

RIVER-LAND



BY ROBERT
W. CHAMBERS



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GERALDINE AND PETER ON THE RIVER BANK

RIVER-LAND

A Story for Children

by

ROBERT W. CHAMBERS

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"OUTDOORLAND" "ORCHARD-LAND"
"CARDIGAN" ETC.

ILLUSTRATED IN COLOR BY
ELIZABETH SHIPPEN GREEN



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TO
PENELOPE SEARS





TO
PENELOPE, DANCING

Through the ruddy ember-glow
Little feet retreat, advance,
Tripping in a shadow-dance.

Laughing eyes that glance askance,
Whirling curls and skirts that flow,
Courting in a noiseless dance
Shadows swaying to and fro;
Time enough for you to know
Why the shades of Fate and Chance
Mingle in your shadow-dance.

Time enough for you to know
When the phantom of romance,
Gliding through the ember-glow,
Faces you in contre-dance!

Flying curls that float and flow,
Laughing eyes that glance askance,
Time enough for you to know.



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I

THE YELLOW BUTTERFLY

GERALDINE and Peter, noses flattened against the window-pane, listened to the breezy swish! swish! of the summer rain along the wet veranda. And while they listened

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they recited in a discouraged whisper this remarkable poem :

“Water wet, dust dry,
Land low, sky high,
Sun shine by-and-by;
Rain, rain, go away,
Come again another day,
Farmers wait to make the hay!”

“Oh, Peter!” sighed Geraldine, “don’t you think we’ve said it enough?”

“Keep it up,” said Peter, hopefully; “the rain is sure to stop if we only talk enough.”

“But my mouth is tired,” whimpered Geraldine.

“Well, then,” said Peter, “we won’t repeat the poem until your mouth is rested, but we’ll think it as hard as we can. Now, when you’re ready to think that poem, just nod your head.”

Geraldine looked out at the rain, her brows puckered, her blue eyes steadily fixed. Presently she nodded, earnestly.

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The roar of the rain on roof and window filled the silence for a while, then, little by little, the silvery downpour slackened.

“I told you so!” said Peter, excitedly. “Now let’s think like fury, Geraldine!”

A robin, gray wings spread, came sailing past the window and alighted on the wet lawn. Another arrived, dropping into the grass with a flirt of his tail and a cheery outburst of chirping. Then, singly and in pairs, the wild birds came winging to the lawn; robins, heads high, taking short little runs through the soaking clover; bronze grackles stalking to and fro, pale-yellow eyes staring about for insects; bluebirds softly fluttering and singing as they drifted from fence to fence like big, azure-tinted moths; golden-winged woodpeckers, chipping sparrows, even a shy, slate-colored cat-bird mewing in the pear-tree on the terrace, and making short dashes in pursuit of little winged things that fluttered in the dripping hedge.

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A moment later the sun broke out through the rain, dissolving it to a golden fog, through which the pines on the hill shimmered like the pearl-tinted spires of fairyland.

“We’ve done it! Three cheers for us!” cried Peter, scrambling hastily down from the window-seat. Geraldine slid to the floor, cheering excitedly.

“We thank ourselves,” said Peter, with a low bow, “for this unexpected and flattering applause. Courtesy to yourself, Geraldine.”

Geraldine courtesied to herself three times, laying her small hand on her heart, and moving her lips in modest acknowledgment of the compliment.

Then they raced to the library door. “Mother!” they said, in the same breath, “may we go out and play?”

Their mother looked up with a smile and nodded, and away they flew with a gay shout,

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their parting cry floating back through the open door—

“Thank you, mother dear!”

Across the lawn sunlight fell; shrubbery and hedge brightened, and a million tender leaves twinkled as the south wind stirred them. The children crossed the garden where wet roses and half-closed lilies hung powdered with sparkling spray, where in hollyhock and larkspur, bent and weighted heavily, wet bumblebees buzzed, drying their gossamer wings in the sun.

Long ago in *Outdoor-land* the children had learned that the world loved them; long ago they had learned to understand the tiny voices chorusing from grass and thicket and leafy branch. They heard the great golden-banded bees grumbling to the little brown bees about their wet and mussy wings; they heard the ants in the grass calling to one another, “Hasten! hasten! The rain has flattened out

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our little hills and there are a thousand things to be done before sunset!"

They heard the great green caterpillar crunching away at the woodbine leaves on the trellis; they heard a fat garden-toad, who had jumped for a fly and missed it, panting, "Oh my! oh my! How vexing to be jeered at by a fly!" And they heard the fly buzzing with laughter.

Yellow butterflies were flying across the lawn in twos and threes, darting hither and thither, and whenever two butterflies passed, the children heard their tiny voices calling one to another, "Meet me at the puddle! Meet me at the puddle!"

"Suppose we go, too," said Peter.

"Where?" asked Geraldine.

"To the puddle where all the yellow butterflies are going. There must be something curious going on there." And he called out to a hurrying yellow butterfly, "Where is the puddle you all are going to?"

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“On the river-road,” answered the tiny voice.

“Is it very muddy?” inquired Geraldine, as another yellow butterfly darted off at a tangent and came fluttering around her face.

“Muddy? I should say so. It is deliciously muddy with the very muddiest kind of mud. Don’t miss it, children. There ’ll be a brilliant assembly there after this rain.”

“But where is it?” asked Peter, as the yellow butterfly fluttered off.

“You can’t miss it!” called back the butterfly; “it’s a puddle full of the muddiest kind of mud and the wettest kind of wet. Au revoir!” In a moment more he became a twinkling speck of gilt across the sunny meadow. As the children followed, through thickets of mint and bergamot and fresh sweet grasses, soaked to the knees, scores of butterflies passed them, all hurrying to the trysting-place, and the air rang with little voices all calling: “Meet me at the puddle! Meet me at the puddle!”

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The soft summer wind dried the children's wet stockings and shoes as they ran along the sunny lane which led down to the river-road; and very soon they saw the river flowing between green banks over which willow and alder bent, and slender branches dipped in the brimming current.

"Gracious!" exclaimed Geraldine, as they came into the road. "Did you ever see so many yellow butterflies in all your life!"

The road ahead was thick with yellow butterflies rising, drifting, fluttering, settling again around a great bright yellow patch which lay in the middle of the road like a circle of yellow blossoms.

"What is that yellow spot?" asked Geraldine.

"Why, it is a whole garden of solid yellow butterflies!" cried Peter, in amazement. And it was. Hundreds and hundreds of brilliant primrose wings tufted the mud; above, a



“WHY, IT IS A WHOLE GARDEN OF SOLID YELLOW BUTTERFLIES!” CRIED PETER”

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column of butterflies whirled up like a pillar of golden smoke.

“Have a drink, children?” inquired a butterfly, fluttering around Geraldine’s white pinafore. “The puddle is delicious this morning.”

“Did you come here to *drink*?” asked Geraldine, incredulously.

“Why, of course,” said the butterfly; “didn’t you?”

“I should think not!” cried Peter. “How can you drink that muddy stuff when there is the river full of sweet, clear water?”

“Why, the flavor of a puddle is wonderful,” explained the yellow butterfly. “It’s full of all kinds of appetizing tastes. It’s like the richest and soupiest kind of soup. I’ve been drinking here since the rain stopped! I’m gorged; and I think I’ll alight on one of your fingers, Geraldine. Please spread them out, and I’ll select a finger to sit on.”

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Geraldine held out her hand, slim fingers separated.

“Do you take home a dish of puddle-soup to your children?” asked Peter, as the butterfly settled on Geraldine’s middle finger and closed its wings.

“My children,” said the butterfly, “have just hatched out. They’re caterpillars now.”

“Are they down there eating puddle-soup, too?”

“No, they’re eating clover leaves in your clover-field.”

“Where did they hatch? In a nest?” inquired Geraldine.

“No. My wife laid the eggs on clover-stems. The eggs were not much bigger than the point of a pin, and they were yellow at first. Then they turned the brightest and loveliest crimson; then the little caterpillars hatched, and I think they drank up all the dew on the stem before they began to eat. My,

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how thirsty they were! Then they nibbled at the empty egg-shells and then started in on the clover.”

The butterfly opened and closed its sunny wings. “The caterpillars are green, striped with paler green,” he said. “In a few weeks each caterpillar will turn into a pale-green chrysalis, you know,” he added, nodding sagely.

“How?” demanded Peter.

“Just the way I did when I was a caterpillar. I crawled up a stem and spun a little button of silk on it. Then I hooked my hind feet into it and spun a fashionable belt of silk around my middle. There I hung, feet fastened, slung against the stem by a tiny rope of silk.”

“Lashed to the mast, like Admiral Farragut!” exclaimed Peter, with enthusiasm.

The butterfly twitched its wings doubtfully.

“Very likely,” he said, politely.

“And then?” urged Geraldine.

“Oh, I burst open—”

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“Like a torpedo! Hurrah!” cried Peter.

“No, not like a torpedo. I burst decorously; it was a leisurely and dignified explosion—”

“There was a report—a slow and dignified report—wasn’t there?” insisted Peter.

“Not a sound. I silently crawled out of the empty chrysalis, dried my wings by pumping them full of butterfly blood and air, and flew away to make love.”

“To make love!” exclaimed Peter, scornfully.

“To make love!” repeated Geraldine, curiously.

“Certainly! I’m a very, very sentimental butterfly. So I flitted off over the clover where I saw a great many yellow butterflies flying, and, suddenly, I espied the loveliest maiden-butterfly you ever saw! Her name was Philodice.”

“It is a beautiful name,” said Geraldine.

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“Isn't it?” said the yellow butterfly. “Our full name is *Colias Philodice*. You ought to see my wife! She's a beauty when she's freshly dressed.”

“What does she wear?” inquired Geraldine, softly.

“Well, instead of the plain black borders to her yellow wings, which I have, she wears a front pair of wings delicately clouded with luminous black. Her feet and antennæ are pink. And when I looked at her, and she shyly glanced at me out of nineteen or twenty of her beautifully jewelled eyes, I fell in love at first sight. Oh, Peter! you have no idea what a glance from nineteen compound eyes can do.”

“No, I haven't!” said Peter, coldly.

“And so you married her and lived happily ever after?” suggested Geraldine, tenderly.

“That's just exactly what I did,” said the yellow butterfly. “And now our children are

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growing up into fine, hardy, clover-fed caterpillars, and I hope they'll hatch into butterflies like their mother."

"Don't they always do that?" asked Peter.

The butterfly walked along Geraldine's finger, waving its wings thoughtfully.

"Not always. Now and then it happens that a negro, or black butterfly, comes from the chrysalis of a perfectly respectable yellow butterfly. Sometimes an albino, or white variety, appears. Sometimes" — the butterfly's voice trembled — "sometimes no butterfly appears."

"Why?" asked Geraldine, awed by the yellow butterfly's emotion.

"There are," said the yellow butterfly, "several wicked kinds of flies called Ichneumon flies. These miserable creatures sometimes sting our caterpillars and lay little eggs in them, and while the poor caterpillar goes on eating, the egg that the Ichneumon fly laid, hatches, and begins to eat the caterpillar.

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Sometimes the caterpillar dies before it changes to a chrysalis. But whether or not it lives as long as that, it never lives to become a butterfly; and out of the chrysalis, instead of a lovely, soft, yellow-winged creature, crawls a sleek, shiny, gauze-winged and wicked-looking fly. Oh, my! it gives me a shock to think of it! Excuse me, children, while I revive myself on a proboscis full of puddle-soup."

As the yellow butterfly fluttered away to join the golden whirlwind eddying above the puddle, a sharp click! click! click! sounded through the still air, and the children looked up quickly.

"Did you make that noise, Peter?" asked Geraldine.

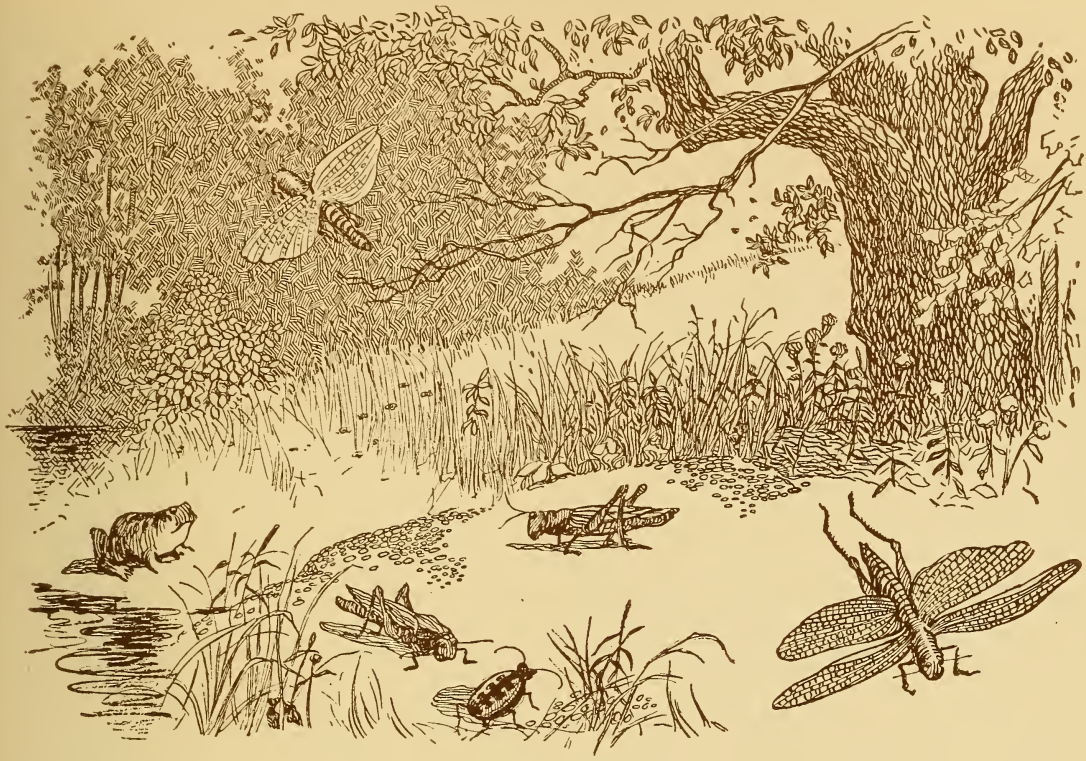
"No, I didn't," said Peter. "What in the world do you suppose it could have been? Listen! There it is again!"

"Click! click! click!" came the sharp, dry, ticking notes.

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“I saw it!” whispered Geraldine. “It was something yellow and brown that went drifting away into the grass. Hark!”

“Click! click! click!” And a small brown-and-yellow winged creature came flying through the air, struck smartly against Geraldine’s pinafore, fell kicking and scrambling into the road, got on its six legs, and looked reproachfully at the children.



II

SINDBAD THE GRASSHOPPER

“OH, pooh! It’s only a grasshopper,” said Peter.

“Only a grasshopper!” cried the insect, in a shrill voice. “Sting me with hornets if I like the way you say *only* a grasshopper! As if

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grasshoppers are of no importance! As if the subject of clicking grasshoppers is to be dismissed with a wild pooh! pooh!"

"Really," began Peter, "I had no idea of offending you when I said 'pooh'."

"Well, I'm glad of it, said the grasshopper, fiercely, turning round and round in the road.

"How do you make that clocking noise?" asked Peter, curiously.

"Noise!" retorted the grasshopper, disgusted, "that is not noise; that is music—good music, too."

The children, taken aback, were silent. The grasshopper walked in a stiff-legged fashion towards the puddle.

"All these idiot butterflies," he muttered, "they can't make a sound—not a single sound. But I can; and I do."

"Are there no butterflies that make sounds?" asked Geraldine, timidly.

"That's a sensible question, and I'll answer

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it," replied the grasshopper. "No, there are no butterflies that can produce sounds. There's a moth in England that emits a sort of mousey squeak when you touch it, and it's the only one that does."

"Thank you for this important information," said the children, politely.

The grasshopper, evidently pleased, took a short clicking flight and alighted on Geraldine's thumb. "As for information," said the grasshopper, "I can sit here on your thumb and give you information until the crows fly home."

"Please do," said Geraldine.

"Why, the things I've seen would fill a forest, and every adventure require a tree full of leaves to record."

"You mean a book full of leaves, don't you?" suggested Peter.

"Do leaves grow on books?" inquired the grasshopper.

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“Not *on* books, *in* books—that is, they don’t exactly grow—”

“In my opinion you’re trying to be impertinent,” said the grasshopper, angrily; and Peter said nothing and turned red.

“As I was saying,” continued the grasshopper, “I have seen the marvels of the world and have lived to return. Shall I recount a few of my voyages for you, Geraldine?”

“If you please,” she said, timidly.

“Well then,” said the grasshopper, “to begin, you know, of course, that the earth is flat and is nearly a mile long.”

“It’s round!” suggested Peter, but the grasshopper turned on him so fiercely that he stopped short.

“Last autumn,” continued the insect, glaring at Peter out of his two globular eyes, “my mother dug a hole in the ground and laid in it a most talented and ambitious egg.”

“Are all eggs talented?” asked Geraldine.

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“No, not all, only grasshoppers’ eggs. Last May that egg hatched out into a marvel of beauty, courage, musical genius, and ambition—in short, it hatched out into a clicking grasshopper.”

The insect stared hard at Geraldine, saying, “You recognize the description of myself, I see. But wait. At first I was a—”

“Caterpillar!” said Peter, eagerly.

“Nonsense!” retorted the grasshopper, furious. “Do you take me for a butterfly? Caterpillars are good enough for moths and butterflies but not for grasshoppers! Permit me to angrily inform you that I hatched out into a small and graceful grasshopper, almost as perfect and handsome as I now am. I lacked wings, but during the early summer I changed my skin five times, and the little wing-pads on my shoulders gradually developed into those beautiful wings which I now use to waft myself melodiously through the summer sunshine.”

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The children stared.

“I have plenty of eyes, six legs, a fine pair of ears tucked away at the base of my fore-legs, two wing-covers, two very handsome, translucent wings, a head full of lips and jaws, and a boundless ambition—”

“To do what?” inquired Geraldine, gently.

“Well,” said the grasshopper, reflectively, “towards evening I have noticed a large, bright spot overhead—about as big, I should say, as a silver poplar leaf. I desire to be able to jump high enough to alight on it and find out what it’s made of and what it’s for.”

“Do you mean the moon?” exclaimed Peter, and he giggled.

“I don’t know what you call it,” replied the grasshopper, suspiciously; “and I see nothing laughable in my remark.”

“Don’t get angry,” said Geraldine, soothingly. “Tell us more about your ambitions.”

“One of them was to fly across the river,”



ELIZABETH CHIPMAN GREEN

“THEY CALL ME SINDBAD THE GRASSHOPPER”

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said the grasshopper, with a shudder. "I have made many attempts, and my hair-breadth escapes from awful perils are so wonderful that they call me Sindbad the Grasshopper. My first voyage was so long ago that I can scarcely recall it—it was almost a week ago!"

The insect stared solemnly at the children, who stared back as solemnly.

"It happened this way," continued the grasshopper: "I was sitting on a green and juicy stalk, eating away, and watching a cousin of mine eating gnats—a thing I never do. It had been raining that morning, and several large butterflies were drinking puddle-soup in the road, and I heard the Camberwell Beauty say to the Yellow Swallow-tail, that the mud across the river was richer and slushier and more exquisitely flavored than the mud here."

"'How about the grass stems,' I asked.

"'Oh,' said the Camberwell Beauty, waving her brownish purplish blue-embroidered and

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creamy-edged wings, 'the grass over there is so luscious and the slush is so slushious that it makes my proboscis uncurl to think of it!'

“‘That’s the place for me!’ thought I. And as I never stop to think when I start to fly, I sprang into the air and went drifting and clicking out over the river. It was a rash and terrific thing to do. As I flew clicking across the ripples a great pink and silver trout leaped right out of the water at me and I heard his jaws snap within an inch of my third pair of legs. Then I lost my head; a gray-and-white bird made a dash at me and missed me; I fell into the water and struck out frantically for shore.”

The grasshopper wiped its head with both front legs, shuddering. The children listened in wrapt attention.

“I had been swimming for some seconds,” continued Sindbad the Grasshopper, “when I began to feel something softly nipping at all of

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my six legs. And what do you think? A swarm of miserable, gluttonous little minnows were attempting to make a breakfast off of my toes!"

"What did you do?" inquired Geraldine, anxiously.

"Do, child! I gave a tremendous kick and swam like fury. Then, under the water I saw a big, golden-scaled sunfish with scarlet and blue gill-covers sailing after me. Frantic, I scrambled madly forward, swimming for my life, but the sunfish darted at me and caught me by the hind legs, and at the same instant there came a splash in the water, and a big, brown, furry mink dived head-first at the sunfish, and the sunfish in its excitement opened its mouth, and I, half-drowned, came floating up to the surface in a whirl of water and bubbles."

"Good gracious!" cried the children, excitedly.

"It was terrible," said Sindbad the Grass-

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hopper, "that first voyage of mine! I could go on relating to you how I swam and swam and kicked at nibbling minnows, how a miserable cat-bird attempted to seize me and got her wings wet for her pains, how the fierce water-spiders chased me, how the malicious whirligigs circled round and round me trying to make me dizzy, how I at last managed to crawl upon a floating chip and how I sat there for an hour, while the water swept me on and on until a friendly alder-branch reached out and stopped me and I climbed up on the river-bank, safe and sound at last—*but*—"

"But what?" whispered the children.

"But on the wrong side of the river!" said the grasshopper, sadly. "Time after time I have attempted to get to the other side, where the grass is richer and juicier, but, do you know, every time I reach the other side I find that it isn't the other side, but the other side is the other side; and it's curious, isn't it?—but

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no matter on which side you are, there's always the other side, and when you get to it it isn't the other side any longer, but the other side is the other side. This," added Sindbad the Grasshopper, "is philosophy."

The children were too perplexed to reply.

"Do you know where the side that is called the other side is?" inquired the grasshopper. "I should like to find it. The grass is much juicier there."

"We don't know," said Geraldine, "we have never studied philosophy. But, if you please, would you kindly make some molasses for us before you go?"

"Molasses!" repeated the grasshopper. "Oh, you mean that brown liquid that comes out of my mouth sometimes? I only do that when I'm angry, or frightened, or hurt. It isn't molasses, it's a liquid which I use as a weapon. If a big ant nips me or a tiger-beetle attempts to seize me, I—er—I simply spit at

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them and they don't like it and they let me go. And now," continued the grasshopper, "I must be on my way to look for that other side they all talk about. I could sit here for hours and tell you about the wonders I have seen on my voyages—how I once met a fox who tried to eat me; how I once saw a caterpillar that fed, not on leaves, as all other decent caterpillars do, but on tiny, downy little insects that gather in herds on alder-twigs; how sometimes I have seen a sort of creature that spends part of its life living on grasshoppers, but unless the grasshopper falls into the water and is eaten by a fish, the creature cannot become fully developed. Oh, I could go on for hours. But I won't," added the grasshopper abruptly. "Good-bye!"

It sprang into the air and went pitching and drifting off over the river; and as far as the children could see it they heard its clear, dry "Click! click! click!"

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“I hope it reaches the other side safely,” said Geraldine.

“But how can it if the other side isn’t the other side when it gets there?” asked Peter.

Geraldine shook her head sadly. “It’s so very puzzling,” she said. “Let’s go down and paddle our feet; shall we?”

So they joined hands and started down the grassy bank towards the shallow water’s edge; and as they reached it, and stepped out on a flat rock, part of the rock under their very feet seemed to turn into a pair of gray wings and go darting away across the water, and a sharp, keen cry broke out: “Peet! peet! peet! Tip-up! Tip-up! Tip-tip-up!”



III

PETE TIP-UP

THE children were so astonished that they almost toppled off the rock.

“Goodness!” gasped Geraldine; “do stones have wings?”

“It is certainly a bird just the color of a

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stone," muttered Peter. "See! It's wheeling about now. Oh, I hope it comes back to be friendly!"

The bird was surely coming back, flitting low across the river, with curved wings bowed so that the tips seemed to touch the smooth surface of the water. And all the while its clear metallic cry rang out: "Peet! peet! peet! Tip-up! Tip-up! Tip-tip-up!"

As the bird neared the rock it wheeled and alighted at Geraldine's feet. There came a flash of white as it tossed its long pointed wings, ran across the rock, and began to bow and tip-up and bob in a most extraordinary manner.

"You frightened me," said the bird; "some of those wicked village children always throw pebbles at me, and my legs are so dainty and slender that the least blow might break them."

"We never throw stones at beautiful birds," said Geraldine, quickly.

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“Oh, I know that!” cried the bird. “You are those little In-door Children, aren’t you—Geraldine and Peter?”

“Yes,” they said, “we are Geraldine and Peter. Will you please to tell us who you are and why you are just the color of a stone and why you walk around bobbing and dipping in that see-saw way?”

“Why, of course I’ll tell you,” replied the bird, pleasantly. “I have several names, you know. The village children call me Tip-up, See-saw, and Tilt-up, Teeter-tail, Peet-weet, Teeter, Sand-lark—oh, I’ve forgotten half the names people give me. As a matter of fact, my foreign name is *Actitis Macularia*, and my American name is the Spotted Sand-piper. My wife calls me Pete, however, so you children might as well call me Pete as anything.”

“Pete,” said Geraldine, shyly, “why are you just the color of a stone?”

“Aha!” laughed the sand-piper, “that’s the

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joke of it. I'm so nearly the color of a stone that those big, sharp-eyed hawks that go sailing 'round and 'round up there among the clouds can't see me. My color is my protection. Why, children, you have no idea how often I've escaped troubles of various sorts by keeping perfectly quiet on a stone or on a sandy shore or among withered grasses in a pasture. You did not see me; you almost stepped on me before I darted away."

"Are you a kind of snipe?" asked Peter.

"Oh, a kind of snipe—yes, but snipe fly differently, for one thing. Besides, snipe are game-birds, but no gentleman would fire at me."

"Are you married?" inquired Geraldine, gently.

"Yes," cried the sand-piper, eagerly, "and my wife is the prettiest thing you ever saw! She's up there, sitting on our eggs."

"Where?" cried the children, excited.

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“In the river-meadow. You see, we’re nesting in a hurry because we want to bring up two broods this season.”

“Oh, *could* we see her—and the eggs?” pleaded Geraldine, softly; “we will be so very, very quiet, and we won’t frighten her, we promise!”

The sand-piper looked perplexed and scratched his sleek gray cheek with one wet foot.

“Well,” he said, doubtfully, “I’ll take you over. But our nest is not much to look at—nothing at all elaborate, like those pretty hanging nests that the orioles weave in your elm-trees.”

“You can’t alight in a tree, can you?” said Peter.

“I? Bless your heart, I can and I do! It always astonishes people, too, who never thought it possible for any of the snipe family to alight in trees. But I do it; sometimes when my

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wife is dozing on the nest in the grass I hop up on a tree or a fence, or even on the ridge-pole of a barn, and I sing very sweetly, 'Peet! peet! tweet!'—oh, I'm not such a bad singer. They call me sand-lark, too, because in the nesting season I go soaring up into the sunshine, singing in the manner of an English skylark—that is," added the sand-piper, modestly, "I don't, of course, sing nearly as well, but my wife likes it."

"You are the dearest, friendliest little bird!" cried Geraldine, impulsively stooping to touch and smooth the silky gray wings.

"Thanks," said the sand-piper. "I see no sense in sulking. Travellers like myself usually learn to get along with people."

"Are you a traveller?" asked Peter, surprised.

"Well, more or less of a traveller. I've been as far north as Hudson Bay in summer, and as far south as Brazil in winter. In winter

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I usually stop along anywhere south of South Carolina or Georgia, and often, in summer, I stay south of Canada.”

“And when do you build your nest?” asked Geraldine.

“Oh, any time between April and September. It depends on where we are. We usually build it near rivers; you see, we eat snails and worms, and one finds the juiciest and plumpest food near brooks and rivers.”

“And why do you tilt up and bob and bow all the while you are talking to us?” asked Geraldine. “Is it politeness?”

“It is probably that,” said the sand-piper, bowing rapidly to Geraldine—“it is no doubt an inborn and instinctive mania for good manners. I bow to everybody and everything—to my wife, to you, to the birds who come here to drink, to the water, to my own reflection in the water—why, I even bow several times to the snails I am about to eat. Polished man-

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ners please and are not difficult to acquire. Why not be polished while you're about it?"

"How true!" said the children, reverently.

"Hereafter I shall bow to my breakfast every morning," said Peter. "It is good practice to bow to every muffin and every fish-ball."

"The best practice in the world," assented the sand-piper. "And now, children, if you care to meet my wife and inspect our domestic arrangements, I will lead you."

The sand-piper spread his gray-and-white barred wings and flitted off in a long curve; the children hastily followed, running along the river-bank.

"Peet! Peet! Peet!" they heard the sharp, sweet call, and followed it out into the meadow until they caught a glimpse of two flashing wings tossed up in the sunshine. Then they heard another voice exclaim: "Pete! What is all that noise of footsteps in the grass?"

"Only Peter and Geraldine, my dear," re-

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plied the sand-piper, soothingly. "They are dying to see our nest and the eggs. May they?"

The children stood, hand in hand, breathless with excitement; for there, on the ground, under a bunch of tall grasses, was a little gray bird looking up at them, slender head raised. The bird's eyes were beautiful and fearless.

"Bow to her," whispered Geraldine; and the children began to bow and curtesy rapidly.

"They are very polite children, Pete," said his wife, rising and beginning to return the salutations by a series of bows and dips.

"Oh!" cried Geraldine, enchanted. "Peter! Peter! Do you see that dear little nest all lined with grass? And those ivory-tinted eggs speckled with brown? Oh, Mrs. Pete, it is the most wonderful nest I ever saw!"

The sand-piper bowed gratefully.

"We hope," observed Pete, "to raise a number of children before we go south in October.



ELIZABETH SMEDLEY GREEN

“OH, MRS. PETE, IT IS THE MOST WONDERFUL NEST I EVER SAW!”

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It makes quite a flock, you see, and it is much jollier travelling with so many than just going alone."

"When the eggs hatch," said his wife, "the babies are certainly pretty—just little balls of down. And you have no idea how lively they are! Why, they're no bigger than spiders, and they run like a flash all over the meadow and the river shore."

"May we see your babies when the eggs hatch?" begged the children, in raptures.

"Yes," replied Mrs. Pete, carefully resuming her place on the nest. "Pete will let you know some day, won't you, dear?"

"With extreme pleasure," replied her polite husband, bowing madly to everybody. "Good-morning, children. It has been a great pleasure to us."

Profoundly impressed, the children backed off through the meadow bowing and curtesying repeatedly so long as the sand-pipers were in

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sight. And long after they had disappeared amid the meadow grasses the children heard a keen, sweet song floating from the distance, a faint echo of the heavenly song of a soaring skylark. Suddenly the song was silenced; a harsh cry, something between a squealing and mewling, sounded from the river.

“What’s that?” faltered Geraldine, startled, as a great shadow swept across the grass and the loud, querulous cry broke out close overhead.



IV

THE MARSH-HAWK

“IT’S a hawk!” cried Peter, looking up.
“Isn’t he a beauty!”

“Hear him squeal,” said Geraldine. “And how he flies, wheeling and turning above every clump of bushes. See! He’s circling over

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the river now. Here he comes again! Oh, speak to him, Peter. I do want to ask him something.”

The great hawk approached, gliding through the air just over the tops of the tall grasses and meadow flowers, and Peter called to him as he passed: “Oh, hawk, would you mind coming a trifle nearer? My little sister Geraldine wishes to ask you something.”

The hawk soared upward, balanced on broad, grayish wings, and hung a moment above the children; then the air fairly whistled as the great bird slanted and swooped.

“Hello, Peter! How goes it, Geraldine?” he said, genially, alighting on the remains of an old stump which was almost concealed among sprays of elder and meadow-sweet.

The children bowed politely to the hawk, who fixed on them an amused and bright-yellow pair of eyes.

He was a magnificent bird. His plumage



"THE HAWK SOARED UPWARD, BALANCED ON BROAD, GRAYISH WINGS"

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was bluish-gray and pearl-gray and silver-gray touched with bronze; his curved beak and talons jet-black. "Did this little lady desire to speak to me?" asked the hawk, with careless good-humor.

"Do you mean me?" inquired Geraldine.

"Of course. You're a little lady, aren't you?"

"I only wished to know," she said, "whether it was you who carried off one of our dear little chickens yesterday. Was it?"

"Nonsense!" cried the hawk, greatly amused; "I don't steal chickens, my child! I'm a marsh-hawk."

"And don't marsh-hawks steal chickens?" asked Peter.

The hawk shook his head and burst into a loud, harsh squeal, which, no doubt, is the way all marsh-hawks laugh.

"No, no," he said, "I'm no chicken-thief, Peter. I'm no enemy to farmers. I wish the

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farmers would get it through their heads, too, before they run for their shot-guns every time I come sailing along the river-meadows."

"Well, if you don't eat chickens, what do you eat, then?" asked Geraldine, curiously.

"What do I eat? Why, I go mousing about over the fields for mice. I dote on mice. I treat myself to a frog or two, sometimes a lizard, sometimes even a grasshopper. But that is about the limit of my bill of fare. Mice, mice, toujours mice. Why, I'm the greatest benefit to farmers; but they're too stupid to understand."

And the hawk ruffled up all his soft feathers and blinked amiably at the children.

"Are you cross-eyed?" asked Peter, suddenly.

"No," said the hawk, "but my eyes are pretty close together, and my beak is close to my eyes. Sometimes, when I realize what a good-looking bird I am, I try a view of my

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own features, but all I can see is my beak, so I look at that. Geraldine, I wish you would tell me how I might spend a few hours daily looking at myself.”

“A mirror—” began Geraldine.

“Oh yes, I know. I sit by the river and gaze at my exquisite features sometimes, but the little, soft, mushy tadpoles come wiggling about and the idiotic sunfish stare, and the minnows gape, and I don’t care for it. I’d like to get into some position where I could see my own face without looking into a mirror full of polliwogs.”

“My mirror isn’t full of polliwogs,” said Geraldine, laughing.

“Then it’s full of finny fishes or water-spiders,” observed the hawk. “Oh, I know; you can’t tell me anything about mirrors; I’ve lived in River-land too long. Hark! Was that a mouse moving in the long grass?”

The children listened intently; the hawk

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bent his bright gaze on a clump of early golden-rod. Suddenly he pounced; the children heard the snap of his polished beak, then the bird rose from the grass and flapped slowly back to his perch upon the stump again.

“Merely a grasshopper,” he said, smacking his beak, reflectively—“but a rather good flavor—not bad, I assure you.”

“Oh,” said Geraldine, “I hope it wasn’t our friend Sindbad!”

“And who, if you please, is your friend Sindbad?”

“A clicking grasshopper,” said Peter. “Was that a clicking grasshopper you swallowed?”

“No,” said the hawk, “it was one of those tender, mushy, green ones, with long whiskers—the kind that tune up at night and keep respectable hawks awake. That ought to teach him a lesson, I think.”

“But what’s the good of the lesson to him now?” asked Geraldine.

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The hawk only shook his head, muttering, "Teach him a lesson — teach him not to fiddle tunes with his hind-legs when I'm sleepy."

"Are you married, too?" asked Geraldine.

"Married two? Not much. I married once. Marsh-hawks only marry once in a lifetime. And you just ought to see my wife, Geraldine. She's mostly bronze in color, like a young marsh-hawk. My gracious, what a figure she does cut in the sunshine when the sun catches her plumage!"

"I should like to see her," said Geraldine, eagerly.

"Well, she's attending to the young ones just now," said the hawk, "and I must confess that she is rather quick-tempered when nesting. So I don't think I'll invite you around for a while, if you don't mind."

"Are the eggs already hatched?" asked Peter. "What color were they?"

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“They were laid in May,” said the hawk—
“six of them—the most beautiful bluish-white
eggs you ever saw. My wife and I came up
rather early from South Carolina this spring,
and we searched all River-land for a decent
place to build. Finally we selected a spot on
the overgrown pasture above the rapids, and
we built a rather flimsy nest out of hay and
twigs. I don’t know why it is, but we marsh-
hawks can’t build decent nests.”

“Which tree is it in?” asked Peter.

“It isn’t in a tree; it’s on the ground,” said
the hawk. “You people are always getting us
marsh-hawks mixed up with the sharp-shinned
hawk and the red-tailed hawk, and those worst
robbers of all, the great blue darter and the
goshawk. They all build their nests in trees,
all, especially the two last, are chicken-thieves
of the deepest dye, and all of them sail and
circle and soar high in the sky. I don’t,
neither does my wife, except when we are

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courting each other. Then we rise above the clouds sometimes, and float and drift through the sunlit azure for hours."

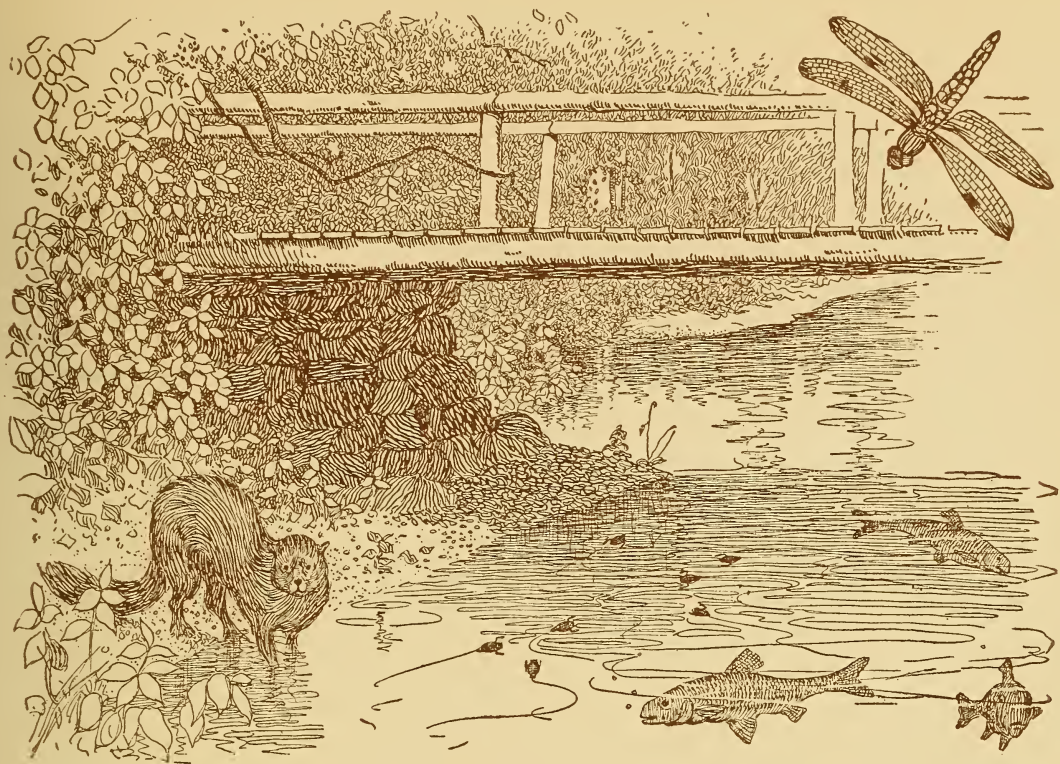
The hawk scratched his head reflectively.

"I ought to be after some of those slate-colored field-mice," he said. "The children will be squealing for their dinner presently. Good-bye, children. Try to make a few people understand that we marsh-hawks, or mouse-hawks, or harriers, or whatever you call us, are not robbers, but that we rid the fields of mice and insects. Whenever you see a big hawk sailing along slowly over the tops of the grass—and particularly if you see a round, white patch of feathers on the back, you may be pretty sure it's only a good-natured marsh-hawk, and there's no need to run for the chicken-yard with a double-barrelled shot-gun. Good-bye."

"We'll remember. Good-bye!" cried the children.

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The hawk spread its broad wings and floated off over the meadow; and far away the children heard its strange hunting-cry long after it was lost to sight amid the thickets of Riverland.



V

IN RIVER-LAND

THE distant cry of the marsh-hawk was now being industriously imitated by a cat-bird flitting restlessly through the willows along the river's leafy banks; "Miau! miau! miau!" came the plaintive mewling; "Meow!

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meow-w!" retorted Peter and Geraldine, laughing delightedly, until the nesting birds in the alders broke out into protest.

"For goodness sake stop that noise!" cried a redstart, fluttering from branch to branch with a flash of his black-and-flame-colored plumage—"you'll be drawing all the hawks and cats and blue-jays in the neighborhood if you keep up that miauling!"

"There has not been such a racket on the Kenneytto since the red-winged blackbirds left," coughed a cuckoo, exasperated.

"I'm trembling so on my nest that I'll addle my eggs," wailed a small, sweet voice. "Do be quiet, children, and let that silly cat-bird alone."

"Do you hear what the thrush says?" piped a delicious voice from the top of the swamp-elm; and a bird with black, white, and bright rose-colored plumage broke out into an ecstasy of musical protest.

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Far and wide floated the lovely song of the grosbeak, stilling the plaintive or indignant murmurs of the birds; a small bunting ruffled up its purple-and-sapphire plumage and composed itself to listen—a living jewel in the sunshine; the irritated Kuk! Kuk! Kuk! of the brown-and-white cuckoo was silenced; thrush, sparrow, and fire-flecked redstart subsided upon their nests; the slate-gray cat-bird, deeply mortified, every feather adroop, sat quietly in the water-willows, mute as its own shadow.

“They’re all nesting along here,” whispered Geraldine to Peter. “We’d better go farther down the river to that pool below the foot-bridge.”

So they stole away along the edges of the flowering thickets where clumps of blue-beeches spread flecked shadows over the meadow—past the bullrush pool, where brilliant dragon-flies sailed on sparkling wings, through beds of mint

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and scented bergamot, to the edge of the still pool below the foot-bridge.

“Now we can paddle our feet without making nuisances of ourselves,” cried Geraldine, tucking up her skirts. “Do you know, Peter, that whenever I’m quiet for more than a minute there’s something inside of me that begins to laugh and sing and shout; and then I open my mouth and out it comes.”

Peter lay down on the grass, and gravely kicked up his heels. “I wonder,” he said, “why it is I sometimes roll around like a colt?”

“I wonder why *I* do,” said Geraldine, doing it.

“I wonder,” said Peter, sitting up on the grassy river-bank and beginning to untie his shoes—“I wonder what all those little things are whirling around and around on top of the water. Look, Geraldine!”

“They’re whirligigs,” said Geraldine, tugging at her stockings.

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“But what are whirligigs?” persisted Peter; “and why do they act like that? Watch them, Geraldine; see them go darting and zigzagging and circling around like skaters on the lake in winter.”

“Wait, I’ll catch one,” said Geraldine, dipping her white feet in the water. “Goodness! See how they scatter when I reach out! Come back, you poor, silly, shiny whirligigs; we’re certainly not going to eat you!”

“There’s nothing certain about it!” retorted a thin and watery little voice. “Other people eat us; how do we know that you won’t do the same?”

“What!” exclaimed the children, horrified; “who eats such a thing as a whirligig?”

“People in Mexico,” said the whirligig, wrathfully. “They eat our eggs, and they catch us, too, and feed us to their chickens.”

Peter made a wry face; Geraldine shuddered.

“It gratifies me,” added the whirligig, “to

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observe your indignation, and I feel reasonably assured that you would not attempt to eat us just because you know we are so delicious."

"Please never to mention the idea again," said Geraldine, faintly. And a hundred thin and watery but grateful little voices chorused their thanks.

"What are you, anyhow?" asked Peter, curiously, as the school of whirligigs came swarming back to the still clear pool and clustered together just beyond where the children's feet hung ankle deep in the water.

"We won't try to catch you again," added Geraldine, "because our mother has taught us not to make nuisances of ourselves; but won't you please tell us why you all go spinning round and round on the water?"

"Why, we're chasing all kinds of tiny water creatures," said the whirligig. "When we catch them we eat them. That's why we all whirl around on the water."



ANNABETH SNIFFEN GREEN

“WHY, WE’RE CHASING ALL KINDS OF TINY WATER CREATURES,” SAID THE WHIRLIGIG.”

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“Is the water full of live things?” asked Geraldine, peering down at the bottom sands. “I never thought there was anything in the river except a few fishes.”

“The idea!” said the whirligig, scornfully. “Why, the river is the most sociable and densely populated place in the world. Use your eyes, Geraldine. The top of the water is swarming with different kinds of gnats, flies, eggs, larvæ, and whirligigs; over there is a bunch of cousins of mine who always spin about on their backs, never on their stomachs; and there’s my big cousin Nepa, the valiant water-scorpion. He’s a fierce fighter, I can tell you, and those goggle-eyed minnows over there had better keep an eye on him. Then, under the flat stones on the river-bed lurks the giant water-bug; and the minnows had better look out for him, too. Oh, there’s plenty of company here — water-tigers that turn into dragon-flies, a large family named Dobson

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that lives for three years as big, black, wriggling, biting grubs before they crawl out on land and turn into great, soft, lace-winged and double-horned flies, bigger than many dragonflies. Why, the river is full of creatures, swimming on the surface, under the surface, crawling on the bottom, burrowing through the mud. I'll venture to say that this river is the liveliest spot in the world."

"Do you ever have terrible wars?—hand-to-hand fights?" asked Peter, hopefully.

"Fights! Well, I should say so—it's all one endless and continuous fight. A saucy minnow comes wriggling along, slaps my cousin Nepa, the water-scorpion, over the head with its tail, and whiz! they're at it. Ten to one my cousin Nepa eats the minnow, too."

"You don't fight, I hope!" exclaimed Geraldine, anxiously.

"Oh, don't I! I fight like mad. Look at me. I'm built to fight. I'm shaped like a

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boat; my two hind-legs are like paddles, and I go racing about after insects that fall into the water or insects that live in the water. I attack very small fish sometimes, but it's a tough job, although I've a sharp beak strong enough to sting like a hornet."

"You couldn't sting us, could you?" demanded Peter, amazed.

"Of course I could. So could my cousin the back-swimmer. I tell you, Peter, we're equipped for trouble and we're always hunting for it. I can dive like a fish, and when I dive I carry down a lot of air with me so I can breathe."

"How can you carry air?" cried Geraldine.

"The air clings to the fine hairs which cover my body; watch me!" And the whirligig suddenly dived, swimming along under water.

"Your body looks as though it were silver-plated!" exclaimed Peter.

"That's the air I carry," said the whirligig,

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coming to the surface and darting and gyrating about between the children's feet; "that glistening silvery film along my legs and stomach is nothing but air; and I carry it down and breathe it through little holes called spiracles in my sides and thighs."

"Is there anything else you can do?" asked Peter, respectfully.

"Certainly. I can crawl about on land. I can fly like a beetle—I have wings folded up under these shiny, polished wing-covers. Often I leave the river at night after a shower and go flying off to find some puddle where there ought to be food. Then I spin around on the surface of the puddle until the puddle dries up; then I crawl out, spread my wings, and fly off to a new place."

"I had no idea," exclaimed Peter, "that a whirligig could do all these things!"

"All whirligigs can," said the insect, proudly, "and there are some thirty or forty different

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kinds whose first names are like mine—Corixa. You can call me whirligig, water-boatman, pond-skipper, or whatever you like, but my real name is Corixa, if anybody should make kind inquiries.”

“There’s one thing you can’t do,” said Peter, thoughtfully.

“What’s that?” demanded the whirligig.

“You can’t sing!”

“Oh yes, I can,” retorted the insect, jauntily. “Listen.”

The whirligig began to strike its horny nose with both front feet; at first the children heard nothing, then, gradually stealing on the ear, a clear note grew, sounding louder and louder.

“That isn’t very bad, is it?” asked the whirligig.

“It’s rather pretty,” said Geraldine, politely.

The insect whirled round and round several times in triumph.

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“What do you do when winter comes?” inquired Peter.

“We dive down and burrow into the mud under the water. When spring comes we crawl out again, swim up to the top, and begin to look for a new crop of trouble.”

“Don’t you ever do anything but eat and fight?” asked Geraldine.

“We lay eggs,” replied the whirligig—“bunches of eggs attached to the stems of water plants. Those cousins of mine, who spend their lives swimming on their backs, lay their eggs inside the stems of water plants; so do the water-scorpions. But my other relative, the giant water-bug, has an awful time with eggs.”

“How?” asked the children.

“Why, you see, his wife is bigger and stronger than he is, and she’s a very advanced and determined female—full of modern notions about the care of children. So when she’s

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ready to lay a bunch of eggs she seizes on her amazed husband, and, spite of his frantic struggles, she lays the eggs all over him!"

"But what becomes of him?" cried the bewildered children.

"He becomes nothing but a walking incubator, and mopes about weighted down with a load of eggs, while his wife goes gadding about. Isn't it awful? I tell you I'll think several times before I marry." And the whirligig went circling and zigzagging off among the shiny swarm that whirled over the placid surface of the pool.

"I don't think I should ever marry if I were a water-bug," observed Peter, paddling his feet in the cool, clear water.

"If I were a water-bug," reflected Geraldine, "I should marry, I think—but I should never, never be cruel enough to lay eggs all over my husband."

There was a silence broken by an exclaima-

RIVER-LAND

tion from Peter: "If that mosquito comes humming around me again, I'll defend myself!"

"You wouldn't *kill* it!" cried Geraldine, reproachfully. "Have you forgotten what we have learned about destroying life that we cannot replace?"

"That's silly!" snapped the mink, poking its furry muzzle out of a cleft in the rocks opposite. "It is the business of Indoor people to destroy every house-fly and every mosquito they can."

"Why?" asked the children, astonished.

"Because they carry sickness in their miserable bodies," said the mink, sharply.

"I can't help it," said Geraldine; "it is wicked to destroy anything alive."

"Then why do you take medicine when you have a cold, or when you have measles or mumps or whooping-cough?" demanded the mink.

"Medicine!" repeated Geraldine; "what

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harm do I do by taking medicine? I don't kill anything, do I?"

"Indeed, you do; you kill millions and millions of tiny live creatures when you swallow medicine."

"Where are they?"

"In your body, child. Sickness is caused by millions of living things, so small that only a most powerful microscope can show them. While they are alive and increasing in your blood, you are ill and you grow worse; as soon as you take the sort of medicine that kills them you are better; and you get well when the medicine has killed them all."

"Good gracious! We didn't know that!" exclaimed the children.

"It's so," squeaked the mink. "And what's the difference between whacking a mosquito or a house-fly, both of which are full of these little living things that will make you ill, and pouring several doses of medicine into your stomachs

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after the mosquito or the house-fly have alighted on you and spread the little creatures that make sickness all through your skin and blood?"

"After this," said Peter, wrathfully, "I shall whack every mosquito and every house-fly that I see."

"It is silly not to," said the mink. "It is nothing but a proper precaution. Now, for instance, it would be cruel to destroy a bee or a wasp just because they sting. It is your business to leave them alone. All creatures defend themselves when attacked, and it is your business not to attack. But you are always right in defending yourselves; therefore, common-sense bids you defend yourselves always against disease-laden mosquitoes and that most filthy of insects, the common house-fly."

"Tee-e! he-e! tee-e! he-e!" sang a tiny, thin, malicious voice, vibrating in Peter's ear. "Tee-e! Z-z-z-z! Let old furry-muzzle talk! What do I care? I'll bite him, too, if I catch

RIVER-LAND

him asleep on a sunny log. I'll bite everybody and everything!"

"Whack!" came Peter's hand; but the mosquito sailed off over the stream, hung above the water for a while to tantalize the hungry minnows, then drifted like a winged mote to a willow twig bending above the stream and alighted on a leaf, head down, hind-legs sticking straight up in the air.



VI

THE OUTLAW

“I BELIEVE that mosquito is laughing at me!” said Peter, indignantly.

“I am,” hummed the mosquito. “Z-z-z! I nearly bit you that time, Peter. Look out or I’ll bite you yet!”

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“In all Outdoor-land,” said Geraldine, sorrowfully, “you are the only really wicked creature that we have met.”

“Wicked? Of course I’m wicked,” sang the mosquito, gleefully. “Am I not an outlaw? Is not every Indoor hand against me? And every Outdoor creature fears and hates me; horses and cattle lash at me with their legs and tails, lesser beasts snap at me or try to roll over on me and flatten me out, birds and insects eat me, the fish lie low under the surface waiting for me to lay my eggs. Ha! ha! Who cares? I’m a fierce freebooter, and whole nations tremble and take counsel together how they may resist me. I lie hidden, waiting for live things; I terrify, I rule, I close entire regions to civilization. It’s a merry life while it lasts! Z-z-z!”

“Then,” said Peter, slowly, “you are what is called a public enemy.”

“Exactly,” said the mosquito; “my stinging

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apparatus is against every one and everything—even juicy stems and succulent flowers I pierce, sucking their veins.”

“Is their nothing good about you?” asked Geraldine, in despair.

“I have not one single redeeming trait,” replied the mosquito, proudly. “Even a house-fly has a shadow of an excuse for his sins, but I have none. Why, as a matter of fact, you know I can live just as well as not without feeding on Indoor people. I was born to the simple nourishment of the moisture and juices found in succulent stems and leaves.”

“And yet you deliberately annoy live creatures!” said Peter.

“Deliberately, persistently—Z-z-z!”

“Have you no wife to influence you for the better?” asked Geraldine, almost in tears.

“Wife? No, but I have a husband who doesn’t amount to much,” replied the mosquito, tartly.



“ARE THERE ANY HARMLESS MOSQUITOES?” ASKED PETER, QUIETLY”

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The horrified children were silent.

“He never bites anything, you know; he sips a little moisture now and then, I fancy, yet, as a matter of fact, I never saw him feed at all. But I feed!” added the mosquito, viciously.

“Are there any harmless mosquitoes?” asked Peter, quietly. “I only want to know so that I may spare them in battle.”

“Well,” said the mosquito, carelessly, “there are five families of mosquitoes in this country, and of these five the Anopheles family is the worst. There are three kinds of Anopheles mosquitoes. This is the way they give you malaria: A mosquito bites an Indoor person who has malaria; the tiny malarial creatures are sucked in by the mosquito, and inside the mosquito they immediately begin to breed. Then the next Indoor person whom the mosquito stings is sure to get a big dose of those malarial creatures in his blood, and he becomes

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ill. Simple, isn't it? — simple, but effective.
Z-z-z!"

The children stared in speechless indignation.

"The Anopheles mosquito usually rests with his head and body at right angles to whatever he is standing on. In other words, he stands on his head," continued the mosquito.

"Why," said Peter, hoarsely.

"Why not?" asked the mosquito.

"Heads were not made to stand on," said Peter.

"Matter of opinion," observed the mosquito. "Now, for example, what do you use your ears for?"

"To hear with, of course."

"Well," remarked the mosquito, "when I'm still in a wingless state I use my ears to breathe through. It's purely a matter of taste and opinion, you see."

"Don't you always have wings?" demanded Peter.

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“No. First, I’m a single tiny egg floating amid a flat mass of other eggs on the water. In sixteen hours I’m a larva—what you children call a ‘wiggler’—you’ve often seen wigglers wriggling and jerking about in stagnant water standing in old troughs or barrels or kettles.”

“I wish I’d known what wigglers were when I saw them in the rain-water barrel,” said Peter, darkly.

The mosquito laughed and went on: “Seven days we wriggle as wigglers, coming up to the surface to breathe every now and then, and eating our fill of food so small that you could not even see it. Then we turn into pupas and float for two days more before we burst our shells and dry our wings and go sailing away on a biting expedition, full-fledged outlaws! Z-z-z!”

“Anyhow,” said Peter, drawing a long breath, “winter will do what my hand failed to do.”

“Not much,” said the mosquito, gleefully.

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“I can hide away in some warm nook when the snow flies, and come out fresh and naughty as ever in the spring. Listen next May and you’ll hear my cheery hum—not high-pitched, like my cousin *Culex*, but low in tone. Don’t worry about me, children. I can look out for *Anopheles* number one—”

“Snap!” A small gray bird hung hovering in the air, darting its head from side to side.

“Where’s that mosquito?” cried the little gray flycatcher, excitedly. “I snapped, but missed. Where is that mosquito?”

The children were silent. They saw the wicked *Anopheles* flying away as fast as its wings could work, but they were fair-minded children, who never told tales. Besides, three against one was not fair, even though the one was a sinner like the outlaw mosquito.

“Did you hear my bill snap?” asked the little flycatcher, settling on a twig and looking carefully around for the mosquito.

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“I should think we did!” began Geraldine. “I had no idea such a tiny bird could be so noisy. Oh, please wait a moment—”

But the bird darted off like a flash, calling, “There’s the mosquito! Excuse my haste, children!” and in another moment the clear, dry snap of its bill sounded from the thicket on the other side of the river. But whether or not the little gray flycatcher caught the wicked mosquito that time the children never knew, because neither the mosquito nor the bird came back to tell them.

“Did you ever, ever believe that any live thing in Outdoor-land could be as horrid as that mosquito?” asked Geraldine, sadly. “And the flies, too—the cosey, cheery, buzzy little house-flies—did you believe they were full of dreadful germs? I suppose we’ll have to whack them now.”

“The way to do,” said Peter, “is to have

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screens. Then they can't come into the house, and then, you see, we won't ever be obliged to destroy any living thing!"

"That's the best way!" cried Geraldine, cheering up immediately. "I couldn't bear the idea of harming anything."

"But, of course, we must be brave enough to do our duty and whack any fly that gets in," said Peter.

"Ye-s," said Geraldine, "but please do my part for me—won't you, Peter?"

Peter nodded, splashing his legs thoughtfully in the water.

"I shall miss the flies," he murmured. "They're good company when mademoiselle reads to-morrow's lesson through for us in advance. And they most always sit on her nose, and then she slaps at them and her glasses fall off—"

"Mother says we must try not to see anything funny in that," said Geraldine.

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“I didn’t say it was funny,” retorted Peter ;
“I only said I should miss the flies. Once
mademoiselle found me making a fly-cage out
of a leaf from your copy-book ; and do you
know what she did ? She made me write a
verse in French about flies.”

“Did you ?” giggled Geraldine.

“I had to.”

“What did you write ?”

“I wrote :

“Une mouche
Dans la bouche
N’est pas très commode ;
C’est louche,
C’est—”

and I couldn’t find any rhyme but ‘touche,’
and that made no sense, and there seemed to
be no sense in anything that rhymed with
‘commode,’ so that’s all I did ; and mademoi-
selle wanted to know where I had heard the
word ‘louche,’ and I told her I heard mother’s

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maid say it about some friend of hers, and that's all that happened."

"That was enough," mused Geraldine, watching the little minnows swimming against the slow current. "I adore poetry, but not that kind you made. Ugh! N'en parlons plus, tu sais—" And she shrugged her shoulders and shook her curly head in dainty disgust.

Long, bluish shadows were lying across the meadow now; the sun hung low over the sapphire hills, and the sunlight was tinted with a deeper glow where it slanted through the trees of River-land.

Bird after bird began to sing, orioles fluting from maple and elm, bobolinks carolling ecstatically as they hovered over the wet meadow; the heavenly note of a hermit-thrush floated faintly from the hill-side pines, and, high on the tip of a tall balm-of-Gilead, a rosy grosbeak poured forth its lovely melody, echoed far away by the sweet, minor calling of the white-throat.

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River-land was astir ; in the mill-pond above the swinging bridge pickerel were leaping into the air—splash ! splash ! Old mother muskrat, with her sleek mouth full of juicy stems and grasses, came silently swimming downstream, steering along without a sound, now in the middle, now close under the overhanging banks. Turtle after turtle left a floating water-soaked log under the dam and swam off shoreward.

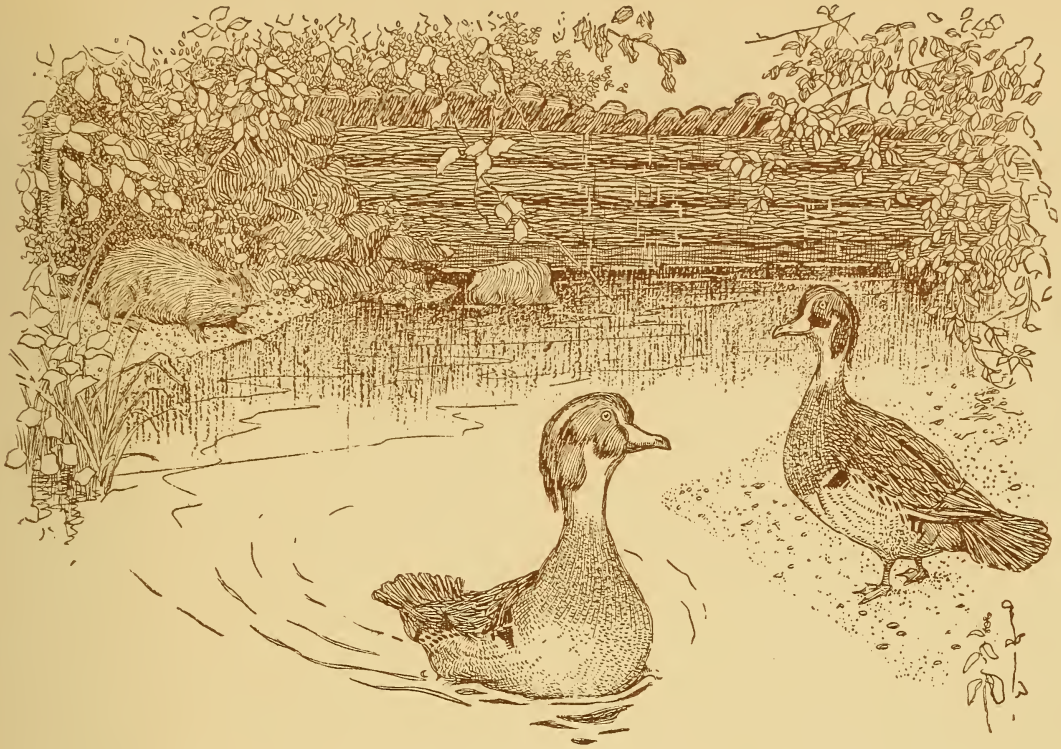
In the golden bands of sunlight that slanted across the stream clouds of gnats danced aerial jigs, unmindful of the pretty cherry-birds in their silken drab-and-yellow-barred plumage, who came silently hovering over the river to snap at the dizzy dancers.

“Look ! What is this flying up the river ?” whispered Geraldine, tugging at Peter’s sleeve.

Whirring along low over the calm surface of the water came a heavy bird, neck outstretched, stocky little wings fanning the air so rapidly

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that, as it neared the children, the whistling, whimpering sound of its wings increased to a shrill whish-h-h! The bird struck the water close to their feet, splashed about for a moment, sousing head and wings in the stream, wagged its tail, ducked its head again and again, and, flinging a rainbow of tinted spray from wing and crest, glanced up demurely at the children, saying: "Good-evening, Geraldine! Good-evening, Peter! What do you think of my new summer plumage?"



VII

THE WOOD-DUCK

NEVER, in all their lives, had the children seen such an exquisitely beautiful bird. Its crested head flashed with every color of the rainbow ; the bill was pink and orange, the eye crimson, the legs yellow, the breast

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a rich mahogany dotted with snowy white. Purple and green lights played over its folded wings; its head was all tufted with gold and green enamelled feathers glossed with iridescent azure.

“Are you a parrot?” stammered Peter, breathing deeply in his excitement.

“Why, no, you silly child; I’m a wood-duck. Don’t you remember last autumn, when your father wouldn’t let old Phelim shoot at a little flock of ducks on the river, because he said that nobody with a shred of decency would kill a wood-duck?”

“But those ducks were gray and brown,” said Peter, “and you’re every beautiful color that I ever dreamed of!”

“That’s because I have on my summer clothes—my bridal plumage,” said the duck, with a soft, twittering chuckle. “But I’m a wood-duck, just the same, and I was out there on the river with my wife and children, just

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ready to travel to Florida, when I saw old Phelim dodging behind the trees with his gun, and I heard what your father said about wood-ducks. And that," added the wood-duck, confidently, "is why I am so fearless and why I came down almost under your feet to splash and bathe and dive and swim and chase gnats and whirligigs for an hour before sunset."

The bird shook out its long, hooded crest and stretched its silvery throat, snapping lazily at a passing gnat.

"Never, never," breathed Geraldine, enraptured, "could I imagine a more magnificent creature than you. Surely you came straight from fairy-land!"

"No, I came from Cranberry Creek," said the wood-duck, a trifle amused. "This is rather a long evening flight for me, especially while my wife is nesting; but I heard the big marsh-hawk telling the great blue heron that you children were paying a visit to River-land,

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so, in compliment to your father, I took this opportunity to pay you our respects.”

“Did you really come over from Cranberry Creek to visit us?” cried Geraldine, delighted.

“I certainly did,” replied the beautiful wood-duck, floating on the still pond, crimson eyes half closed.

“I can scarcely believe that you are a duck,” murmured Geraldine. “We have ducks, you know, all white, with orange-colored bills, that waddle and waddle and quack all day. Can it be possible that a heavenly bird like you quacks?”

“No,” replied the wood-duck, with its gentle, musical laughter. “I don’t quack—in fact, I can’t quack. No wood-duck can. But I have a rather sweet call at nesting-time. Wood-ducks are not like any other ducks in the world. Did you ever hear of a duck that could fly up into a tree and walk about the branches as comfortably as any blackbird?”

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“Can you?” asked Peter, astonished.

“All wood-ducks can,” laughed the bird.
“More than that, we build our nests in trees.”

“A duck’s nest in a tree!” cried Peter, amazed.

“Certainly. Sometimes we use a hollow tree where an owl or a squirrel has nested, sometimes we use an old birds’ nest in a crotch, and sometimes we make a new nest in the forks of the branch—a big nest, not very well built, but warmly lined with dried grass and feathers. In that nest my wife places the eggs. There are usually ten, sometimes fewer, sometimes a baker’s dozen or more; and they are the prettiest little pale-creamy eggs you ever looked at.”

“But,” said Geraldine, perplexed, “when your little ducklings hatch, how do they get down from the tree to the river?”

“Sometimes, when the nest is on a branch overhanging the stream, my wife just coaxes them to the edge of the nest and then shoves

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them overboard with her bill. But if the tree is inland in a swamp or among dry timber cover, my wife carries the children, one by one, to the stream. They don't weigh much—they're just little puffs of fluff; but you ought to see them swim! Why, the moment they feel the water they go darting out over the surface as nimbly as whirligigs."

"Did you teach them to swim?" asked Peter. "Father taught Geraldine and me."

"Ducklings don't have to learn; they just know," said the wood-duck. "We wood-ducks are experts in the water. We can catch one of those lightning whirligigs as easily as we pick up a beechnut or an acorn or a plump white grub in the forest. And there's another matter I wish to mention, children. We wood-ducks are easily tamed if we're not shot at. Year after year we come back to the same tree to nest; we are fearless and friendly if nobody attempts to harm us—so



“ WE WOOD-DUCKS ARE EXPERTS IN THE WATER ”

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friendly that we often alight in people's duck-ponds and even follow the waddling domestic flock up into the very poultry-yard. Why, even in the limits of New York City we still nest; and if I were certain that these whirligigs would not tell the rattle-pate kingfisher, and that the kingfisher would not gabble the secret up and down the entire river, I could tell you exactly where some cousins of mine have nested for years, and still nest, within the city boundary of Greater New York."

"Dear me!—goodness me!" sighed Geraldine; "how could anybody be so cruel as to fire a gun at you?"

"They do, all the same," said the wood-duck, shaking its jewelled head solemnly. "Why, only last February I had a narrow escape in the Florida flatwoods when one morning, just at daylight, some quail-hunters shot at me as I dashed through the trees towards a cypress-swamp. Guns are bad

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enough," continued the wood-duck, scratching its golden cheek with its yellow toe and preening its chocolate - brown - and - white - dotted breast—"bad enough in their way. But down there in Florida a wood-duck must keep his eyes open every second."

"What else is there to harm you?" asked Geraldine, anxiously.

"Snakes, my child; alligators, crocodiles, hawks, great fierce fish in the lagoons, and in the jungle there are wildcats that make no noise when they walk along the branches. Here in the North the hawks are always watching for us; so are the foxes. Don't you think we wood-ducks have a hard enough time without dodging the guns of Indoor folk?"

"Indeed we do!" cried the children, full of sympathy.

"We do no harm," said the wood-duck; "we eat wild rice and other seeds when we're on shore; in the water we grub up the tender

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roots of water-plants, and we eat insects. It is true we are fond of beechnuts and acorns, but there are plenty of these for everybody, including small boys and wood-ducks. Besides, we don't go in big flocks; we travel south with our children and come north in March and April all alone."

"But why in the world do people try to shoot you?" asked Peter.

"Because we are, I understand, very good to eat," said the wood-duck, chuckling. "It enrages the mallards and the canvas-backs when we tell them that we are quite as good to eat as they are. And it's so—in fact, any duck that doesn't eat fish is good to eat. When canvas-backs eat fish nobody can endure their flavor; and if a black duck or a red-head confines itself to a diet of wild rice and buckwheat, nobody could tell the difference between them and a rice-fed canvas-back."

"I shouldn't think you would care to talk

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about how you tasted to other people," said Geraldine, with a shudder.

"Oh, we don't worry about anything," said the duck, carelessly. "It's rather a matter of pride with us that we really are as good to eat as those flat-headed, bull-necked, blue-footed canvas-backs, who are always boasting about their position in the most exclusive society. If I'm to be shot and eaten, at least it will be a comfort to me, as I lie in the platter all trickling with delicious gravy, to know that there is not a duck in the world which is better worth cooking than I am."

The wood-duck rose upright in the water and whipped the air with its splendid wings.

"My wife will be anxious to hear all about you," he said, "so I must say good-night, children."

"Give her our love!" cried the children, as the duck darted up with a whispering whir,

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circled once in the sunset glow above the trees, then turned due north, winging away so swiftly that in a second or two it had dwindled to a dark dot in the evening sky.

For a while the children sat in silence, drying their feet in Peter's fresh handkerchief. Then they slowly drew on their shoes and stockings. The sun was dipping so low behind the purple Mayfield hills that only one glowing edge remained like a rim of fire against the sky. And, as they looked, it vanished, and the low hills turned a darker blue, and the sky overhead grew pink and gold.

"Go to bed! go to bed! go to bed!" croaked a surly old bull-frog from the reeds. "Scoot! scoot! scoot!" hooted an owl from the darkening alders. "Good-bye! good-bye!" wailed the phœbe-bird from the old foot-bridge, as the children joined hands and moved slowly away through the meadow.

Dusk fell over river and thicket; against the

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deepening sky the trees in the orchard stood out clear and dark.

“Come again! come again!” whispered the little gray moths swarming around them through the tall grasses.

“We promise,” murmured the children. “Good-night, little moths.”

When at last they reached the hill-top, Geraldine stopped, laying her hand on Peter’s shoulder.

“Hark!” she said; “something is singing down there in the dark.”

They listened, heads turned; and far away, stealing out of the velvet dusk, they heard the voice of the stream singing the faint, sweet songs of River-land.

THE END

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