I know that, whereas I eat ten kernels of corn to one grub I kill, that grub would do up a whole hill or more of corn now, which would mean the loss of a million kernels this autumn. The fact is, I believe they try to shoot us just for the sake of killing something.”

With that John sent out one more defiant caw

and then dropped off slant-wise into the old orchard below. He brought up on a scraggly, old apple-tree whose trunk was honeycombed with parallel circles of small holes. As he looked about he noticed Downey the Woodpecker just below him.

“Good-morning to you, Downey.”

“Thank you, John; it seems as though summer were coming at last, doesn’t it?” answered Downey stopping his work for a moment.

“Downey, how do you make those holes so uniform; they all seem to be exactly alike.”

Downey again stopped his tapping and, steadying himself with his wiry little tail pressed close to the tree trunk, looked up at John Crow and remarked:

“John, my family always were good carpenters,—came naturally by it, I suppose. You’re pretty good yourself when you come to build your nest. I don’t know that I ever saw a crow’s nest blow down.”

“Do those little worms you dig out taste good, Downey?” asked John.

“Yes, *we* like them; but a big fellow like you would have to get about a thousand to make him feel as though he’d eaten anything. Then, besides, I don’t think you could see them anyhow; they’re mighty small. Billie Bluebird likes them well enough, though.”

“Is that what he is doing, following you about so? but he isn’t very quarrelsome.”

“No, Billie’s a good fellow,—all his family are.



“A NICE, SELF-RESPECTING BIRD BY THE WAY.”





He knows I do all the work, so he's satisfied with the leavings."

"That's right, Downey; that's what I've found. His whole tribe follow the golden rule pretty well. Now you take Cowbunting. He's just the opposite. He's as mean as possible, lazy and always trying to impose on folks. The way his wife goes about laying an egg in respectable folks' houses is scandalous, and I hear she always selects the nest of some smaller bird and a hanging nest at that, like that of White Eye, the Vireo—a nice, self-respecting bird, by the way—and when that dirty-looking egg comes out, the young one is so much bigger and stronger than the other poor little chaps, that he gets all the food and finally kicks his fostermother's family out of the place."

"I've seen that very thing, John. It's too enraging, to see White Eye feeding that great cub of a bird that's twice her size and no more like her than an egg-plant is like a pea; but I must be going along. I've got to help my mate this afternoon, getting the house built."

"Where are you living this summer, Downey?"

"Right over there in the maple-swamp. Don't you remember that dead tree standing alone? Well, we finished the door yesterday, and Mrs. Downey's working back and down. I hope we won't strike anything wrong. I won't have a leaky house,—gives the children rheumatism, you know. Ta-ta,"

and Downey, in soft, undulating flight, started for home.

“Nice little chap that,” said John Crow to himself but at the next moment he started convulsively and listened. He thought that he heard the voice of his hated rival far off in the swamp.

For a month past John Crow had been “keeping company” with a decidedly handsome young crow of the year before, and as John, though still in his prime, was by no means young, he was much troubled by the recent attentions of a newcomer to his sweetheart. The Killingworth crows had always been clannish, and, when the dashing and debonnair Fairfielder came on the scene, all were suspicious; but John was angry. Jim Crow the newcomer, was a Crow with a history, John proclaimed. None of the local crows could find out much about him nor get any facts from him as to his antecedents, but he was pleasant and plausible and at once became a social favourite. He told the greatest lot of yarns about the seashore and what one saw there. For instance, one afternoon shortly after his arrival at Killingworth, and when all were sitting around after taking a hearty dinner, someone asked him to tell a story—and after much urging he began as follows:

“I was foraging early one morning down near Stratford Light. It was in the early part of the winter, and I was out for breakfast before dawn. I’d already got a pretty good shore-meal, a couple

of soft clams and some fiddler crabs—ever see those fiddlers? They run sidewise faster than you can follow, though their legs are placed like other folks' legs except there are more of them,—and I'd found a white-fish—they call them moss bunkers down there—that a fish-hawk had dropped probably in the autumn, but it was good all the same, and finally I thought I'd just fly over to Charles Island—that's off Milford, only the matter of a mile or so. The Island has no inhabitants—leastwise it didn't have then—though they tell me that they are going to put up summer resorts there, whatever that may mean, and I thought I would just sit on one of the trees growing there and see sunrise. It was just getting to be grey light and you couldn't distinguish anything at a distance, when all of a sudden one of those terrible guns went off quite close to where I sat. First I saw the flash and then I heard the awful noise, and I was startled. I just sat there. Then as day began to break I could see better. I could see as many as fifteen boats. They were anchored and seemed stretched all the way from Charles Island to Welch's Point. I couldn't understand it at all, but I could hear ducks by the thousand away outside talking to each other. I couldn't make out what they were saying, but I heard the 'Good-Mornings' of the south—southerly, that was about all. Then, too, I could hear lots of Belltong Coots talking and chattering. They're pretty, too.

Jet black all over with a bit of snow-white on the back of the head and the most curious beak you ever saw, all yellow and red and white."

"Fairy tales!" snapped out John Crow, who had just joined the party and had heard the last of Jim's remarks.

"No, honestly, Mr. John, I'm telling the truth."

"Oh, please go on," chimed in one of the lady crows.

"Well, as I was saying, the daylight and sunrise came on together all of a sudden, and the air was filled with ducks, and then I saw what it was all about. Those poor ducks wanted breakfast, and the men had made a line of boats and guns, yes *guns*, and had said: 'No you don't, you can't get any breakfast without paying for it!' but the ducks would fly for the line of boats and 'bang! bang!' would go those terrible guns, and then the poor birds would skirt the whole fifteen boats, and I'll never forget the noise. Why, every boat had a man in it, and sometimes two, and everyone would 'bang! bang!' and every now and then a poor duck would drop out of the air and turn over in the water, and when at last they gave it up there must have been an awful slaughter. I couldn't stand it and flew home to think it over, and that's one of the reasons why I'm here now. It's getting to be pretty bad down there, I can tell you."

When Jim had finished his story there was scarce a dry eye in his audience. But John Crow was "set on

edge" by the popularity of Jim and remarked sneeringly :

" Seems to me they were the most foolish kind of birds. When they found what was going on, why didn't they go away and wait, instead of persevering in the way you say they did."

" Well, Mr. John, I never gave ducks credit for much sense anyhow, and in this case you can only say that perseverance is a good quality when properly directed."

So John flew over to the spot where he had heard the suspicious sound but found nothing and was forced to conclude that his fears were groundless. He skimmed down to the brookside for a drink, and as he stood listening he wondered over what the tinkling little brook was saying as it danced down on its merry journey and whether Jim Crow had really seen all the things that he had told about. As he stood there on the wet stones he couldn't help observing a remarkably vigorous Skunk-cabbage and a little Jack-in-the-pulpit. John said to himself :

" I have rarely noticed Jack-in-the-pulpit before. He stands here in his little box, with three or four stems and leaves, and even these shrivel down to almost nothing after awhile ; but Skunk-cabbage grows larger and larger and spreads out his beautiful leaves and gives shade to lots of things. Why I saw Longbill the Woodcock the other day asleep and contented under one of his arms.

But just let a cow, or a man, or anything heavy step on him, and every creature avoids him; even Cooney the Fox makes a circle to get away from the smell. I suppose he wishes he were a graceful Jack-in-the-pulpit; and that Jack probably envies the great spreading leaves of Skunk-cabbage.

"Foolish plants," quoth John, as he flew upward; "but no one seems contented with his own lot. All want to be something else, excepting crows," and away he went to make his afternoon call on Glossie, as he called his sweetheart. Glossie's home and feeding ground were down near Nineveh, more than three miles from Chestnut Hill. John Crow was feeling as young as any of his rivals. From time to time in his graceful flight he would half close his wings and send forth his deep-sounding song. Half way down to Nineveh Falls, his attention was arrested by a noise over the hill toward Widow Redfield's pine-forest, and, being of an investigating nature, John deflected his flight to see what it meant and soon ran into a gay gathering of his own relatives. As he approached he could hear the greatest amount of chattering crow-talk, and, as finally he was himself observed, the birds gathered about him and all tried to tell the news. They all seemed to wish to talk at once, and he could only make out that an unusual event had taken place. At last he gasped:

"Won't you keep quiet for a minute and then



"A VIGOROUS SKUNK-CABBAGE AND A LITTLE JACK-IN-THE-PULPIT."





appoint a speaker to tell me what you're so noisy about ?”

At this a stylish-looking young crow stepped forward. He was what John had always called a ‘no ‘count’ kind of bird, and John was surprised that he had been selected as spokes-crow ; but his surprise was multiplied tenfold by what followed. The young crow spoke up ; seeming to have a little tinge of pride and triumph in his voice :

“ Why, Mr. John, we were celebrating my wedding.”

“ I'm glad to hear it, and I suppose I ought to congratulate the bride. Who is she ?”

“ Glossie from Nineveh,” spoke up one of the grooms-crows.

John gave a convulsive start, and then after a scarcely perceptible pause answered :

“ Indeed ! It seems to me that I've met her somewhere. Wasn't it rather sudden ?”

“ Oh, no,” answered the bridegroom, taking courage from the fact that John had heard the news so calmly ; “ I proposed in the old pine-tree this morning, and we were married at noon.”

“ Ah,” quoth John, and then he flew back to his old home and had a quiet revery. As he settled himself comfortably for the night in the recesses of the old pine-tree, he remarked under his breath : “ I have made a lucky escape.”

## CHAPTER VIII.

## APRIL.—PART II.

Mourning Dove—Whippoorwill—Jack Crow's Family.

THE sweet soft note of Mourning Dove came out of the cedar-tree near the cider-mill. In its sad cadence it bore out the name of the bird that produced it, and sounded almost out of keeping with the bright sunshine and the merry whistle of the other feathered choristers. Still it was Mourning Dove's song, and his mate, who was busily engaged in constructing her flimsy nest, thought it far superior to the spring song of any of the others. Mourning was accustomed to sit half concealed on a dead branch and watch his mate search about in the dry leaves below for what she regarded as the best materials for their future home. Not that he was lazy, for every now and again he would dart down and try to show her a particularly strong twig, and would be very proud when she bore it up to the tree. Afterwards he would return to his perch and inflate his iridescent little throat, and again his sad note would sound out on the mellow morning air. At noontide the two would stop work for a while, and sit together for an hour or so, plan-

ning about the future and wondering whether the children would bear out their parents' expectations. Then towards evening they would go down to the swamp side for supper and would walk about and try to pick up a good meal. The warm April sun spangled the meadow with the pretty blue Houstonia, while the violet buds were just beginning to show in the swampy places, purple and modest. One evening toward the close of the month Mourning Dove and his mate had been getting their meal as usual and when about to fly home, they were interrupted by the sudden arrival of Whippoorwill who dropped down close by them and flattened himself on the top rail of the old grey fence. He immediately started his evening song, which, though not musical, was one of the pleasant reminders of spring. No one of the Rockland birds could quite understand Whippoorwill, or Whip, as they generally called him. For, whereas all the others began their songs at early dawn, Whip completely reversed this order, and it was only when the last rays of the setting sun cast long shadows across Deep Hole that his queer cry would begin and continue well through the twilight and on into the dark. Mourning Dove was not talkative or self-assertive; but he had a streak of curiosity in his nature, and now that he had the opportunity for a little conversation with Whip he took advantage of it.

“I say, Whip,” he cooed out, “why do you wait

all day until everyone's gone to bed before you begin singing?"

"Mourning," answered Whippoorwill, looking around a little startled, "I'm not good for much in the day-time. Haven't you noticed my eyes? I'm a good deal like Longbill the Woodcock. The sun hurts me, while after it goes down I catch my supper of insects; so that I feel glad to be awake just as most creatures are going to bed."

"No, I don't remember that I ever noticed your eyes, Whip; but we don't see much of each other anyway. I don't mind your song, though; it almost puts me to sleep at night."

At this moment Whippoorwill yawned, and Mourning continued:

"Whip, but you've an enormous mouth!"

"If I didn't have, Mourning, I'd have a hard time. That's how I manage to live. Do you see that little bunch of flies over there? Now watch me," and with that Whip made a graceful sweep. Mourning Dove and his mate watched breathlessly and with great interest. After a moment Whip was back on the old fence-rail, and without saying a word he opened his expansive mouth and disclosed at least a half dozen small gnats that had evidently been taken at one swoop and were sticking there.

"Astonishing!" exclaimed Mourning. "It does not take you long to get a meal, does it?"

"But I don't have very long to spend in hunting



“WE DON'T MAKE ANY REGULAR NEST.”



food. I stop feeding at about ten o'clock generally, and I have to do part of the housekeeping as well."

"Indeed, Whip. I've often wanted to ask where you make your home."

"On the ground in some bare spot. We don't make any regular nest; we just scrape out a little place to keep the eggs from sliding away, generally near some old grey moss."

"I should think you would lose them. Aren't they hid at all?"

"Not a bit, Mourning; but did you ever see one of our eggs?"

"No."

"If my mate should lay one on that grey moss, you couldn't any more tell it from the moss than you can tell one piece of water from another in the brook running beside it."

"I'm getting surprises every day! Whip, we're glad to have met you again; but we must be going. It's later than we've been out since the night when Malty the cat drove us from home. That was a year ago, and it isn't a pleasant memory either, is it, mate?" and with that Mourning Dove and his wife started for home, and the whirring of their wings as they jumped from the ground gave Whippoorwill a little fright.

The next day broke clear and cloudless. It was the twenty-seventh of April, and already the tender green of apple-tree and plum-tree buds could be

seen swelling larger and larger day by day, and the peach-orchards bore a distinct tinge of pink, precursor of the brilliant display to come. Upon the steep sides of Pine-Orchard hill could be heard the gobbling cries of the young crows as they took the food supplied by their parents. They were just beginning to get their glossy black coats and already were noisy and boisterous. It was easy to locate them by the sound, and as their parents made continuous trips to and from the nest they felt obliged to caution their offspring again and again about receiving their food in so rude a way. Said their father one morning:

“Not that anybody would harm you, I suppose; but it’s very bad manners to sit and caw and quarrel all the time. Your mother and I are away a good deal, and when we get back and give you something, it won’t do for you to grab and gobble. Now I learned *my* manners in a different way. When I was your age I was kidnapped—stolen, you know—and it was a great schooling I got, I can tell you.”

“How was that, Daddy?” exclaimed his oldest boy huskily, as he tried to swallow both his own piece of frog-meat and that which had been offered to his sister.

“Here! You drop that, you little thief!” and his father grabbed at the disappearing morsel which he finally gave to its rightful owner.



Little Jack gave his sister a vicious dab while his father wasn't looking and then said :

“ I thought that both the legs were mine, Daddy.”

“ Won't you tell us the story, Papa ?” asked the girl-crow modestly, and from the difference in size between the two children any one except a fond parent would have surmised that this particular pilfering trick was not the first one.

“ Yes, I'll tell you of my early life if you'll be good ; but I don't want to see any such unfair treatment of your sister again, Jack.”

“ That's the first time I ever took any of sister's food, Daddy.”

“ Oh, brother !” cried his sister ; but before she could go further, Jack, Jr., had given her a kick with his sharp little claws from the bottom of the nest, and she said no more.

“ Well, I'll tell you,” spoke the father. “ I was born far away from here, and I don't suppose you'll ever go there, so it doesn't make much difference. Nearly five years have gone by, and it was early April too. My father began building his nest in March. Now your Uncle John—whom you'll meet some day—doesn't get his family out much before the middle of May ; but at any rate I was half feathered, just as you are in late April. I remember the old home well. It was in one of those great chestnut trees, and, by the way, children, I don't know why it is ; but nowadays the crow family

doesn't select such trees. I suppose it's for protection, for I remember my home was big and roomy, but you could see it a long distance off, even after leaves were on. Nowadays, however, we generally take a cedar or pine tree. Then again in those days my parents didn't sneak to and fro, the way we do now."

The young birds had moved uneasily about the nest and were picking their feathers and didn't seem much interested.

"Well, Daddy, won't you get to your adventure."

"Yes, I'm coming to that; but don't you care about your old father's history?"

"Yes, we like that well enough; but didn't you have some fights or something?" asked the boy again.

After a pause Jack Crow began:

"Now I'll go on. One day in late April, as I was saying, I sat up on the edge of the nest—there were four of us, two boys and two girls, and like you, Jack, I was the biggest and strongest, though I don't remember stealing my sister's dinner. I was just sitting there and wondering when I'd be able to fly, when I heard some one tramping down through the woods and the dry leaves. I remember seeing the snowdrops and wild flowers. Of course I didn't know them myself, but from the time we opened our eyes we had had instruction every day as to what we saw. Well, when I heard this noise I had

a feeling that it was made by a *man*, for we'd been told about men—the first thing as I recollect. So I just sat back in the nest, and we four crouched low and didn't make a sound. Do you know what happened then?"

"No, Papa, go on," cried Sister excitedly, and Jack's eyes were full of wonder.

"I heard some talk below, and then I heard the funniest creeping and scratching noise, and after five minutes or so a head was suddenly poked over the edge of our home and it looked at us. I was scared, I can tell you! We just huddled together close down in the nest and waited. The man didn't look very cruel but just put his hand out and scratched my head; then he turned and called out to some one below: 'It's a crow's nest with four young ones in it.' Then the other says: 'How big are they?' 'Oh, they're almost fledged.' 'Why not take three?'"

"Weren't you almost scared to death?" asked Jack excitedly.

"I was very frightened, children; but I liked the fellow's face, to tell the truth, and after a minute or two he let down a string and the man below fastened a basket to it, a covered thing something like a nest, and then, children, the man grabbed me and brother and sister, but left little Pete, and then he put the lid on the basket and lowered us down. But I wasn't going to be stolen in that way; so

half-way down I made one jump, and I tell you I was surprised. I couldn't fly at all, but I just fluttered down, and there I was, a little more bruised and scared than the rest, but close by where they had landed! Then the man climbed down, and he and his friend looked me over and said that they'd take us 'home' as they called it. So they put the cover on the basket and tied it, and there we were!"

"My! Daddy, that was fearful. What did they do? Eat you?"

"Well, my son, look at me! You don't see any marks of teeth on me, do you?"

"No, but it must have been exciting."

"It was, my boy, but it turned out all right. We must have travelled a long way; but when the basket was opened, we saw a nice clean room whose floor was all covered with white sand and a nice lot of plants and things. I heard afterwards that they called it an aviary; but when we got through with it the plants didn't look the same as they did at the beginning, I tell you."

"It sounds to me, Sister," said her older brother, "like a fairy-story!"

"The next thing," continued their father, "was a time of which I don't remember anything. Even now it's like a dream; but after a time we seemed to feel at home, and on the second day, when my foster-father came into the big room and held out some raw liver on the end of a pointed stick, I said

'Yes' and grabbed it, and it was good. Then the others took it, and gradually the man treated us so well that we began to look for the time when he was coming. A day or so after this he brought us some new stuff to eat. It didn't look very good, but we had come to trust him and even talk to him. So I grabbed it, and I tell you it was fine. Do you know what he had done? He had got a lot of worms and chopped them up with crackers soaked in milk, and, though it wasn't nice to the eye, yet after the first taste we became wild about it."

"My, Papa, you've seen a lot, haven't you? Tell us some more."

"Yes, let me see. We became more and more at home, and of course we got larger until we could fly a little, and we became very fond of the man that gave us such good things to eat. I remember that one day I jumped off the perch to his shoulder. I was scared; but he didn't say anything, and after a minute or two he held up a raisin to me. You don't know what raisins are, children, and it wouldn't be any pleasure to me to tell, or to you to hear, about them, if you had seen everything; but I want to say that raisins are just *grand*. I took the raisin and swallowed it. Then I said to myself: 'You're my friend;' and from that day we were chums. Why, we all used to sit on his shoulders after he came into our house. We would fly right down and perch on his arm or hat or head. He used to like it, I be-

lieve, for he began to bring queer bright-coloured things for us to play with. But whether we are a selfish lot or whether it's our nature I can't tell, but almost always, after we had held the things in our feet and pecked at them for a while, we would go and try to hide them in the sand or in some little place where we thought no one could find them. I have since heard that this has been a failing in our family. After a while I used to sit on Master's shoulder and peck at the gold in his teeth or try to pull out the false ones; but it was always from affection or fun, for I grew to love him; and I would sometimes rub my head against his cheek."

"Well, Daddy, what happened after that?"

There was a long pause.

"I'll tell you in as few words as possible, children, for it is a sad chapter of my eventful life.

"We grew up and were well treated in every way, but after we were six months old and as big as I am now, a great sorrow came to me. We had finally been given every freedom, and were allowed to roam about that beautiful place. We would walk over the lawn and perch on the men's backs or shoulders as they were weeding or working at something else. But one day Sam and Johanna, my brother and sister, your uncle and aunt, decided that they would disobey all orders and try whether Farmer Lewis' wild cherries weren't better than those at home. Your aunt and uncle, children, were always some-

what headstrong and they consulted no one, but after a little chat with each other off they flew. I never saw them again! Yes, I did, but it was not in their joyous merry play; for while your Aunt Sally and I were playing tag in the home-garden, and just as she made me 'it' by picking off an extra melon-bloom, we heard two terrible shots—noises, my children, that I trust you may never know. We were frightened enough to return to our roosting-place, the dear old cage; but Sam and Johanna didn't come back that night. The next day we started out to look for them. Finally we came to Farmer Lewis' boundary line."

Jack Crow had become considerably worked up over his story, and now as he came to the climax he almost broke down.

"Why, Daddy, why don't you go on? Were they hurt"? cried Jack and Sister almost together.

"Yes, children; they paid the penalty of their foolishness. They just hung there limp and lifeless, and each one was nailed to a bean-pole. They hung about twenty feet apart; no, I think it was about eighteen."

"What became of you, Papa?" sobbed Sister.

"Why, I don't know—you're here, aren't you?"

Just at this instant Mother Crow appeared and cried out:

"John, what ideas are you putting into the children's heads? Can't you stop being so sombre?"

## CHAPTER IX.

## MAY.—PART I.

Hangbird the Oriole—Brilliant the Scarlet Tanager—Speckle the Trout—Ruffle the Partridge.

IT was the tenth of May at Rockland, and the sweet, clear whistle of Hangbird the Oriole could be heard in orchard and elm. Following his unvarying custom, he had arrived on that very day and was now rejoicing that his long journey from the south was over and that he could at last settle down for a summer of quiet home-life.

Hangbird had passed through many States and climates, and had made many acquaintances everywhere on the way. His most constant companion, however, had been Brilliant the Scarlet Tanager. They had not been what you might call close friends, for there was always a tinge of envy in Hangbird's nature, and he was accustomed to say :

“I don't know what people see to admire in that gaudy, red-and-black Brilliant. He can't sing nearly as well as I can, and it seems to me that he flaunts his colours too much in other people's faces. He





"BUT WHEN IT CAME TO THE BUILDING OF A HOME, THERE HANGBIRD DID EXCEL."



and his friends are forever flying about the peach-orchard, where there are scarcely any leaves as yet, and seem to be trying to show off. I am just as good-looking in orange-and-black, but I stay up among the tulip-trees and elms."

Hangbird frequently addressed his remarks to Blackburn the Warbler, who was also dressed in orange-and-black, and there were some ill-natured birds who said that it was a pure case of jealousy.

But when it came to the building of a house, there Hangbird did excel. Even Brilliant had to acknowledge this, but in spite of his dazzling dress, Brilliant was really a most amiable and unassuming bird, and he never entered into an argument if he could help it. Yet he was brave enough, and in defence of his home he had been known, again and again, to drive off much larger birds than himself, such as Quarrel the Jay and even Red Shoulder the Hawk, while his wife, modest in her green-and-yellow gown, would sit quietly on her flimsy little nest and admire his temerity. This year Brilliant and Hangbird had, by accident, built their nests quite close to each other, and both of these homes were in elm trees. Brilliant and his wife selected a horizontal branch, and, where it divided itself into branchlets well out from the tree-trunk, had begun to build. They brought a few coarse, dead twigs with which they made a light foundation; then they sought smaller and smaller ones; and finally they lined the nest

with the wee, curly roots that they found at the foot of a cedar tree down by the swamp-side.

“Hello, Brilliant,” cried Hangbird, one bright morning, as he passed and noticed the work. “Do you call that a nest? Why, I can see right though it. The first easterly storm that comes will blow it down in no time.”

“I know, Hangbird, it’s a poor piece of work; but we don’t know how to do better. I wish you would give us a lesson or two some day when you have time. We’d be willing to pay something.”

“I’m pretty busy just now, Brilliant, and you don’t seem to show any natural talent; but I’ll see. I don’t know; I may help you, and I may not.”

For their nest Hangbird and his mate had selected the drooping bough of a neighbouring elm. The nest was placed where the hanging branch-tips divided into three. They brought long bits of twine and thread that they found in the ash-heap, and they added horse-hair from the barnyard. These they wove in and out between the twigs. Finally they brought horse-hair only, which they interlaced among the coarser stuff, until, on the second afternoon, one could make out the shape of a small bag that swung to and fro in the lightest breeze. By the third afternoon the house was nearly completed, and they lined it with the finest hair and even a few feathers. It was a beautiful piece of tailor-work and would almost hold water.

Ten days had passed and Mrs. Brilliant was sitting, contented and happy, on four little, dull-blue, finely speckled eggs, while her near neighbour Mrs. Hangbird brooded over five black-splashed, white ones.

Some days had been sunny and warm, while others had been filled with showers that had hurried along the fruit-blossoms, so that one could almost see them come out. The apple-trees looked like great bouquets of pink-and-white roses, and the air was soft and laden with perfume. One afternoon, after an unusually sultry day for the season, some great clouds began to pile up on the western horizon, and, a half-hour later, muffled thunder could be heard in the distance. At first the clouds were of snowy whiteness, the upper ones looking like huge piles of fleecy cotton; but, as they increased in size and climbed higher in the sky, the sun was hidden, and all became black and forbidding.

Gradually the air began to grow cool, and now and then a little puff of wind would sigh through the half-grown leaves. Then at last, after a spiteful splash or two of rain-drops, the storm broke in wild fury. It whirled the dust in mad circles and tore the old year's twigs away. Brilliant the Tanager crouched low beside his mate and whispered words of cheer to her, while she clung fast and tried to save her precious eggs at the risk of being herself dashed to pieces.

But all was in vain! Another furious blast of wind! and she felt herself going; then suddenly with a little scream of despair, she was hurled, nest and all, out into the tempest. Brilliant tried to follow, but was quickly thrown into a near-by cedar tree, where he clung helpless and trembling. But his poor wife, having freed herself, was carried on and on by the fury of the gale, until finally, half dead, she was cast violently into a last year's hay-mow. There she lay dejected and unhappy. Within twenty minutes, however, the storm had passed, and the sun was shining again. Then, as well as she could, Brilliant's mate arranged her dress and finally flew weakly to the upper branches of a giant oak near by. From this point she could see the surrounding country and soon discovered where she was. So by little flights, for she was still wet and bruised, she came to the place where had been her home. There sat Brilliant, bedraggled and dejected, and there too on the ground lay the remnants of their house and their precious eggs now broken and misshapen. Near by could be heard Hangbird the Oriole whistling blithely among the leaves that glistened in the bright afternoon sun, and the scent of the wild honeysuckle and wistaria was in the air, and all nature seemed so happy. Poor little Brilliant came to his wife's side and whispered:

“How true, dear, is the saying: ‘Laugh, and the world laughs with you; weep, and you weep alone!’”



“SPECKLE, DO YOU CATCH THEM EVERY TIME?”





After a moment Hangbird came over and called out gaily :

“ I’m sorry, Brilliant, but you know I told you so.”

But Brilliant said nothing. On the following day he and his wife had made up their minds to begin life again and had decided to rebuild their house, but on a new site. They would go down to the brookside, where it would be more secluded and more sheltered. It was only a short distance from the old place, and they could still hear Hangbird whistling, as he did the greater part of the day. They had this time selected a sweet-smelling hemlock tree, and the laughing little brook splashed by close to their home, as it danced down on its way to the sea. Often, too, they could see Speckle the Trout, as he darted from one dark pool to another, and sometimes they had little talks with him.

One evening Brilliant sat above the brook whistling his modest song and was interested in watching Speckle, who, every few moments, would jump clear out of the water. Finally Brilliant flew down to the lower branches and called out :

“ Speckle, do you catch them every time ? ”

“ No, indeed, Brilliant, not more than once in five times ; but it’s fun and exercise, and I’m already getting in training for my trip up the brook this autumn.”

“ How far are you going ? ”

“ Oh, only up to spawn and back ; but I tell you there are some ticklish runs and rapids to go through, and I’ve got to be in good condition, or I may get bruised. Look out ! There comes someone ! Why, Brilliant, it’s one of those club members, and with a fishing-rod, too ; but I don’t think he’ll do much harm. If I’m not mistaken he is the one I heard of as gun-shy and afraid of worms ! Nice man for a shooting-and-fishing club ! Good-bye, I’ll go to my study under the alder stump,” and Speckle disappeared with one swift dart.

A moment later a good-looking man dressed in an English tweed suit, with knickerbockers and bright-coloured stockings, came stumbling and grumbling to the brookside. He wore spectacles, and, as he leaned forward and peered about remarked :

“ Why *do* they make me fish when I hate it so ? Now there’s a pool that looks like what Jack described as a good one ; but if a fish is there and he bites and I don’t take him I’m lost, for I can’t bait a hook for the life of me, and Jack must be a mile back. There ! I thwacked my ankle again ! Why *do* they make me go fishing ? ”

Then after much effort he dropped his bait into the pool quite close to where Speckle lay. Speckle had heard the fisherman’s soliloquy and in turn said to himself :

“ Ah ! my good man, I’ll try to see if I can send you back to Jack,” and with that he carefully seized

the free end of the dangling worm. He gave a good pull, when suddenly the tip of the rod and the line flew up from the water and high into the overhanging branches. Then the distinguished-looking man became angry and spoke words that Speckle had never heard before. The fisherman proceeded to pull angrily on the entangled line, which after a moment snapped with a little report and bounded back into the branches of the tree overhead, when the man muttered further unintelligible words, and, kicking viciously at a stone that stood in his way and that Speckle thought must have hurt him, he disappeared with a crash through the cat-briars and alders.

“He may be a great man, Brilliant, but he isn't a real fisherman.”

“No, Speckle, he's too fat for tramping, too.”

The days passed quietly enough down by the brookside ; but Brilliant and his mate didn't lack company, although their companions were not all congenial. Slick the Mink, for instance, would pass at least once a week, and he always stopped and with oily talk would ask after Speckle the Trout and where he kept himself ; but he got very little satisfaction from Brilliant, who knew very well that the questions were not wholly disinterested. It was the same way with Slim the Weasel. Naturally there was talk among the neighbours, and Brilliant had never heard a really good word spoken for Slim. No one seemed to care for his wasteful habits.

On the other hand, when Ruffle the Partridge came by he was always welcome ; for he stopped to chat and generally had some gossip or story to relate. Ruffle was very popular. In the spring, it is true, he loved to strut about with wings down and tail spread, for all the world like a turkey-cock ; but this was only " a way of his," as his friends would say. Then again in the spring-time he was wont to sit on an old log, preferably a hollow one, and appear to strike his strong wings rapidly together against his body. This made a loud drumming noise that resounded through the forest-aisles like distant thunder. Ruffle was often asked how he did this, but he would never tell. He would simply say :

" Almost everyone does something better than, or different from, what anyone else does, and, if I showed you the trick, no one would ask me questions any more."

He was proud of his swift flight, too, and never tired of telling of an experience he once had with " one of those paper sports from the club," as he expressed it. When asked to repeat it, Ruffle would begin as follows :

" I was eating chestnuts and acorns one day in last October, down on the Deep Hole road, and while enjoying myself, I heard a queer kind of noise, and looking up I saw a tall man coming down towards me. He was carrying his gun, like a club, in

one hand, while with the other he was making signs to a yellow dog some distance behind him. He seemed to be kind of angry and kept saying to the dog: 'Come here, Jack,' and 'What are you stopping for all the time?' But do you know, I believe that animal was smelling me out? for I'd just come down into the hollow, and I must have left some scent. At any rate I lay low and thought I'd just scare the man. I knew from his general manner that he couldn't hit anything! Well, he came within two feet of stepping on me when I whirred away, and I'll assert that I made considerable noise with my wings. He stood almost as if paralysed for a second! He didn't even try to raise his gun, but just as I topped the hill I could hear him shout: 'Bang—Bang!' You see he was so startled that he forgot all about the gun! To make a long story short, I lit on top of the ridge just below, and, as he went ambling by as unconcerned as though nothing had happened, I could hear him singing at the top of his voice:

'Bird of the wilderness, blithesome and cumberless.'

He was the queerest of those club-members I've seen yet, and that's saying a good deal."

But now, in the month of May, Ruffle the Partridge was otherwise engaged. He had drummed away during the latter April and early May days and had joined his mate in her search for suitable

quarters for their nest. They had at last decided to build on a dry, sandy knoll that, with a southern exposure, gave them warmth and sunlight and a place where the young birds could gambol and romp until they should be strong enough to try the swamp. Then, besides these advantages, the deadly wood-tick was less apt to find them there, for he was a product and denizen of moisture and shade.

The nest was very simple, just the natural grasses and leaves from near by, that, being first scraped together, were afterward moulded into a circular depression by the plump breast of mother partridge. It was placed at the foot of a good-sized cedar tree, at a point where two large and superficial roots branched so as to make two retaining walls as it were. There Mrs. Partridge began to lay her complement of eggs, and they made a beautiful exhibit. There were fifteen of them, and their colour was that of the purest cream. During the period of incubation, Ruffle kept up his drumming in the far side of the swamp, and sometimes it would seem as though he were trying to call attention away from the treasures upon which Mrs. Ruffle sat, like a pretty, brown picture. So silent and still was she that it was impossible to distinguish her figure from the brown leaves and grasses in which she lay.

After three full weeks she could feel the little chicks beneath her moving in their respective shells, and at this time she would call Ruffle two or three



"I HAVE COUNTED A NUMBER OF TIMES, RUFFE, AND I MAKE IT TWELVE."





times daily to come to her; and as he sat there proudly she would say to him:

"I've counted a number of times, Ruffle, and I make it twelve."

"That's good luck. Only three gone wrong! I hope we can raise them," he would answer.

Then the little fellows, one by one, would burst forth from their bondage, and, after twenty-four hours of brooding, off the party would start on the sunny side-hill, leaving the empty shells behind them.

It was surprising to see the little chaps hide. It reminded one of Longbill's youngsters, except that there were many more in Ruffle's family, and that within ten days the twelve chicks could fly a little. When they were three weeks old they were startled one night by the sound of heavy tramping along the lower side of the hill. They had had a very pleasant day, having extended their wanderings much further than usual, but toward evening their mother had led them back to the old knoll near by the spot where they had been born. The sound that they heard was well known to their parents. They knew that it was Hiram, the hired boy, who, having milked and turned the cows out to pasture for the first time in the year on Pine-tree lot, was taking a short cut back to the farm. As luck would have it, however, Hiram turned right up the hill, towards the spot where the young birds were getting ready for the night. The hurried orders of their parents were

but imperfectly understood; but, as the chicks scattered in every direction, Mrs. Ruffle began to tumble and somersault right in Hiram's path.

"Goodness me! A wounded partridge!" he exclaimed, and at once started in pursuit. It was Longbill's trick over again, for when Mrs. Ruffle had led Hiram a merry dance of about sixty yards, she flipped up to a branch and looked down at him. Then Hiram knew that he had been fooled, and he stooped for a stone. But in a second the joyful whirr of wings, dying away in the distance, told him that he must wait until later in the season to get even with the Ruffle family.



"WOULD LIFT HIS HEAD AND ALLOW THE FINNY PREY TO SLIDE DOWN  
HIS CAPACIOUS THROAT."



## CHAPTER X.

MAY.—PART II.

Bigbill the Kingfisher—Phœbe the Flycatcher—Woodthrush—  
Fork-tail the Swallow—Longbill the Woodcock—And  
Others.

THE rattling, clattering cry of Bigbill the Kingfisher could be heard up and down the banks of the river, and his swift, unerring flight was a pleasure to watch. Jaunty and almost handsome he looked, as after one of his flights he would sit above the water on a dead limb or an old stake. His great head poised on one side, his gaze seemed to be able to penetrate the depths below, and from time to time he would execute a swift dive into the pool, when his body would almost disappear. Soon he would bob up, and, returning heavily to his perch, he would lift his head and allow the finny prey to slide down his capacious throat. Occasionally it was a nephew or niece of Speckle the Trout, but more often it was a common fish like Sunfish or Dace, for, to be frank, Speckle and all his relatives were very clever, and they didn't come up near the surface except at dawn and dark, at which times

they varied their usual diet by taking the flies that foolishly buzzed close down over the surface of the stream. Even at such times Bigbill couldn't catch the trout, for they were as quick as lightning. Speckle, seeing a fly above, would start from a point three or four feet below the water's surface, and then with a swift dart would reach the air, and, with a flop that sent the graceful circles widening toward the bank, would return to his former position. Bigbill the Kingfisher had tried many times to take him, but the exertion was so great and his failure so pronounced that finally he gave it up, and, with the utmost unconcern, would sit and see Speckle and his family feeding on the flies that infested the pond. But let Sunfish show himself, and it was different.

Bigbill's mate also had arrived, and now they were wandering up and down the twisting stream to find a suitable place for their summer home. One morning in mid-May they were prospecting as usual, and in their wanderings they came to a great overhanging ledge of rock and had stopped to rest and get luncheon. They had scarcely got settled when they heard the plaintive cry of Phœbe the Fly-catcher close by, and a moment after he sat, with crest erect and jerky tail, beside them.

"So you're back, Bigbill, are you? Gone to housekeeping yet?"

"No, Phœbe. My mate and I can't seem to find the proper spot. How have you been?"

"I can't complain, Bigbill; but what kind of place are you looking for?"

"Why you know, Phœbe, we want to find an earth or clay bank about six feet or more high and as nearly vertical as possible. You know we drill a hole four or five feet long into the bank, and make our house at the inner end. It makes us feel safer that way."

"Don't you line your room with cotton or horsehair, or anything else?" asked Phœbe in surprise.

"No, my wife doesn't believe in pampering the children; she says they're healthier if they are brought up without any particular luxury."

"But isn't it damp, and don't they get rheumatism, or dumb ague, or some other ailment?"

"No, indeed! I've never known a case of any real disease in my family excepting once when my boy Shortfoot thought he'd be smart and walked out of the door while we were away and fell down on those rocks and broke his leg. You must have seen Shortfoot, Phœbe, he sits a little sidewise now; he's married and has a family of his own. He lives down towards Long Meadow, close by salt water, and he's turned out pretty well, too, with no bad kinks in his disposition that I've seen. Last year he raised as fine a pair of youngsters as you'd meet anywhere."

"Indeed!" exclaimed Phœbe; "but, Bigbill, let

me tell you that there's a little cliff right here that I think might suit you. I've built my house under that overhang there; but you can't see it from where you are, although it's in plain sight and your eyes are very keen, too."

"You don't mean to say that it's really there, Phœbe," said Bigbill, as he and his mate scanned the face of the rock. "I can't see it; can you, Sis?"

"Not unless it's that little kind of bunch of moss half way down from the top," answered Bigbill's mate.

"That's it," exclaimed Phœbe in a disappointed voice.

"Indeed, it was only a guess on my part," answered Mrs. Bigbill. "I just thought I'd say something."

"You might show us about that cliff, Phœbe—no, wait a second! There's a fish, and I'm getting tired of having those Speckle people fool me." At the word Bigbill dropped head first into the pool, but in a moment he emerged, shaking his plumage, and returned to his former position.

"Well?" said his mate.

"Well?" he replied quite sharply.

"Didn't you catch anything?"

"No, I didn't catch anything; but, if I live, I'll get even with those trout,—they're the only ones of the fish family that I can't do anything with. They make me weary; but I gave that one a dig he won't





"I'VE BUILT MY HOUSE UNDER THAT OVERHANG THERE."



forget in a hurry. He's gone off to die somewhere in the brook, I'll wager. Come on."

So Phœbe the Flycatcher led the way, and in a moment they came to where the little birds had made their nest. Bigbill and his mate just looked on in wonder. The foundation had been of soft mud, and gradually moss and rock-lichens had been woven in until the outer walls were an exact replica of the rock on which it clung. It was lined with soft sheep's wool and looked as warm and comfortable as could be. As Mrs. Phœbe sat close down over her pearly white eggs, her plumage blended so perfectly with all the surroundings that it would defy anyone or anything to discover it. A half-hour later Bigbill and his mate were hard at work drilling a hole into the soft clay not far from Phœbe's nest, and the brakes clinging to the sides of the ledge, with the maiden-hair fern just coming to life again and the evergreen laurel gnarled and twisted above, made their future home at least a picturesque one.

Just as the sun was lowering himself toward the western horizon they stopped work and started upstream for supper. Woodthrush had begun his evening song, and his metallic music rang out on the evening air in ever-changing cadence. Woodthrush was one of the few birds of the glade who would have been sadly missed. He was not forehanded, but like all artists was more or less improvident. He was essentially a musician, and, although fond of his

wife and family, still he subordinated everything to his study of notes. He spent hours each morning and evening in practising the old melodies and in attempting to invent new trills and variations. Perched high up on the great limb of chestnut or oak,—for one could never find Woodthrush on a twig,—he would make the forest aisles resound with his melodious music. He was not at all obtrusive either. He seemed to love music for music's sake, but other birds whose vocal accomplishments were not as great, would often gather about and, though making believe to be engaged in their usual avocations, would listen with pleasure to the clear, true notes of Woodthrush. Like most great musicians, also, Woodthrush had peculiarities. For instance, when ready to build his nest he would go forth and find the longest strip of paper or string that he could carry, and then he would fly up to the hemlock with it and lay it down as the very foundation of his well built nest, and there it would dangle and often call attention, when otherwise the nest might have been passed by unobserved. Perhaps this dangling string is Woodthrush's crest or coat-of-arms, as it were.

After a little, Bigbill and his mate came to a good spot for supper. It was where the brook spread out into a number of miniature lakes in the broad meadow. The brookside was wooded with swamp-maple and with an occasional wild cherry and chestnut whose limbs spreading over the water gave

the better chance to Bigbill for his fishing operations.

As he sat silent and alert he could see Fork-tail the Swallow and his family skimming over the marshland and moor. He couldn't help admiring the graceful curves and circles that Fork-tail made as with the speed of thought he would change his flight in pursuit of Hum the Mosquito or Buzz the Bee. Once Fork-tail came near enough for conversation, and Bigbill called to him :

“ Fork-tail, where are you living this year? ”

Fork-tail didn't stop his flight but began to describe circles and ovals and ellipses and all sorts of curved figures about the tree on which Bigbill was perched as he answered :

“ Just began my house in top of cow-barn, Bigbill ; only got foundation laid. I feel pretty dirty, too,—been all day in the mud-puddle, middle of the road yonder. I've got to wait a few days for drying before I begin to feather it. You near here? ”

“ Yes, down near Deep Hole. Phœbe showed me a spot. I don't exactly like it,—never built in such a spot before,—but it's pretty, and my mate likes it.”

“ Phœbe the Flycatcher, or do you mean Wood Pewee? ”

“ Phœbe, of course. Wood doesn't live in such places. The fact is, I don't know where Wood does live, do you, Fork-tail? ”

“ Yes, but there are very few birds that do.”

"How's that?"

"I'll tell you, Bigbill," continued Fork-tail, still circling and answering in little chopped-off sentences. "You know, perhaps, what a modest little fellow Wood is; well, his nest's just like himself. I was circling round the white oak on the hill the other day, trying to catch those small black gnats. There was a big cloud of them, and I saw Wood building his nest. He didn't seem to mind me, but when any other bird or beast, particularly Tawny the Red Squirrel, came around, one couldn't find Wood anywhere. I don't know where he went, but he just disappeared for a while."

At this point Fork-tail was interrupted by Bigbill the Kingfisher who said:

"Excuse me, Fork-tail, for a minute," and, turning one side, he went through some queer motions with his throat as though he were going to be sick, and then he *was* sick. Then he turned his head and said:

"Beg pardon, won't you go on, Fork-tail."

But Fork-tail the Swallow had been watching quite interestedly all the time and answered:

"Why, Bigbill, are you sick? What did you throw up?"

"I do that three or four times every day. That pellet is the bones and scales of what I ate this morning. It isn't a very nice habit, but I can't help it. What did you say about Wood Pewee's nest?"



"LONGBILL . . . HAD BEGUN TO THINK OF THE CARES OF THE SEASON."





“Do you mean to say,” lisped Fork-tail as, through interest, he made his circles smaller, “that you always do that?”

“Why yes, Fork-tail. Have you never seen Hoo-Hoo the Great Horned Owl do it? Why, just for fun I picked one of Hoo-Hoo’s pellets to pieces one day, and I found the greatest collection of stuff you ever saw. Mouse-hair, and rabbit-hair, and teeth, and little skulls, and bones, and goodness knows what all. But what I throw away is all one kind—fish-bones and things of that nature.”

“That’s extremely interesting, but, as I was saying, if he were undisturbed Wood could make about the prettiest nest one ever saw. You know Wood isn’t more than half the size of Phœbe, and when his house was finished, upon my word, Bigbill, you couldn’t tell it was there. I don’t know how he does it; but it’s all covered with the moss that grows on the tree, and, being small, it looks exactly like one of those bunches you often see on white oak.”

“Well, I think Phœbe the Flycatcher is very skilful in that way, Fork-tail. Where are you going?”

But Fork-tail was off to the meadow again, and Bigbill resumed his piscatorial work. During all this conversation Longbill the Woodcock, down below on the brookside, had been an interested listener; for away back in later March his wife had begun to think of the cares of the season and had

selected the site for her home. And now in later May her little children were already able to run about with surprising agility. They were very young and still very small, but they could play hide-and-seek to perfection, and from morning until night they occupied themselves with games of this kind. They were as agile as acrobats, and, as Squirm the Black-snake put it, "They're too likely for me." One bright spring morning, for instance, when the apple trees were just dropping their pretty petals and the columbine made the sunny side-hills seem all aglow with redness, Longbill had said to his mate, "Let's give the young ones an outing." So they were taken to the edge of the ferns and alders fringing the stream and were shown a bit of the outer world. They were only about ten days old but as lively as crickets, and they romped about in their queer Woodcockian way and were having the time of their short lives. But just as one was trying to show another the best and quickest way to crawl under a leaf, a warning cry came from one of their parents, who had been standing on a neighbouring tussock and, with wise and judicial mien and with keen eyes, had kept general watch and ward over the family. Simultaneously with his note of alarm came a crashing sound through the brush ahead, and at the next instant Rex the Setter could be seen still distant but approaching rapidly. He had evidently got the scent, for he seemed eager and intense.

Every now and again he would stop and point directly toward the place where Longbill squatted, silent but alert. Longbill whispered, "Hide," to his young ones and then, with a whirr and whistle, up he flew, and to the amazement of his children he went right up to Rex the Setter and dropped as if with broken wing directly in front of the dog's nose, and not six feet away from it. Rex was taken completely by surprise, for he knew perfectly well that it was spring time and "out of season" and was only having a little fun on his own account. This action of Longbill, however, was too much for Rex's nerves, and he actually lost control of himself and started in to pick up Longbill; but just as he came closer, Longbill fluttered helplessly away a little further, and Rex started to chase and Longbill at the same time put on a little more speed, and over and over he rolled as if his leg, as well as his wing, was broken. And it was strange, in thinking it over afterwards as Rex did, to remember that Longbill took a direction so opposite to that in which the scent had lain; but at the time it seemed so easy. For Rex thought to himself, "I'll just take you up to the house for my master, and show what I can do even if it *is* spring." So on and on he followed, and at times he thought he had Longbill surely, for he came so near and the scent was so keen. Then, too, he didn't need his nose, for Longbill was in sight most of the time. Rex knew that he could

tire Longbill out, for apparently the woodcock couldn't fly. Then came the rude awakening, for Longbill, having enticed the dog far from the birds' home, gave one more exhibition of gymnastics, and then it was flip and away! and Rex sat down and tried to think it out. But Longbill sailed up as blithely as ever, and, after making a few turns, started back to his family. Rex trotted homeward with his tail depressed, and that night he dreamed queer dreams of what might have been. But, long before this, Bigbill the Kingfisher had disappeared, and, as night settled down, the only sounds were the splashing of the stream and the evening hum of the spring time.

## CHAPTER XI.

## JUNE.—PART I.

Bullfrog—Squirm the Blacksnake—Thrasher the Brown Thrush  
—Quarrel the Jay—White Eye the Vireo—Mew the Cat-  
bird—Bob White—Billie the Bluebird—Brush—Brake and  
Hoo-Hoo—And Others.

**B**ULLFROG sat lazily basking in the sunlight. Since early morning he had been busy getting breakfast, and now he was resting and digesting his meal. This had consisted of a varied assortment of gnats, flies and mosquitoes. During the morning he had indulged in a few patronising words with Mottle the Toad, who had been clumsily bent on the same errand. Mottle was looked down on by almost all the members of his great family, the Reptilia. The Reptilia dated their ancestry back thousands of years,—even to the days of Pharaoh, they asserted,—and Mottle belonged to some side branch. But Bullfrog and he never got on well together. Modest to the extent of stupidity but lacking in all the progressive, go-ahead qualities of the others, Mottle was treated as an inferior and was constantly suffering rebuffs and insults. Even

Scaley the Lizard and Wall Eye the Newt would push him aside with some coarse jest as to his colour or clumsy gait.

“He doesn’t seem to know anything,” they would say. “Why, when Ringtail the Coon comes by, Mottle just squats down and shuts his eyes and doesn’t try to get away. At the same time perhaps he knows that Ringtail wouldn’t touch him any more than he would poison.”

They all pitied Mottle, and this was the hardest of all to bear. Mottle would sooner a thousand times have been cordially hated. There would have been something positive in that! Still Mottle filled a little niche of his own, and the cattle and the horses in the pasture all avoided hurting him; for didn’t he catch and eat thousands of spiteful mosquitoes every day?

Bullfrog sat in his cosy nook half asleep while Mottle was clumsily foraging about a short distance away. It took Mottle about twice as long as it did Bullfrog to get a good meal. After a while Mottle’s wanderings brought him close to where Bullfrog was lying, and entirely inadvertently he half stumbled, half jumped, right on top of him, and then rolled off. Bullfrog woke with a frightened start, but when he saw who had disturbed his nap he was very angry.

“You dust-coloured Batrachian! what do you mean by invading my house in this way?”

"Excuse me, Bullfrog; I didn't see you. I was only getting breakfast," answered Mottle humbly.

"Why don't you look where you're going! Now I've got to go into the pond for an hour."

With that Bullfrog gave Mottle a parting kick and jumped angrily three feet or more toward the pond, but he failed to notice that his direst enemy, Squirm the Blacksnake, who had been watching him for an hour, lay coiled and threatening right in his path. In fact Bullfrog came down right in the coils of Squirm!

"It seems to me, my slippery friend, that I heard you saying something just now about stopping to think and calculate. I wonder if anyone will miss you!"

During his short lecture Squirm was coiling himself about Bullfrog, but he found the latter so slippery that he had to keep a tight grip on one leg with his sharp fangs in order to make sure.

For an instant Bullfrog was paralysed with fear, but it didn't last long. He scarcely had time to catch his breath before the tip of his last hind toe was sliding out of sight. Then Squirm, after swallowing a number of times, in order to make sure that Bullfrog wouldn't reappear, heaved a sigh and remarked:

"The better the day, the better the deed. This is Sunday, but I've rid the world of a selfish braggart and got a good frog-dinner into the bargain." He

began to crawl lazily away, but Mottle stopped him to say:

"I didn't bear any resentment against him, Squirm, and I'm sorry he's gone; but he was always slurring me and my family. Is that he distending your stomach so? Poor Bullfrog; he didn't follow his own advice."

"Stop that!" cried Squirm a moment later, as fierce-eyed Thrasher the Brown Thrush pounced down and began to pick angrily at his back. "Now! that hurts," but Squirm was slow and unwieldy now, on account of the load he had within him, and as Thrasher kept crying out and calling his friends, the snake started to crawl into the bushes near by. But Redbreast the Robin and Quarrel the Jay and Mew the Catbird and White Eye the Vireo were soon circling about close down over his body and making a great racket, until finally Squirm was glad to drag his aching body out of sight among the overhanging leaves and briars. Then Phœbe the Flycatcher, who had never seen Squirm before, remarked:

"Snakes are queer creatures."

"They tell me," remarked Quarrel the Jay, as the birds sat about somewhat exhausted after their excitement, "that in other parts of the world there are Squirms thirty or forty feet long, and that they swallow big things—as big as Cooney the Fox or Ringtail the Coon."

"I've heard of them, too," broke in Redbreast the



Robin; "they eat only once in six months or the like."

"I never heard that before!" exclaimed Mew the Catbird.

"I never could abide anything without legs, barring Speckle the Trout of course, and Speckle has water legs," said White Eye the Vireo.

"Squirm can't see beyond his own nose, anyway, lying there in the grass," put in Quarrel, "and how he manages to live is more than I can see; he must just creep along and take everything that comes his way. Perhaps he has great powers of smell, though, for I know he climbed a low tree the other day and ate up all Thrasher's cousin's family."

"Is it possible?" exclaimed Mew. "I'm so nervous and excited that I'm going home; I shan't sleep a wink to-night."

So the birds parted, each taking his own flight home.

Down in the sweet-smelling meadow spangled with the new-blown daisy and fragrant with clover-blossoms, lay a little, secluded corner bounded by two sides of an old, grey, crumbling rail-fence. Back of it lay the cool, moist swamp, on the borders of which the wild grape perfumed the air and the blue flag grew tall and majestic. The wild azalia, too, with its varied colours, helped to give shade to the great fern fronds beyond. Here Bob White the Quail had cast his lot and built his house.

Mother Quail's nest lay deftly placed at the foot of the crumbling post and directly beneath the lower rail. It was a simple home formed of dried grasses, but it would defy Cooney the Fox to find it without the careful use of his keen nose. It was surrounded by redtop and timothy, and the leaves of Virginia creeper, with their five leaflets, encircled the old fence and gave grateful shade. Downey the Woodpecker had begun a nest in the old post some years before, but, finding it too soft in the center, had abandoned it and turned it over to Billie the Bluebird, who had occupied it now for three years or more. In such close proximity to each other, it was natural that Billie and Bob White should be intimately acquainted, and as a matter of fact they became fast friends. During the long and tedious period while Mother Bob was brooding her fifteen creamy eggs, Billie sat near by on the old apple-tree branch and with querulous but musical note gave the alarm-signal to his wife and Mrs. Bob White in case of danger.

One bright, perfumed morning, after Bob White and Billie had been sitting near their nests and discussing, among other topics, the difficulties of bringing up a family properly, Billie flew off to his favourite twig, and Bob sat on the top rail of the broken-down fence and made the swamp resound with his sweet, resonant calls, *Bob-White* and *Poor-Bob-White*. Between times, he would hop down and say some



“MOTHER QUAIL'S NEST LAY DEFTLY PLACED AT THE FOOT OF A  
CRUMBLING POST.”



pretty things to his mate spread out so flat over her precious eggs. While thus engaged he heard Billie's warning note, and though he recognised that it wasn't the "hurry call," still he hopped to the top rail and, with crest erect, surveyed the landscape.

A young man and woman were seen in the distance, but approaching. The man was dressed in an outing suit, with cap, leggings and stout shoes. The woman wore a rough jacket and short leather-trimmed skirt and leggings. Both seemed engrossed in conversation, and for some reason or other Bob White didn't feel afraid. So he just dropped down to the lower rail and waited. Surely enough the couple came right up to within a few feet of where the birds were. Then they climbed up and sat on the top rail. Billie the Bluebird sat still and observant on his apple-tree branch and, with head on one side, looked and listened. After a moment the woman said :

"I've had a nice time, but I'll be glad to go back to the children."

"I wonder how the little fellows are," was the answer.

"Oh, John will look out for them and give them a run every day, I think."

"I told him to give them nothing but dog biscuit—no meat—and I don't believe he'll disobey orders."

"What a funny family," thought Bob White; "he said, 'dog biscuit but no meat.'"

"Isn't this a perfect June day?" said the woman.

"Yes, but I suppose it's just as fine in Milford. Do you remember those pretty lines about Midsummer?"

"No. What are they?"

"They run something like this:

"'While the stillness of summer-noontide over hill and deep-embowering wood and rock and tree spreads forth her downy pinions, scattering sleep upon the drooping eyelids of the air.'"

"Oh, trash!" exclaimed Bob White to himself. "He's saying poetry. I fancy they've got a nest somewhere, too, I'll slip away through the grass. I never *was* sentimental."

Billie the Bluebird hadn't comprehended the whole of what was going on; but, seeing Bob creeping away unobserved, he went over and asked him about it. Soon the man and woman climbed down from the fence and disappeared in the distance.

Cooney the Fox had a regular path which he took almost every evening. It lay about seventy-five yards from where Bob White had built his home, and Billie, after he had discovered this habit of Cooney, used to wait for the fox and from a perch above engage him in conversation, in order to divert his attention and incidentally his nose from Bob White's home. So when Cooney came by that night, Billie thought best to tell of the conversation between the man and woman which he had heard

and to elaborate upon the story of the entrancing attractions of Milford, in order if possible to incline Cooney to go over and investigate. Finally, after a remarkably long dissertation, for Billie was usually a bird of few words, he concluded :

“ I heard them say it was only thirty miles to the west of here.”

Cooney was much impressed by Billie's rose-coloured story, and after the two parted company he said to himself :

“ I believe I'll send my boys over there to prospect a little. It'll do the youngsters good and maybe it's a good thing.”

So it happened that when toward daylight he got back near home and had climbed the narrow, rocky path to the top of the ledge, he had about decided to send one or both of his boys down to Milford for a few days to look the land over. He said nothing, however, until after their breakfast, which had consisted of rabbit, *au naturel*; but after the meal he made himself comfortable in his favourite corner and began :

“ Boys, I've got some news for you. I want you to start to-morrow for Milford. It's thirty miles west of here, but from what I hear it's just full of possibilities,—I mean everything good to eat. You can take a good meal before you start and stay three or four days. If it's anywhere nearly as good as I hear it is, why you and your mother and I will just

move over there. I'm getting tired of this place anyhow."

Cooney's boys were overjoyed at the prospect of adventure and entered heartily into the scheme. They slept all day but dreamed of the Eldorado of which their father had told them. They slept that night and well along into the following day. In the late afternoon, after having filled themselves with the remains of the rabbit, *au naturel*, and some mouthfuls of chicken, and with a dessert of good advice from their parents, they started out toward the setting sun.

The night before Cooney had tried to find Hoo-Hoo the great horned Owl, in order to ask him some questions about the route to be taken; but he had been unsuccessful in catching him at home. Hoo-Hoo was an authority in that section about roads and paths and hen-houses; but Cooney had heard that Hoo-Hoo was busily engaged with his growing family,—a family, in fact, almost grown,—and that the education of his youngsters was taking up most of his time.

Brush and Brake started out in single file as they had always been taught, and they soon turned toward Nathan's pond. Thence after a half hour's trot they came to North Guilford and Lake Quinnebaug. Here they decided to stop for supper. They were not very hungry, so that a young pullet from Scranton's farm and two or three frogs from the



pond were ample. Then, too, they had been cautioned by their father against overloading their stomachs.

Just as they had finished their meal and were cleaning up somewhat preparatory to the longer run,—for they hoped to reach Milford by daylight,—Hoo-Hoo dropped down right over them. For a second they were startled, but as he spoke they recognised their friend.

“Hello, boys! I saw your father this evening, and I’m almost out of breath trying to catch up with you. You’re off to Milford he tells me. Well, I’ve been no further than New Haven and didn’t think much of that place. I’d starve in that locality; but Milford may be very nice, and I believe you have only to keep on a few miles after leaving New Haven. I think you’ll find the people there about like other folks. I can’t go any farther with you; but if you skirt the old Boston turnpike from now on, I fancy you’ll be pretty nearly right.”

With a final “Good Luck” Hoo-Hoo disappeared in the darkness.

“I was thinking, Brake,” remarked Brush after a few moments of silence, “that if we meet any of our kind on the road they may make some remarks about my tail, or rather the fact that I haven’t one. What do you think?”

“Pshaw, Brushy, it seems to me that’s your best hold. You just tell them honestly how it came

about, and you'll be a hero. Don't you remember after the Spanish war, what a fuss was made over the fellows that came back with wounds, or with one leg gone, or with anything that could show that they had been there—why, they were made much of. I wouldn't feel that way. Come along."

So off they started again. They didn't talk; they just trotted along, in single file, with Brush in the lead, for he was the older, and so towards morning they reached the outskirts of New Haven. Then they turned off to the north and west, and at about six o'clock they came to a cross-road. There stood a sign-post, and after a great deal of figuring they decided that they would turn up to the right. The sign read: "Milford 4 miles. Derby 3 miles." They had done right, for in less than an hour they could see from the high ground the steeples of the First and Second churches in the distance.

So far they hadn't seen anything very different from their old home at Rockland, excepting that there were more houses and barking dogs. They were tired out and decided to go up to Turkey Hill and rest before proceeding further. They didn't know that it was Turkey Hill; but it was, and a comfortable place they found it, all dark and shady with nothing but cedar and hemlock trees and a carpet of soft moss.

Toward evening they started out again in order to look things over, and by night they were down

toward Wheeler's Farms. Here they stopped for refreshment. A large flock of Pekin ducks were sitting and preening themselves at the side of a pond back of the farm buildings, and Brake brought one in just as a sample. They both pronounced it excellent. After their meal they went down through Camp Meeting woods and Oronoque Run and the Plains, and by the next morning they hoped to see Milford proper. They curled up close together under an overhanging ledge and slept.

Scarcely awake the same morning they were startled by some most unusual sounds far ahead, near a great house that they could now see through the early morning mist.

"Come on, Brake, get the cotton out of your ears and let's go down and see what that is."

"All right, brother, but we must go carefully. You know this is a strange country to us."

Soft as snow was their tread as they trotted cautiously forward. They passed to the left of the great barn and farm-buildings and skirted the swamp until they came to the road, and then, just as Brush was about to cross it, they both came face to face with the queerest animal! It was black with tan markings, a long whip-like tail, long hound-like ears and the queerest, twisted-up legs that looked as though they had been broken and badly mended. These legs spread out sidewise in front. The body was very long and the legs very short. But the

creature had the mildest expression in his soft brown eyes and didn't seem particularly surprised at seeing the strangers. The look he gave them disarmed suspicion at once, and both Brush and Brake sat down and looked at the new animal.

"Why, where's your tail?" spoke up the new creature. "I know what you are; you're foxes. Mother's told me all about foxes, but I never heard of a fox without a tail."

"Alas, stranger," spoke up Brush in accents of sorrow, "it came off in honorable combat."

"Oh, tell me all about it."

"Yes, but may I first inquire what you are?" answered Brush in his smoothest voice.

"Certainly. I'm Charlemagne Pretzel-Brown, master's dachshund pup, and I, too, have a history. See that scar? Well—but go on and tell me first."

Then Brush recounted all about the fatal trip down to Poverty and told with a perceptible shudder about Deacon Smith Clark's gun. Charlemagne sat and listened with intense interest, his eyes dilated and his mouth slightly opened. When Brush had finished he turned to Charlemagne and said:

"Now, Master Brown, won't you tell us your history?"

"Oh, it's a long story and I don't think I'll bother you with it now; but I will say that my name is Pretzel-Brown and not plain Brown. My father can



“MAY I FIRST INQUIRE WHAT YOU ARE?”



trace his history back an awful way, and so can my mother."

"What do you mean? .*We* go back of the Revolution, don't we, Brake?"

"Pshaw, that doesn't amount to anything. Daddy told Sister Hilda and me that we were Egyptians once."

"Who's Sister Hilda?"

"Why, my sister,—her full name's Hildegarde Pretzel-Brown."

"That's a hard name to remember, I should think. Does she look like you?"

"Not in colour; but we've grown up together, and she's a dead game sport for a girl. I'll introduce you, if you'll come over to the house."

"Not to-day, I think, Mr. Brown," answered both in a breath, and Carley, as he was called at home, thought he detected an exchange of glances in their cunning eyes. In fact he was suspicious of his new acquaintances from the first glance and a wee bit afraid too; but his fearless character asserted itself, and he put on a bold front and was even a bit patronising when at parting he said:

"Well, I hope you'll have a pleasant journey home, but if you behave you may stay here for a week or so."

## JUNE.—PART II.

Bob White's Family—Brownie the House Wren—Ruby-throat  
the Humming-Bird— Wood Pewee.

MRS. BOB WHITE had been a mother for ten days now, and with her family of twelve she was accustomed to scour the hillside adjacent to her home in search of toothsome delicacies for her little flock. During her rambles she kept a sharp lookout for Squirm the Blacksnake, who was wont to lie concealed in the grass and dart out unexpectedly if chance threw a young quail in his path. The little ones were very small at this stage of their lives—"like little winks," as Hoo-Hoo the Great Horned Owl once put it—and their dartings here and there, as they played with each other or chased the crickets and other insects from place to place, were like little flashes of yellow light. Meanwhile Bob White would sit on his favourite fencepost and send out his resonant whistle, and from time to time he would join his mate in her picnicking and would admire his comely children.



As they grew apace their parents extended their wanderings, and dale was added to hillside until finally they took no account of home-lot, but spent the night wherever they might happen to find themselves. One evening late in June, just before roosting time, they were all gathered together and were grooming themselves before retiring to the bog-meadow where at this time they usually spent their nights. They had found a specially rich spot, a meadow rich in crickets and seeds and little green shoots of clover. So they had camped there for a whole week. On the afternoon referred to they were sitting idly about and Bob White was preening his pretty feathers and was showing the children the quickest way of pulling loose the encircling casings that still held most of their plumage in thrall. During an interval of toilet-making his oldest child, a butterball of a young quail, who by the way had always been of a thoughtful, investigating turn of mind, turned to his parent and said :

“Daddy, how did we get out of the shell? I don’t remember what I did at all. It was dark, and all I recollect was a crackling sound, and, the next thing, we were all sitting cosey and warm under mother’s wings.”

“I’ll tell you, children,” answered Bob White, clearing his throat and settling down for a little lecture. “Your mother sat three full weeks on those little eggs before you came out, and it wasn’t

until about eighteen days had gone by that we were sure you were alive. Then one morning she whistled for me to come, and then she told me that all the eggs were good excepting one. She could feel you little chicks moving about and trying to pick your way out. Nature has told you to begin picking at the big end, and now you may ask how you found room to turn around and make that little circle of holes until you broke through. Well, now you just listen. You've never seen a freshly broken egg, I think. If you have you've noticed the big, round, yellow center. That's called the yolk, and when your mother begins to set, that's what feeds you and keeps life in you. Of course you know that you can't eat your cake and have it too. So when the yolk is gone it leaves a space where it was, and there's where you get room to work at picking the first holes through. Do you understand?"

"Yes, daddy," answered his interested listeners, "and is that the way all the birds do?"

"Yes, children, all of them. Now we'll go to roost," and at this order, down to the swampside they scattered, the young birds flying weakly, but encouraged by the sight and sound of their whirring parents. They all dropped down in a little bunch together, and after a few moments were sitting in a circle with their tails all close crowded in the center. Bob White made a practice of sleeping in this manner, for in case of sudden alarm during the night,



“BARRED OWL HIS COUSIN, WHOSE CLAWS WERE LIKE NEEDLES.”



each one could spring out in a different direction. They were often startled thus by Cooney or by Hoo-Hoo or Barred Owl his cousin, whose claws were like needles, so sharp were they. On the following morning, at a signal from their parent, the Bob White family would be up and away. They did not as a rule fly far, for Bob White walked to his breakfast, but wished at the same time to leave as little evidence of his nightly roost as possible. In the meadow they roamed quite freely, but Mother Quail kept a keen watch, and her warning cry could be heard from time to time as some shadow, possibly that of Red Shoulder the Hawk, crossed the sky in line with the sun and aroused suspicion. Often the cry of alarm was unnecessary, as when John Crow or Quarrel the Jay flew past; but the chicks obeyed instantly and seemed to know that their parents were solicitous for their welfare only and were not trying to exercise unnecessary authority.

One day when the young quails were almost as big as robins and could fly quite well, they were taken, as a special picnic, up to the farmhouse, in order to see what was going on and to accustom themselves to novel sights and sounds. As they approached the farm buildings they were cautioned again and again to be careful; but through pardonable excitement they soon became scattered, and as they came close to the woodshed three of the flock found

themselves separated from the rest. They were startled at hearing the sawing of wood, an entirely new sound. They called in a timid way for their parents, but received no answer. Just as they were becoming really alarmed and about to scamper back from the buildings, a funny little bird, with slightly curved but sharply pointed bill and jerky tail, darted down and perched on an old cherry-stump close to where they squatted. He was a curious little chap dressed all in brown, with little pin-head markings of a greyish colour on his back. He seemed to have seen them and darted about in the jauntiest way and found time every few seconds to sing his queer but pleasing little song.

"Who are you?" he snapped out during one of the intervals of song. No answer.

"You look like young quail," he continued. "I can't always tell Ruffle's young ones from Bob White's, but you're so slick-looking, I think I'm right. Where are your father and mother?"

"We're lost, Mister," spoke up the little cock-quail, reassured by the kindly actions of the droll bird.

"I'll find them for you," exclaimed the latter. "I'm Brownie the House Wren. I live right here in that flower-pot. The farmer fixed it up for me. Good of him, wasn't it? My mate's laid a number of eggs—about twenty, I think—and she's trying to get the greater part of them hatched."

"Twenty eggs!" ejaculated little cock-quail; "but she must be bigger than you!"

"No, she's the same size that I am; but she lays many that she doesn't expect will ever come out, just to be on the safe side, you see."

"Do you know about the yolk, and the air-space, and how the birdlings pick their way out, Mr. Wren?"

"Surely, child; why, I'm a three-year-old. I've raised two families, one of eight and one of five. How many are you?"

"We are twelve; but daddy was glad one egg didn't hatch, for he says there's no luck in thirteen."

"And I believe he's right, children. I'd like to show you what nice eggs my mate lays—small, but pretty brown things—but I feel that I'd better find your family first. Which way did they go?"

"I can't tell you, Mr. Wren; we just missed them all of a sudden."

"I'll find them for you all right; but, young as you are, you needn't bother to call me Mr. Wren, for I am not used to it. Just call me Brownie, as the rest do."

So Brownie started off, hopping from twig to weed and occasionally flitting up above into the branches of the lilac or cherry and making a little reconnaissance. The young quail followed in the thick, green grass as best they could and placed every

confidence in their new acquaintance; and he deserved it, for in a very short time he had led them back to the main flock. On their way, however, little cock-quail by accident almost stepped on Ground Finch, who, concealed in a small tuft of grass, was brooding low over her dust-coloured eggs. Little cock-quail got a dig in the ribs from Ground Finch for his carelessness, and this scared him, and peeping, he ran off into the grass and was again lost for a few moments; but he heard his parents' cries close at hand, and, after a moment of talk with Brownie, who was heartily thanked by Bob White, the party started for home again.

. . . The honeysuckle on the lattice-work was heavy with perfume. The Virginia creeper and the great scarlet trumpet-flower hung assertive in the bright sunlight. On the borders of the kitchen-garden the June roses were already beginning to drop their petals, and the graceful fronds of the bleeding hearts were nodding wearily in the heat of the midday sun. The gladiolus, tall and flamboyant, moved gracefully in the lightest air, while near by the tall and stately Hollyhocks stood sentinel-like and still. The honey-bee busied himself in loading up with his sugary burden, and the air was all a-hum with the sounds of summer. Ruby-throat the Humming Bird was now perhaps the most active and persistent in his calling. From morning until night he could be seen coming and going from



flower to flower. He would place his sharp little bill in the open mouth of the trumpet-flower, and, after having extracted its superfluous sweetness, would, with the speed of a flash of light, dart side-wise to the next bloom and after a few moments disappear as if through magic. It was hard to follow Ruby-throat in his movements, much harder even than to watch Bumble Bee, who was clumsy in comparison ; but Brownie the House Wren became so interested one day that he neglected his usual work and just thought that he'd find out where Ruby-throat *did* live. Brownie's eyes were keen, and when he saw Ruby fly again and again to a certain white-oak tree near by, he naturally suspected that there was some reason for it. So he just flew over and sat quietly on one of the lower limbs. Soon he was rewarded by seeing and hearing his busy little friend come buzzing up. Ruby alighted first on an outer twig and looked about in a knowing way, then commenced to preen and dress his bright iridescent plumage. After a few moments, and as if to make sure that no one noticed, he darted up to a small fork on one of the middle branches of the tree and disappeared. This was too much for Brownie, who was consumed with curiosity and much perplexed ; so he bobbed up to where he had last seen the bright-coloured, little hummer, when, as he sat looking sharply about, a little glint of green flashed into his eyes, and there close beside him sat Ruby-throat,

and just beneath he could descry Mrs. Ruby squatting low on what appeared to be a little knob of wood. Brownie himself was discovered at the same instant, and with a little, vicious hiss Ruby-throat turned on him.

“What you doing here?”

“Nothing, Ruby. You know me, don't you? I'm Brownie the House Wren; we've always been friends.”

“Yes, but I have no patience with people that sneak and that interfere with other people's business.”

“I'm not sneaking; I'm just curious to see how you little creatures live.”

“Well, now that he has found out, jump up, wifey, and show Brownie your eggs.”

“Ah, isn't that wonderful! Why, they're no bigger than peas and your nest is beautiful. No one ever finds it out, does he?”

“Very seldom. You see it's a good deal like Wood Pewee's house, except that it's so small. It's a strange thing that Wood has a nest in the same tree this year.”

“He's a wonderful bird, too,” answered Brownie; “but I wish he wouldn't begin singing so early in the morning, and then his songs seem terribly sad to me.”

“I like them,” lisped Mrs. Ruby-throat. “Wood began this morning at three o'clock, and, after he'd



“WHY, THEY ARE NO BIGGER THAN PEAS, AND YOUR NEST  
IS BEAUTIFUL.”



waked me, his little song put me right to sleep again."

"Well, good-bye, Ruby. Thank you for showing me your nest," and with that Brownie was off, and a moment later his tireless little trills could be heard from vine and bush near the woodshed.

## CHAPTER XIII.

JULY.—PART I.

Bullhead the Pout—Musk the Water-rat—Longbill the Woodcock—Moccasin the Water-snake—Sidelegs the Water-beetle—Dart the Spider—Darning-needle—Greenhead—The Black-duck Family—Snapping-turtle.

“**A** NOTHER sweltering day,” croaked Greenhead, cousin to Bullfrog, as the sun in majestic stillness showed his blinding face over the crest of Knob Hill and made the water of Ben Smith’s pond shine like burnished silver. “If this keeps up we’ll be stewed; the water is actually hot now at four o’clock.” Greenhead was talking to himself; but after a moment Bullhead the Pout stuck his uncouth nose above the surface of the water and blubbered out: “It’s pretty hot, Greenhead, but it’s a good plan, in the middle of the day, to get down a foot or two into the mud. I find it cool and pleasant.”

Bullhead the Pout was ugly, stupid and simple. All the denizens of the pond snubbed him except Moccasin the Water-snake, who occasionally ate one of his family. Musk the Water-rat, who was clever,



“MADE THE WATER OF BEN SMITH’S POND SHINE LIKE SILVER.”





used to compare Bullhead, in the pond, to Mottle the Toad on shore. Musk used to say:

"Bullhead wearies me. He can't talk so that you can understand what he says, on account of that mouth of his. Why, every time he yawns it looks as though his head were cut off, and those little, beady eyes look cunning, but there's no sense back of them. Then he lives most of the time down in the mud. Now I never saw any one that lived in the mud who had much sense. Take Lamper the Eel, he's a stupid kind of snake-fish; or take Sucker, or Spot the Mudturtle, or any of the rest of those fellows; they don't seem to know anything; they've got no cleverness; they just get along and manage to live. As for Bullhead, no one except Moccasin would think of eating him, because of those stickers on each side of his chin—regular, sharp-pointed bones—but when Moccasin gets a bullhead by the head, as the snake swallows him, the stickers lie flat on the fish's sides until he's digested."

Musk the Water-rat always spoke sharply and at some length. The Pond people said that he did it to call attention away from his odour which was far from pleasant, though most of the neighbours of field, wood, and stream preferred him to Plumetail the Skunk, while a few couldn't endure him. His odour was a heavy kind of musky perfume that caused one to want to get fresh air.

So, after Bullhead had made his remark to Green-

head about getting cool down in the mud, Greenhead didn't answer at once but finally remarked languidly :

“ Bullhead, if you thought an inch or so ahead of your nose you'd remember that after *we* once come out of the mud we've got to breathe fresh air and plenty of it. What do you think would become of me if I tried to get cool down there in the mud for fifteen minutes? I'd stay cool forever. You had better go and read your primer.”

After a moment of silent thought Bullhead gave a lazy flop and disappeared.

“ Phew!” gasped Greenhead, “ I'm all heated from talking to that stupid lout,” and he made a vicious snap at the water-gnats that had been buzzing about his head for five minutes and seemed to be attracted to it like moths by a flame. As the sun rose higher and higher in the sky the heat continued to increase, and Greenhead decided that he had better move into a more shady spot. Pursuant to the thought, he covered the ground between himself and the ferns, which grew fresh and green near by, and was settling himself for a quiet nap when he noticed Longbill the Woodcock sitting half asleep under the heavy fronds.

Greenhead and Longbill had been well acquainted for some time. Their tastes were not unlike, and the general territory they covered was similar. So they started a little talk. Longbill began :

“It’s hot, Greenhead, isn’t it?”

“Indeed it is, Longbill, but what’s the use of reminding a fellow of it all the time.”

“Why, I haven’t seen you before to-day.”

“But I’ve met others, and I’d like to have someone begin conversation by saying something different, something cooling, like ‘When do you go down in the mud for the winter?’ or, ‘Did you notice Farmer Green’s ice-house this morning? or——”

“I was only trying to be civil, Greenhead, and was going to tell you of a fearful tragedy I saw this morning; but if you’re so sensitive why——”

Greenhead was a notorious gossip himself, and, when Longbill reached this point, he pricked up his nose—having no ears to speak of—and said eagerly:

“Now, Longbill, I didn’t mean anything. I like to hear you talk, for it’s always interesting. Besides, I’m much irritated this morning, by the heat, I suppose. Why, it’s like jumping into boiling water to go in the pond, and then I had a short talk with that fellow Bullhead, and he’s always saying something one doesn’t want to listen to.”

“Talking to Bullhead, were you? How long ago?”

“Why, about three-quarters of an hour ago—perhaps an hour.”

“So? Well, you’ll never have a chance to tell fairy tales to him again.”

“I don’t care for that kind of remark, Longbill.

I may be what they call sanguine; but I think I tell the truth—at least I think I try—but what are you talking about?”

“Oh! nothing much! Two deaths in the pond, that’s all, and pretty exciting, too.”

“Why, Longbill, what *do* you mean, how’d you hear—tell me about it—who were they?”

“I thought I’d interest you.—How do you do, Yellowthroat”—as Maryland the Warbler dropped down above them. “Well, Greenhead, I was rambling along the edge of Ben Smith’s pond here, finishing my breakfast, when suddenly I came upon Moccasin the Water-snake. His actions rather puzzled me. He lay there all coiled up excepting his head, which was held up straight and just moved as regularly as could be, from side to side. Meanwhile his black tongue was shooting out and in, in curious fashion. I stood still and didn’t make a sound. But while I was watching I saw a slight commotion in the water, and looking down I saw Bullhead the Pout sucking away at something in the water. He was trying to get some breakfast off those lily pads, I think, and was most interested. He was shoving a leaf ahead of him, and finally he got close to shore. Then I saw what Moccasin was doing. He was lying low and waiting till Bullhead came near enough, and he was going through those tactics with his head to fool the fish. I noticed Moccasin particularly. Hasn’t

he grown, Greenhead? He's twice as big as he was last year. Well, when Bullhead got quite close up to the shore, Moccasin just struck so quickly that I couldn't see it. You know I'm not very sure of my eyes in the daytime,—not as bad as Hoo-Hoo, you know, but I get slightly blinded by the sun—but at any rate the next minute I saw that there was trouble all around. Moccasin had missed his aim, and instead of striking Bullhead squarely on the nose, he caught him a trifle sidewise, but as usual he started to swallow him right there. In a couple of seconds I knew that there was something serious, and do you know what happened? Bullhead had been greatly scared; but he didn't forget to stick out those side-arms of his, and one of them went clear through Moccasin's throat and showed for nearly a half inch outside. You could see the other one opposite poking the skin out like a tent. Why it just choked Moccasin, so that he couldn't swallow, or say anything, or even breathe. I tell you, Greenhead, it was a comical sight except for the terrible-ness of it. Moccasin was doing a kind of ballet-dance, and poor Bullhead's body from the gills down was flopping about in the wildest way. You would have thought the two together a new species of animal with two tails and no head!"

Longbill stopped for a moment to catch his breath.

"Go on, Longbill, I'm intensely interested."

"That's about all. They're lying down there by the pond-side, and if you want to see them, you'd better go now, for they won't keep long in this weather."

"You don't mean to say they're dead, do you?"

"Yes, indeed, and both dead from want of breath."

After a pause Greenhead said:

"I can't feel very sorry though, Longbill; for Moccasin and my family never did get along, and then Bullhead was a stupid kind of fish and didn't do much good to anyone."

While Longbill was speaking, Sidelegs the Water-beetle had been an interested listener. He had been coursing about among the stems of the water-lilies, coming to the surface from time to time, to get a breath of air and to chat for a moment with Dart the Spider. Dart the Spider was quite a favourite with all the denizens of Ben Smith's pond. He was taciturn in the extreme and had never been known to vouchsafe a remark of his own accord; but he forced attention to himself by the different feats he performed on the bright surface of the pond. His long legs spread out, and, apparently with no effort, he skipped about with the quickness of thought and seemed to go forwards or backwards with equal ease. He was always dressed in a suit of dark brown with only a small white stripe down along his side. Sidelegs and

Dart had long been fast friends, and there had never been a question on which they had disagreed ; for, though living in exactly the same locality, yet their habits, food and mode of life were quite distinct. Sidelegs fed entirely below the surface, while Dart kept above it and made short little streaks along the still water as he shot here and there. So on this morning when Sidelegs heard the news he went at once in search of Dart. Just as he reached the lily-pad on which Dart usually rested when not doing his tricks, he was quite surprised to see Darning-needle sitting gossiping with Dart in as friendly a way as you please.

“ Good-morning, Darning-needle, good-morning, Dart. Have you made up ? ”

There had been some coldness between the two.

“ Yes ; it wasn't much,” spoke up Darning-needle. “ I was only trying to scare Dart, anyway, and we've got to hang together now, Sidelegs ; there's been a fearful tragedy this morning.”

“ Why, that's what I came to tell you. Have you heard of the death of Moccasin and Bullhead ? ”

“ Yes, but did you hear the particulars ? ”

“ I should say I did ! They were both suffocated, each trying to kill the other ; but Moccasin began the fight by attempting to make a fish-breakfast of Bullhead.”

“ I'm glad I haven't any enemies,” remarked Darning-needle. “ I don't know exactly why it is.

Even Phœbe the Flycatcher doesn't bother me; but I don't know that he could catch me if he tried, unless I were sleeping. The only living thing that doesn't care for me is Hum the Mosquito, and he has good reason for feeling that way. I'm extremely fond of Hum, you know."

Dart relaxed his feelers just a bit at this attempt at witticism, and Sidelegs actually smiled.

Just at this moment a small boy, wearing hip rubber boots, and a white linen cap, and carrying a net fastened to the end of a bamboo stick appeared, whistling and happy, on the green shore of the pond. Just behind him walked a good-looking man, who was giving the boy directions as to how to net the brilliant butterflies that from time to time, on soft and silent wing, crossed his path. The man was speaking:

"There, my boy, see that specimen! It's Phaeton. Try to get him—careful now. Don't be too quick; he's getting some honey from that Ragged Robin."

When Darning-needle saw the strangers he couldn't understand what it was all about, but after a moment he exclaimed:

"Spider, I know what those people are after! They're trying to catch Phaeton or some of his family, and Phaeton's so unsuspecting, I believe he'll get into trouble. I'm going over to warn him," and with a dart quick as a flash, Darning-needle perched on the



point of a beautiful, purple iris-flower within a yard or so of the boy.

"I say, Phaeton," he lisped, "look out for those fellows!" But Phaeton was so deeply engrossed in getting his breakfast that he didn't notice Darning-needle's little cry of warning, and a moment later the tall man was running a long pin, that looked to Darning-needle like a shining dagger, through Phaeton's pretty, velvet body. Then the man produced a pasteboard box from his pocket and soon had Phaeton firmly fastened to the floor of the receptacle.

"That's the first specimen we've found this year," he exclaimed joyfully.

"Why, Papa, we have twenty-two now," answered the boy.

"Yes, but this is the first Phaeton, my lad."

Darning-needle groaned inwardly and being of quick temper completely lost control of himself.

"I'll try to scare you folks," he cried in anger, and with that he began a series of dartings in and out at the two who had now seated themselves on the grass close by and were admiring poor Phaeton, who was not dead (for the long pin had run through on one side only), but who kept his brilliant wings opening and closing slowly and hopelessly. At his second attack Darning-needle struck the boy squarely on the cheek, and with the frightened cry: "Oh, Papa, the bee has stung me," the lad dropped the box, which,

in its fall, struck a stone and set Phaeton free. But two of his ribs had been broken, and he felt very sore. Still he was able with great effort to reach a stake that stood twenty yards out from the bank. Darning-needle joined his friend and tried to console him, and to congratulate him on his narrow escape; but Phaeton could do nothing but pant and gasp and thank his stars that he had got free from his horrible prison.

And then the man and the boy came down to the water's edge and called Phaeton names. But finally they picked up the empty box and started away up the road. Then the frogs began to croak again, and the usual hum and buzz of the life of Ben Smith's pond began afresh, and it was the sleepy, subdued monotone of midsummer noon. Spot the Mudturtle with his numerous family sat in shiny line along the half-submerged log. No weather was too hot for Spot, and during a good part of the day he would lie there apparently lifeless or asleep, and bask in the baking sunlight, but should any one happen along near the bank he would slide with a little slump off into the water and disappear.

Far up at the bend of the pond where the water-alders grew close and tangled, Webfoot the Black Duck had built his nest among the bogs and leaves, and his family of ten were now well feathered. They made daily trips about the borders of the lake. This morning they were as usual poking about and

picking up the various seeds and grasses that grew in abundance in the shoal water along the shore. It made an odd sight to see them tipping up and, with tails pointed in air, feeding from the bottom. At times all ten would be upside-down at once, their tail-feathers looking at a distance like a lot of small, triangular, sharply pointed stumps. At such times Webfoot and his wife kept watch, and with keen eyes and heads erect jealously guarded their precious flock. They could quickly and unerringly scent and see any danger from above the surface; but when it came to any terror or threat from the muddy depths below, then they were all at sea, as it were, and their fright was correspondingly greater.

Snapping Turtle took advantage of this fact, and it was through his depredations that Deacon Botsford, the only farmer who had home lots abutting on Ben Smith's pond, was obliged so often to count and re-count his flock of Pekin ducks in order to make sure that one or more were really missing. Snap, as both friends and enemies called him, employed methods which were simple enough,—so simple that he rarely had the opportunity of putting them in practice upon Webfoot or Blue Wing the Teal, who were both clever. He would just lie on the bottom of the pond near where the Deacon's ducks were known to feed. His shell was exactly the colour of the mud in which he delighted to wallow, so that even when the ducks were feeding

on the bottom it was impossible to detect him. But he, on the other hand, looking upwards, could see every object, however small, floating on the water ; as he had the blue sunlit sky beyond as a background. Snap's mouth was strong, and the edges of the upper jaw were as keen as a knife and overlapped the lower, so that anything held between became as if in a vise. Then, too, he was as quick as thought in shooting out his head from its horny casing. By means of these powers of attack or defence, it was easy enough to catch a leg and draw a duck down, and, once below the surface, Snap just waited and soon took his meal at his leisure. By bitter experience Webfoot knew of these things, although his family with keen instinct had usually escaped. But on this sultry day every one living near or in Ben Smith's pond seemed careless and lazy.

Snap wasn't at all hungry ; for, besides the ducks and frogs and fish he usually ate, he got considerable nourishment through numerous odds and ends and was always fat. On the other hand, when on this afternoon he saw from below the whole Webfoot family feeding blithely above him, his natural instincts overcame all other thought, and with one quick motion of his head and his long and almost snake-like neck he had Webfoot's oldest boy fast by the leg. Snap was a two-year-old Snapping Turtle and strong for his age ; but as he struggled to pull Webfoot's boy below, he thought that he had

undertaken a very hard task. Snap was not large; still he had secured a good hold well up above the tarsus. After a few moments, however, he was forced to learn that the difference between the taking of one of Deacon Botsford's fowl and the capture of a wild duck was very great; for try as he did he couldn't force the duckling's head below the surface, and after exhausting every means he was at last compelled to loosen his hold from sheer exhaustion. During the struggle Webfoot and his mate on wing encircled the pond and uttered plaintive cries, while the nine remaining children scurried away close in among the bushes and grasses, and hid in terror in the shallows where Snap couldn't go.

As at last the latter released his prey, the young duck exhausted from his exertions and unable to swim—for his right leg was crushed and bleeding—flopped hastily from danger's reach but glanced back from time to time through fear of pursuit.

That evening when their parents were giving them their usual talk before putting their heads under their wings, Webfoot remarked: "It was one of those occurrences you can't count on, children, and we must all be glad that it was no worse."

But the wounded duckling sat there groaning with pain and thought that it was bad enough.

## CHAPTER XIV.

JULY.—PART II.

The Salt-meadow Neighbors: Stilts the Great Blue Heron—  
Teeter the Sandpiper—Yellowleg the Snipe—Jack the Cur-  
lew—And Others.

DOWN on the salt-meadow there was perhaps more bird-life to be seen than anywhere else in Connecticut. This was especially true for the month of July. Put on a magic cap, and go with me down to the edge of the swamp-land, and wander along near the borders of the creeks. We have only traversed fifty yards in the open, when *Ardea* the Green Heron rises, squawking, ahead of us, and after a short flight drops ungracefully down to the mud again. It is low tide, and but little water is left in the black, slimy bed of the stream, which in tortuous lines meets more and more of its own kind until, as one emerges at last on the sandy beach of Long Island Sound, the creek has attained the width of an English river, and at high water appears to be a great stream sparkling in the heated sunlight. Looking back over the level expanse of waving green we observe a shimmering, rising atmosphere, the result of a heated exhalation from below.

As we emerge from the swamp-maple cover our ears are saluted by the meadow-lark's sweet whistle from the grass, and the Marsh-wren bobs about among the fringing sedge and seems to be the busiest citizen of the meadows. The salt-grass sings with sounds—the subdued sounds of midsummer, punctuated from time to time perhaps by Jim Crow's hoarser call, as, perched on the tall stake—future guardian of the haystack—he flaps his wings and tells the world how happy he feels. Marsh Hawk, too, is there, and on silent, swooping wing, he glides noiselessly up and down the wide expanse, ready at any moment to drop down on the young and inexperienced birds who have not yet learned to know this malicious marauder. Stilts the Great Blue Heron, has left his footprints in the mud and sand, and a whole wake of desolation among the numerous Mummychog family as he went by. It did not seem as though there was any limit to the capacity of Stilts the Great Blue Heron. He pursued the Mummychogs at low water only, when the receding tide left numerous, isolated pools filled with these little fish, and it was easy for Stilts to take all that he wanted; for, with his strong beak and long sinuous neck, he could strike with lightning-like rapidity, so that any fish within three feet was likely enough to find its way down the long canal between Stilts's bill and his stomach. Sometimes he was known to take two or even three at a stroke! He would start

at the narrow portion of the creek and with slow and silent tread thread his way in stately fashion clear down to where could be seen the bright, blue waters of the Sound stretching off in limitless perspective.

Standing erect he was easily five feet tall, so that if any unusual sound was heard, he would simply raise his head and take an observation of his surroundings. On his journey down he was accustomed to croak out a few words of salutation to the various birds he met. But he was neither sociable nor popular. He had no particular enemies excepting perhaps Whitehead the Eagle, who used occasionally to chase and kill him, which was easy, for Stilts was slow and clumsy on the wing. But even Whitehead passed him by as a rule, for Stilts's flesh was coarse and rank and fishy, and it was principally for the fun of scaring him that Whitehead ever even noticed him. There was nothing lovable in Stilts's make-up. He would spear away at poor, little, grotesque Fiddler the Crab, just to see him run for his hole, and he would make a pass at Saltwater the Marsh-hen and snap out a coarse jest as Saltwater disappeared into the reeds and grass. He had large, forbidding eyes of bright yellow with black pupils, which made one avoid him without knowing him.

On this hot July morning he was on his usual pilgrimage down the stream. Teeter the Sandpiper, an unassuming little member of the great shore-bird





“STANDING ERECT HE WAS EASILY FIVE FEET TALL.”



family, was trotting jauntily ahead, picking up the small snails that abounded on the edge of the water and trying to keep out of the way of the great bird behind him who, he thought, commanded respect from his size, if for no other reason.

“You speckle-breasted little fool,” croaked out Stilts. “Can’t you keep out of the way? You’re spoiling my breakfast, and, if you haven’t sense enough to do anything else, I wish you’d keep that tail of yours quiet ; it makes me nervous.”

“Yes, sir,” apologised Teeter the Sandpiper ; “I was trying to keep away, but will you please tell me which way you’re going?”

Teeter had come quite close and seemed very sorry to have offended the great bird.

“You take that,” and Stilts shot out his sharp, yellow bill like a flash ; but he missed his mark, and Teeter skimmed off on hurried wing down the creek close under the cover of the bank. As he flitted off he called back :

“I was going to tell you about those men with a gun, over the bank ; but you’ll hear from them.”

Stilts the Great Blue Heron was startled by this parting shot, but much more so by the one to come. He raised his head suddenly, and there, within forty yards, were two men both carrying guns and looking straight in his direction. There wasn’t a moment to be lost in any especial thought or calculation ! Stilts surmised, however, that the men had seen Teeter and

were waiting for *him*; so in a flash he thought that his best chance would be to start at once and try to get out of harm's way as fast as possible. Up into the air he sprang and with some noise and a ponderous flapping of wing he started to follow Teeter's course. But his great size prevented him from keeping out of sight, and he quickly made himself visible to the two men on the meadow. The latter happened to be a couple of dilettante ornithologists who were out collecting birds of the shore, and when Stilts the Great Blue Heron disclosed his identity to their startled view, they hesitated at first; but with the cry, "Give it to him!" off went the guns, and the fine shot played a merry tattoo upon Stilts's broad wings. It stung, too, and suddenly a terrible pain came to him in his right pinion. Soon this became intolerable, and after a few seconds he was forced to alight in the open meadow. He felt terribly sore, but stood with his head and crest erect and his feathers pressed closely to his body. He knew that he was badly hurt; for, when he spread his wings and essayed to fly again, he found that the tip of one was useless, causing him to go sidewise so much that after an instant he was sprawling in the grass. Then with considerable pluck he started to walk away. He couldn't run; no heron ever could. He just stalked off in a quiet and dignified manner, although he was frightened and nonplussed at the turn affairs had taken. Meanwhile the naturalists

had been watching, not silently but with much excitement. As they saw his dilemma they started to run him down; but Stilts was now on the opposite side of the slough and it was a difficult place to cross. One of the men in his haste had tried to wade the creek; but his rubber boots got firmly stuck in the black mud, and he was forced to call to his comrade for assistance. Finally they were compelled to go far back to where the stream was narrow and where they could leap it without trouble. Meanwhile Stilts was steadily stalking away from them, apparently making for a piece of woods that jutted out into the marshes beyond. As the naturalists approached, Stilts continued his stately steps; but his fine crest stood erect, and from time to time he would open his long, strong bill in threatening manner. As the men came nearer they began in some excitement to make preparation for the capture of the bird alive.

“Have you any stout twine, John?”

“No—nothing strong enough for him.”

“What’ll we do? I’d like to take him home alive and study his habits.”

At this last remark Stilts determined to make one supreme effort to get away, and so, springing up into the air, he unfolded his broad wings, and surely enough he cleared the grass, and, though unable to propel himself in a desired direction, still, by working around, he got the benefit of the off-shore breeze

and sailed down toward the sand dunes which, covered with wild-plum bushes, fringed the shore. As he first essayed to fly the naturalists were taken completely by surprise; but in an instant their guns were at their shoulders, and the sharp report of the firearms added to the fearful fright that already possessed the bird. Many small pellets of shot struck him harmlessly; but, as he attempted to top the bushes, he completely lost control of his steering gear, and striking the rough and thorny hedge he fell helpless to the ground. His enemies, however, were now far behind, though still in pursuit. After a few moments Stilts pulled himself together and began to stalk down the steep incline toward the half-submerged flats that stretched out for a half-mile into the Sound. It was great luck that it was low water, for Stilts could now walk out beyond all possible danger and be safe until the rising tide should drive him shoreward again. His pinion was bloody, helpless and twisted now. It would be weeks before he could fly again, and how his back ached! He had never been so weak and unhappy in his life, and he wondered what he had done to deserve it all. As he neared a bit of shoal-water where the plashing waves made music and told of the lack of depth below, he noticed six or eight good-sized birds resting, and as he came closer he recognized Yellowleg the Snipe. Yellowleg had always made merry with Stilts the Great Blue

Heron and called him names. So now he whistled out :

“Hello, Lanky! What you doing out here? Haven't you stepped on enough frogs this morning?” Then after a laugh Yellowleg called out:

“If you'd go and get a couple of well-coloured glass-eyes put in, you'd catch more of those poor innocent Mummychogs, Froggy.”

Stilts listened as well as he could to their coarse jibes, and as he waded into the shallow water he croaked out :

“Can't you see I'm in trouble? Look at this wing! The guns that did *that* have got the whole bay surrounded and are just circling down on all of us. Haven't you foolish creatures seen those men off there?”

Yellowleg and his friends had listened to the first words with indifference; but as he went on they ceased laughing, and now all stood erect and listening.

“Stilts is right! There are two of them now,” cried one pointing shoreward with his bill.

“Which way shall we fly, Stilts?”

“It won't help you probably, but if you fly straight up in the air about a mile or so and then turn southeast—no, northeast—you *may* escape with a few wounds,” groaned Stilts. “I'm gone anyway. Please leave me alone.”

With that the Yellowleg party started off in haste

up into the air, a procedure attended by the utmost exertion, and finally as they became mere specks in the sky they sailed off in consternation, leaving Stilts sore but smiling. "I got even with those foolish birds," he soliloquised.

Far enough from shore to be safe, he sat and planned as to what he should do next. He noticed that the bar to Charles Island was not yet covered, and decided to make for it; for he knew that the men on foot would never try to wade out there, as the rising tide would catch them. He could see the naturalists sitting on shore and apparently holding a council. As he started to move off toward the bar, a large flock of little, ring-neck plover circled about his head two or three times. He was in no mood to admire aerial evolutions, but the buzzing noise they made caused him to look this way and that and then the little bunch of birds called out: "Hello, old long-neck," and were off. Stilts knew that he was unpopular, but to have it thrown at him from all sides was galling at this time. He plodded on towards the bar. Finally after wading a long way out, with the water almost up to his breast-bone, he began to feel it growing shoaler, and he knew that he was approaching the shallow water. The tide had begun to rise, and even now the water was lapping the central ridge of pebbles that marked the division between Milford harbor and Stratford Sound. Jack Curlew's flock were slowly coming in from the



eastward, and the solitary figure of Stilts called their attention at first to himself and then to the fresh, green islet far out from the shore.

"Let's drop in here for the night," whistled Jack to his partner just behind. "It looks safe, and I think we can find a meal." Then they wheeled about, and after many circlings and musical cries they set their wings and, erect and circumspect, alighted on the shore. After a few moments of watchfulness they began to work along with business thoroughness, and found that the place was full of food. Shrimps and periwinkles and snails galore were there. While they were scouring the shore and having the best meal since they had left Cape Cod, they ran right up to Stilts the Great Blue Heron who, having laboriously reached the main shore of the island, sat exhausted and unhappy in solitary silence.

"Hello, Daddy Longlegs!" exclaimed Jack; "what are you up to out here? Why aren't you spearing frogs or fiddlers?"

"Curlew, I'm an unfortunate old bird, and I'm beginning to think that there's no charity in the whole world. I'm wounded and unhappy."

"Why, is that so, you poor old sinner? I'm sorry. Come, boys," calling to his companions, "here's old Daddy Longlegs, who says he's in hard luck; let's help him."

Jack Curlew's friends gathered around.

“Now tell us about it.” Then Stilts told the whole story and the curlews sat about and pitied the poor old heron.

“How can we help you, Stilts? We’re not particularly fond of you, but we’re fellow-creatures, are we not, comrades?”

“I’ll tell you, Jack, if it isn’t asking too much, I wish you’d just fly over to the shore and sit down in front of those gunners. You can see them from here. Don’t sit in gunshot, you know.”

“No, Stilts, I don’t *think* we will.”

“And then move along shore slowly, taking time about it, and entice them down towards Meadow’s End. Then they’ll give up the idea of giving me any more of those lead-pills that I don’t like. You’ll be back in an hour.”

“What do you say, boys—shall we do it?”

“Yes, come on,” cried a sympathetic, old hen-curlew; “but I vote we fly about to attract attention and then settle down about a hundred and fifty yards down shore under a bank or something where we might deceive them.”

“Come on,” cried Jack, and off they flew, and the air was full of their melodious music.

It was now well into the sultry, humid afternoon of a July day on the Connecticut shore, and the naturalists had been taking a little, broken siesta under the shade of the wild-plum bushes, a nap which was somewhat disturbed by the hum of the

mosquito whose home they had invaded. At last one of them exclaimed :

“What was that, John?”

“What did you say?” sleepily answered his comrade.

“Didn't you hear that whistle? Listen!”

“By Jove, those are curlew—there they are, see!”

“Let's watch them; it's a big flock. There they've dropped down back of the bogs. We can get at them all right.” And with that the naturalists put cartridges into their guns and began to creep down along the sand-dunes and plum-bushes. They were soon opposite the spot where they had seen the curlew alight and began to crawl. They failed to hear the musical whistle of the watcher, so on they crept through mud, mire and mosquitoes, and were now close over the bogs.

“You take the first shot, John!” and John arose to his feet. Nothing flew, and then Ernest, his companion, likewise stood erect.

“Well, that beats me. Why, there they are below, towards Meadow's End. How did we make that mistake?”

“We must have calculated wrong, but it's very strange. Shall we follow them, or go back and wait for the blue heron?”

“A bird in the hand's worth two in the bush. Let's get a few of those curlew.”

“I think you're right. We can go back in the

meadow and work right down on them behind those old logs. Come on!"

So off into the meadow they made their detour and finally came cautiously out to the shore. It was at a point where some old logs had been planted on end as a kind of breakwater against the spring tides and afforded good cover for one approaching from the shore. As they crept along, Ardea the Green Heron flopped up, and Meadow-lark and Marsh-hen added their warning cries. Then as finally they peered cautiously over their blind, they could see nothing save a few diminutive sandpipers playfully plying their avocations below them.

"What's the matter with us, John? Have we forgotten how to mark down birds? There are those curlew, a hundred yards below us."

"I'm not going to give it up. Let's give them another try. See how the tide's rising. That'll make it easier."

As at last the naturalists trudged homewards some three miles out of their way a solitary killdeer plover flew back and forth over their heads and with plaintive cry seemed to make sport of them, but Hum the Mosquito was all business and added his bite to their discomfiture.

## CHAPTER XV.

## AUGUST.—PART I.

Sora the Rail—Dwarf the Least Bittern—Webfoot the Black-duck—Green-wing the Teal—Wood-thrush,—And Others.

SORA the Rail sat in a great bunch of cattails far up in the cove and waited for high water, at which time he could venture out among the tall stalks of the wild rice and reach up to the sweet, succulent seeds, that were far out of reach ten feet above the mud and sand at low tide.

Sora was regarded as a dark and mysterious member of the avi-fauna of New England. No one seemed to know whence he came or when or whither he went. There were many stories afloat, however, in regard to him. Some said that he stayed north all the year through, and that when cold weather came he would bury himself deep in the mud of the bottom and, like Burrow the Woodchuck, remain torpid and unconscious until the soft May breezes and the warmer waters stirred him to life again. Then, they said, he would bob up serenely

from below and go to housekeeping in the sweet grass of the meadow.

Others asserted that he *could* fly long distances, and that when the October nights began to be frosty and the moon was at its full, he would start on his long southern journey. Hoo-Hoo the Great Horned Owl asserted that he saw him one night flying right in the eye of the moon, but when Hoo-Hoo called out to Sora he received no reply, although he told the others that he'd make affidavit that it was the rail.

Then again, Hangbird the Oriole said that he had seen Sora away down in Louisiana in the Bayou Têche region and had spoken to him, but that Sora had treated him like a stranger and had said that his name wasn't Sora at all, but Ortolan. Hangbird whispered about that he believed Sora was leading a double life. Just as startling was the assertion of Dropleg the Chat, who said that he had seen Sora in Carolina, and that there Sora had snubbed him, also, and had said that his name was Reedbird.

As Dropleg was intimately acquainted with Boblink the Reedbird, he felt that Sora's behaviour was, to say the least, strange.

But in spite of all this gossip, Sora was liked by every one. He was amiable and had such unusually courtly manners that, without saying much—for he was somewhat taciturn at times—he involuntarily

called attention to himself. No one knew him well; but those that knew him best were perhaps Webfoot the Black-duck, Dwarf the Least Bittern, and Redwing the Blackbird. On this morning Sora sat chatting with Dwarf.

"I don't know how *you* feel, Sora," Dwarf was saying; "but I'm getting hungry. I wish the tide would hurry and rise."

"You'll enjoy it all the more later," answered Sora in his treble voice, and with a jaunty little jerk of his diminutive tail, which stuck up behind almost at a right angle to his body.

"I hope there won't be many boats out to-day. I can't see what delight those 'shovers' take in scaring us almost to death."

"Two dollars a tide," responded Sora briefly, as he snapped up a toothsome waterbug.

"I suppose that's it; but then the man in the bow of the boat, with the terrible gun! What pleasure can he take in trying to kill innocent things like you and me?"

"Eats us, I think. There comes one!"

The tide wasn't more than three-quarters up, and there was as yet no chance for Sora or Dwarf to reach the seeds; so they stopped talking and watched the approaching boat, and listened to the conversation of its occupants.

The boat was a flat-bottomed skiff, and way aft, in the stern, was a kind of raised seat or platform,

on which stood a barefoot man wearing an old slouch hat, some coarse trousers, and a cotton shirt wide open at the neck. In his hands was a long pole, with which he pushed the light boat through the grass where it was not too thick. Standing in the bow was another man dressed in canvas shooting-clothes and hip rubber-boots, and he held a gun in his hands. They stopped almost opposite the bunch of cattails where Sora and Dwarf sat concealed, and then they began to talk :

“Charlie,” began the man with the gun, “I’m glad we’re the first in, anyway.”

“Well, there ain’t going to be any tide ; so I don’t see that it makes much difference. Birds are all in the cats, and this won’t be no cattail tide.”

“What time is it high water?”

“Let’s see ; yesterday was ten o’clock. What time are you now?”

“Nine-thirty.”

“Well, it won’t be high water for nigh a good hour yet, but it won’t amount to much, anyway. The tides are low now, you know, but you’ve got this territory mortgaged all right.”

“Oh, I don’t want to make a big bag ; thirty or forty will do.”

“Good gracious !” ejaculated Sora. “That man’s a brute !”

“Yes, and you’ll be lucky with this tide if you get



twenty. There's plenty of birds, but they're all in the cats," answered the man called Charlie.

"Sora," whispered Dwarf the Least Bittern, "let's stay here right where we are."

At this moment another boat rounded the point, and, following the open water of the creek, approached the first.

"Hello, Charlie! Have you pre-empted that section?"

"Looks like it; don't it, Johnse?"

"Well, we'll jest take the other side, then. Not going to be any tide, though."

"No, morning tides are no good anyway."

The cove was a beautiful sight. For half a mile the creek wound its way in, with two or three graceful curves, to the mainland. The entrance was so narrow as to be scarcely distinguishable from the wooded sides of the broad, rolling river. Once inside, however, it broadened out into an immense basin, brilliant in its vast expanse of wild rice just coming into seed.

Here and there a clump of cattails would add a richer green to the prevailing colour, and, every now and then, the ragged robin in brilliant scarlet, and the water-lily in white and yellow, made little jewelled spots of brightness. The boat, propelled evenly by means of the long pole, parted the swishing stalks, and the dry seeds rattled down on thwart and floor. Various birds flew up from the grass

from time to time. There were Bobby the Marsh-wren and Ardea the Green Heron, the latter, on frightened wing, squawking noisily as he scampered out of fancied danger.

Webfoot the Black-duck sat in the Bed Chamber, as a secluded little nook up toward the head of navigation was called. He and his mate had come over from Deep Hole the night before, a little matter of thirty miles, in order to ascertain whether the much-vaunted corn-grass of the Housatonic was so far superior to the water-cress and river-nuts of the Hamonnassett. Webfoot had been munching the seed all the morning, and when he heard the approaching boat he was in the act of explaining to his mate how variety in diet is a cardinal principle of health. He raised his head and listened, but seeing nothing, remarked to his mate :

“ Let's take a turn around and see what it means,” and with that they sprang from the water with a splash and a whirr.

“ Bang! Bang!” went the gun, and with hearts in their throats Webfoot and his mate sailed off. As they swiftly winnowed the air, they could hear an exclamation of disgust from the “shover” away behind.

“ Never touched a feather !”

Sora had now climbed to the top of the cattails and with much concern watched the progress of the boat. He had a great many relatives about the

place and had said to Dwarf the Least Bittern more than once :

“ They’re young and foolish, and I do hope they won’t expose themselves unnecessarily.”

But, even as he stood, he saw bird after bird jump up in front of the boat, and once in a while it looked to him as though one had dropped dead or badly hurt. It was a great comfort for him to hear the “ shover ” remark once to the man with the gun :

“ Why, you can’t seem to hit nothin’. I’d’s lief stay in front as ahint your gun.”

This seemed to provoke the man in canvas clothes, for he turned angrily and snapped out :

“ You were engaged to shove this boat and not give your opinion on my marksmanship.”

The other man didn’t say anything, but Sora thought that he saw a queer, disdainful kind of look come over his face, and after that the boat seemed to go into places where they didn’t find so many birds.

Gradually, after an hour or so, the tide began to fall, and soon the boats could be seen taking their way out into the river. Then at last Dwarf the Least Bittern was happy and called out :

“ Come on, Sora, the coast’s clear. Let’s eat all we can before the tide falls.”

They wandered here and there. They met Web-foot, who told of the frightful scenes he had wit-

nessed down at the other end of the cove. He claimed that he had seen at least six of Sora's relatives killed, picked up and tossed into the boat. Bobby the Marsh-wren said that he had just left one of Sora's cousins who had a wing and leg broken and seemed to be suffering; "but," he added, "he was very foolish, and against the advice of all of us he insisted on playing tag at the top of high water with a lot of swamp sparrows who made him 'it' all the time."

That afternoon the wind shifted to the eastward, and the sky became overcast. Towards night the storm broke and raged with fury. Sora was safely ensconced in the centre of a bunch of cattails, but from time to time his rest was broken by the sound of new arrivals in the cove. Early in the morning following he started out to investigate, and at the very first turn he nearly ran into Green-wing the Teal and his large family, numbering ten.

"Good-morning, Sora," called out Green-wing. "Stormy weather."

"Yes, indeed. Come far last night? Heard you arrive towards morning."

"Did you? We came over from Essex, and I tell you the wind blew. We didn't start till after midnight, and it took us less than an hour. Is there good feeding here?"

"Yes, it's tolerable, but dangerous."

"Good gracious! Is that so? I told the family



"DANDY STOPPED AT NETTLETON'S POND."



that I would find a quiet place where our meals wouldn't be disturbed every few minutes. Why, Sora, over on the Connecticut River the boats at high water are so thick that you can scarcely see the grass!"

"It's pretty bad here, Green-wing; I've about fifteen funerals to attend this week, all of near relatives too."

"Sora, what *are* we coming to? I'm kept thin worrying over this business."

"I'm thin as a rail myself," answered Sora, thinking to give Green-wing a more hopeful view of affairs through a punning allusion to himself. "Any other people come in with you?" he added.

"Why, yes, we met Baldpate the Widgeon and his family, and Dandy the Wood-duck; but Dandy stopped at Nettleton's Pond. He said there was a supply of water-nuts there that he wanted to gather, but he'll be here to-day."

"Green-wing, do you know I think I'll go down to Stratford for a while anyway, to the mouth of the river; the sedge there is too thick for those boats to get through excepting at unusually high tides, and it's about as good eating as anything I know, barring corn-grass, and I'm getting rather sick of corn-grass, especially when I'm so nervous eating it that it gives me indigestion."

This was one of the longest speeches Sora had ever made, and he almost sank back exhausted; but

recovering himself he said good-bye and started to make a tour of the cove and bid farewell to his numerous friends and acquaintances.

By afternoon it had cleared off and was cool, and the moon rose, nearly full. Then Sora started down the river. He thought that he would stop at a few places on the way in order to hear any news that might be about. So he dropped into Middle District where he unexpectedly met Stilts the Great Blue Heron, who exchanged civilities with him and stalked on in his stately way. Then he dropped in at the Point of the Island, where he heard of more deaths in his family and also learned that Osprey the Fish-hawk was down at New Meadow and might give him some further news. But Osprey had left before he reached there, and so, after a rather long flight, Sora found himself nearing the broad mouth of the river. He could just see the glimmer of the lighthouse, and, as he looked, the great top, revolving, turned its brilliant flash upon him.

He knew what it was—the Stratford Lighthouse—and he had often heard how birds and insects had been attracted toward such places. He tried hard to overcome the impulse to fly to it, but turn as he would he couldn't conquer an irresistible longing to fly to that light. So on and on he kept in a kind of delirious trance. On and on he flew while the great, magnificent light flashed, every few seconds, in its giant revolutions, a summons to death. . . .



A sudden stoppage of flight! a gasping flutter to the ground! and Sora the Rail lay bruised and unconscious at the foot of the great lighthouse. Towards morning he came to himself and looked about. The ground at the foot of the light was strewn with dead and crippled birds. He even saw some of his own family, but by far the most of them were strangers to him. There were Warblers without number, then ducks and terns and gulls and thrushes, and close by his side lay Golden Crown and Yellow Belly and Towhee and young Rosebreast.

"What made you do it?" he asked of a wounded and bleeding Wood-thrush, thinking there might be some explanation for his own folly; but Wood-thrush only answered: "I saw the great light and just couldn't help it."

"It was a terrible temptation," answered Sora as he fluttered weakly along the shore and fell heavily into the sedge.

## CHAPTER XVI.

AUGUST.—PART II.

Kingbird—Billie the Bluebird—Redbreast the Robin—Yellow-  
hammer—Swift the Chimney-swallow

HAYING was over in Rockland, and the exhalation from the close-cropped meadows was that of new-mown hay, sweet and intoxicating. Swallows were skimming the fields over and feasting on moth and mosquito. The young of a hundred species of birds flew from one resting spot to another, and all nature was a hum with animal life—with the grasshopper's rasping, little rattle as he fled from approaching footsteps, and the cricket's incessant song in the coolness and shade of the streamside. Already Kingbird was making ready to begin his southern journey, and almost every fence-post had its white-breasted tenant, busy in snapping up the various insects that filled the air. Perched on the point of the tall mullen-stalk sat Billie the Bluebird, less cerulean than in the spring perhaps, but just as alert and jaunty.

The golden-rod was not yet in full bloom, but at



“HE HAD SEEN KING AGAIN AND AGAIN . . . WITH CREST ERECT  
ENTICING BEES.”



the edge of the hay-field a few early stalks could be seen already showing their yellowish buds.

Kingbird was another notable visitor to the north for the summer. He also was one of the hard-to-get-acquainted-with feathered folk. He was highly respected for his bravery and his business-like attention to his own affairs. His whole family was distinctly clannish, associating with no others, unless chance brought them to the same neighbourhood. When Kingbird arrived in late April or early May he was a noticeable bird. He was always in evidence. He dressed modestly enough, however, in slate grey on the back, with pure white breast and belly. One feature was quite prominent, and that was his crest when erect. At such times he disclosed a line of feathers of flaming orange colour, hidden at other times by the almost black superficial feathers.

He disclosed this line of brightness only when suddenly surprised or frightened, although Billie the Bluebird made the startling statement that he had seen King again and again, on the fence-rail or telegraph-wire, deliberately stand with crest erect, enticing bees and butterflies by means of this flower-like patch. Billie was just now telling Redbreast the Robin about it, and he said that he was quite sure he was right.

“I’m not mistaken, Redbreast; for again only yesterday I saw Kingbird on the fence-post, and he sat quite still and didn’t say anything, when one of

that yellow order of butterflies came flipping along and flew right down and started to light on King's head! Then King turned and just dashed out over the meadow, and I could hear those strong nippers of his snap together, and after he had come back to his stand and had beaten off the butterfly's wings he swallowed it. Then he took eight honey-bees in the same way, I believe. It looked so. I was greatly interested."

"Weren't you acquainted enough to ask him about it?" said Redbreast.

"Yes, I thought so, and I went over and said: 'Don't that red spot on your head help you to catch bees and things?' Well, he acted somewhat surprised and angry, and he looked at me for a minute, and then he said: 'Billie, that's none of your business.'"

"He never was very sociable," commented Redbreast; "but isn't he brave?"

"He doesn't know fear. The way he follows John Crow and his gang about and drives them away is wonderful."

"Yes, but I saw him only yesterday, Billie, when old Red Shoulder was coming through the woods, and as Red Shoulder started to cross the meadow, Kingbird hurried after him, and I tell you he made it lively! He got above Red Shoulder, you see, and the way he'd pounce down and nip the hawk's head was marvellous! He teased him so badly that

Red Shoulder every now and again would turn right over in the air and let out with those cruel claws of his; but King didn't care a bit and didn't give it up until Red Shoulder was lost in the woods. I tell you, Billie, he's brave; that's what he is, he's brave."

"You're right, Redbreast, and as for those small hawks, Sparrow and Sharp Shin, they don't come round any more than if Kingbird were poison."

"Have you sampled the wild cherries this year, Billie?" asked Redbreast as with energetic hops he covered six feet or more of ground in pursuit of an earthworm that he thought he saw making a little movement on the sod in front, but that he didn't capture.

"Yes, I was up among them for a while this morning; but I can't stand all the birds that meet there: they're too mixed for me, and I'm not particular, as you know. Let me see. I'll try to tell you who were there, and I'll forget half. There were some of your relatives, Redbreast, and they were well behaved enough, but that Yellow-hammer! he's a quarrelsome bird—why, I saw him and another bird fighting over a cherry, and the noise they made bobbing their heads together and calling each other names was too ridiculous. Then there was Yellow-belly the cousin of Yellow-hammer. Yellow-belly's a modest kind; at the same time, I tell you, he's what I'd call a glutton! You've no idea of the amount of cherries that little fellow can eat, and

then he swallows them, pits and all, just as fast as he can pick them. You must remember Yellow-belly, Redbreast. He looks something like Downey but larger—you know his other name's Sapsucker, 'cause he makes all those rings around the tree in the orchard and drinks the juice, why he can beat Downey in the even way he puts those circles of holes. Then the Oriole family—five of them young ones! They're not very pretty now—not like Hangbird in the spring-time, I assure you—and they're young and quarrelsome too. Then I met Mew the Cat-bird and White Eye the Vireo and Brilliant the Tanager. Why, Redbreast, you'd no more recognise Tanager than if he were some other bird. He's moulting now and is the queerest mixture of green and black spots you ever saw. Then there were many others like Thrasher and Kingbird. It was the most mixed gathering I ever saw, and for my part I'd rather go without cherries than associate with some of those birds."

Redbreast had listened attentively, and finally he said :

"That *is* a queer lot, Billie, but I'm very fond of wild cherries, and I think I'll go over early to-morrow and try them. Good night, Billie," and Redbreast left for the neighbouring pear tree, where he began to arrange his feathers for the night.

Swift the Chimney-swallow was much in evidence during these early Autumn days, and queer, little,



black streaks he and his family made in the sky ; as in groups of five or six they circled over the house and barn in search of gnats, flies and mosquitoes, or from time to time uttered their queer, little twitter. Swift had had hard luck at Rockland this year. Arriving about the first of May he had started soon after to make his nest. After circling the farmhouse a few hundred times and inspecting the different flues of the great stone chimney, he had at last settled on one that seemed to offer exceptional advantages. It happened to be the flue leading to the "front parlor," a room by the way, which the New England farmer uses only on gala occasions such as weddings, christenings or the opening of the new district school. Of course Swift didn't know that this year the farmer's daughter had been "keeping company" with the son of a neighbour during the winter season, nor that the wedding had been set for the thirtieth of May—Decoration Day. So in the regular order of events Swift and his mate started in to build their nest in the chimney-flue. Swift had a habit of never perching on anything. He could and would cling to the sides of a chimney or even a hollow tree ; but, even when engaged in procuring material for the nest to be built, he never stopped in his seemingly endless flight but would wrench the little, dead twigs from their fastenings on the oak or chestnut and bear them to the new home, dropping down the chimney in graceful fash-

ion with wings raised almost to a right angle with his body. To begin his nest he would first scrape away the loose soot with his spiky, needle-like tail-feathers and his little, short, flesh-like claws. He would then place the larger twigs against the bare bricks or stone, fastening them to their foundation with a sticky saliva that he was able to produce from his throat at will and that drying at once, held the twigs firmly in place. When completed the nest looked as if one had taken that of Brilliant the Tanager and, cutting it exactly in half, had glued one half to the chimney-side.

Swift had this year completed his nest in satisfactory style, and his wife had laid her five creamy, translucent eggs and in time had hatched out five ugly, little, soot-coloured young birds.

Swift and his mate tended their offsprings with solicitous care, and already the dusky, little pin-feathers were beginning to show. Then that wedding-day came! On the twenty-eighth of May, however, a remarkable change had taken place in the temperature. It often happens that the last days of the New England month of May are marked by cold and rain,—a kind of spring equinoctial storm, and so it was this year. But at last it became clear and cold on the bright, sunlit morning of the thirtieth. For two days all hands on the farm had been busy, even in the storm, gathering the belated lilac fronds, the laurel blooms and the last of the



“SWIFT HAD THIS YEAR COMPLETED HIS NEST IN SATISFACTORY STYLE.”



trailing arbutus. With these they had entwined the pictures and proverbs and mottoes and doors. It is doubtful if "George Washington and his wife Martha" had ever had a more picturesque environment. "God Bless our Home" was brilliant in a frame of Marsh Marigold, and "The Missionary's Return" was made less sombre by the thick and slightly wilted wreath of pansy blooms. There had been a consultation in the morning between Farmer Green and his wife, regarding the advisability of lighting up the hickory logs.

"I didn't think, Silas," spoke his wife, "that we'd have to use this hearth again, and only last week I had Henry put on the fire dogs, the slickest looking logs he could find just for looks during summer; but if you think it's necessary we'll do it. Maria's making a good match, and I want to show folks that we're grateful for all those presents."

"I think we'd better do it, Sarah, for with all that mosquito-net finery of Maria's she might catch cold—but I suppose after to-day *he'll* have to pay the doctor's bills. Be that as it may, I think we'd better light up the fire just before the Parson gets here."

"I guess, Silas, that being the case, we'll wait until Parson Brown gets here; for in this weather and roads, he may be a trifle late," answered his frugal spouse and added: "You attend to that part,

I must go and look after those cherry tarts or they'll get burnt," and his wife left him.

"Well, I'm glad I've got but one daughter," soliloquised Farmer Green. "This house hasn't been fit to live in for nigh three weeks now. Think of Sarah making me put on my shoes after dinner last night, just because those Scranton folks called, and they came to the front door, too! I'm mighty glad I've only got one daughter."

The melodeon had been moved into the front room, and twice a week Miss Slooback had come down from Durham to practise Mendelssohn's wedding march, and Farmer Green had been obliged to drive her home again at nine o'clock at night, and, as this brought him back at eleven, three hours after his usual bedtime, he was getting tired of it all, and he said, "I don't see what they want with that foreign music anyway. Why can't they play Old Hundred or some tune some one knows."

At eleven o'clock the guests began to arrive, and Silas Green was out of his element. His wife had brought out his broad-cloth suit, which had been packed away in naphtha balls for "nigh two years," as he expressed it, "and," he added, "that was to wear at poor Zeke Nettleton's funeral, the time Patience Redfield fainted. Patience was a kind of favourite niece of Zeke's."

Silas had to stand by the old colonial mantel-piece and give the bride away.

Sile Green, as his neighbours called him, was a simple, good-hearted type, and he presided over the present function with precision and dignity.

Parson Brown was usually late, and on this occasion he gave the guests the cue to conversation by his tardiness. Finally he drove up, and Henry the hired boy, spick and span in his new clothes, a present from his employer, helped the minister to put up his shaggy, old mare and also gave her a souvenir present of an extra quart of oats. As the ceremony proceeded, and at the time when the country boys were getting a wee bit tired over the long prayer which rang the changes on the mosaic-work of hopes for the future of Maria and John, and just as they were longing to sample the next room's resources and the silence between prayer and benediction was most intense, a scraping sound was heard in the chimney-piece accompanied by some plaintive cries. The Rev. Mr. Brown was a coward about mice, and the noise reminded him of mundane things and frightened him. With a sudden and entirely irrelevant "Amen" he jumped to one side, closing the services, and then looked nervously behind him. Meanwhile a tragedy had been enacted up the chimney-side. The heat from the unusual fire had not been intense but was sufficiently hot partly to melt the glutinous material that had held together the home of Swift the Chimney-swallow. The five occupants were large and heavy, and, while the

melting nest was still roomy enough to hold some of them, yet two of its unhappy occupants were unable to retain a foothold, and at the moment referred to were forced to give way and fall, carrying parts of the structure with them. They bounded down from side to side to the bottom of the shaft. Poor Swift and his mate had been in an agony of fear ever since they had first noticed the curling smoke coming up from the flue. They had had somewhat similar experiences before, and they knew that their children could stand considerable heat and smoke as well; but what worried them most was the crowd of people and the decorations, which seemed to indicate something out of the usual routine. Again and again they made attempts at rescue, but had to give them up, and, when at last they ventured down, they found three of their children gasping and soot-covered; but two were missing and it was easy to guess how they had met their fate.



## CHAPTER XVII.

## SEPTEMBER.—PART I.

Slick the Mink—Small-mouth the Black-bass—Downy the Woodpecker—Yellow-hammer—Orchard the Oriole, and Others.

IT was an early September day at Nathan's Pond. The surface of the water was mirror-like in its stillness and reflected the azure sky and the clouds above with such distinctness that the counterfeit picture seemed almost more perfect than the fleecy clouds themselves. Even the graceful circlings of Red Shoulder the Hawk were reproduced with startling clearness. But let Fork-tail the Swallow but touch the water in his effort to take the belated flies and, presto! all was gone. The pond lay there in its yellowish frame like a great sapphire set in gold; the air was mild and dry, and nature seemed at peace and resting after the toils of the past summer. One of the denizens of the shore, however, was not happy. This was Slick the Mink. He had spent an arduous but unusually profitless night far from home on the banks of the Hamonnassett River, where he had been told that the trout were

as tame as cattle and the bullheads and sunfish were to be had merely for the asking. His informant had been Slim the Weasel, and now, as, tired and foot-sore, he crept homeward through the brush, he vowed renewed vengeance on the prevaricator. He had hunted Deep Hole and Beaver Dam and Nettleton's Pond with diligence and energy, but to no purpose. He had taken three medium-sized bullfrogs; but these didn't begin to satisfy his appetite or to equal his expectations.

"'That little villain' is all that people say about him that's bad. If I'm not mistaken those were his tracks I saw two or three times last night. I believe the rascal has worked all the good there is out of that region and was trying to fool me, and he succeeded, too."

So when Slick came at last to the opening close to his home and could command a good view of the lake, he was delighted to see two men fishing. One was on a shelving rock, the other in a flat-bottomed skiff that seemed to be anchored close to shore. His exclamation of delight was almost audible to the fishermen.

"Well, this *is* luck; I may get breakfast yet! Those are fishermen from the Club, and I remember that big fellow on shore there. I'll watch him."

The men had not been there long before the fish began biting. The fishermen were using the succulent hellgramite, so dear to the taste of the black-

bass for which they were angling, and, though at first the weather had been too fair for good luck, yet, as Slick watched, the sky became overcast and the wind shifted from south to southeast. Slick, with the keen intelligence of his race, accentuated in this case by hunger, made his plans. He took up his position beneath a flat rock about ten yards behind the jovial fishermen on the shore, who from time to time during the changing or renewing of bait held a desultory conversation with the man in the boat. Slick didn't take much account of their talk, but sat sullen and empty. After a while the man on the rock gave a jerk with his rod and then began to reel in, and after a time he pulled out a small, quarter-pound bass, which, after unfastening and looking over, he threw to the mossy bank behind him. Slick licked his chops for a second and then silently sneaked forward and in a moment was back in his little improvised dining-room, where he made short work of his gratuitous meal. After this the fish commenced to bite with a vengeance, and both the jovial fisherman on the bank and the sedate man in the boat began to pull in bass. The competition between the two men became very keen, and now and again Slick could hear queer words passing between them. He thought that he understood English fairly well, but some expressions puzzled him.

“That makes me one ahead—no, I'm two ahead.

Now, don't catch any more " and " How do we stand now?" were too much for him. But as often as the jovial fisherman unhooked and threw his fish behind him, so often did Slick the Mink make his little *sorties*. He couldn't eat all the fish at once; but he knew how and where to keep them for use at the proper time. At last the jovial fisherman called out from the bank:

"Time's up! let's reel in and go home. How many have you got?"

"Nine, I think, unless some have escaped," answered the man in the boat. "How many have you?"

"I beat you by two; I've eleven."

"Let's see them."

The jovial fisherman was engaged in reeling in and taking his rod apart.

"I'll produce them all right. One's a beauty—nearly a pound, I think."

"Let's see *him*," cried the other somewhat excitedly.

The jovial fisherman put his hand out behind him and feeling about and touching nothing turned round and looked. Not a fish in view! His pupils dilated, and he seemed greatly puzzled. He felt of his pockets as though he had lost something and then stood up and looked where he had been sitting.

"What's up, old fellow?" called out the man in the boat.

"Oh, nothing, nothing; I was just looking for something."

"Where's that big bass?"

"Oh, yes, the big bass; that's so," and the jovial fisherman looked in a sort of timid way behind him again. Then he stood up and stretched himself and seemed to be trying to remember something. He turned around twice and scanned the ground about his feet; then he got down on his knees and looked critically at the soft, green moss which carpeted the sloping bank.

"What's the matter, Charlie," called the man in the boat, who, having put away his rod, was making believe to pull up his anchor; "lost anything?"

"No, I think not; I don't *feel* just right. A kind of dizzy spell, I think. I say, Jack, did I—do you remember—I mean how many fish did I—er—catch?"

"Why, yes, you caught a lot. Can't you count them? You're not feeling ill, are you?"

"No, I think I feel fine, but I just had a bad streak of blindness. Come over here, will you, Jack?"

"Why, surely, old fellow," and with much effort the man in the boat pulled up his anchor and tried to row to the shore; but the boat shook from side to side, and a close observer would have made affidavit that the man in the boat was rolling from side to side with uncontrollable laughter. As the boat struck the bank he jumped out with the small

anchor in his hand. Then his friend met him and, seizing him by the arm in a convulsive kind of way, said in a frightened and almost pathetic voice :

“Come here, friend !”

His comrade made no reply. He couldn't. As they reached the spot where the quondam jovial fisherman had been seated, the latter said in sepulchral tones : “Jack, look *there*,” pointing to the moss-bank, sloping lush and green to the flat rock. “Are there *ten small-mouth black-bass* lying dead there ?”

By this time the man, now out of the boat, could contain himself no longer and broke out into peals of maniacal laughter. This seemed to irritate the other, and with a tone of hopeless conviction he exclaimed, half to himself : “Yes, it's so, I'm crazy !” but with that the man out of the boat, trying to recover himself, told the jovial fisherman how he had seen him catch ten fine bass, had seen him unhook and throw them on the moss behind him, and had also seen Slick the Mink stalk out and take away all of them, one at a time. The jovial fisherman thought earnestly for some time and then said :

“Is that the truth, Jack ?”

“On my honour, that's true, and perhaps we can prove it, for I watched the creature, and I don't think he could have carried all those fish very far.”

“Why didn't you tell me what was going on ?”

“It was too much fun, and the mink looked

hungry, and I couldn't help admiring his trickiness. Then, too, we had a wager on every fish, you remember."

"You ought to be the president of a trust company, Jack."

Mid-September is neither butter nor cheese. Everything seems in-between. The chestnuts may or may not be ripe. Bob White's early offspring are full-grown and wandering. His second brood are fledglings. Sora the Rail is preparing to start south, and everything seems to be getting ready for something else. But it is generally sunny and soft and mellow. This mellowness is the best observed in the apple orchard near the swampside. The undertone of nature's machinery is sleepier and less rasping than in August; a more dreamful quality has been infused into the chords and combination of sounds. As you sit beneath the apple-tree and watch the Newtown pippins, yellow and large and ripening, your eyes will quite likely be attracted to the little, tapping sound close by, and there on the trunk of a neighbouring tree you will observe Downy the Woodpecker encircling it in parallel lines and diligently driving his stout little bill through the superficial bark in search of insects and larvæ, and leaving a little well-defined hole after each operation. As you turn at the sound, his quick eye detects the movement, and in an instant he has

placed the tree-trunk between you and him, and all that you can now see is the little black-and-white head with crimson spot, peeping suspiciously around from time to time. Make no movement, and, soon reassured, he will begin again and add his quota of music, a rattatoo, to the rest of the chorus. His larger cousin, Yellow-hammer, is also in evidence ; but, unlike Downy, he is about as often seen on the ground drilling away for insects and worms into the hard-baked sod, as on the trunkside. . . .

Yellow-hammer was a polyglot and a poly-named bird. He had full control of a half-dozen bird languages, and he staggered under more than a dozen names, such as Golden Winged Woodpecker, Highhole, Yellow-hammer, Flicker, Piut, and so on ; but he bore his cosmopolitan character well and was generally liked. In the orchard he found his club, lodge-room, or gossip-gallery, and didn't spend a great deal of time in feeding. He was a large, handsome bird, and the patch of white on his rump made him very noticeable as he flew up from the fields where he was wont to feed in amicable fashion with Redbreast the Robin and his great company of friends. Another of excellent habits could often be observed at such times, and this was Orchard the Oriole. He was a near cousin of Hang-bird, but not so large, and his colours were quite different. The male was chestnut-and-black, while his wife was plain enough in a greenish dress. And a strange



thing, too, about Orchard was that it took some years for him to acquire his final, handsome plumage, and one could often find him in queer dress, even during spring-time, when, in green-and-black only, he would help his mate in the construction of their house. The nest partook in general character of that of his cousin Hang-bird ; but Orchard was only an apprentice, as it were, compared with his gaudy relative. Still the nest was adapted to its surroundings and didn't need as much care as Hang-bird's, for it was never exposed so much to wind and storm. He had a pretty song, too, which, though more modest than that of the Hang-bird, was still quite musical. On a September afternoon one might see a half-dozen of Orchard's family in various garbs, diligently looking over the trees and occasionally placing a late seed or bud under their claws and prying out the succulent morsel within.

On the ground and among the crisp leaves and golden-rod could always be heard the rustling sounds of the various sparrows. Of these finches perhaps the most prominent, and certainly the largest, was Towhee, the Ground-robin. Here again the difference in colour between the head of the house and his spouse was quite marked. Towhee was mostly black—jet black with a splash of dull, rusty-looking feathers on the sides and some odds and ends of white scattered about. He had a pretty, metallic note, scarcely to be called a song, and this

is what gave him his other name, "Che-wink." His mate was less pronounced in dress, but still a very presentable kind of bird. The black of her partner was replaced by sage-brown in her costume, and they both scratched among the leaves quite after the fashion of barn-yard fowl. Another interesting bird at such times was Fox-sparrow, named after his russet coat, and he was one of the earliest arrivals in spring-time. Then White Throat and White Crown were there, too, and the rustling and fuss they all made together—for all were friends—was most noticeable. In the autumn the birds, who were mostly young ones, were too busy in learning how to shift for themselves to make any effort in the way of higher education, and the sounds that came from them at this season were in the main tentative only, or those of alarm, if the portentous shadow of Sharp Shin or Sparrow Hawk should cast a cloud across the sun.

But these sleepy sounds of September are pleasant to hear, and they make many people contented with things as they are, and they speak a valuable sermon to those who are not. Nature is the best of teachers, and the laws and logic silently inculcated by the birds of the air and the beasts of the field can always be studied with profit.

As the sun slowly sinks again, bringing another day to its close, the yellow moon pokes his head, grand and majestic, above the eastern hills, and

Hoo-Hoo the Great Horned Owl starts from his slumber ; Cooney the Fox sends out his sharp bark, and the pathetic cry of Ringtail the Coon, which sounds like an infant in distress, brings the farmer's wife to the door. The last Katydid takes up the day-song of the birds, and in tireless strains seems to say : " I have lived ! I have lived ! "

## CHAPTER XVIII.

SEPTEMBER.—PART II.

Brush and Brake—Clawem and Softwing—Scramble the Grey Squirrel—Tawny the Red Squirrel—Red Shoulder the Hawk.

**B**RUSH and Brake stayed about Milford for a longer time than they had at first intended, and it was well into September before they thought of going home to Killingworth. The excuse they gave to the casual acquaintance they had made was that they wished to make an exhaustive report to their parents; but Charlemagne Pretzel-Brown the Dachshund, who met them several times again and to whom they had made this excuse, came back and told Sister Hilda flatly that he didn't believe it, and his reasons seemed good.

“You remember, Hilda, the little colt that died when it was only a week old? Well, the farmer buried it over in the cider-mill lot, and I've been wondering what's been at it for the past fortnight. I ran off late this afternoon to see if I could find a rabbit over there at the swampside, and I wasn't making much noise when I came right out on those foxes eating away at the poor colt's body. They

had dug a regular hole. I just sat and watched, and after each of them had had a rib or two they filled in the hole and made it look natural. Then I made a little noise, and they saw me, and, not knowing that I'd been watching all the time, they told me that yarn."

"What else did they say, Carley?" exclaimed Sister Hilda.

"Oh, they're cunning, deceitful beasts. Brush, the one without a tail, said that so far they didn't see much in Milford to brag over. They'd sampled Todemy Smith's hen-roost and found the chickens tough; the wild grapes weren't nearly so sweet as those at Poverty; and the worst thing they found was that people were building fox-proof hen-houses. I didn't tell them who was doing it, but I think Master's very wise all the same. Why, Hilda, they are the cleverest animals I ever knew! That other one—what's his name?—told of how a hound and some men got after him the other day, and, after he'd played with them for a while, he went into a hollow tree, climbed up a little way and then out of a hole onto the dead limb of another tree leaning up against the hollow one, and then he ran down and off, and when the hound came and barked at the hole the man said:

"'Why, the dog's treed a coon.'

"'I never saw him do that before, when he was on a fox-trail,' said the other, and with that they both

sat down and started to smoke out the coon, and presently when the hound got the fox-scent again at the foot of the other tree, they whipped him and called him names and tied him to the fence and spent two hours trying to smoke out the coon. I tell you, Sister, those foxes know a *lot*. And they tell me we're too civilized down here!"

It was quite true. Brush and Brake had been lingering in order to finish up the poor, little colt; but, wishing to deceive people, they had made plausible excuses for remaining. Finally one day, as they lay in their warm nest back of Ben Smith's pond, Brush proposed that they should start for home.

"We've had a fine time, brother, and I'm fat with all this eating; but we've got to go home some time. My opinion is that this is a good place to visit about once a year. I feel that I'd get lazy and careless if I were here all the time, and then they seem a bit keener with guns and traps down here. I remember that Jim Crow—you remember Jim—said something to that effect once."

"I believe you're right, Brush, and I scarcely think they'll know us when we get back; for we've lived on the fat of the land. I hope we shan't forget anything. Did you notice that peach-orchard down at Beaver Brook? There must have been a thousand trees in it."

"Yes, and the apples and potatoes and onions!

I never saw onions until now. They remind me in a way of something at home; I can't think what. I wonder what people do with them."

"Yes, and that good-natured dog, Brown—I can't say the whole name—why he told me of the most ridiculous things that they have in the garden. I put them down in my head. There's eggplant—did you ever hear of such trash?—and artichokes, spiky things that a ground-hog wouldn't touch, and okra and parsley and Brussels sprouts—I've heard of chestnut-sprouts and oyster-plant—they have two or three names for *that*—and that mint that grows about the swamps over home and that we always avoid. I tell you, Brake, it makes a great difference where one lives; but I must say they are a little more up to date down here, as young Brown said."

"We must try not to be too 'know-it-all,' Brushy, when we get back."

"Well, I don't know. It seems to me that when one gets off the regular line and comes back he ought to tell people what he's seen, not to hurt feelings or seem stuck up, but just to show them how others live."

"It doesn't make much difference; they'll talk anyway. They're sure to say, 'Those Cooney boys are back, and just because they've been away they think they've seen the whole earth.'"

So at last Brush and Brake started for home.

They had very little difficulty in finding their way back. They just went dead east towards the rising moon. They travelled fast, much faster than when they were going to an unknown country, and they were pardonably desirous of telling every one they knew about what they had seen abroad. Gradually things began to look more and more familiar as they went on, and, when they were still six or eight miles from home and wondering as to what reception they would get and as to how many changes had taken place—for they thought that they had been away for a very long time—they were delighted to be met by Hoo-Hoo the Great Horned Owl, who, with two comrades as large as himself, came down over them and with much snapping of bill gave them a hearty welcome.

“Well, if you are not Cooney’s boys!” cried Hoo-Hoo. “These are my children, Brush and Brake. Almost as big as I am, aren’t they? Boy and girl, yes. And where have you been all this time? I suppose you’ve much to tell about.”

“Why, Hoo-Hoo, you don’t mean to say those are your children!”

“Yes, they are,” said Hoo-Hoo proudly. “This is my boy, Clawem and—step up, sister—this is my daughter, Softwing—kind of fancy name, isn’t it? But my wife has what I call new-fangled ideas regarding the naming of children. I wanted to name her Catchrat, but we agreed on a compromise. She



wanted to call the boy Judge ; but he's so clever with his feet, I said *no*. But tell me, boys, how did you enjoy yourselves?"

" Oh, we had a rattling good time ; lived on the fat of the land ; met numbers of queer people. By the way, Hoo-Hoo, have you ever eaten artichokes or Brussels sprouts or seen fox-proof hen-roosts or——"

" Now, stop, Brush ; what *are* you talking about ? You haven't learned a new language, have you ?"

" No, Hoo-Hoo ; but you come around with your family some day, and we'll make your eyes open even in daytime."

" Well, I am surprised," gasped Hoo-Hoo.

An hour later the boys astonished their parents by bursting in on them just as they were sitting at breakfast.

" Hello, Father," called out Brush and Brake in the same breath. " We're back again."

Mother Fox was delighted. " How well you look ! Come now, just take a little of this turkey. You must be hungry. It isn't very fresh—your father brought it in nearly three weeks ago—but perhaps it's as good as you've been having."

" Mother, we had a hearty supper of colt tenderloin before we left Milford, and I beg to be excused."

" Colt tenderloin ! What on earth's that ? and

where did you get your elegant manners? You haven't been spoiled, have you?"

"Well, Mother, living up here in the country, you are apt to forget that there are other places, and that the world's going on somewhere else. Colt tenderloin is something to dream about."

"I suppose I *am* an ignorant old fox," answered the mother humbly.

"See here, you young foxes, you sit down and eat what's put before you, and if you don't treat your mother with proper respect you'll leave this house pretty quick, and you won't go looking quite as well dressed as you do now either. Sit down there, *quick*."

Cooney's voice was one of absolute command and Brush and Brake obeyed instantly.

"I'm glad to have you boys back, and you can work your cityfied manners on any one else that'll listen to you; but that nonsense won't be permitted here!"

. . . . .

"The melancholy days have come, the saddest of the year'," quoted Scramble the Grey Squirrel to a friend as they sat munching chestnuts on a broad and comfortable limb about forty feet from the ground.

"Yes," answered his companion; "we're happy enough during the summer, when the leaves are on and no one can see us; but from now onward it's a



“WE’RE HAPPY ENOUGH DURING THE SUMMER WHEN THE LEAVES ARE ON.”



continuous 'heart in your throat.' I must say that I don't care for the winter, and, by the way, Scramble, did you ever know the leaves to fall so early? Here the nuts are all ripe, and it isn't quite the first of October."

"I knew we'd have frost early, for I remember that old Katydid started in mid-August with that tiresome song of hers, and the old saying is pretty true: 'When Katydid begins, it's but six weeks to frost.'"

"Have you begun to put up anything for the winter yet, Scramble?"

"Yes, I hold that you can't begin too early. I've got about two pecks of chestnuts, two quarts of acorns and a few walnuts in the hole up here, and this, with what I've buried, makes a pretty good beginning."

"I should say so, Scramble. Do you look for any poaching this year?"

"I don't know; that question is worrying me considerably. I've heard that the new family that moved into the apple-tree yonder have no sort of conscience—brought up badly, perhaps. Are you acquainted with them?"

"No; but I don't like their looks. I got a little information from Chipmunk. He says that a sister of his knew them well, up at Stannard's, and she says they don't stop at anything. In the summer, they steal all the eggs they can lay their paws on.

She says that Redbreast the Robin lost two settings in succession on account of them."

"Well, I believe that a squirrel that'll do that is a worthless kind of beast. I'll watch them, and if they come over my way I'll give them a piece of my mind, and if that doesn't do I'll go further. What are they called?"

"Tawny the Red Squirrel. Haven't you seen them? They're rust-coloured and about the size of my boys."

"I regard it as about the worst crime of all to come into another fellow's yard and sneak around and dig up his food and carry it off, don't you?"

"Look out, Scramble! There comes Red Shoulder the Hawk!" exclaimed his companion, and with that they both disappeared into the hollow limb just below.

With a flop and a grunt of disappointment Red Shoulder sat close to the opening.

"I say, Scramble," he called out, "they tell me you've got some new neighbours. Who are they?"

"Tawny the Red Squirrel and family," answered Scramble huskily from within.

"Where do they live?"

"Over there in the orchard."

"Come out and show me."

"I can't now, Red Shoulder; I'm busy, and I might also mention that I don't forget the fact that

you made a meal of my wife last year. Do you recollect that? And 'the burnt child dreads the fire.'"

Red Shoulder didn't answer, but muttering to himself, "That fellow hasn't got any eclipse of memory," he sailed off down toward the orchard. He stopped on the top of an old fence-post, and at the same moment he heard Bob White close by calling his family together :

"Oh, Bob White," Red Shoulder shouted, "come here and have a chat."

Bob White, having got his family close together in the thick weeds and golden-rod, answered :

"You'll have to excuse me, Red Shoulder. I'm giving a little picnic to some friends and can't leave."

While Bob was speaking Red Shoulder was listening attentively, in order to locate the sounds as exactly as possible, and now with keen eyes and sharp talons he dashed haphazard into the weeds. Bob White was taken completely by surprise, but whistled loudly :

"Scatter, all of you, in every direction! Meet in swamp!"

And when quiet was finally restored, Red Shoulder found himself alone among the weeds, and the feathery golden-rod seemed to be nodding derisively above him. Then he flew off angrily to his favourite tree, which overlooked the landscape in every direction. He soon got over his disappointment and

settled himself for the night with his head close between his shoulders, one foot only clutching the moss-grown limb. Then he gave himself up to dreams of chicken-yards and dove-cotes, until, refreshed by an undisturbed night's rest, he awoke in the glimmering dawn. As he began to preen his feathers preparatory to his day's journeyings, he noticed a little movement at the foot of the neighbouring apple-tree. In the grey mist of the early morning he could not satisfy himself as to what it might be, but that it was some kind of animal that would provide him with a breakfast he felt quite sure. In common with all the Raptores he was deliberate in coming to a conclusion and lightning-like in carrying out his decision when made. The grey of dawn gradually turned to the white of day as the minutes passed, and the various objects became more and more distinct, until at last Red Shoulder could detect the forms of two small animals among the chestnut leaves beneath the home of Scramble the Grey Squirrel, his interlocutor of the evening previous. It took him but a second to grasp the situation. Tawny the Red Squirrel was pillaging the winter warehouse of Scramble, and, not only this, but had taken time by the forelock, as it were, and had persuaded his wife and a thieving friend to aid and abet him. Red Shoulder watched them for a little time. Scramble was evidently still abed, for he had as yet given no sign. The bur-





“TAWNY, THE RED SQUIRREL . . . . HAD PERSUADED HIS WIFE AND A  
THIEVING FRIEND TO AID AND ABET HIM.”



glary had evidently been well planned, for as fast as Tawny the Red Squirrel dug out the provender, his mate and her accomplice would hurry away with as many nuts as they could carry and stow them in the old apple-tree hollow. They were in such haste, however, that they couldn't help making some noise, and this was what attracted the attention of Red Shoulder the Hawk.

Red Shoulder was no particular friend of Scramble, as we have seen; but he had in his make-up some qualities of honesty and hated to see this underhanded business. Incidentally he was hungry for his breakfast, and, not having prepared anything, he thought that Tawny would probably meet his wants. So he waited for his opportunity, and, watching the arch conspirator carefully, he finally descended upon him just at the moment when Tawny had most of his body concealed by reason of his burrowing operations. The little warning cry from the other two squirrels was lost on Tawny, who had perhaps trusted too much to his friends. In an instant the cruel talons were fastened securely through his body back of the shoulders, and his piteous little squeals for mercy were drowned by Red Shoulder's exultant laugh. "You *would* steal other people's hard-earned savings, would you?" and a few moments later Tawny disappeared, head and all. Had they known it, it might have been a satisfaction to those he left behind that, being old

and tough, he gave Red Shoulder an attack of acute indigestion.

While Red Shoulder was swallowing Tawny, Scramble the Grey Squirrel, who had been awakened by the unusual chatter of his neighbours, did not stop even to wash, but came quickly out on the chestnut limb close by. In an instant, being clever, he took in the situation, and as the last vestige of Tawny disappeared from view he called out :

“Red Shoulder, I almost forgive you for eating my wife,” and then he disappeared, and, except for the everlasting prattle of the brook, there was silence for a time over hillside and vale.

But within two months Red Shoulder, through an indiscretion as marked as that of Tawny, got into trouble. He was caught in a steel trap set for Slick the Mink, and all his wife's efforts could not release him.



" RED SHOULDER'S MISFORTUNE. "



## CHAPTER XIX.

OCTOBER.—PART I.

Snarley the Lynx—Scramble the Grey Squirrel—Cooney the Fox—Drum the Partridge.

THE swamp was brilliant in its autumn dress. No one who had not seen it would believe that anything except from a painter's brush could show so many colours. There were bright crimson and canary-yellow and vivid green, all on one leaf. It had been an exceptional year in Connecticut. There is something exceptional in every year; sometimes it is a prolonged drought, drying up wells that for a hundred years had fed out water in unfailing quantities; again it is the prolonged rains of July—fifteen inches for the month—that rot the potatoes in the ground and let the weeds get so far ahead of the farmer that he can never catch up. But this year was rich in exceptions. There had been a phenomenal drought, a phenomenal crop of potatoes, and now came a phenomenal frost. It settled down suddenly over Scuppo and Rockland and Poverty. It came like a thief in the night and didn't stop until it had robbed the farmer of his remaining tomatoes, lima beans and green corn. It was what is called "a killin' frost," and Farmer Green found a half-inch of

ice in the feed-pail and six belated young ducks dead in the barn-yard. Then, as if to make it more noticeable, the mercury, starting at  $27^{\circ}$ , went directly up, up, up and only stopped at  $72^{\circ}$ , near which point it remained for the whole month. It was irritating, to say the least, for, if things had been natural and the frost had come when it should all those acres of corn and beans and tomatoes would have been housed or sold beforehand.

But the frost did one thing that, though not useful, was most ornamental. It put the swamps and hills into a most gorgeous dress of scarlet. It did it overnight, as it were, and when Snarley the Lynx returned home in broad daylight after one of his usual outings, he could not but stop and gaze with pleasure over the broad valley and hillside. The swamp maple there in the early sunlight, in the intensity of its redness and the immensity of its expanse, made the lowlands look like a great, red, smouldering fire, while the framework of hills, on the contrary, presented almost every shade of colouring. The hickory sprouts and white-birch leaves were brilliant in lemon and canary-yellow. Nestled among the yellow patches were the rich silver-greens of the white pine, while side by side came the burnished bronze-red of the white oak, and, just below on the swampside, could be seen the intense crimson of the poison-sumach together with the climbing clematis, whose leaves spoke of spring but whose



soft feathery seed-balls told another tale. Viewed with half-closed eyes, the steep hillside opposite looked for all the world like a monster reproduction of Grandma Scranton's "crazy quilt."

While Snarley was sitting there yawning and admiring the landscape he thought that he heard distant but approaching sounds, and soon, surely enough, he could make out the voices of his arch enemy, man, far down in the valley below. As the voices came nearer Snarley became very keen, and, with ears pricked up and body all a-tremble, he looked and listened. Finally, and as though he had satisfied himself of something unpleasant, his ears flattened down on his head, the hair of his back rose threateningly and his sharp, white teeth showed dangerously. He crouched low on the ground as if to spring.

"By the shade of my grandfather, that's Joe Hoadley, the terror of my ancestors! Where, in the name of all the Snarleys that that man has sent to their doom, did he drop from? Yes, that's he, surely. I'll hide myself in the top of this chestnut-tree. I don't believe those stupid bird-dogs will find me out."

With that Snarley, after a half-dozen graceful bounds, reached the foot of the tree and soon planted himself safely away up among the yellow leaves and listened. Soon the hunters, for there were two of them, appeared, and, as they neared the tree in which

Snarley lay flat and concealed, the latter overheard their talk.

“Fred, I think those birds have flown.”

“Can’t you find them?”

“No. Hi! there, Toby, come around here! Fred, bring Rex over here; we’ll beat it out again. I saw those partridges drop down close by here.”

An interval of crashing through the brush and briars followed.

“Woop! Fred, come up here, Toby’s got them.”

“All right. Where is he?”

“Right ’twixt you and me. There, now, Rex’s backing in fine shape. Careful there! Can you see on your side?”

“Yes.”

“Well, I’ll go in and put them up.”

A short interval of silence—then whirr! buzz! and away sped the great birds through the thick cover. Short and sharp was the report of the gun, and then came the thrumming rustle amongst the crisp, brown leaves.

“Well done, boy. He wanted to go with you, didn’t he? Where’d the other go?”

“I couldn’t make out. Down in the valley, I think.”

“I’ll tell you what I think we ought to do. We’ll work this side-hill down to Beaver Dam and then turn and come up on the other side and take

our lunch up under the big chestnut tree yonder. There's a fine spring under the ledge."

"Good gracious!" ejaculated Snarley the Lynx to himself. "I'll have to stay here, I suppose. That fellow Hoadley, I've heard, knows almost everything, and I remember hearing Grandfather tell about what a dead shot he is. That was long ago—let's see; nearly four years—and Grandfather was right, for when that villain killed him, Grandfather was almost twenty rods off and running a mile a minute. Why, they say Grandfather turned ten clean somersaults! I'm going to see him some day. They put straw and stuff inside of him, and Cooney says the 'Paper Sports' have got him up on the mantel-shelf in the club-house. Cooney says he looks quite natural, excepting for the dust on him—and I don't think Grandfather collected *much* dust, especially when that man Hoadley was about. Cooney says he saw him—Grandfather—one morning through the slats of the blinds. He says they've got him in dreadful company though—with Slim the Weasel, Slick the Mink and Ringtail the Coon all in line on the mantel-shelf together."

By this time the hunters were down in the valley, and Snarley found himself talking aloud. Just as he finished his soliloquy he heard a little barking noise near by, and turning he saw Scramble the Grey Squirrel close beside him.

"Morning, Snarley."

"Morning, Scramble. Chestnuts good?"

"Fine. This is the best tree in Killingworth. Have one?"

"No, thanks, Scramble; I haven't much appetite this morning. See those villains just now?"

"Yes, Paper Sports, weren't they? I'm not particularly afraid of them, so I didn't even stop eating."

"Paper Sports! you little chucklehead! Do you know who one of them was?"

"No," answered Scramble, dropping his chestnut in surprise.

"Why, that was Joe Hoadley. Have you never heard of him?"

"Good Heavens, Snarley, you don't mean that, do you?"

"I do, and I'll wager that if all your relatives and all mine and all Cooney's that that man has *skinned* were laid out in line, they'd reach from Poverty to Scuppo!"

"Snarley, I have made a narrow escape. To think that I hopped about innocently while that villain was close by."

"You may learn sense some day."

"What do you suppose they enjoy in killing us?"

"Why, that man asserts that he eats some of us and sells our skins. It makes me feel creepy to think about it."

Snarley the Lynx and Scramble the Grey Squirrel

kept up a desultory conversation for two hours, and, just as they began to tire of each other's company, Snarley started convulsively and whispered: "Hark!" and then far down the winding cart-path they could hear the hunters returning. They seemed in high spirits, and Joe Hoadley, as his great frame came in view, was singing at the top of his voice this strange version of an old saying:

"When poverty comes in at the door,  
Sweet Love, we'll out at the casement fly."

Snarley thought that quite an easy way of keeping out of the poorhouse.

"Joe, let's go down into that piece of white birches and sprouts and see if we can't pick up a woodcock or two this afternoon."

"All right, boy."

"Poor Longbill," sighed Snarley, safely ensconced up among the branches, but greatly relieved to see them start off again. After they were out of sight and sound, Snarley was on the ground in a moment, and calling a good-bye to Scramble the Grey Squirrel, he started off on a gentle lope northwards in the opposite direction to that taken by the hunters. He decided to take the swamp-road and veer off to the east as he came toward Rockland, on the chance of meeting Cooney the Fox. He wasn't on what one would call intimate terms with Cooney, but still they had been ac-

quainted for a number of years, and really the only differences that had come between them were some slight arguments, long, long ago, relative to the real ownership of one or two of Deacon Smith Clark's guinea-hens. As Snarley had got the better of him in the debate in both cases, Cooney had always felt a kind of cool friendship for him; but now Snarley thought that if he could accidentally meet Cooney or one of his boys and tell them about Joe Hoadley he might square accounts. He knew how the Cooney family felt on the subject, for it was common swamp talk that Joe Hoadley had made more inroads into this class of animal life than almost any other foe. But the fact remained that, whereas they all feared and avoided Joe Hoadley, still they had great respect for him and for his methods. As Hoo-Hoo once said :

“ He may be a fearfully bloodthirsty man, but he doesn't do any more than we do; he just puts his cleverness against ours and lets the best one win, and he's clean: that's what I like—he's clean.” When John Crow croaked out, “ Well, Hoo-Hoo, what do you mean by clean?” Hoo-Hoo answered :

“ I mean there's nothing underhand in his way of doing things; he just goes out as we do and hunts just as we hunt others. He don't take any unfair advantage.”

So on this sunny afternoon Snarley trotted up toward Rockland and passed not more than a short

half-mile from Cooney's home. It was the tenth of October, and the very last half-frozen Katydid was scraping out his weary, sleepy cry. Snarley wondered why the frost of the week before hadn't sent him into his nest, but the slow measured cry, "Katy did, Katy didn't," rasped out on the still evening air in a doleful, hopeless way.

Opposite Cooney's home Snarley gave his old signal, in order to see whether by chance any of the family were there, and immediately a distinct but distant answer could be heard. Soon afterward Cooney appeared, and, when a few civilities had been exchanged, they sat beneath a spreading pine tree and Snarley told the story of all he had seen and heard that morning:

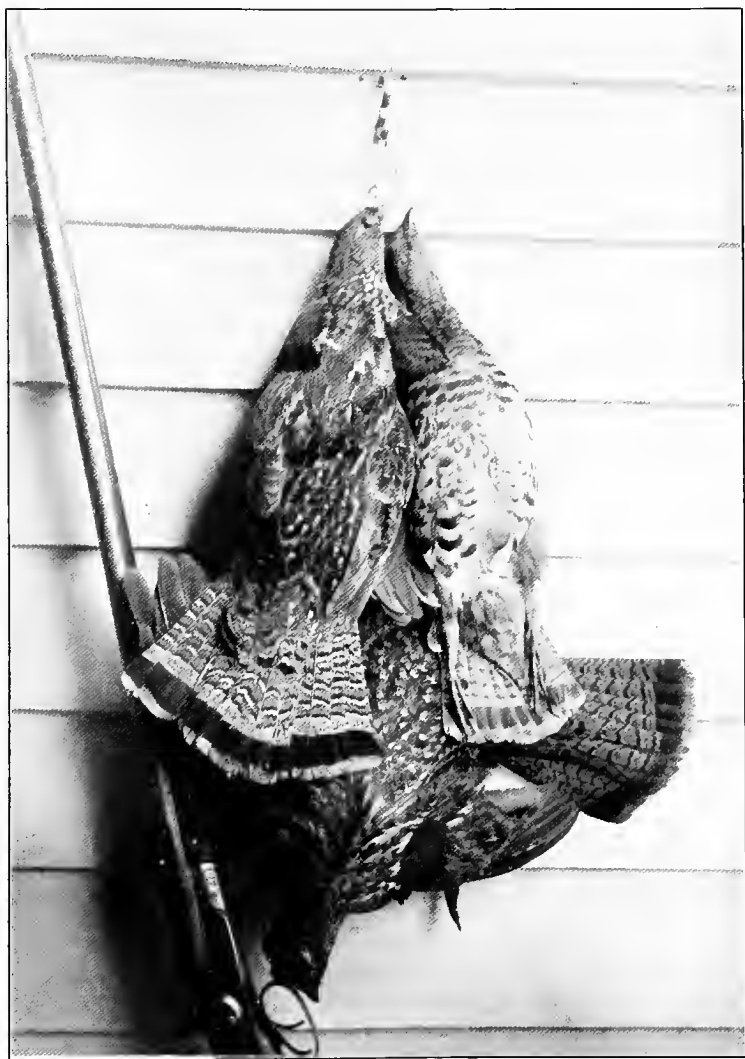
"I'm very much obliged to you, Snarley, for telling me, but I'm not as scared this time as I might be. Shall I tell you why? That fellow is out of his usual range and won't stay long, and, between you and me, that's why my family moved from the neighbourhood of Derby. I was only a bit of a cub then. He's here with some of those Club-men to teach them how to shoot, and he isn't looking for us now. I saw a funny thing myself this afternoon."

"What was that, Cooney?"

"I'll tell you. I was coming home down Rockland swamp-road, you know, when all of a sudden I saw a partridge walking along ahead, and at first I thought it was Ruffle; but after looking a second

I saw it was Ruffle's cousin, Drum, so I just lay quietly at one side of the road and waited. Drum came out on the road and began dusting. So I said to myself, 'Here's my chance to take my wife a present,' and I began to get ready; but just at this juncture I heard a noise over toward my right, and surely enough one of those men from the club came in view. He didn't have any dog that I could see. So I just squatted down. Suddenly he stopped short close by me, and I saw that he had seen Drum. 'Well,' said he, 'that's funny, a chicken in the road! There's no farmhouse near here,' said he; 'that's funny.' All the time while he was talking Drum was dusting himself and fussing in the road. Finally the man said, 'Why, I believe it's a partridge!' and with that he squared off. He wasn't more than five rods from the bird. He raised his murderous gun to his shoulder, and then he muttered, 'I've got to get that bird!—perhaps I'll say I killed it flying.' Then he whispered softly, 'There's dust on the sight of the gun; I'll make sure;' and with that he took down the gun and wiped it all off with a silk handkerchief. All this time I could see Drum cleaning himself and not suspecting anything, and there wasn't any real danger excepting a surprise; for, saying 'I'll aim at his head,' the man fired off the infernal machine, and Drum flew up and away into the swamp as frightened as possible, but with not a feather mussed.





"A GROUP OF RUFFLE'S RELATIVES."



Well, Snarley, you should have seen the look on the face of that man; he was just astonished! He laid his gun down and paced the distance off two or three times and then said he, kind of to himself: 'I don't know that I'll tell about it, but I may,' and then he walked off mumbling to himself."

"I wish they were all like that, Cooney, don't you? Good-night."

"Good-evening, Snarley; looks like a storm, doesn't it?"

## CHAPTER XX.

OCTOBER.—PART II.

Cooney the Fox—Ringtail the Coon—Shy the Red Deer—  
Swift the Otter.

COONEY the Fox had one accustomed run. He had many others that he knew like an open book; but this was his particular turnpike, as it were, between Camp-meeting woods and Branford Point. Starting out at seven o'clock in the evening—which in October in New England means dark—he would soon strike Oronoque Run and then go down the Plains, and by skirting Todemy Smith's pond-hole he would come to the swamp just west of Peck's farm. But he always made a point of stopping for rest and thought at the Cider-mill Oak. This giant tree had stood for over a century, and it seemed as if it must have been hollow from its very beginning, for within the memory of the oldest inhabitant it had been called alternately Coon Tree and Cider-mill Oak. The latter appellation referred to the fact that its broad, spreading branches had, for years gone by, overhung the local cider-mill, and the farmers in those old days had been wont to trudge many miles beside



“BUT HE ALWAYS MADE A POINT OF STOPPING . . . AT THE  
CIDER-MILL OAK.”



their ox-carts, laden with the fruit that was soon converted into liquid, on a basis of shares, the pomace being used as a fertilizer. Then the sweet apple-juice was carted back and placed in the cellar for consumption during the winter nights, when, around the roaring, crackling fire, the children would tell their ghost-stories and their parents would crack nuts and jokes. But Cooney always found something besides rest and refreshment at the Cider-mill Oak; for, since the old mill had fallen to pieces, it had been the natural home and resort of Ringtail the Coon, and quite often Cooney and Ringtail would meet there. There was neither special friendship nor enmity between these two. Their tastes didn't clash especially, though Ringtail *would* eat young chickens on occasions if they were properly served.

On a crisp, moonlit night in mid-October, when the hoar-frost was beginning to hint at ice, Cooney the Fox started on one of his usual trips "down cider-mill way," as he explained to his wife on leaving the room under the ledge. "I'll not be out very late," he explained, "for I'm not really going for food so much as to get a whiff of this air." His two boys wanted to go along, but they were not in very good odour with their father as yet, on account of the treatment of their mother after their return from Milford. They couldn't seem to "get rid of those cityfied manners," as Cooney expressed it, and

he often regretted the day when he had sent them over to prospect the new country.

The moon was at its full, and old Cooney, as he trotted lazily along, noticed how the trees were losing their foliage. It was perfectly calm, with not a breath of wind; but, as he skirted the Peck Swamp, the crispy leaves, loosened from their fastenings by the frosty air, dropped about him with a little crackling sound. Cooney was an educated fox, and his teacher had been the experience of five long years. His ears and eyes and nose had been trained to a point where any and every sound, sight or smell the least bit out of the ordinary would cause him to stop and investigate. On this bright evening he was feeling very fit, and as he sidled along he ruminated how much he had to be thankful for. He stopped under a spreading apple-tree for a moment to scratch his left ear, which had been torn a day or two before by an accidental encounter with a cat-brier vine and now bothered him in its itching. Just as he did so he thought that he heard Ringtail the Coon down towards Cider-mill Oak, and then he became sure of it; but the cry was somewhat unusual in its intonation, and just as he was about to move off in its direction, a dull thud close behind caused him to turn suddenly. In a moment he saw that it was only a large, round and yellow Newtown pippin apple, which, grown too heavy for its stem, had startled him by its fall.



"I'm glad it didn't hit my head," he soliloquised and moved on. Soon he came out of the shadow and stood in a little streak of moonlight, and in a moment Ringtail, for it was he, trotted out from the darkness and spoke to him.

"Good-evening, Cooney."

"Good-evening, Ringtail. How are you to-night?"

"I'm feeling pretty glum, Cooney."

"What's ailing you?"

"I lost my oldest boy this afternoon."

"You don't mean it! I'm sorry. How'd it happen?"

"It's a long and bloody story, Cooney, but I'll tell you a little of it. I and my boy were out all night last night and went too far to get home to the rest of the family before light. Besides I'd taken the youngster a long way, and he was full of frogs and corn—frogs aren't all gone yet, Cooney, and they are fine. That's what delayed us, I suppose, and you know, Cooney, I'm not living here this year. I've got a cosey little home near Tibbals's Bridge. So I planned that we'd spend the day in the old place. I know every branch and hollow in that old tree, but Barney, my boy, had never been there. So I said, 'Barney, you follow me,' and into the hole at the foot I went and crawled up to the big limb, and showed him the nicest place, and got him all fixed and tucked in, and then I went up to that other

smaller hole—the one that has the big air-hole on one side—and then saying ‘ Good-night ’ I went to sleep. Cooney, the next thing I knew was the most awful scratching and climbing I ever heard down on the tree-trunk below. So I put one eye to the opening, and there right below me I saw a man, and, as I saw him, he called to another fellow below, ‘ Hi, Gus, there’s a coon in the tree!’ and the other fellow calls out: ‘ You don’t mean it?’ ‘ Yes, I can see his eyes; he’s down there.’ Cooney, I was just paralysed with fear, for I knew it was my boy they’d seen. Then the man in the tree said, ‘ You go and get the gun, and we’ll get him. I’ll stay here and watch him.’

“ Cooney,” and at this point Ringtail brushed away a tear with one of his front paws, “ that fellow got down and cut a club and then said to the other: ‘ He can’t get away now ; you hurry!’ and he was right, for we were just cooped in. You know, Cooney, I’d have done most anything for Barney, and I *did* crawl down to his place once ; but when I got there the poor little chap had left and gone to try to get out below. But of course he couldn’t do that, and I don’t know where he was then. You know I’m getting old and clumsy and make an awful noise a-scratching when I let myself down. So I thought I’d best go back above and wait. In about fifteen minutes, back came the man he called Gus with another fellow and a gun. What do you think

they did then? They took a lot of dry leaves and stuffed them in that hole until the hollow was full; then they put fire to it. Can't you smell the smoke in my fur now, Cooney?"

"I thought I smelt something like burning wood before I got here, Ringtail," answered Cooney.

"Of course you did; that's *me*. They threw a mass of old stuff in and it made a dreadful smoke. All I could do was to put my nose out of the little hole and get fresh air."

"What happened to your boy?"

"I'll tell you what happened, Cooney, and I saw it all. He must have tried a number of places, for I could hear a lot of scratching down below and could hear those bloodthirsty villains shouting, now and then, and saying 'There he is,' and 'See his nose,' and then they didn't say anything for nearly five minutes, when I saw Barney make a break out of that hole for the swamp, and then that gun began to go off. At the very first shot Barney keeled over, Cooney, and then he got up again—for he took after me for grit—and made for the swamp; but he was badly hurt, and then some more terrible noises came, and he lay down and they gathered around and one of them picked him up by his tail and said, 'He's hog-fat for a young one.' Think of that, Cooney—by his *tail!*" and Ringtail broke down.

"Didn't they look for you?"

"No, I lay low. But they sat down and poked my boy about and said his skin was fair and that he'd make a good coon stew!"

"What'll your wife say?"

"That's what's bothering me now, Cooney. I daren't go home. You know when she's angry about ordinary things she's pretty bad, but when I break this to her I'm in for a terrible time."

"Why don't you break your leg or something, and get her sorry for you, too, or shut up one eye and make believe you're blinded by a shot, or roll in that red mud down Nineveh way and call it blood."

"I might do something like that, Cooney; I never thought of getting out of it that way."

Cooney felt sorry for Ringtail, and his sense of cunning which had been excited was uppermost. So after a second he said again:

"I'll tell you, Ringtail; you come with me, and we'll pay them back. We'll just make a visit to the chicken-yard and have a good meal afterwards up among the cedars. You must feel hungry, and if I don't send you home a bleeding hero my name isn't Cooney."

"I'll go with you, Cooney; for you know how to do these things, and I don't."

When Ringtail, a day and a half late, came to his home near Tibbals's Bridge, he was received with joy and he looked like a veteran back from the war.

His coat was bloody and bedraggled and he limped badly, and the grief at the fatal misfortune that had overtaken her oldest son was almost swallowed up in Mrs. Ringtail's sympathy for the poor wounded martyr. Ringtail himself finally began to think that he was a brave coon.

It was the hunter's moon that looked down on Shy the Red Deer a few nights afterwards, when after feeding among the willow-sprouts down below Collins's he finally made his bed in a clump of cedars where the white-and-green moss blended into an improvised mattress. Shy the Red Deer was an uncommon denizen of wood and field, but latterly his family had become more numerous, and was quite often started from the swamp or neighbouring buckwheat stubble along the Hamonnassett River. Shy had not perused the game laws carefully, but, after he had been scared half to death a dozen times during the autumn by being disturbed at his rest by men who, although carrying guns, yet never offered to molest him, he became convinced that things had changed, and in consequence he became less suspicious. Shy the Red Deer was, in Connecticut, one of the rare sights, yet the country is so well adapted to his wants and habits that he now felt a new sense of gratitude and often remarked to his mate: "If this would only last, how happy we could be." His worst enemy in these days was Speed the Fox-hound, who, now that the cool weather had

come, would sneak off when set free for a run and if he came across the track of Shy would follow him up with dogged determination until finally Shy was forced to take to Nathan's pond or Nineveh Lake to escape being worn out.

There was another large animal that was quite numerous along the stream; but perhaps the less said about him the better. His name was Swift the Otter. He lived in a hole in the bank and was a slippery and uncanny creature. It was rare to see him, for he was a nocturnal hunter, and his nature partook of the characteristics of Slim the Weasel and Slick the Mink. In the mud along the river, but more readily in the snow, one could easily trace him. He was over four feet long, including his slimy tail, and he was built on the snake's model—long and slender. His fur was thick and warm, and as he came fresh from the water his dress shone like silver. He could slide into the pond with a little, noiseless slump, and scarcely a ripple would indicate the spot where he had disappeared. Water was his element, and, like seals in the salt water, he could dart about with the swiftness of thought, and herein lay his ability to get a good meal of fish almost whenever he liked. Speckle the Trout, when young, could generally evade his swift attacks, except when he cornered him, as he was wont to do in time of drought. He was keen in his work and knew how to play on Speckle's timorous nature, for all



"HE LIVED IN A HOLE IN THE BANK AND WAS A SLIPPERY AND UNCANNY CREATURE."





the Speckle family were in mortal dread of Swift the Otter. For instance, when on shore he would investigate just how the land lay, and then when he discovered a small pool somewhat isolated from, but connected with, the main brook, he would start first above and then below it, and would, as it were, herd what fish there were toward this point. Frantic fear would finally drive Speckle's family into the isolated pool, and there Swift could play with them and finally eat them. He could take Sucker at any time, for Sucker generally lay half asleep on the bottom and was a sluggish "no-account" fish anyway, and only good enough, as Swift thought, to fill in stomach-space.

Speckle, on the other hand, was regarded as what the French would call a *bonne bouche*, and, if Swift were entertaining company in his hole at home, he would always try to take back one of the celebrated "Hamonassett Seventeen-ounce Beauties" as a special delicacy. Swift the Otter remained out all winter, and one could often notice in a light snow his curious and unmistakable tracks. He was so long and narrow that his trail was unlike that of any other denizen of the New England mountains or marshes.

The present head of the family in this section was an old, greyish-looking otter known everywhere by the name of Three Paws. The way in which he obtained this sobriquet was interesting. It was two

or three years ago, when, during the winter, Farmer Bartlett had set his traps all along the stream; for his hen-roosts had been persistently pilfered by Slim the Weasel and Cooney the Fox. So he had got an assortment of steel traps, large and small, and had lain awake at night inventing toothsome baits with which to set them.

The trap down near Deep Hole was large and of the double-spring variety, and it was placed on the regular animal path at the streamside. It was deftly concealed by means of dead and sodden leaves, and, as Swift the Otter slid along on a bright October evening, all that he could see was the toothsome head of a fine black bass lying there and inviting closer inspection. Swift didn't hesitate a moment. He seemed to think that it might yet escape, so out went one of his front paws, and snap! shut the cruel, steel teeth.

There was a period of commotion in the immediate neighbourhood, and the bushes were beaten down, and leaves and mud and water flew in every direction. Exhaustion came at last, and Swift the Otter lay there completely exhausted and with a badly broken leg. He could understand now what had happened, for it was not the first time that he had seen a steel trap; but he had never dreamed that he himself would become a victim.

As the hours passed, the pain became intolerable, and the certainty that eventually he must die of

starvation or at the hands of his direst enemy, man, made him put all his thoughts on some means of escape. Then, as he looked down at his crushed and mangled foot he thought to himself, "What good will that ever do me again?" but at this very moment, when it was just glimmering daylight, he heard distant but approaching footsteps, unmistakably, to his keen ears, those of a human being.

With a hopeless groan, "It must be done," he seized his aching paw above the cruel, serrated, steel jaws, and in a few seconds his sharp fangs had severed the broken bone and tendon, and with scarcely a wincing murmur he drew forth the bleeding stump. But he was *free*, and with no time to lose he plumped into the stream and was lost beneath the surface. The cool spring-water seemed to revive him somewhat and caused the wound to ache less acutely; although he found great difficulty in preserving a straight course on account of the loss of his foot. But the current was with him, and when, a mile below, he crept out on a shelving rock he bemoaned his fate.

When Farmer Bartlett had reached his trap and examined it carefully, he sat on the bank, lit his pipe, and, though a good and church-going man, he said some strong words and was sorry for them afterwards.

That was some years ago, and ever since then Swift had passed under the sobriquet of "Old Three Paws" and was regarded as a hero by both friends and enemies.

## CHAPTER XXI.

NOVEMBER.—PART I.

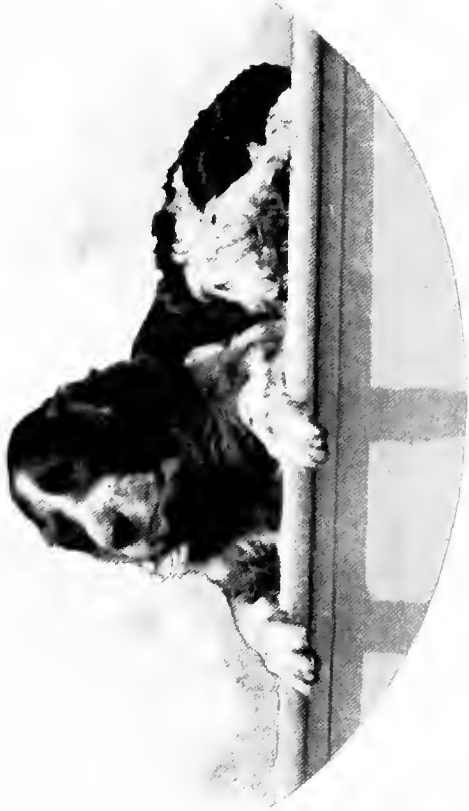
Billie the Bluebird—Bob White the Quail—Ruffe the Partridge  
—Longbill the Woodcock—Hoo-Hoo the Great Horned  
Owl—John Crow.

**B**ILLIE the Bluebird was half dead with cold, but he kept up his musical chatter as he flew from apple-tree to pear-tree and searched each nook and cranny for any chance worm or seed that might have escaped the keen eye of Downy the Woodpecker. He kept closely about the buildings, occasionally perching on the eaves or blinds, and once he actually flew into the farmhouse door, which had carelessly been left open, in order to snap up a half-torpid wasp too paralysed with cold and fear even to sting. All at once Rex the Setter bounded out of a neighbouring building and galloped over toward the farmhouse.

“Hello, you,” lisped Billie. “Won’t you tell me please what that house is?”

“Why, they call it the Club-house, and it’s a mighty nice place, warm and jolly.”

“Why do you come jumping out into the cold in this gay way, then?”



"MY NAME'S REX THE SETTER."



“ To tell the truth, I got somewhat tired listening to stale jokes. There’s a man in there, a very fine fellow, who sometimes does tell a lot of good stories; but this afternoon he told some real ‘ chestnuts,’ and I thought a breath of fresh air would do me good. What’s your name?”

“ My name’s Billie the Bluebird. I live down here a way, in a place called Skunk Hollow. Ever been there?”

“ Anywhere near Poverty?”

“ Yes, about four or five miles from there. It’s down in the hollow below Widow Redfield’s house, just this side of Nineveh.”

“ Yes, I know all that region. My name’s Rex the Setter; I’ve hunted down there off and on now for five or six years.”

“ Have you? Did you ever run across Downy the Woodpecker, or Ruffle the Partridge, or Hoo-Hoo the Great Horned Owl, or——”

“ Yes, every one of them; but I’m not on what you’d call speaking terms with many birds. You see, my business is hunting them.”

“ Is that so? But you don’t catch them and kill them, do you?”

“ No, I just smell them out, and my master does the rest.”

“ What do you mean by that?”

“ Why, he tries to shoot them with his gun. Sometimes he does, and sometimes he doesn’t.”

“Well, what fun do you get out of it, and why does he try to kill my friends?”

“If he kills them, I get the smell, and sometimes I carry them in my mouth. Then, too, if he gets them, he takes them home, and my mistress says: ‘That’s fine,’ and then we all have a feast, and my master feels happy.”

“That’s funny, for I’ve heard Quarrel the Jay and John Crow and Bob White the Quail say that the safest place to live is up here next to the Club-house, as you call it—the closer the better—and that when the men here go out one must keep near the muzzle of the gun to be perfectly safe. Is that so?”

“That’s more or less true, Billie, but there are exceptions. Now that man that tells the old stories—and, by the way, some of them say he’s got a joke-book that he studies—can hit Ruffle or Bob White almost every time.”

By this time Billie the Bluebird had flown down to a perch on the picket-fence close to where Rex was munching away at a bone. Billie put his little head on one side and watched the operation curiously. Finally he said:

“Mr. Rex, won’t you tell me how you ‘scent ’em out,’ as you say? I can’t understand that part.”

“Why, that’s not hard, Billie,” answered Rex as he swallowed the last morsel of bone and ran his long red tongue up and down his lips to cleanse his mouth. “Take Bob White the Quail, for example.



Master and I start out about half-past seven, if the morning's bright and crispy. If it's foggy and wet, we wait until eight or half-past. I trot along 'at heel,' as Master calls it—that means behind him. When we come to where the buckwheat has been, close by the big woods or swampside, we go through the bars, and then Master says, 'Hie on!' That's the signal to hunt, you know. You probably know also that Bob White and his family walk out to get their breakfast and generally fly back to cover. So I just take the border of the field all the way round. Don't you see? That saves a lot of work; for, if Bob White is out feeding on that field, I strike his track."

"But how do you know? A little bird like that doesn't leave any tracks or smell."

"Yes, he does, Billie, and it's the finest kind of scent! It's like—well it's hard to say what it's like—but it puts me all in a tremble, and I forget everything in the intense ecstasy of the sensation."

"What's that, Mr. Rex? I didn't quite catch what you said."

"I mean it's like the finest dream you ever had."

"The smell of Bob White's feet! Pshaw! What are you talking about!--but go on; I'm interrupting."

"Honestly, Billie, you can't appreciate it, I know; but that scent of Bob White the Quail or Ruffle the Partridge or Longbill the Woodcock is

the most delicious part of life to me and my kind. The minute I strike it I just stop short and fall down, or, if the scent is very strong, I can't fall down, and I just stiffen out as though I was made of stone."

"What do you do that for?" asked Billie. "It must be extremely uncomfortable."

"I don't know why. I can't explain it, but I just do it. Then, if Bob White is close to me, I just drink in the scent and stand there. Sometimes, if the weeds are high and Master's some distance off and can't see me, I may stand there all stiff and silent for some time. It *has* happened that I've stood there as long as five or ten minutes—so long that my legs gradually gave way and I came down sitting. I don't know what happens as long as Bob White is close by and the scent is coming to my nostrils."

"Well, I've heard queer stories in my time; but this beats all," exclaimed Billie the Bluebird. "Tell me some more."

"There's not much more to tell, for, if Bob White's running, of course the scent gets weaker and colder, and I partly recover consciousness and flatten out and crawl on my belly, following the smell until I'm forced to stop and stiffen out again. Finally Bob White and his family get into some thick, little patch of weeds or brambles, and when Master comes up he just walks in, and up they fly,

and he shoots at them. That's the hardest thing I have to do. He expects me to lie quiet until he loads his gun again. I tell you it's hard, especially if you've seen one or two birds drop."

"I don't see any fun in all that," interrupted Billie.

"You would if you were a setter-dog. When Master gets two more cartridges in his gun, he calls out, 'Dead bird, fetch!' and then I hunt around and find the bird all by the use of my nose, mind you, Billie—and then I pick it up and mouth it. Ah! that's the best thing of all. Then I trot back to Master, who takes the bird out of my mouth and pats me and says, 'Good boy,' and then puts the bird in his game-pocket, and on we go."

"I think you've told me all I care to hear, Mr. Rex, and I think it very cruel."

"But, Billie, we never hurt you or your family. It's only Bob White and Ruffle and Longbill and occasionally Webfoot the Black-duck."

"Why do you pick them out? They have done you no harm. Why doesn't your Master hunt some 'no-account' animals like Quarrel the Jay, or Cow-bunting, or Plumetail the Skunk, or Slim the Weasel, or Slick the Mink?"

"Why, my dear little friend, they are not good to eat. You couldn't send any of them to your friends as a present, especially Plumetail. Then, besides, I'm no good on that class of things—*that*

would take a coon-dog, a stupid sort of dog that I don't associate with."

"There's your Master calling to you. I'm much obliged for your information, and, though you seem to be a decent kind of dog, I'm not fond of dogs in general, and I can't yet understand why you like to kill us poor birds."

"We don't like to kill you, Billie. I like to smell of you, and my Master likes to eat some of you, and I have to help him out, and I must say I love that part."

"Rex! Come here, you villain! Why don't you mind me?"

"There's your Master again, Mr. Rex. I'm glad I'm independent enough so that no one can order me about in that way. Glad to have met you. I've learned something anyhow," and with graceful flight Billie the Bluebird disappeared toward the orchard.

The great windmill back of the barn was slowly winnowing the air. Now it would stop and seem to go to sleep; then, as if slowly awakening, it would stretch itself and begin to revolve; again, wide-awake with the quickening breeze, it would whirl around at a great pace. The creaking sound, as the shaft rose and fell, made a kind of sleepy monotone that told of lowing cows, whinnying mares and the cackling fowl below. It was a "sour day," the sun obscured, mist over the landscape, silence

and stillness and coldness everywhere. Bob White the Quail and his family lay close huddled together among the bogs down at Swampside and wished that the drops of dew, which clung to every blade and leaf, would dry off and make it so that, with some degree of comfort, they could go out into the buckwheat and rag-weed stubbles.

Ruffle the Partridge, too, declined to leave his perch on the lower limb of the cedar tree, and, though hungry enough, contented himself with picking away at the pretty blueberries or occasionally reaching up to the Bitter Sweet, which hung in graceful clusters and festoons, the orange-coloured, half-open shell seeming to invite inspection of the bright-red berries within. Occasionally Ruffle's pretty crest would stand erect, as some unusual sound came to his ears—the crashing of the brush as the witch-hazel fell to the woodman's axe or the shouts and laughter of the farmer's children on their way to school, or, more than all, the screeching though plaintive cry of Red Shoulder the Hawk, who circled high in air over the swamp and woodland and never seemed to get tired.

Longbill the Woodcock, however, was glad to get a day when he could work and walk about without being half blinded by the sunlight, and so, down there in the valley where the white birch sprouts stood thick and tangled, he trotted about in his own peculiar way among the soft and silent mould, and

with his long nose he pried out the worms and larvæ from their winter's bed.

Hoo-Hoo the Great Horned Owl sat silent and sleepy close into the trunk of the great pine on Rocky Ledge. Hoo-Hoo rarely travelled during the day-time. It hurt his eyes, he said, and he couldn't see much anyway.

So to-day he sat, with ears flattened down and eyes almost closed, and was enjoying his midday nap. After an extended siesta he was disturbed by the familiar though not ever-welcome voice of John Crow. John sat in the neighbouring tree and it seemed to Hoo-Hoo as if John were in trouble, for his voice sounded so queer. Hoo-Hoo opened his eyes and looked about a little, and after he had become accustomed to the light he could just distinguish John in a near-by spruce, and noticed that John's feathers were ruffled and dull, quite unlike his usual glistening iridescent dress.

Hoo-Hoo didn't exactly dislike John, but John was such a tease that one often lost all patience with him. For instance, John knew of Hoo-Hoo's habit of sleeping during the day, and from pure deviltry would often get a lot of his companions and proceed to make Hoo-Hoo's life unbearable. He would take his comrades to the pine-tree where Hoo-Hoo was taking a much-needed rest, and, approaching silently from behind, he would give the owl a sharp dig in the ribs. Then, as Hoo-Hoo awoke with a

start, the whole crowd would join in an exasperating chorus of cawing laughter, and Hoo-Hoo would snap his bill loudly and swear vengeance on his persecutors.

At other times John Crow would steal stealthily beneath the perch where Hoo-Hoo stood, and, grabbing a tail-feather or two in his strong beak, would close his wings and swing back and forth to the great amusement of his fellow conspirators, for Hoo-Hoo had all he could do to keep from falling backwards and could do nothing but snap his bill loudly and threaten to catch John some night at a disadvantage. But in spite of it all, as has been said, Hoo-Hoo liked John when he behaved himself, and he admired the crow's knowledge of things in general—"his likeliness," as he expressed it, and his wonderful ingenuity in teasing and in playing practical jokes.

So now, seeing that John was alone and seemingly in distress, he executed a few soft snaps of his bill and in a moment John flew wearily over.

"Good-morning, John."

"Good-morning, Hoo-Hoo."

"Mean sort of day, John."

"You're right, Hoo-Hoo, but I feel remarkably bad. I don't know exactly what's ailing me. You know a great deal, Hoo-Hoo, and, though I haven't treated you just right always, I want to consult you now."

“Oh, I don't mind your boyish pranks. I know you don't mean anything by them. But what ails you? You look wretched.”

“I'll tell you, Hoo-Hoo. Let me see. I was flying down from Tibbals's Bridge the other day where I'd been getting breakfast on Lynn's buck-wheat-field and corn-patch, and I was feeling fine. As I came along I heard a loud noise of shooting down by the Club-house, so I thought I'd pass that way and see what was going on. Curiosity, I suppose! But at any rate when I got down over Stevens's place I saw a half-dozen of those Club-men standing at the side of the building and throwing black things in the air and trying to hit them with those murderous guns.

“I was well up, ten or fifteen rods, I think, and I didn't believe there was any danger, when suddenly I could hear one of those fellows say: ‘Look at the crow,’ and with that, Hoo-Hoo, you should have heard the noise! Why, I was down at Madison on the Fourth of July once, and from the outskirts of the town I heard a tremendous noise, but that wasn't a circumstance to the terrible fire from those guns! I almost saw the shot shooting by me, and it hit my wings, too; but I was so far off it didn't in any way hurt me, excepting one bullet that struck me in the stomach. Ah! but it did sting. I didn't think anything of it until I got down to Deep Hole, but as I sat on the big chestnut tree and was all trembling



with excitement, I noticed some blood trickling down, and do you know, Hoo-Hoo, there was a hole in me! Since that day I haven't eaten anything to speak of, and for the last few days I've had dreadful pains inside. Now I want you to give me some advice, for Ringtail the Coon told me you helped one of Cooney's boys long ago when he was hurt."

Hoo-Hoo had listened attentively through John Crow's tale and sat silent for some seconds. Then he turned his great goggle-eyes toward John Crow and began :

"John, curiosity isn't a particular failing of mine, and I'm very sorry for you, so I am; but there is no use in trying to scoop up spilt milk, and so I'm going to tell you a story—but first I'll say that I think you'll recover. I think you're suffering from lead poisoning and you've got lead colic; that's what you've got. That's supposing that I know something about medicine.

"Now listen. I was sitting right here a while ago when two of those Club fellows came by with guns. They weren't thinking of shooting anything, but were just talking science and arguing for all they were worth. One of them said, just as they sat down:

" 'I did the *post mortem* on them, and I know it was lead poisoning—all the symptoms,' said he; 'colic and wasting of flesh and blue gums and all.'

"Then the other fellow says: 'Do you mean to

say that they'd shot so much over that lake that when the ducks went down for the sand with which to digest their food they picked up and swallowed lead shot, and that the acid inside of their gizzards dissolved the lead and poisoned them? Why, man, you're crazy.'

"Then the other one said: 'That's what I claim—not that I'm crazy, but I examined ten ducks, and there was no wound on them, and down in their gizzards I found those shot-pellets in all kinds of shapes—round and square and egg-shape.'

"Now that seems pretty far-fetched, John; but I don't know, *I don't know*. That man talked pretty strong."

"Do you mean to say I'm poisoned?" cried John Crow in a frightened voice.

"No, John, I don't say you *are* poisoned, but you *may* be."

"Land sakes! and all from my foolishness; but, Hoo-Hoo, I look like a scare-crow, and I feel it, too!"

"Now, John, don't you get downhearted about a little thing. If it's lead-poisoning, it's a mild attack and you'll get over it. Now, you do just as I tell you. Don't try to eat anything for a few days, but drink a lot of Beecher's Spring water—it kind of works you, you know—and if you're not as fit as a fiddle in two weeks my name isn't Hoo-Hoo the Great Horned Owl."

"If I *do* get out of this scrape," exclaimed John Crow, "I'll not go within ten miles of one of those murderous guns—not if I can help it. And, Hoo-Hoo, I want to do something for you."

"Oh, that's all right, John. Only leave me alone when I'm sleeping in the day-time ; that's all I ask."

"Thank you, Hoo-Hoo, I'll not forget it," and with that John Crow flew heavily homeward.

Darkness was fast settling over moorland and lea, and a long time after John Crow had taken his departure, Hoo-Hoo awoke from a dreamful nap. A little, clicking noise had waked him and called his attention below, and as, a few seconds later, he sat on the fence-post, he exclaimed between mouthfuls:

"It's the survival of the fittest, I suppose ; but it's good anyway."

Poor Chipmunk! He hadn't noticed those great, yellow eyes looking down at him from above in the pine tree.

## CHAPTER XXII.

## NOVEMBER.—PART II.

Longbill the Woodcock—Bob White the Quail—John Crow—  
 Hoo-Hoo the Great Horned Owl—Musk the Water-rat—  
 Scramble the Grey Squirrel—Tawney the Red Squirrel,—And  
 Others.

**B**OB WHITE had spent the morning in the buckwheat, and toward noon he went down with his flock to the birch-sprouts and soft ground of the valley. The leaves of all the trees were off now, excepting perhaps the scrub-oaks, which sometimes went well into the winter before the curled and withered foliage fell from its fastenings. It was November, and during its earlier days Longbill's family was present in numbers, and on moonlight nights one could occasionally see him, as with swift, low flight he sought one cover after another on his way south. If the weather was mild he would often linger for days in one locality where he found the food plentiful and the cover suitable, so that at this season one might start many birds from a small area. It was in such ground that Bob White and family found Longbill and his friends on this Indian Summer noontide, and in a natural

way they drifted into conversation with him. Longbill began :

“Bob, how do you manage to spend the whole winter up here? How can you get any food?”

“We suffer somewhat at times, Longbill; but, you see, I don’t depend on anything under the ground; I live on grain and seeds and can generally get a meal.”

“There’s something in that,” answered Longbill thoughtfully. “Strange I never thought of it. I’ve got to dig my bill into the ground to get *my* food, haven’t I?”

“Of course,” answered Bob White. “Then up here we are pretty well protected; for, though I don’t care to say much in favor of those men from the Club, yet I’ll tell you what they do for *us*. Late in the fall—a good deal later than this—they bring out a lot of barrels, each with the head knocked out of one end, and they put them out in the buck-wheat or rag-weed stubbles near the swamp, and then they pile some brush over them and cover one end with wire netting with openings big enough for you or me to get through, but small enough to keep out Cooney the Fox or Plume-tail the Skunk. Then they wait until snow flies, when they scatter grain all over around these things. You don’t know how it is, perhaps, but when one of those terrible storms comes, snow covers up everything, and all we can see to eat wouldn’t be half a meal for *one*.

So the men's contrivance just saves us. I know as well as you do, Longbill, why they do it ; but it shows that we're of some account in the world, doesn't it ?”

“That's so,” pondered Longbill. “I shouldn't make out very well, should I, in two feet of snow ?”

“You wouldn't get many worms,” responded Bob White, not to be outdone in repartee, “that's a fact.”

At this moment the loud cawing of John Crow was heard above, and, whether he saw them or whether it was accidental, down he came and lit in a tree close by. Of course they knew him ; everybody did. After a few moments he walked over.

“Hello, fellows,” he called out in a jovial way. “Infernally hot for November, isn't it ?”

“Yes, somewhat warm,” spoke up Bob White. “You look pretty slick, John.”

“Yes, I'm feeling fine. You know whom I've got to thank for it?—not a particular friend of either of you, but he's the best old friend I've got.”

“Whom do you mean ?” spoke up Longbill.

“Hoo-Hoo, to be sure.”

“What do you mean, John ?” exclaimed Longbill and Bob White together in amazement.

“Because he pulled me out of the worst scrape I was ever in. He cured me of lead-poisoning.”

Longbill and Bob White looked at each other and then back at John Crow, and then they ex-

changed second sympathetic glances with each other.

"I know what you're thinking, but it isn't so. I'm as sensible as you are. I haven't lost my mind," and then John Crow told of his interview with Hoo-Hoo and about his advice and how he had followed it, and he ended with the remark:

"I believe that Beecher's Spring water will cure anything from dyspepsia to measles."

After an interval of silence Bob White spoke up:

"I was just telling Longbill," he said, "about how we spend the winters up here. You know more than I do about it, John."

"I hope you didn't tell him about the last one," croaked John Crow; "that'd discourage people from coming here even during the summer time."

"I begin to think my plan's best," answered Longbill, "though I don't fare nearly so well down in Florida as I do up here. It's different; but it's warm down there; it's warm."

"For my part," quoth John Crow, "I don't mind the cold; it's the snow that bothers me. I can't get about naturally—have wet feet all the time and get rheumatism; but I don't know that I'd like summer all the time, would you, Bob?"

"No, I don't think I should, and, if it weren't for those ice-storms, I don't think I'd mind the winter."

"What do you mean by ice-storms?" queried Longbill.

"Why," answered John, it begins to snow and then turns to rain, which freezes on every leaf and twig and coats everything everywhere, making a crust so that Bob White can't get anything to eat, and I tell you it's hard sledding for all of us for a while. Even Ruffle the Partridge, who can live by the week on buds, goes hungry. You never saw one of those ice-storms, Longbill? Well, there's one thing; when the sun comes out it's pretty—looks as if every bush and rock and tree were made of glass."

"There's worse than that for me," spoke up Bob White; "for sometimes it begins with light snow generally at nightfall, and, after a foot or so has fallen, it turns to drizzly rain, and then it is cold again, and it shuts us right in at our roosting places with an ice roof over our heads. Why, I and my family were under the snow that way for three days, and all we got to eat was a few poor seeds growing right around us. Sometimes, I hear, whole flocks starve to death."

"That's terrible," remarked Longbill. "Well, as I said, I'm glad I go down to Florida for the winters."

"What are those relatives of mine doing up on Pine Tree Hill? I'm going to see about it," ejaculated John Crow, as much loud cawing was heard in the distance. "I must see about that."

So speaking, he flew off hurriedly. Surely enough, the crows were making a great racket, and, as John approached, he could see ten or more of his friends



and acquaintances diving in and out of the deep green recesses.

"It must be a hawk or some 'varmint,' like Snarley the Lynx," soliloquised John.

But when he reached the great tree the matter was quickly explained, for before seeing anything, he could hear Hoo-Hoo's bill snapping angrily. In a moment John was at his side, and then his sonorous voice of command rang out:

"Here, you young fools--quit! This is a friend of mine, and because he sleeps in the day-time is no reason for your making fun of him in this way. Some night he'll catch you sleeping, and a few of you'll go into mourning."

John Crow, the oldest of the Killingworth clan, was greatly respected by all and feared by many; for, even if he was old, he still held his youthful strength and cunning. He was also a diplomat of the first rank among crows, and they all knew it. His word was law; but it happened that in this particular gathering was one very impudent youngster who seemed to be the ringleader and general inciter to mischief, and now, after an interval of silence, when the rest of them were somewhat awed by the sudden appearance of the older bird, he spoke up bravely enough, but kept himself half concealed from view among the rest.

"Boys, don't mind that old fossil! He thinks he knows everything."

John Crow's ears were very acute, in spite of his advanced years, and he at once identified the speaker. He didn't say a word, but just acted. He caught the braggart by the back of the neck, and, after a few moments of shaking and when he had cleared his throat of feathers, remarked:

"I'm poor, old John Crow, and I've been put on the shelf; but if any of the rest of you want to argue this matter, just step up."

Meanwhile the boasting braggart of a few moments before was sitting, sullen and whimpering, on a neighbouring limb. Finally a clever young crow, recovering his voice, spoke up:

"Mr. John, we didn't mean anything by teasing Hoo-Hoo, and most of us didn't care for it; but he," pointing to the dilapidated boaster, "started in and encouraged us."

"He did, did he?" and John looked over towards his unhappy victim, who in turn crouched, limp and low, on the branch. "Well, you must all of you remember what I told you about Hoo-Hoo. He saved my life, and just because he wants to sleep in the day-time instead of at night is no reason for your persecuting him. There's a good maxim you youngsters have got to learn, and it is: 'One good turn deserves another.' Now you, all of you, just go home, and do it quickly, too."

Then the whole flock departed without a word,

and as they disappeared down toward Poverty, John turned to Hoo-Hoo and said :

“ You won't mind this time, Hoo-Hoo, will you ? If it occurs again there'll be one less crow, that's all.” But Hoo-Hoo answered :

“ John, that's all right. Boys will be boys, you know, and, though they make it decidedly uncomfortable, still I don't mind it much.”

“ It won't happen again ; I'll tell you that.”

On the 26th day of November and on the eve of Thanksgiving Day came the first snow in Rockland. It came unheralded, for the few days previous had been warm and soft. But towards night the wind had shifted to the north-east, and what began as rain soon turned to snow, and it came down so fast and feathery that by midnight a fleecy mantle of white overspread everything to the depth of three or four inches. A bright, clear morning followed, however, and the snow melted fast both from above and from below. But just after dawn the conditions were perfect for following the various tracks, which criss-cross each other in every direction. Those of Cooney the Fox preserved a straight line, with very few deviations. His fore-paws and hind-paws would for a long distance fill the same little holes, making a straight line of dots in the soft snow. Occasionally, however, this would change and each of his pads would mark its own individual print. Crossing

Cooney's trail where it ran down near the stream-side, could be seen the tracks of those two robbers of the river, Slick the Mink and Slim the Weasel. The two sets were not dissimilar in general form, but quite so in size. Slim was only about one-half the size of his distant cousin Slick, and this difference showed itself in the snow. Two pairs of little tracks a considerable distance apart indicated the jumping power of the owners, when they exercised this ability, and these tracks showed plainly the course taken. The little prints on the snow were not quite parallel, one lying slightly behind the other. On a morning like this it was easy to discover the home of either by following the trail backwards, and Farmer Bartlett was wont on such occasions to scour the brookside and, by little blazes with his hatchet on neighbouring trees, to locate the best spots for his traps.

Musk the Water-rat left perhaps the most distinctive trail of all. This was easily explainable, for his tail is fleshy and heavy and with a flatness from side to side. When out of water he is clumsy and awkward, and his two parallel tracks at short intervals hold between them the distinctly marked line where the tail furrows the snow. Musk is wont to build winter houses in the ponds and shallow enlargements of the river. On a smaller scale these resemble those of his distant cousin, Beaver, but they are not nearly so commodious or well con-

structed. They are formed of mud, sods and dead sticks and grasses, and, commencing on the bottom of the pond, they rise gradually until the surface is reached, and still on and on they stretch until finally the surface of the pond is dotted here and there with the queer, black, beehive-shaped masses rising sometimes two and three feet above the water or ice. These are the winter homes of Musk the Water-rat. On the approach of really severe weather he retires to them by his subaqueous passage, and, like Burrow the Woodchuck, he reappears only when the suns of late March or April free the rivers and ponds from their icy bondage. His date of retiring for the winter is uncertain. It depends entirely on the weather, or rather on the ice, and Musk seems to possess a power of divination, for he is never caught and frozen out. It may be as mild as April at three o'clock in the afternoon, yet in he goes, and the next morning there may be a full inch of solid, clear ice on the pond. As has been said, the trail of Swift the Otter is an open book, and in a light snow it is most interesting. It tells the veriest novice of the movements of a large, long and slim animal whose feet must be very short. Scramble the Grey Squirrel leaves his marks everywhere, and his less distinguished, because less respected, relative, Tawny, is likewise in constant evidence on the white covering. Their footprints, too, differ in size only. All four feet,

however, come down almost together, as a rule; but one can always count the four separate little depressions closely crowded together. One constantly comes at such times to little burrows down in the snow, with bits of dirt and nut-shells scattered about the openings. A regular, beaten path leads from tree-trunk to holes—holes where the frugal, little husbandman has stored away the acorn and walnut and chestnut. It beggars the imagination to try to guess as to how one of these little rodents can, on an absolutely level surface of white snow of from six to eight inches in depth, jump from the tree-trunk and, leaping away, dig down at some spot beneath which he is certain to find his breakfast. He never makes a mistake.

But a still stranger fact, perhaps, is the one that Tawny can locate Scramble's store-house, and, little thief that he is, he often despoils his neighbour's magazine with impunity.

By nine o'clock the sun was bright and warm, and the snow was soft and slushy. Slim the Weasel was safe down in his hole beneath the spreading roots of the swamp maple. Slick the Mink was curled up in a warm ball in a similar nest whose opening was only a few inches from the running water. Swift the Otter was in among the rocks at Nineveh Falls. Tawny was down in the apple-tree hole, while Scramble was in the depths of the chestnut limb, for, while none of them minded the cold, they all disliked wet feet.

## CHAPTER XXIII.

## DECEMBER.—PART I.

Speed and Drive the Fox-hounds—Reynard the Fox.

SPEED and Drive lay snugly warm in their straw-floored kennel. They were two Connecticut fox-hounds of the old-fashioned type. They were related by the bonds of cousinship only, but were great pals, and from the day when, as puppies, they had been unmercifully thrashed for chasing, catching and eating a rabbit, they had been drawn together by the bonds of strongest friendship. Speed was the elder, but he put on no airs because he had seen two years more of the world than Cousin Drive, and in fact they looked enough alike to be taken for twins. They had learned in a strict school to take a fox-trail and never leave it. They might cross the track of Scramble the Grey Squirrel, of Snarley the Lynx or of Bunny the Cottontail, or even see these tempting creatures a dozen times, yet they would never notice the distraction further than to experience perhaps a little inward regret, but would keep right on and make music that resounded through the frozen swamps and caused the air to tingle with excitement.

The milking was over. The chickens, turkeys, geese and ducks, the cattle, horses and pigs had been fed, and the only sounds to be heard were those comfortable ones of the crunching of grain or of grateful grunting, with the swish of hay and the munching of oats, further on in the barn.

"Speed, are you awake? Did you hear what Master said to Fred?"

"No, what was it?"

"He said, 'We'll take a turn around with the dogs to-morrow. It looks like snow.'"

"I hope that's so, Drive; we've been chained up here for nearly a week now, and I'm getting stale; but it does look like snow, doesn't it? If they only give us a chance and take us up to Camp-meeting Woods we'll show them, eh?"

"Oh! shouldn't I like to get on the track of that old fellow that's eaten so many of Selectman Miles's pullets! I don't care how long it might take, I'd tire him out, or my name isn't Drive Smith."

"Trouble is, when we get him tired out, he'll make for his hole. That's *his* game. I wish I could talk so that they could understand. I'd tell Master that one of them ought to stay pretty near that hole. They know where it is, for I showed it to them only the other day."

At this point Fred the farmer came out towards the kennel, and Speed and Drive were soon munching away at their dog-biscuit mixed with skimmed



milk and were thinking only of how good it tasted. After dinner they barked for a while and listened to the echo, and, as the moon began to tip the cedars with silver light, they made sixteen turns each and composed themselves for the night. But Drive couldn't sleep at first, and finally, when sleep came, it was full of dreams. He seemed to be chasing an endless chain of foxes that turned and twisted over hill and valley; so that when, in his dream, he doubled up on the top of Chestnut Hill, he could see from the corner of his eye the front of the line not twenty rods behind him. He turned suddenly to catch the foremost fox when, with the quickness of thought, the whole line turned like machinery and started in the opposite direction. Finally the whole line ran up Pine Hill and disappeared into its green recesses just as Drive was reaching for the nearest fox. Then the scent disappeared entirely, and, as Drive was frantically rushing to and fro in order to recover it, he awoke in a cold perspiration and barking.

"What in the world's the matter with you?" exclaimed Speed, awakened suddenly from a deep sleep by the actions of his kennel-mate.

"Why, Speed, I had a horrid dream—a nightmare," and Drive told of his broken rest.

"It may mean something good for to-morrow. Let's get what rest we can," and Speed turned over twice. They both slept soundly now, and the next

thing they knew it was just at break of day, when the cocks' muffled crowing in the chicken-house hard by awoke them. Everything about their kennel had that soft silence that always bespeaks snow, and surely enough when, after extraordinary yawnings and stretchings, they looked out, there was a white covering over all. It was just right, too, soft and light and damp even now, and only three inches of it.

"I believe you'll be right, Speed. This is just perfect. The fox-hound that couldn't take a trail in this ought to be made into bologna sausage, and my dream may work the way we want it to. I wonder when they'll come for us. I'm just dying to get off," and with that Drive gave a howl.

Fifteen minutes later the master and Fred came out to the kennel.

"How do you feel, boys? You want to go? Come on!"

Speed and Drive gave another howl of joy, which was a little subdued on Drive's part, however; for simultaneously with the remark 'Come on,' the leash was snapped and Drive had to be content with watching the caperings of his cousin, who immediately settled to business, and, as they silently tramped along the white, fleecy highway, used his eyes and nose for all that was in them. They started up the Plains road, and, coming to the second set of bars, they let them down and crossed through to

the northward. Once or twice they crossed the tracks of Bunny the Cottontail, of Ringtail the Coon and even of Snarley, but Speed paid no attention except that he stopped for a moment, and as he looked up he seemed to say : ' I know what that is, and also I know my business.' But when they had travelled half way to Camp-meeting Woods, and just as they were crossing an old corn-patch where the withered stalks stood dry and desolate, Speed, who was quite a little ahead, stopped and began to smell about and after a moment gave forth a joyous bark. Then Drive was set free and at his side in a moment.

"What is it, old fellow?" he cried as their noses came together near a well-defined track in the snow.

"It's he, and not far away either. I know the smell of old Sly-boots's tracks among a hundred."

After a pause and three sniffs Drive answered :

"You're right, Speed. Now for fun; he can't get away to-day unless we run him to earth. Oh! I do wish I could talk to Master and tell him where to go, but he may think of it."

With that both Speed and Drive spoke out, and the sound of their voices was wafted back in diminished volume from the distant hills. What a deep, sonorous sound it was as the hunters neared it! Down the incline it sailed, then up the little valley, then to the high ground again with ever-increasing or diminishing cadence.

It gave the sportsmen alternate thrills of acute

expectancy or subdued disappointment; but so long as the music was in the air so long was there a sensation for them.

As they separated and moved hurriedly along to reach the road across which Reynard might pass, they became aware that Speed and Drive had turned the fox and were coming towards them. With that they flattened themselves behind the nearest shelter, an old stone wall; but it was either too late or Reynard was just playing one of his little games with them, for of a sudden the dogs turned north again, and soon their voices were fading away on the crisp air.

Speed and Drive were on a hot scent, however, and even without this it was easy to follow the tracks on the light snow. They didn't hurry. They knew with whom they had to deal, and they kept close together and held running comments regarding the chase and its possible outcome.

"Did you see that, Drive?" panted Speed as they topped an old rail-fence. "How that sly fellow took to the ice over Brick-kiln Pond; he didn't calculate, though, that this snow spoils the ice-game. We've got the best chance we've yet had to get him."

By this time they had reached Oronoque brook, and suddenly they were forced to cease giving music, for the scent was gone.

"At his old game, Speed," cried Drive excitedly.

"You take the north bank, and I'll take the south. We can find where he came out. Just give me the tip when you get the trail again, and I'll do the same for you."

So they separated, and a few moments later Drive heard Speed's voice far above. As they came together again Speed remarked :

"Just as I thought : he climbed a fallen tree a little way and jumped out into the snow ; but I've found his track again. Wonder where Fred and Master are."

"No matter, let's keep the fellow going," and they both sent out their deep tones among the alders and maples.

And now they entered the Camp-meeting Woods. The great oaks, gnarled and knotted, fringed the outer edge, and now and then a spreading chestnut with its symmetrical branches shook down the fleecy flakes, showing that the increasing sunlight had scant sympathy with the artistic arrangement on bough and twig. Hickory, too, abounded, and the smooth bark of the younger trees made one wonder how Scramble the Grey Squirrel and his distant cousin Tawny could ever find foothold there.

Reynard was laying out a difficult task for Speed and Drive, for now, hot and delicious, the tracks turned in among the unbroken boulders lying scattered about the woods like mammoth marbles with snowy caps but with sides all mouldy and moss-

grown. The stunted maples and birches and cedars which had found lodgment in the interstices seemed unhappy, grotesque and out of place. Speed and Drive, panting but enthusiastic, still slipped and scrambled along and muttered imprecations upon the fox family in general. Then the tracks turned sharply to the north and east and crossed a little snow-covered pond.

"There he goes with his old tricks, Speed," gasped Drive, well tired after their slippery course through the woods; "but it isn't as if there were no snow. We can get along here as well as he and keep the scent too; besides I know this pond too well. If we fall through, it isn't more than a foot deep!"

"There he goes over the hill," barked out Speed in excitement. "Did you see him, Drive, just over the knoll? Just as I thought—he's getting tired and going home, but he's the old fellow we're after. I *do* hope Master had some sense."

Down the slope they went, pell-mell and noisy enough. The scent lay keen and strong; then, too, they didn't need much scent. It was as easy as daylight to follow the trail. But both thought it better to make lots of noise, so that their master and Fred could hear where they were. They were still more than a mile from the hole, and with judgment, unusual even in the best of fox-hounds, Speed and Drive "let up" a little on the pace and music as well. This procedure almost invariably produces

the proper effect upon the New England fox, for it seems to indicate that he has temporarily baffled his pursuers. In consequence it gives him time to get his second wind and also to lay some new plan for "throwing them off." Often at such a juncture, Reynard hops up to the top of a stone wall and runs a hundred yards or so if possible on this insecure foothold. As Cooney—who was Reynard's uncle—had once said to his boys:

"It's about as easy to walk a greased tight-rope as for one of those clumsy, noisy hounds to follow along on top of a stone wall, and, boys, when there's snow, well, if you don't fall off yourself, it's certain. You see, they can't follow on top, and they can't do any good work at smelling along from below."

As Reynard had been brought up in this same school and had always shown great aptitude not only for following advice but in inventing improvements, he had become an immune, as he thought, and now he actually laughed at the race he was running with the hounds. He stopped to rest, and said to himself:

"If you think, you stupid dogs, that I've seen the last of Selectman Miles's pullets, you are far away from the proper line of thought." Then, yawning: "Well, I'll be moving along. The ice and the brook and this stone wall will keep you figuring for a time, I think. I'll go home now for a nap."

But just as he finished his soliloquy all was sud-

denly changed, for close to him, so close as to be actually dangerous, he saw his two enemies! With a spasmodic bound he was off toward Fowler's swamp, and Speed and Drive, giving musical tongue, ran close in his wake.

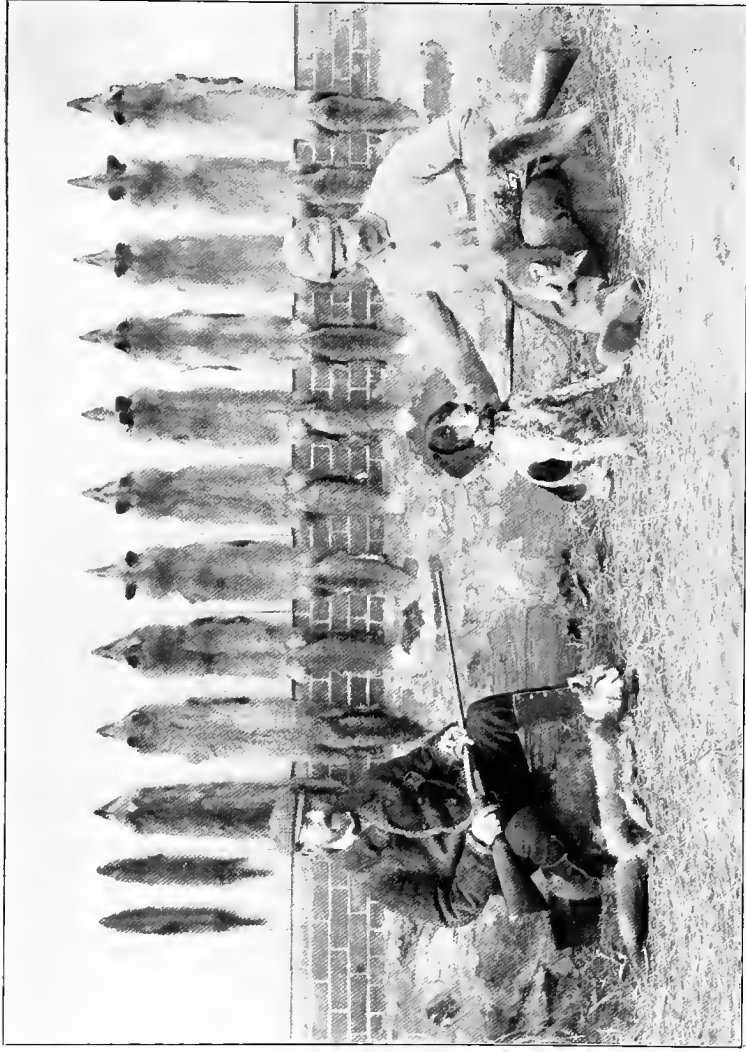
He had been so startled at the change that had taken place that all zest in his cunning tricks was lost, and what he wanted most now was to get to cover and safety. Before he had run a hundred yards, however, and as he was galloping toward an opening in the stone wall ahead, where an unused cart-path had given ancient access to the swamp, the master rose up from behind a great boulder. Reynard halted in pure astonishment. A short, sharp report rang out on the keen morning air, and without a gasp Reynard rolled over and lay still. Selectman Miles's pullets had been avenged! Then, after a moment or so, Speed and Drive came up panting and almost exhausted and began hauling and mauling and smelling Reynard, and after they had enjoyed their triumph for some time, Fred, coming up, examined the prize somewhat critically.

"Yes, sir, he's the old fellow, sure enough; see his teeth!"

The master looked at Reynard's mouth and found the right canine tooth black and decayed, with one molar on the left side all gone. The rest of the teeth were old and worn down.

"He was the old villain, surely enough, Fred. I





"SELECTMAN MILES' PULLET'S HAD BEEN AVENGED."



wonder how many partridges and quail and ducks and pullets have seen their way down his throat. Good boy, Speed. Well done, Drive. He led you a merry chase, my boys, and it was only the merest chance that made me stop at the fence there. I thought he was leading up towards Turkey Hill."

The master and Fred sat on a fence-rail and lit their pipes. Reynard's body lay on the snow in front, a little blood from his wounds tingeing the whiteness with bright vermilion.

Speed and Drive, panting but happy, lay on either side and glanced from time to time at their dead, desperate foe, as though he might rise once more and be off to the woods. Then again they looked up at their master for a renewal of commendation. Finally Fred put away his pipe, and drawing a stout cord from the pocket made a slip-noose through which he placed the two front paws. Drawing it tight, with the other ends he securely tied the hind legs, and soon, slung from his foe's shoulders, Reynard dangled, tawny in the sunshine, and the homeward trip began.

Speed and Drive, coupled together, trotted behind.

"Cousin Speed, this has been a great day. I'd sooner have caught that fellow than any other two foxes in the county," spoke Drive.

"That's just the way I feel, Drive," answered Speed. "He was clever. That trick of getting in

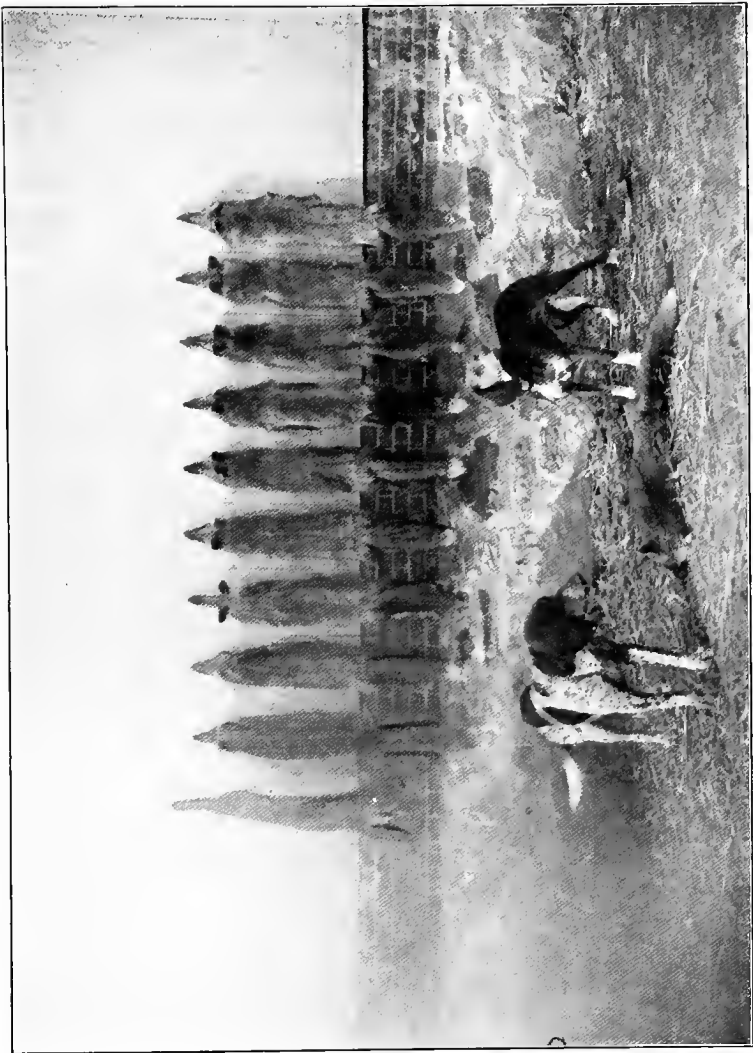
among those rocks was a new one. Why, a little more of that would have done me up, and that rascal knew it was slippery and that we couldn't do anything except get played out.

"And the stone-wall game is hard, especially when there's a light snow," said Speed again. "I couldn't do anything except run alongside and get a whiff now and then. It was the luckiest thing for us, and a foolish thing for him, that he stopped as he did; you see he's fooled us so often that he got over-confident. I tell you, Drive, the one that keeps his head and goes along steadily, even when everything seems to be going his way, is the one that wins in the long run. Now, it was a pretty shrewd bit of advice you gave when you said after we came out of those rocks, 'Let's keep quiet for a little.' You remember, you said, 'Let's keep quiet a little while, and may be'—I remember your words—'may be we can deceive that old fellow just as he's been deceiving us all winter,' and it was *so*."

"Well, he was the cleverest fox in this township, and the example he set as to hen-houses and roosting partridges must have done much towards making chicken-raising discouraging and game scarce."

They trotted along in silence for a way, and finally Drive spoke again:

"I heard Master say he was going to cut up that beast to see what he'd had for supper last night. I'd like to see, too, wouldn't you?"



"SPEED AND DRIVE."



"Yes, I should. I wonder what they'll find."

Arrived at the farm-buildings, Speed and Drive were chained, and after an extra dog-cake apiece, a kind of reward of merit for good behaviour, they both curled up and had a good nap. Later in the afternoon they were disturbed by the voice of their master who was calling to Fred:

"Oh! Fred, bring out the carcass of that thief and let's see what's inside of him."

So Reynard's body was produced, and in the presence of Fred and Speed and Drive a scientific autopsy was held. An incision was made in front. This disclosed the stomach, into which a cross incision of perhaps three inches in both directions was quickly made. This uncovered a pleasing mosaic work of semi-digested food. First a partridge's claw came into view!

"Speed, I wonder if that murderer has at last killed Ruffle?"

"I hope not. Ruffle was not one of my close friends, but I always liked him."

"Look, Speed! As I live, that's a guinea-fowl's feather! And see! A frog's head, too! We were right about him. But wasn't he an epicure to take his meals in courses!"

When at last the operation was over, there lay in a row, first, the frog's head, somewhat out of shape, then a few moist but unmistakable guinea-fowl's feathers, then a partridge's claw and finally a mis-

cellaneous assortment of bones in small bits, with feathers, and hair which Drive declared was a rabbit's, and nothing else. He was rolling in fat, too.

"If this was an evening's meal, why are there any birds left!" growled Drive. "But of course it may have been an exceptional occasion like a wedding or some anniversary."

"I think we got the funeral," answered Speed in subdued tones. And then they weighed the carcass, skin and all, and it tipped the scales at twelve and three-quarter pounds, the largest fox of the season.



## CHAPTER XXIV.

## DECEMBER.—PART II.

Junco the Snow-bird—Bob White and His Family—Ruffle the Partridge—John Crow—Soft Wing and Hoo-Hoo the Great Horned Owls.

A BLIZZARD of considerable violence was raging through the Rockland section and the residents of Poverty and Scuppo were being rapidly snowed in and were preparing for a siege. The storm had begun in a very suspicious way. It had been overcast and threatening for fully twenty-four hours, but gradually the temperature, which had been unusually low, started to rise from the zero point, and in the early afternoon Silas Green reported to his wife that the mercury now stood at 20°, and at about this time the fine, little flakes began to sweep across the dark background of Pine Hill. They were few and scattering at the outset ; but within an hour the air was so full of driving snow that the barn was almost invisible from the house, and the wind had attained the proportions of a gale. Night closed down early, dark and forbidding, and when at nine o'clock the cattle and horses and pigs were visited for the last time, Silas Green could scarcely make his

way back to the house against the biting blizzard and heaping drifts.

“By gracious!” he muttered, “this is a pretty bad storm. I wonder if we’ve got enough to eat in the house!”

Silas was up at daylight, and on looking out of the ground-floor window he could distinguish nothing, but soon discovered that the snow was piled to the top of the sash. Up the stairs he plodded, muttering imprecations on the weather and words of wonder at what he had seen. As he looked forth from the second-story window all was white. Not a fence-rail, or post, or bush, or weed was visible; but, through the still driving storm, he thought that he could detect the contour of a low, squatty building near by, which he had never seen before. He rubbed his eyes and gazed out over the smooth and snowy surface. He took his spectacles out of his pocket, and, after rubbing them clear and bright with his red bandana handkerchief, meanwhile watching the new building intently as though it might disappear at any moment, adjusted his “extra eyes” with circumspection and gazed again. After a long pause he pushed his glasses up on his bald forehead and exclaimed:

“Well, that beats all! If that ain’t my barn sunk out of sight! This is the worst snow-storm I ever saw. How on earth can I get to the cattle!”

As he descended the creaking staircase and

walked thoughtfully toward the kitchen, his wife called to him from the bedroom and in no gentle voice :

“ Mr. Green, if you'll set the clocks right next time, I'll be obliged to you. Here it's after eight by the clock, and I can't see to dress. How do you suppose I can get the children ready for school?— and you know it's a good two-mile walk! Now, if you'll get me some of that kindling from the woodshed I'll try to get them off, unless the clocks are wrong and it's only six o'clock !”

“ There won't be any school to-day, Maria,” answered her husband, intending to be facetious, “ and I'm not going to get you kindling wood, either.”

Mrs. Green dropped her apron, which she was just in the act of tying on, and gazed at her husband in amazement.

“ Silas! you haven't gone crazy, have you? This isn't Sunday or a holiday, and I want you to get the fire up *right off*.”

“ Well, Maria, I'll go down to the cellar and break up some of those boxes that came with the pickle-jars last year if you say so. They only litter up the place anyway.”

“ Silas, are you crazy? Have you milked yet? ”

“ Nop.”

“ What's ailing you, Silas? Don't you feel good, or am I dreaming? ”

“ No, Maria, I'll stop teasing. The blizzard has

snowed us up tight. The snow's up to the second story, and, until I dig tunnels to the barn and woodshed and all, we'll have a hard time getting enough to eat, I reckon."

"You don't say! What'll we do, Silas?"

"Well, we'll have to live on cold victuals and what eggs there are in the house. Isn't Hiram here yet? We'll have to dig *him* out first, I guess."

Even Junco the Snow-bird was in distress and had trouble in getting food, and down there under the shelter of the lean-to, near Deep Hole Bridge, he sat talking with his family. They could just see daylight over the tops of the huge drift that all but blocked the entrance; but now, as the storm showed some signs of abating, he spoke to his mate:

"Wife, I'm going to take a turn and see what's happened. I wonder what's become of Bob White and *his* family this weather."

And after some words of caution from his wife, Junco sallied forth. Some time before he had seen the three or four empty barrels that had been placed about the brush-piles and the stubbles in the neighbourhood, and he, too, had been told that they were there for Bob White to use during severe weather. He could scarcely find foothold anywhere, but, after alighting in the deep and silent recesses of a pine-tree which from a distance looked like a conical mound of sugar, he took some observations, and then after a careful survey he noticed a lump just a

little higher than anything about it, and was sure that this must be one of those barrels. He saw, too, that close by stood a dead hickory tree whose thin and withered limbs held little or no snow. So off he started again on his tour of inspection and in a moment sat perched on the lee side of the dead tree. From this point he had an excellent view of his surroundings and saw that he was right about the barrel, for at the point of the mound was a slight depression which he concluded must be the open end. Then after a moment's thought he piped a few modest notes, and after an interval he thought he heard little calls and sounds in answer from under the snow. He flew down as low on the tree as was possible and sat perched on a bunch of fungus close in to the trunk. Then he was sure that he heard sounds, and at once he called out, in his queer little voice:

“Who are you, there?”

Seemingly from away underneath the white mound came a little, distant answer:

“I'm Bob White. We're being buried alive; can't you help us?”

“No, I'm only Junco the Snowbird, but I'll tell you, Bob, what I'll do. I'll try to look up Ruffle the Partridge, and I think he might do something. You know he's great at making holes in the snow.”

“All right, friend. Do what you can for us.

We're getting a little air now. Heat of our bodies is melting the snow in front, I believe."

Off flew Junco towards the pine forest near by, through whose thick and heavy foliage but little snow had filtered. He was sure that in such weather he would find Ruffle stowed away in some such snug corner, and he didn't have to search far. In a few words he explained to his old friend the predicament of their mutual comrade. Ruffle put up his crest in surprise and thought for a moment, and then he asked :

" Junkie, is there any tree or big bush near by?"

Junco told Ruffle of the dead hickory.

" That'll do all right."

Then they whirled away, and it was easier now, for the snow and the wind had both nearly ceased. They reached the dead hickory in safety, and in a moment Ruffle saw how the ground lay. He, too, could hear the cries of Bob White beneath the snow.

" You stop here, Junkie," said the older and larger bird, " and you just watch!"

Then Ruffle took a long breath, and, setting his wings, he darted down straight for the barrel. Then, checking his flight but slightly, into the fresh snow he plunged for two feet or more directly in front of the little depression that marked the air-hole of which Bob White had spoken to Junco. As Ruffle emerged from the opening that he had made, his

wings were covered with snow ; but, shaking himself free, he returned to the tree where Junco the Snow-bird sat spellbound.

“ Why, Ruffle, what a great fellow you are ; you’ve made the hole twice as big as it was.”

“ I’m going to do it again,” cried Ruffle, and off he went a second time. This performance was kept up until at last the open end of the barrel was in plain view and Bob White, the father of the flock, sat on the loose snow just outside, cleaning his feathers and looking very much pleased.

Then both Ruffle and Junco congratulated Bob, and Bob and his family thanked their saviours most gratefully and, after civilities had been exchanged in one way and another, Ruffle said :

“ What’s that wire for, over the front of your house ? ”

“ I’ll tell you,” answered Bob White. “ The men of that Club, near Rockland, put out those barrels to give us help in such weather as we’re having now, and they scattered buckwheat and corn and oats and screenings all about, to get us to come and feed here. Then they put that wire on, just big enough for us to go through, and it’s lucky for us now, too ! You know what happened last night after snow began and we all got in here ? Well, I’ll tell you. We knew a few minutes beforehand what was going to come, for we couldn’t help it from the odour. Plumetail the Skunk

turned the corner and looked in on us. He thought he had us beyond question, for he just sat there licking his chops and saying, every now and then · ‘Well this *is* luck,’ and ‘What a chance,’ and such things. And then he started for us. By this time we were all terribly scared and were huddled in the back part of the barrel. In a second his nose struck that wire and he stopped short and said, somewhat angrily, ‘What does this mean?’ Then he walked up and down, looking for a hole big enough to crawl through, and then he began to chew at the wire furiously. I’ll wager his mouth’s sore this morning if he’s above ground.”

“What did he do finally?” asked Junco the Snow-bird.

“When he got through with his exercise, he was pretty nearly buried in the snow himself, and mumbling something about revenge and things, he burrowed his way out somehow and went away.”

“That *was* a narrow escape; but where’s all that food you spoke of, buckwheat and all such?”

“I should think, Ruffle, that it must be about two feet and a half underneath where I stand, and I’m very sorry I can’t get at it, to give you some and to have some for my family, for we are all getting hungry.”

“I can get a meal, Bob, for I eat buds and berries and such things; but I’m extremely fond of those things you said were there.”



The storm was over, and the December sun was struggling through the breaking clouds. The air was still crisp, but with a softened character that bespoke a change of wind and barometric conditions. As the early twilight came on, a subdued sound could be heard coming from the pine forest on the hill. At first it seemed like the sighing of the winter wind through the fronds of the evergreen pine-trees; but continuing, it became more and more evident that it came, not from the trees themselves, but from something in the depths of the wood. As Bob White the Quail and Ruffle the Partridge and Junco the Snow-bird sat there and listened, they all felt that something solemn had occurred. A kind of gloom seemed to overspread everything, and while they sat puzzled and awed, a shadow, sombre and slow-flying, came out of the darkling forest, and John Crow alighted heavily on the dead and decayed hickory branch. He presented a picture of woe and didn't seem to see anything, but kept up a doleful muttering scarcely audible to his neighbours. Ruffle knew John Crow so well that he didn't hesitate to speak out.

"Hello, John!" he called from below. "What is it? Any news?"

John Crow was startled from his despondent attitude, and looking down he recognised who had addressed him.

"Yes," he answered, with tears running over his

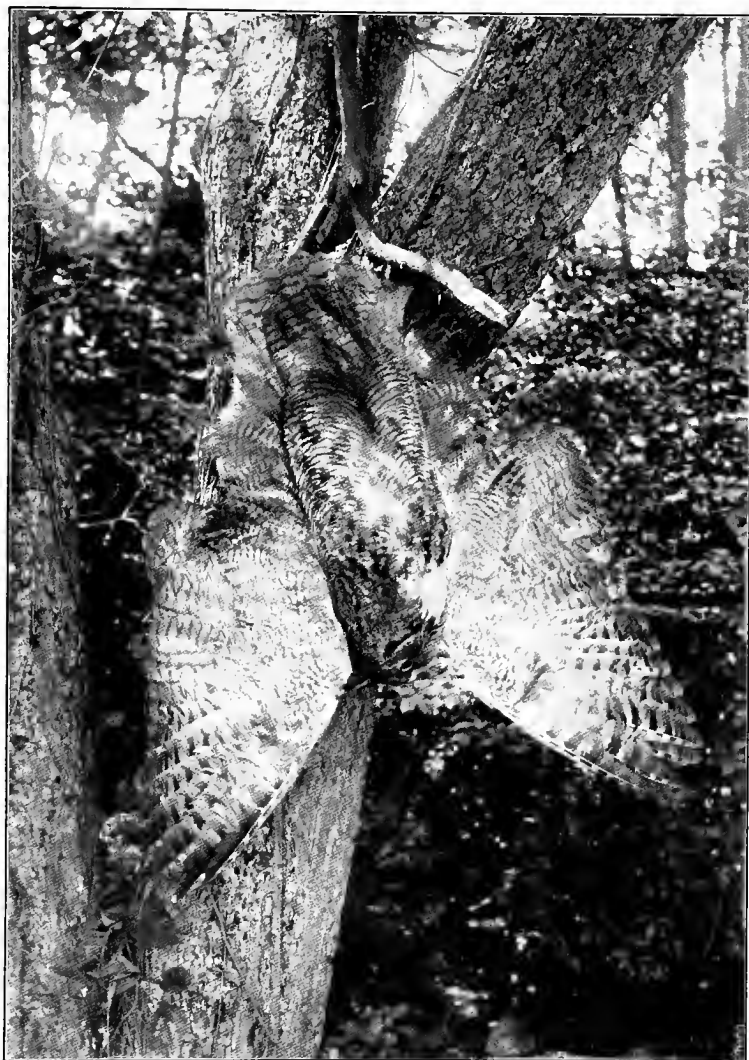
glossy plumage, "something *has* happened. Poor old Hoo-Hoo, my best friend, is dead."

"You don't mean it!" called back the birds almost together. "You don't mean it! When did it happen?"

"Yes," answered John Crow, "poor old friend! He's gone, and, though you may not feel as I do, I tell you he was a good friend and an honest enemy."

"What killed him?" asked Ruffle. "Was it the blizzard?"

"No, not that, I think; but do you remember that last month his mate was killed? One of those men with a gun caught her out in an oak-tree in the day-time—her own foolishness, I suppose, but she told the story before she died, for she managed to get home alive. She had been having supper with Softwing, her daughter, on one of those Smith Clark guinea-hens, and she ate too much, I fear; for as far as I can find out, she didn't feel good and stopped, about daybreak, close in to the trunk of that old pine-tree, and she sent Softwing on home to say that she'd come later in the day. Well, when she got home she was terribly injured and she just died the next day. It almost broke the old man's heart; but he had his daughter left, and a very bright girl she was, too. So he says, 'I've got,' says he, 'to live for her.' You know his boy went off housekeeping down at the shore a long time ago."



“OVER HE FELL AND JUST HUNG THERE BY ONE CLAW.”



An interval of painful silence followed, and John Crow continued :

“ He wasn’t very strong after that, and took his loss dreadfully to heart ; but Softwing made it easy for her father and humoured him in every way she could. That’s about all. Yesterday morning when he woke he missed her. She had gone out the afternoon before to get a Cottontail for him— favourite dish of his, you know. Well, he searched all day for her, and where do you suppose he found her? Late in the afternoon he discovered her, half-covered with snow and with her leg in one of those steel-traps, and she holding on to a piece of Cottontail those people had set down in the trap there for Cooney, I believe. Hoo-Hoo didn’t say a word. He didn’t take on a bit, but just flew heavily home, and this morning after the storm was over some I started out to say ‘ How do you do?’ to the old man. You know, ever since he saved my life from lead-poisoning I tried to go and see him every morning before going to work. Well, there he sat, the same as usual in the big crotch, as erect as you please, frozen stiff and stone dead. I couldn’t believe that he was dead at first and nudged him a little, when over he fell and just hung there by one claw. He’s up there now if you want to see him. He isn’t long dead. He was my best friend. He died of a broken heart.”

THE END.











