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THE AMERICAN MUSEUM
OF
NATURAL HISTORY
TENANTS OF THE TREES
"I often wonder if his toes are not cold"
(See Page 41)
Dedicated to
That brave little herald of Spring,

**The Bluebird**

Whose slight, sweet song gladdens us in
lulls of the March gale, bidding us be of good
cheer, and telling us Spring will come again.
To the Reader

The author has received so many inquiries from his young readers in all parts of the country as to how he became acquainted with the birds and squirrels, that he has deemed it wise to tell them in the introduction to this volume, when and where his acquaintance with these little furred and feathered friends began.

His aim in so doing is to show them that he has had few advantages for nature study that the average country girl or boy does not enjoy, and his hope is that their interest may be quickened so that they will begin at once, for themselves, that sweet companionship with these shy little strangers; that they will open their ears and eyes to the song in the thicket, and the flash of fur and feathers in the tree-top, and, best of all, their hearts to the glad life about them.

If this, even in a slight measure, is accomplished, these simple chronicles of the tree-folks will not have been recorded in vain.
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My aviary is the good green wood,
I would not cage its songsters if I could.
Sweeter the song of one wild bird to me
Than all the notes of sad captivity.
Tenants of the Trees

I

WHERE I STUDIED WOODCRAFT

ONE of the first external things that flooded my childish consciousness, thrilling the awakening soul with a new joy, was the song of a robin, filling my little chamber with sweet melody, and causing the child in the crib to lie very still lest the minstrel be frightened away.

He was on the old elm, that stood like a giant guardian just above the roof of the house. Its long low branches almost swept the shingles, and indeed, one could hear them brushing the roof on a windy night.
Cockrobin had builded his nest in the old elm, so near to the window that I could almost touch it with my hand. The last thing that I remembered at night, when the sleepy man came for me from over the slumbrous hills, was the tender twilight reverie of robin, and the first sound that broke upon my waking senses was his morning rhapsody.

There were other songs too, even more bewitching than robin's, including the wonderful liquid notes of the oriole, and the gurgling of blithe bobolink down in the orchard, but robin lived so near to my trundle-bed that he seemed a part of my slumbers, and his song as much a prelude to slumber as mother's "Twilight Stories."

My second passion, one that nearly every country child experiences, was for flowers and bouquets of all kinds. Some
of these bouquets were very primitive, consisting of buttercups, daisies, and dandelions, all picked with such short stems that it was almost impossible to hold them in one's hand, and the shorter-stemmed ones were always falling out; but these bouquets were most satisfactory. The bright colours fascinated the eye, and if they were not fragrant, it only needed imagination of childhood to make them so.

When a few more years had made the little legs sturdy, and the feet more sure of their footing, this passion carried us far afield, in search of the rarer wild flowers.

Some we loved for their fragrance and beauty, while others held a personality that made them always interesting.

Such was the jack-in-the-pulpit, who stood so straight in his pulpit, and
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preached a sermon for every day in the week.

When I was five years old, and had worn pants and a Garibaldi waist for at least a year (it seemed to me like ten), I put away childish things and became a man.

The particular event that marked the change I shall always remember, for in reality it was a veritable crossing of the Rubicon, and the passion engendered on that warm summer morning has gone with me ever since.

Over in the meadow, two stone's throw from the house, was a little brook where I went to play when I had leave.

This morning I found a pin, longer and more pliable than its fellows, and the spirit of Isaac Walton awoke within me (the same Isaac that our fathers and
grandfathers have felt before us) on finding that pliable pin.

It needed only a twine string and the butt of an old buggy whip to complete the outfit, and the young fisherman was ready for the brook.

I could not hazard the risk of being told that I could not go down to the brook this morning, so took "French leave." This gave an added relish to the undertaking and made it seem almost like piracy.

Do you wrinkled, care-worn old men, who have been making corns and bunions upon your feet for the past seventy years by wearing tight shoes, remember the joy of scuffling with bare feet, in the dew-laden grass? Do you remember how the dew sparkled and the fragrance rose from clover and buttercup, as you stirred them in their bed and sent showers of
dew from their faces? Oh, the thrill and the joy of it all! It will not come again. You might take off your shoes and scuff in the dew now, but it would not be the same. The trouble is, your heart is no longer the heart of a boy.

Over the brook was a quaint little stone bridge. The sunlight filtered down between the stones, and fell upon the clear water beneath. Out in the open the sunlight was transparent and nearly colourless, but down under the bridge, it was a shaft of burnished gold. How my heart thumped as I shook out the twine line and tossed the pin hook into the sparkling brook.

With what eagerness I watched it drift to and fro, and what a thrill it gave, each time the swirl caught the worm and tugged at the line. Then there was a flash of something bright through the
water, a quick splash, and a tug at the line that was so sudden and unexpected that the young fisherman nearly lost his tackle, pole and all. But a moment later, he recovered his nerve, and dragged a beauty of a trout, flopping and jumping, on to the middle of the bridge.

There was no more fishing that morning, for with a whoop like a wild Indian, the small fisherman clutched his fish tightly in both hands and started for the house at his best pace, shouting as he went, "I've got a trout, I've got a trout."

The fish was not even taken from the pin hook, although he soon flopped himself free. The fish-pole was trailed behind in the dust, in the excitement of the moment, and all but the prize was forgotten.

The admonition not to go to the
brook, had also been lost sight of, but it did not matter now he had caught his first trout.

For half the forenoon, the boy sat on the door-step admiring the speckled beauty, with his wonderful deep green mottled back, and his red and yellow sides, and he was loath to part with him, even to let him go into the frypan for his dinner. This fish seemed almost too good to fry. He was the boy’s first trout.

This day marked an epoch in the life of the boy, for from that time a companionship with the little brook began, that he has never outgrown. Nothing, even now, rests the tired thought-racked brain, like the low plashing and purling of a tiny silver stream.

Before the boy caught his first trout, he had been contented to wade in the
shallows, and catch shiners in his palm-leaf hat, but this was too childish sport for him now. Shiners and pollywogs might do for children, but he must have fish-hooks, and a peeled alder pole, and fish for trout in the deep holes. There was no peace for his elders, until the fish-hook and line had been obtained, and the alder pole was of his own making.

Then whenever there was a holiday, or an odd hour between light tasks that were his, the alder pole might be seen trailing behind the small boy, whose nimble legs were carrying him at their top pace, to the brook.

His patience and natural love of fishing brought many kinds of fish to the willow stringer, that he carried in one hand. There were trout and dace, red fins and suckers, rock suckers and shiners,
and once in a great while a horned pout, that had wandered far up stream from the distant pond.

All the water grasses, reeds, and rushes he also knew. And the lilies that floated gracefully upon the current, supporting themselves by their broad leaves, and breathing their sweet breath upon the summer air. Then there was sweet-flag that was so spicy, when prepared with candied sugar, while the cattails made graceful wands or magic rods.

Strange tracks there were, too, in the mud along the bank of the little stream, but the boy did not discover or understand them at the time. He learned later to know them all, and to tell a muskrat track from a mink track, and also to look for woodcock borings.

The same summer that he learned to angle, he built a dam on the brook, and
made the water turn a small wheel for his amusement. This was a most interesting bit of machinery, and it lasted until the heavy fall rains, when the dam was swept away, and the water-wheel and the long spout that had conducted water to it went down-stream.

The following year the boy's father took him to a distant deep hole and taught him to swim. Diving and swimming upon his back were accomplishments that he also learned, and after that the water had still more attraction for him, for he was then no longer afraid of it, where it ran deep and swift, as he had been before.

A brook always seems to the nature lover like a living, moving thing. He loves to dabble his hand in it, and feel the rush of its current. Its touch is so soft, and its caress so refreshing. Then
the brook is so moody, that it seems like a living spirit. Where the shadows of overhanging trees and bushes fall upon it, its own face is clouded and sad, but where the full sunlight falls, it gives back the very smile of heaven.

Then in anger, when swollen by rain, it is majestically terrible—tossing, foaming, and roaring.

But the brookside was only one of the many places where the boy learned of nature and her wondrous ways.

There were long tramps over the hills to distant pasture-lands for berries during the summer season.

I have seen blueberry lots where the wild bushes stood so near together, and were so loaded with their fruit, that the lot would look almost as blue as water at a little distance. Then along the edge of the woods among the pines, what
giant blackberry bushes bowed under their load of delicious berries. Out on the bog meadow, where the muskrat builds his home by the ditch, there were plenty of cranberries, growing on their pretty vines down in the meadow moss.

We boys quite frequently left the berry-picking to see if we could discover any of the tenants of the queer conical houses, which at a distance looked so much like haycocks. Or, if it were hot, as it was quite likely to be in the autumn, when we had a spell of Indian summer, we would go away into the deep woods beyond the meadow to spy out chestnut and walnut trees, or possibly wild grapes.

Bounteous stores there were in the woods, and we knew quite well where they were to be found. The dry knolls where the partridge-berries grew, and the lightning scarred spruce that had
such stores of gum. Hemlock limbs we selected for bows, and a straight willowy ironwood did not go unnoticed, for when it was cut and peeled it made a glorious fish-pole.

No country farmhouse is quite complete unless it is fortified against sun, wind, and rain, by a goodly array of shade-trees. I always keep a miniature of the farmhouse where I spent my childhood, in a bright corner of my memory, and when tired of hustle and bustle, I retire to it for a quiet half-hour.

The road at the front of the house was lined by a double row of maples, that spread their green grateful shade across the lawn in summer-time, and in autumn flung out their scarlet banners to the wind, and carpeted the greensward with the most flaming Persian rugs. At the back of the house was a
giant elm, that spread its broad branches in every direction, proclaiming shade and protection for all.

The old elm was so strong and graceful, that it seemed a veritable monarch. Near the barn were two mountain-ashes, that shed their leaves early in the autumn, and as though to make up for this nakedness, put on a garb of scarlet berries, that made them easily the brightest trees in the neighbourhood.

The large apple orchard across the road carpeted the grass in the early days of May with its white petals until, under some trees, it looked as though there had been a snow-squall, but the petals of other trees were too pink to suggest snow, and almost bright enough to be rose petals. Blossoming cherry and plum-trees also helped steep the air with sweetness.
What a touch of life and hope there was in the morning wind as it came galloping over the billowing grass across the broad meadow, up to the little back porch where I had lugged the old-fashioned dasher churn, determined to get as cool a spot as possible for so warm a task.

If the trees are the friends of men in the spring-time, so they are in the autumn, when they hang heavy with red and russet fruit, and cluster with brown obstinate nuts, that so long withstand clubbing and poling, but rattle down so easily at the touch of the first frost.

There was always something doing in the trees, too, and that made them even more interesting. Perhaps it was a bird's nest, or a family of young robins learning to fly. They might be peeping away with might and main, or perhaps they sat perfectly still and looked as though
they did not know what it all meant. Their short tails and round bodies always gave them a comical look. Sometimes there would be a great commotion in the trees, and loud calls for help. Then investigation would disclose a mischievous red squirrel trying to rob a bird's nest, with both the old birds flying at him and pecking at his eyes.

Sometimes a tree would be black with crows, all of whom were cawing as though shouting to the chairman for the floor. You might wonder for a long time what they were doing, but presently you would see a great brown owl, or a steely blue hawk, fly hastily out of the tree, and make for the woods with all speed, closely followed by the noisy procession.

The last week in April is fence-mending time in the country, where they have
Tenants of the Trees

brush fences. Then nature is beginning to unfold her secrets, and to tell the world that old, old story, that is yet new with each recurring spring. It is the stint of the boy to go with the hired man and cut small saplings for fence stakes, but he occasionally neglects his portion of the fence-mending to creep away into the woods after something more interesting.

Perhaps he has heard a cock partridge drumming in the distance, and he wishes to creep up, and catch a glimpse of this wary bird upon his drumming log, with head erect and pompous as a drum major, sounding forth his thunderous roll-call of the woods. Or it may be that the chatter of a red squirrel in a distant thicket has whetted the boy's curiosity; or the calling of the crows may have suggested the possibility of locating a crow's nest,
which could be visited later on in the season, when the young crows are hatched out.

Each season calls for a pilgrimage to the woods and each is as different as four acts of a drama.

Summer-time gives us wealth of life. No matter where you go, life is creeping, crawling, stretching up to the light. Leaves, wild flowers, grasses, briars, and ferns all swell with life, and breathe it forth upon the fragrant air.

But the season when one can find out most about the wild creatures in the woods, just how they live, and what they were doing last night, is winter. There are not as many birds or squirrels about then as in the warmer seasons, but each tells his life story in the soft snow whenever he goes abroad.

It was one of my keenest boyhood
delights to go far into the woods with the logging teams when the snow was deep, and see with my own eyes what was doing.

We could almost always find a fox track near a little spring at the edge of the woods. The spring was a boisterous, bubbling vein of water, and did not like to cease its motion, even at the touch of Jack Frost. So on a warm day Mr. Fox could get a drink there, although he might have to eat snow during the extremely cold snaps.

Where the wood-road crossed a swampy bit of land and there were scrub spruces and a little laurel, we usually spied the triangular rabbit track, with its four paw prints in a bunch. The two by two’s of the squirrel or weasel could be seen almost anywhere, but the weasel’s track was heavier than the squirrel’s and you
could occasionally notice where his belly brushed the snow.

A hole in the snow, with a lot of scraggly tracks about it, showed you where a partridge spent the night. Or there might be a fox track leading to the partridge's hiding-place; then there were usually feathers and blood upon the snow.

I saw a track one winter that puzzled me for a long time, but an old hunter finally told me what made it. The track was merely a succession of long trough-shaped holes scooped out in the snow, two or three feet apart. The old woodsman's eyes were sharper than mine, and he showed me where long fine hairs upon the creature's belly had brushed the snow between each track hole, and here and there a footprint where the hind paws had spurned the snow.
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It was an otter's track, and the snow was too deep for his short legs, so he travelled in a series of plunges, and this had made the queer track.

A skunk makes something the same track in soft snow, only he is not lively enough even to jump, so his track is a shallow trough ploughed from bush to stump.

Did you ever notice a partridge track running clear around a low bush? If you will examine the ends of the twigs that are low down, you will find that the buds have been stripped from them, for the hungry partridge's supper.

This only happens in exceptional seasons, for the partridge prefers to do his budding up in a tree out of the reach of cats and foxes.

Another country experience that brings the boy near to nature is the maple sugar
season. To stand in a maple sugar grove, where scores of trees are festooned with the brightly painted buckets, and hear half a hundred sap spouts ticking out their silver drip, drip, drip, is pleasant music.

To boil sap at the lonely sugar camp is quite as delightful. There is the awe of a winter's night in the woods, when the moonbeams play pranks with trees and bushes, and people the dim ring at the edge of your lantern's light with phantoms and hobgoblins. The wind, too, is full of pranks, and delights to shriek, and moan, like an evil spirit, while the great limbs of the maples grinding together make uncanny sounds. All these things make a boy's blood tingle, and lend mystery and possible adventure to the night's work.

The dry sugar wood snapping and
gleaming in the spacious arch sends out a cheerful, homelike light, and its waxing and waning help to make the night spectral. Then shrouded and hooded figures dance and wave their arms wildly in the clouds of steam that rise from the sap pan, while a screech-owl fills in the pauses between stories and songs with hair-raising laughter and shrieks. Even more ghostly than the graveyard scene in Hamlet, is a winter night in the woods.

Like Hiawatha, I early learned the use of bow and arrow, but could not slay the roebuck, or even a chipmunk. The only thing I remember killing with either bow and arrow, or cross-gun, was a pine grosbeak, that a friend wanted to mount. But the big barn door and the gate-post suffered, and even the house bore arrow marks. There are scores of rude playthings that every country child knows
How to make, that are quite as interesting as manufactured toys. Bows and arrows, sling-shots and darts, spears and lances, jumpers, and sleds, hoops, growlers, kites, and water-wheels. All these and many other simple devices, make the country boy's life quite as full and happy as that of the pampered, toy-laden city child.

I was particularly fortunate in my companionship afield, for I enjoyed the confidence of two or three old woodsmen, at whose heels I tramped the woods in spring, summer, autumn, and winter.

Together we saw the wary partridge spring from cover on roaring wings, and speed away like an express train. The whistling wings of the woodcock did not give us such a start, and as he flew much slower, one had a better view of him.
Once we found tracks in the dust by the roadside where a bevy of quail had passed the night. They had stood in a bunch, with their tails together and heads outward as though for mutual protection.

We saw strange things on those long rambles through the forest. Molly Cottontail scurried across our path, but squatted under a bush, to see what we were like. Squirrels eyed us curiously from the tops of trees, and the red squirrel usually scolded away and made a great fuss because we dared to come into his woods.

I came to know all the call notes, songs, and cries that floated down the aisles of the sweet green woods. The rat-a-tat of the black and white, and red and white, woodpeckers, and the queer cackle of their larger cousin, the yellowhammer. Once we heard the cackle of
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"They had stood in a bunch, with their tails together."
the piliated woodpecker, a very wild and rare bird, sixteen or eighteen inches in length, and the most beautiful of all the woodpeckers, but only once were we fortunate enough to see him.

On some of these long tramps we learned that both the blue jay and the bittern are spies or sentinels, and when they hear or see any one coming through the woods they quickly spread the news and put the wood folk on their guard.

I have heard the woods ringing with bird calls and the chatter of squirrels, but at a call from a noisy jay it would become as quiet as though entirely deserted.

There were wonderful songsters that we stole quietly upon, at the edge of the woods, or found in low bushes along the swamps. The veery and the hermit thrush are two of the sweetest singers that ever trilled a note, not to mention
their merry cousin the brown thrasher, who watches the farmer as he plants his corn, and continually cries, "Plant it: plant it: dig it up: dig it up. Pull it up. Pull it up."

I also learned to tell many birds by their flight when they were too far away to distinguish colour or form. There was the peculiar galloping of the woodpecker family, that is only imitated by one other bird, and that is a small yellow bird, or wild canary.

Then there is the habit of sailing which is common to the hawk family, and rarely indulged in by other birds. The quick strokes of the quail and the meadow-lark, and the darting and skimming of the barn-swallow. The lightning plunges of the night-hawk down the twilight sky, followed by that hoarse booming sound. These are only a few
peculiarities of flight that make it possible to tell birds merely by their motion.

The boy who drives cows to pasture at dawn, and goes for them again at twilight, is always learning something new if he keeps his eyes wide open.

Little brown birds are frequently flashing out of the grass by the path, telling you where their nests are, and the pasture-land is the favourite resort of chewink, and the queer cowbird, who is too lazy to build a nest of its own, and so lays its eggs in its cousin's nest, and expects them to hatch and bring up her young. I am told by one who knows all about birds, that the outraged tohee bunting always hatches a new brood, after he has brought up the first brood with the orphan cowbird.

Another sight that fills the young mind with wonder is the steady strong sweep
of a flock of geese through the trackless sky, on their way to Hudson's Bay, or some of the Canadian lakes. Nearly as impressive is the flight of a flock of pigeons, with their quick choppy strokes.

Another view that is less majestic, though stirring, is had from the hilltop of a winter's morning when sly Reynard leads the pack by at a stiff pace, while the full-throated cry of the hounds echoes from hilltop to hilltop.

These are some of the secrets that nature yields to the bright eyes and eager mind of the country boy, who follows her ways faithfully, and is content with seeing.

He may not have quite as much book knowledge as the city boy, but he has other treasures that are infinitely more valuable. The wind has told him secrets at the garden wall on a summer's eve,
and the wild flowers have opened their hearts to him and lifted up their faces for him to see.

He has heard the low sweet whisper of spring rising from the dank mould at the touch of sunlight, and his heart has been glad with the joy of bursting buds, and opening leaves.

He has seen the speckled eggs, and the fledglings in the nest, and wondered at the manifold life of bird, beast, and plant.

But best of all, this is his world, made especially for him. The birds have sung just for him and the flowers have bloomed for his delight.

Blackberries have ripened at the forest's edge merely that he might pick them, and the tall chestnut and walnut trees have been mindful of him.

How could he be other than happy in
a world like this, and that he has been, the world-weary man can best tell you. It was out of such a heart, and with a deep longing for the joy of childhood, that the poet, Hood, wrote this beautiful stanza:

"I remember, I remember
The Fir Trees dark and high,
I used to think their slender tops
Were close against the sky.
It was childish ignorance;
But now 'tis little joy
To know I'm farther off from Heaven
Than when I was a boy."
The Aesthetic in Nature
FAIR herald of the coming spring
Who fearest not the winter's snow,
The friendly fields begin to show,
O haste thy gaily painted wing;
I long to hear thee carolling
Upon the treetop, sweet and low,
For when I hear thy song, I know
That soon the robin, too, will sing,
And all the merry woods will ring
With Springtime's well remembered song,
That flowers will wake from slumber long
And lift their fragrant offering —
Didst know what joy thy song would bring,
Dear little harbinger of Spring?
II

THE HARBINGER OF SPRING

THERE was no hint of spring in the crisp winter air and no touch of warmth along the broad heavens, or across the white frozen earth, when this little harbinger of spring appeared.

Although it was the middle of February, the eaves had dripped but twice during the month, and the earth looked drear and forbidding.

My own spirit was weighed down by the cheerlessness of the landscape, for nature's moods are usually reflected in my own. The soul is like a looking-glass reflecting the lights and shades of all life which we see revealed in nature. I could
not shake off the idea of perpetual snow and unending cold. My prophet's eye was dim, and summer seemed ages away.

To break the monotony of indoor life, I went into the wood-shed for a whiff of outside air, and to try if, by coaxing, spring would show her sweet face.

Fancy my astonishment and joy, almost at the first moment, as though in greeting, to hear three delicious little notes, sweet as the breath of a new-born rose, and as refreshing to the heart as an entirely new joy. There was no mistaking the song. It was as liquid and sweet as the sound of molten silver falling into a resonant crucible.

"Cheer-i-ly, cheer-i-ly, cheer-i-ly, I bring you an olive branch and a promise of better days."

My eyes swept the near-by fields for the sweet little stranger, with a boy's eager-
ness, but nowhere was he to be seen. Yet still that slight song floated down the crisp breath of morning like a benediction. "Cheer-i-ly, cheer-i-ly, cheer-i-ly."

Then my eyes strayed up into the top of the old elm, and I saw him, perched upon the utmost twig, like the brave little adventurer he is.

How his bright blue coat glistened in the sunlight and how his red vest flamed. How slight a messenger he seemed for so great a message. How far he had brought these tidings of great joy, across frozen fields, and bleak moors: "Spring is coming; be glad, better days are near."

How my eyes devoured him, as he balanced himself nicely upon the very top of the elm, and poured out his cheerful news. He was the only bit of warmth in the whole landscape that day, which
made his beauty and brightness even more apparent.

Three months later, when the scarlet tanager and the oriole had come, he would appear as very commonplace, but now his was the only gay coat in the fields.

Would we remember then that it was he who first sang of spring, when the reality was yet a long way off? It is easy to believe in spring, when arbutus is here and the pasture-lands are green, but when the snow is over all, how much more courage it takes to sing of spring-time.

I often wonder how it happens that so fragile a body, and such slight wings, are the first to penetrate the frozen north. There must be a brave heart underneath that scarlet vest, one that storms and cold cannot quell.
The Harbinger of Spring

God must have planted in the heart of the first bluebird a seed of optimism, and the flower of hope, for he is the sunniest, cheeriest little herald that ever carried good tidings.

For several days after this first glimpse of this bright blue coat, we saw nothing of him.

He was probably hiding in a barn, or in some other sheltered nook, until warmer days. He had done his part for that week at least, and was bound to take the best possible care of himself, for was he not the first bluebird, and of more importance than a whole flock of his fellows who would appear later? Had he not revived the fainting hearts of those great silly bipeds, men, and given them faith in the power that never fails?

I often wonder if his toes are not cold, as he perches upon the bar-post of a bleak
March morning and forces his slight song up the boisterous wind.

His little blue coat would seem to be no protection against the winter cold. Maybe it is his cheery heart that keeps him warm, but in some miraculous way he survives to greet the first robin with a knowing nod.

"Hello, — you here?" chirps robin as he hops over the mowing, looking for seeds or grain.

"Been here a whole month," is the cheery reply.

"You are awfully slow, robin. You should have been here two weeks ago."

It is a bright day for bluebird, in the cheerless March calendar, when Mrs. Bluebird appears. You at once notice from the fulness and sweetness of his song that something uncommon has happened, but it is not until you discover him
hovering about his modest little mate that the cause of his rhapsody is apparent.

The male bluebird usually precedes the female by a week or two, and her final advent is the occasion of renewed courtship, and a deal of attention on his part, which she receives as a matter of course, and no more than her just due.

Her garments are not as gay as her mate's, and she has no song, but she is content to shine with borrowed lustre, and informs you with a queer little nod "that it is all in the family," so why does it matter?

House-hunting is the next event in the lives of these spring heralds, and as Mr. Bluebird is particular about his abode and Mrs. Bluebird is even fussy, it is a long and arduous task, and often consumes days, or even a week or two?

All sorts of holes, both natural and
artificial, in trees, bar-posts, and frequently old buildings, are explored, only to be rejected for some reason or other.

Finally, when the season is getting advanced, and the robins are here in large numbers, they select a spot and set to work upon the nest. As they are quite dainty nest builders, and work slowly, they do not get the house done and really take possession as early as you would think, considering how long they have been with us.

When the eggs, ranging from four to six in number, are finally laid, they are just the colour that you would expect, for what but a delicate blue, suggesting the sky of a balmy day in spring, would a bluebird want her eggs to be?

As the season advances, and our great army of songsters comes pouring in from the south, bluebird is occasionally lost
The Harbinger of Spring

Bright as it is, his coat is not so bright as the livery of the flaming oriole, or the gay scarlet garb of the tanager.

His song, too, is soon drowned in the great chorus of robin, oriole, bobolink, and song-sparrow, but you will occasionally hear his sweet "cheer-i-ly — cheer-i-ly" in lulls of the great rhapsody.

It sounds faint and far away now, like the retreating spirit of spring, but it always arouses a feeling of deep gratitude in my heart, and I remember him for what he was when the winds still whistled boisterously and the face of the firmament was sombre.

It is easy enough, I say, for bobolink and all the rest to sing, when the dalliant breezes are heavy with perfume, and earth and sky are full of sunshine and gladness. It is a dull heart indeed that would not
sing at this glad season, but my little blue-coated songster showed you the way, and his was the sweet prelude to this rapturous anthem. Would you, who sing when life is nought but song, have sung when the old world was bare and desolate?

It was my little spring herald that taught me the greatest lesson that we can learn in this life; that of hope and trust, optimism and good cheer.

If, like him, we can smile when clouds are over us, and laugh out of a lonely heart, we are masters of life, and all it contains.

So I contend, that of all the birds that we love, both for their song and their plumage, for their morals and their manners, if any one were to be stricken from the list, we could least spare the bluebird, for without him there would be no spring, and no reawakening of glad new life.
Upon a friendly maple-tree
I hear the robin singing —
His rich and happy melody
Through all the woods is ringing —
Cheer-up, Cheer-up, all things clear up,
We are merry, cheery, cheery.

The sun has slowly sunk to rest,
The shades of night are falling,
And from his bough beside the nest
The robin still is calling, —
Cheer-up, Cheer-up, all things clear up
We are merry, cheery, cheery.
III

MORE EARLY COMERS

THERE is a long dreary stretch of wintry weeks between the coming of bluebird, which was a red-letter day in the calendar of late February or early March, and the advent of robin redbreast. You had begun to think that bluebird was the only songster with courage and faith enough to face the tardy New England spring, when cockrobin appeared.

You first notice him hopping briskly over the bare brown mowing looking for seeds upon which to make his breakfast. He much prefers worms and small fruit, but one cannot be too particular on a crisp spring morning about April Fool’s Day.
The worms are sensible and have not tried to bore up through the frozen earth, and who ever heard of fruit preceding the blossoms?

Cockrobin is very brisk this morning and hops nimbly about. I am afraid that his toes are cold, and that he keeps on the move to warm himself.

It is always the cockrobin that you see first. The large flocks, of which these scattering males are the advance-guard, are still on Long Island or in Southern Connecticut enjoying its sunnier clime. When it is a little warmer cockrobin will hurry back with the cheerful news, "Cheery, cheery, all is well, come on." Then the great flock will come northward.

We are always glad to see this pert, saucy fellow. Although we know that he will steal our cherries and currants,
and eat half our peas a little later, yet he is always welcome for the warmth there is in his ruddy breast, and the hope there is in his blithe song.

For a few days robin and bluebird quarrel as to the brightness of their respective liveries, and the quality of their song, then some warm morning a very modest little bird perches upon a bar-post and invites you to behold him, in the most plaintive little song that ever came from the throat of feathered creature. "Phœbe, phœbe," he sings, over and over again. "Phœbe, phœbe, see me, see me."

"Cheerup, cheerup, cheerup," replies robin from the old elm. "You can't sing a little bit. I would give up trying if I were you." But the little stranger keeps right on, unmindful of robin's scorn.

"Phœbe, see me, see me."
Tenants of the Trees

He is a flycatcher, and depends upon the sun to drive flies and moth-millers from their snug beds in cracks and corners so that he can catch them.

Let's watch him for a few moments. He is perched upon an apple-tree limb, close to the barn, where it is warm and sunny, watching for his quarry. Presently, if he is lucky, he will dart out, make a slight swoop in the air, and snip will go his bill and an unwary fly will be buzzing in his crop. He will then fly back to almost exactly the same spot on the limb that he occupied a moment before and resume his watch. If we should have a long cold snap he would have a sorry time of it, for the flies would return to their sleep, and the Phœbe would have to be a vegetarian for awhile or starve.

Who is this gay fellow darting and skimming over the brown mowings, as
light-heartedly as though he had not a care in the whole world? How airily and gracefully he skims along, as though every motion were a delight to him, as it probably is. Don’t you remember him? His very motion is enough to tell you who he is. No other bird flies as lightly as that.

His brown coat and lighter vest should identify him as well.

It is barn-swallow. Welcome, gay chatterer. Where is the rest of the noisy colony that chattered under the eaves last spring and plastered the niches with a score of mud houses? No barn is quite complete or quite country-like without its complement of barn-swallows, darting in and out, and chattering like magpies.

But while we are talking of chattering, just wait until some warm morning when a flock of about five hundred purple grackles, or blackbirds, as you children
Tenants of the Trees

call them, settle in the big elm and begin talking over old times and their plans for the coming spring.

Then there will be a chatter and a babel that will make the swallows seem like very quiet birds. Each blackbird will be croaking and squawking at the top of his voice, all talking at once, and each trying with might and main to make himself heard above the gossip of his fellows.

If the morning sun plays full upon the flock you will see some of the brightest garments that have yet appeared in the new spring styles, all iridescent and shining, and reflecting the sunlight in its many rainbow hues, bottle green and plum colour, light blue, navy blue, and all the darker shades, down to the shiniest black imaginable. They are all proud of their brilliant colours, and prink and smooth out their feathers with great care.
Presently they will fly away like a black cloud, only to return again in a moment, noisier and gayer than ever.

Down in the meadows, the purple grackle's cousin, the red-winged blackbird, is disporting himself, not so noisily, but quite as ostentatiously as his cousin. You would never know from her dress that Mrs. Redwing belonged to the same family, for she is very modest, has no flaming red wings, and looks more like a retiring brown bird than a gay redwing.

You will notice that just the opposite style prevails in the bird family from that in the human family. With us the females wear the gay feathers and bright dresses, but in the bird family it is the males, and they do all the singing as well. So the world would be very desolate without them. But what of the nest and the bright coloured eggs, and the young
Tenants of the Trees

mouths waiting to be filled! Ah, that is the mother bird's world, and she fills it as only a mother can.

Song-sparrow will be along directly. He is not much to look at, but wait until his liquid song floats down the morning stillness, then you will thank Heaven that he has returned.

Yes, the whole gay-coated throng will soon be here, for the spring comes on rapidly, once the shad-blossom shakes out its white folds. The Baltimore oriole, with its orange and yellow tunic and its flutelike song, the tanager, with its scarlet coat and its high shrill melody. Together tanager and oriole, who is the true robin, will flash across the fields catching the full sunlight and dazzling us with their brightness. Down in the meadow, the gayest, sweetest song of all will soon be heard. For bobolink will
be there in his plain black and white, and Mrs. Bobolink, in her yellow gown. The world will soon be flooded with sunlight and song. But what of these simpler songs that cheered us in early spring days when our hearts were heavy? Will they be lost in the great chorus?

Not while the human heart has gratitude, and the mind can still recall its friends in need.

We will thank God for bobolink and oriole, tanager and veery, but deep down in our hearts we will still love the blue-birds and the robin, for the olive branch they brought us when we needed cheer.
Little flowers in the leaves
FASHIONED so fair, this small inverted dome,
   With bits of moss and grass and strings,
And underneath the brooding wings,
Four tender tiny gaping things,
And near the nest the one who sings.
Ah,—heart of mine, is this not truly home?
IV

LITTLE HOMES IN THE LEAVES

It is the last of April, and for a few brief hours the sky has caught the very smile of June. The wind and the sun may think better of it in half an hour and send us a cutting hail-storm, but coquettish April is wearing her sweetest smile just at this moment.

Underfoot there are still traces of mud time, for the frost has been very slow in coming out this year.

Bluebird has been prospecting for a suitable place to build his nest for weeks, and robin has been upon the same quest for a few days, but active nest-building has not yet begun.

With alternating sun and rain, heat
and cold, the days slip by, with very little change in the landscape, until about the fifth of May. Then the sun leaps at a single bound into new activity, and with a glad rush the leaves appear. Not all at once, of course, but they will come on much faster than one would imagine, once the conditions are right.

This is what the bird-folks have been waiting for, and with a chorus of twitters and chirps they fall to nest-building, with an industry that knows no such word as failure.

Several spots may be visited before the right one is finally found. The proper building-material may have to be brought from a long distance, and the nest may be blown down by the wind, or destroyed in some other way, before it is finally completed, but they pick and pull, poke and twist, till the home is complete.
It may be a very plain mud and straw house, lined with feathers and horsehair, like that the robin builds, or it may be a daintier house, like the bluebird's.

Perhaps it is a wonderful hanging basket, carefully woven and swinging from a limb, like the nest of the oriole, or maybe it is no larger than a fair-sized peach and lined with the finest, softest material, like the nest of the humming-bird, but wherever located, or however fashioned, it is the abode of love and gladness, song and sweet content.

Some of these pretty nests may be placed in the tops of the tallest trees, where curious boys and more curious cats cannot get at them, while others are under a clump of grass on the ground, as the nest of the little brown bird who has such dainty spotted eggs.

If I should undertake to describe all the
delicate colours, shades, and tints of birds’ eggs, I would have to employ half the painters’ terms, which might confuse you. Red and yellows do not occur to any extent in birds’ eggs, but blues, greens, and browns, and all the neutral tints between, are used with the nicest art. One of the most dainty colours on the painter’s palette is called robin’s-egg blue.

One of the very first to sit is Mrs. Woodcock, who is not particular about her nest, and chooses almost any depression that is slightly hidden.

But the May days are not far advanced when a dozen or more patient mother birds are sitting upon their eggs, while their mates sing through the morning hours.

The most common of these are Mrs. Robin, in her plain nest in the crotch of an old apple-tree; Mrs. Bluebird, who is
living this year in a deserted woodpecker’s hole; which tenement has been entirely rearranged to suit her own fancy since the woodpecker family moved out; Jenny Wren, in her nest among the leaves of the woodbine; Mrs. Phœbe, comfortably installed in her plain house upon a beam in the shed; Mrs. Swallow in her mud nest upon a rafter of the barn; Mrs. Oriole in her swinging nest in the elm; Mrs. Tanager occupying a less fashionable nest in the hedge; Mrs. Bobolink in her grass home tucked under some bush or stump; and all the thrushes, living on or near the ground. In all these pretty little homes, warm mother hearts are beating just above the eggs and the birds are hoping that no evil will befall them; that the black snake and the crow and the king-bird will not discover their abodes, and that the
"birds'-egg" boy will not come their way.

Do you notice anything peculiar about the song of robin or oriole this morning? It seems to me that it is fuller and more exultant than usual. Perhaps something is doing in the little nest, and he is telling it to the world, that others may rejoice with him, for his joy is almost too great for his small breast to hold.

There he goes with a worm. Now let's watch the nest and see if we can discover anything. Mrs. Robin has come forth, and she would not do that if the worm were intended for her. See! look quick; there are four wide-open bills thrust above the edge of the nest, and there goes robin's worm, like a penny in the slot. Now he is off for another. His is the hungriest family I ever saw. He will do little but bring worms all day
long, and at night those four gaping mouths will come up as readily as in the morning.

You would never know that Mrs. Bluebird's young family were bluebirds, for they are black as coals. It is not until they have been out of the nest for some time that they put on any shade of blue.

Mrs. Towhee Bunting, also called cheewink, is very much annoyed by the cowbird, a lazy brown bird that inhabits cow-pastures. This lazy bird will not build a nest of her own, but lays her eggs in the nests of her cousin, the cheewink. Mrs. Cheewink always brings up the orphan cowbirds as carefully as she does her own, but she usually raises another brood and hides her nest so skilfully that the cowbird cannot find it.

I once knew of a cheewink who was so annoyed at finding the cowbird's egg
in her nest, that she put a false bottom in her nest and walled the cowbird egg inside, so that it should not hatch with hers.

The night-hawk is not mindful of her young, and she often lays her eggs on a rock, with very little soft material under them.

It would surprise you to watch a family of young birds and see how fast they grow. In two or three weeks first feathers appear, and in as many months they are shoved from the nest, never to return.

One will often find in an old orchard what the bird-student calls a robin-roost. This is a favourite limb, where twenty or thirty young robins all roost together at night. There they will sit winking and blinking, like a row of sleepy chickens.

Do the parent birds teach the young
"Dangling a fat worm in his beak."
to fly, and other accomplishments that are necessary to bird life? Some naturalists say they do, and others that they do not, but I incline to the former opinion, else why does the father robin stand upon a near-by limb, dangling a fat worm in his beak, while the young stretch their heads over the edge of the nest for the prize? Why is there such a chirping and calling of the old birds and answering peeps from the young, unless they are trying in bird language to reassure the fledglings, and coax them to make the first attempt with their wings?

The calling about a crow's nest is fairly deafening when the young are learning to fly. Even in the Scriptures it is written, "As an eagle stirreth up her nest, fluttereth over her young, spreadeth abroad her wings, taketh them, beareth them on her wings."
I wonder if my young reader has a collection of birds' eggs nicely numbered and lettered in his cabinet; if so, here is a thought for him to ponder when the spring brings the birds back again.

Supposing there are one hundred eggs in your collection; one hundred less birds sing to us and make the world glad. Imagine a tree filled with one hundred birds. How bright it would be with their plumage, and how your dooryard would ring with the song of a hundred throats. All this joy and gladness, these bright coats and sweet voices, you have crushed in the shell. Each time your hand stole into the nest that was sacred to get another egg for your collection, you took a life that was precious in the eyes of God.
FLASHES a flame of gold and orange by,
Dazzling the vision with its wondrous hue,
As though a lens shot all the sunlight through
Upon that form and dimmed the summer sky,
Or like a smith, with mimic hammer high,
Of rubies made, who from a rainbow drew
Showers of sparks; thus when the oriole flew
His wondrous wings beat out such flames, the eye
Could only dream of him when he had flown.
SLING-SHOT TIME

IT is nesting time in Bird-land, but sling-shot time in the world of the enterprising boy, whose pockets are filled with pebbles, and in whose hand is a brand new sling-shot.

Now don't think for a moment, boys, that I do not sympathize with you in all the lawful sports that gladden a boy’s heart, — sports that make his eye quick to see and his hand strong to act. But the world is very large. God has made it so, that there might be plenty of room for you and your sling-shot and the birds and their nests.

Did you ever try marking out a target on the side of the barn, and shoot pebbles
at that, in competition with a boy friend? It is good sport and quite as satisfactory as shooting pebbles at every bird or squirrel that comes near the house. This is the way to make the target:

Mark out a circle four inches in diameter, with a piece of chalk, then fill it in solid white. This is the bull’s-eye, and counts five. About that draw a circle eight inches in diameter. This is the first ring, and counts four. Then outside that another ring, twelve inches in diameter; this is the second ring and counts three. Also make two more rings outside this one, one sixteen inches, and the other twenty. These count two and one, and any stone that goes outside the last ring does not count at all. Then stand ten or fifteen paces away from the target and fire ten shots each, and see which marksman can make the highest score. This
will hurt no one and will prove good sport.

I do not think we usually consider how much larger and stronger than the birds and squirrels we are, when we hurl stones at them. Supposing a giant as tall as the maple-tree in front of your house were to shoot a stone the size of a grindstone at you, out of a mighty sling-shot, do you not imagine it would hurt, if he hit you? Even if he missed and the great stone whizzed by your head, would not your hair stand up with fright?

I remember as well as though it were yesterday, the remorse of a small boy, who threw a stone at a towhee bunting, while on the way to school. The bunting was sitting in an alder bush, cheerily calling "Cheewink, cheewink" to the passer-by.

Now the small boy had no intention of
hurting the cheewink, but he was carrying a fine round stone, that he had just taken from the brook, in his hand, and the hand let the stone go at the bunting before the small boy knew what he was doing.

There was a frightened twitter, a swish in the bush, and the stone rolled away in the grass. The boy peeped excitedly into the bush, but no bird was to be seen. Then he looked upon the ground beyond the bush and saw two pathetic little feet pointing up out of the grass at him. “You did this, you are a murderer,” they seemed to be saying.

The culprit did not wait to learn more, but fled toward the schoolhouse, feeling very sorry for what he had done. His face was so red through the morning lessons that he felt sure the teacher must know he had done something naughty.
He missed words in the spelling class that he knew quite well, so that altogether he had a very sorry day of it.

He could hardly wait for the school to close at night, that he might go back to the scene of his crime and see if he could find the wounded or dead bunting.

Stealthily he approached the spot and peeped through the fence, but the accusing feet were no longer thrust up through the grass at him, and he does not know to this day whether the bunting finally recovered and flew away, or whether some small animal found the dead bird and ate it. But in either case the act was thoughtless and wicked.

Tommy Andrews thought he was the happiest boy in the whole world that May morning, when his father put a new sling-shot in his hand, and told him to go out and amuse himself with it, but
Tommy went out to the driveway and filled his pockets with small stones and began throwing them at the barn. "Zip," said the rubber; "Hum-m-m," said the stone, and a moment later it would hit the barn with a resounding whack. What fun it was, and how Tommy would swell with pride, when the stone struck the board that he aimed at. He was a real David; if he only had a giant to throw a stone at, what a hero he would be.

Just at that moment Chatterbox, the red squirrel, ran out of the corn-crib, carrying an ear of corn in his mouth, and started along the wall for the woods. "Here is a mark," thought Tommy. "Here is something alive, something that will be afraid." "But father said not to hurt any one," cried Conscience. "Pooh, a red
squirrel ain't any one," retorted Tommy. "Zip," said the rubber. "Hum-m-m," said the stone, and it struck upon the wall close to poor Chatterbox, who dropped his ear of corn and fled to the woods for his life.

"Zip," said the rubber again, "Hum-m-m," said the stone. But this time it fell short of the flying squirrel, and Chatterbox was soon out of range. "My, wasn't that exciting," said Tommy. "I wish I could see another squirrel, it's great fun to see him scamper." But poor Chatterbox was of quite another opinion. He had been badly scared, but he did not mind this. It was a great disappointment for him to lose the ear of corn that he had been to so much pains to get for Mrs. Squirrel, who was very hungry and poor with nursing her four baby squirrels. All Chatterbox could take her after an
hour's patient search was a rotten apple, from which she ate the seeds.

Tommy's bright eyes had barely lost sight of Chatterbox fleeing along the walls when he espied Baltimore oriole, flying to the old elm with a long piece of string dangling from his bill. He had been searching for two days for just such a string as this with which to hang his nest from the limb he had chosen, and was filled with joy at finding it.

Quick as a flash, Tommy slipped a stone into the sling-shot. "Zip," said the rubber. "Hum-m-m," said the stone, and the frightened Baltimore oriole dropped the string that had cost him so much patient labour, and it was lost in the bushes, and he was not able to find it again, although he searched faithfully while Tommy was gone to dinner.

Chippy, the pretty little striped squirrel
who lived under the roots of the old elm, was tired of his cold, damp hole, where he had lived all winter long, and came out to take the sunlight, and perhaps to find a butternut with which to piece out his pantry shelves, for food was getting low. Anyhow, a butternut would taste good; he had not had one for months.

"Zip," said the rubber. "Hum-m-m," said the stone, and with a frightened chirp, poor Chippy fled back into his cold hole, and left all the sunlight for Tommy, selfish Tommy.

The same evening, cockrobin perched upon the old elm and began his twilight rhapsody. His heart was almost bursting with joy. Four eggs, as blue as the heavens, had hatched that day, and cockrobin was telling the good news to all the world, that others might rejoice with him. Rays of the setting sun fell aslant
through the branches of the elm full upon
cockrobin, making his bright breast to
glow like coals in the twilight fire.

"Zip," said the rubber. "Hum-m-m,"
said the stone, and it flew straight to the
mark, striking innocent, joyous cock-
robin fairly upon the side of the head, and
turning his rich song into a squeak of pain.

He tottered for a moment on the limb,
then with a great effort flew away toward
the woods.

Just at the edge of the woods his wings
collapsed and he fluttered feebly to the
ground, staining the grass with drops of
crimson, brighter than his gay breast.
Here he lay for hours, unmindful of the
cold of the May night, or anything save
an aching head, that hummed and
throbbed just as a boy's head does when
he falls and strikes it upon the door-step,
or is hit by his playmate's bat. But when
the gray light of morning stole across the fields, and the birds began to twitter in their nests along the edge of the woods, cockrobin aroused himself, and flew away to the brook to bathe his bloody, throbbing head. He thrust it down into the water many times, and the cool water soothed the throbbing as long as he held it under. When he had washed the blood away, and made himself look respectable, he flew home to his mate and his little ones to tell them of his mishap. But as he went he noticed that one half of the world that had been so bright the day before was black as night. He almost flew into an apple-tree before he noticed it, for it was on his dark side.

The fact was, cockrobin was blind in one eye, the stone from the sling-shot having closed one of his bright eyes for ever.
Mrs. Robin was greatly grieved at his mishap. She also had to bring all the worms to the nest now. She was much hindered in this task of feeding her young, by stones from a tireless sling-shot, that hummed about her whenever she appeared in the road where worms were plenty.

But Tommy was having great sport with his sling-shot. His father had merely told him not to break windows or hurt anybody, and who ever heard of calling the birds and the squirrels anybody?

The following day cockrobin flew down to the orchard to get away from the whizzing stones and enjoy the sunlight and sweetness of the May morning.

His head did not ache so badly this morning, but the blindness on one side made him very anxious. He was always
afraid of running into something or that some one of his enemies might approach from that side and do him harm.

But the sunlight and warmth and scent of apple blossoms soon revived his spirits, and he was singing softly to himself, "Cheery, cheery, cheery," when a glittering steely blue bird came sailing noiselessly across the fields. The sunlight fell full upon his bright back and shining wings, and made him look like a tinsel bird, instead of the cruel pigeon-hawk that he really was. Usually cock-robin would have seen him at once, he was so bright and shining, but he was approaching on the robin's blind side, and the first warning of his coming that cockrobin had was the swish of the hawk's wings among the blossoms of the apple-tree.
With a frightened chirp the robin spread his wings to fly, but too late.

The same instant the pigeon-hawk buried his talons in his ruby breast and flew away to the wood with him. From the top of a beech the hawk sent down a shower of bright feathers torn from cock-robin's gay breast, and the old elm by the farmhouse knew the sweet songster no more.

Thus is the inquiry of the old nursery tale brought back to us. "Who killed cockrobin?" Was it pigeon-hawk, who found him maimed and helpless, or Tommy, whose careless sling-shot first blinded the robin and left him an easy prey to all his enemies?
GAY crested tenant of the deep wild woods,
    Oft have I heard thee wake these solitudes
Where quiet loves to dwell, with lightning stroke,
    Holding with clinging claw to elm or oak,
Until the echoes of thy sturdy whacks
    Gave back a sound, like to the woodman's axe,
While thou didst drive thy beak, with point like steel,
    Deep in the wood to find thy morning meal.
VI

A STARLIGHT TRAGEDY

"THE little brother to the bear," as several naturalists have so aptly called him, came scratching down the outside of an old stub birch and alighted at its foot. It was an old trick with him, for the birch stub was hollow and its dry inside had been his home for two or three years. So he had got used to this backing out of his front door and sliding tail first down his front walk.

The creature, who was about the size of a small dog, weighing perhaps twenty-five pounds, was not a bear, as you children know bruin, but a large raccoon. His habits are those of the bear, and as he belongs to the family, it is quite fair
to call him the little brother to the bear.

He dens up every autumn and sleeps through the winter, living upon his fat for several months, just as the bear does.

His gait too, as he shambles along through the woods, reminds one of the movements of a bear, only he is rather more agile and more stealthy.

Presently he came out into a meadow, where a quiet little brook slipped gently upon its way, winding in and out among the meadow-grass, and about the feet of tall willows.

This little stream was the favourite haunt of the raccoon, for he is something of a fisherman, and will eat almost anything, if it has a fishy smell about it. In fact, his Latin name means the Washer, derived from his peculiar habit of tak-
ing everything to the brook and washing it before eating.

It was a very pretty face that was mirrored by the moonlight in the little brook. Cunning and roguishness, and perhaps a bit of the bear's drollery were its principal traits. About the end of the nose was a white ring, and black rings around each eye. His tail was also ringed for nearly its entire length. There is but one other North American animal who enjoys this distinction of a ringed tail, and that is the civet-cat of the Southwest.

Presently the starlight that fell across the raccoon's shoulders showed him a small moving object in the water. Quickly and cautiously his paw went down, and in another second a half-pound sucker was flopping in the grass.

Mr. Coon broke the back of his catch at a single bite and then leisurely ate his
prize, all but the offal and head, which he left in the grass.

This was all very good as far as it went, but the coon was still gaunt from his long winter's fast, and a meal of one course would not satisfy him. A little further on he poked out a fresh-water clam, and breaking it open with his teeth, scooped out its slimy contents. Fish and clams were a good beginning, but he must have warm blood before he slept.

In a clump of alder bushes near the brook he got a strong bird scent. It must be on the ground and very near, for it fairly ravished his nostrils. His habit of blundering along was laid aside, and he crept stealthily, almost foxlike, toward his prey. It was from under an old log that the scent came. He was just considering whether to try and creep nearer,
prize, all but the offal and head, which he left in the grass.

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or spring at once and trust to luck, when a woodcock whistled up through the alder bushes and whirred away into the darkness.

Mr. Raccoon nosed along the edge of the log, until the scent told him where the woodcock had been, and then thrust his nose into the nest. It did not contain young birds, as he had hoped, but five or six warm eggs. These he ate ravenously and the setting was spoiled. Then he crouched for awhile under the edge of the log and waited for the woodcock's return, but she had gotten a bad fright and did not come back. It was lucky that the raccoon had come in the night, for the woodcock is more watchful at night than by day, or she might have been taken too. I have frequently had a woodcock light upon the ground within ten feet of me and stand winking and
blinking for half a minute, before he would make me out.

Finally the hunter got tired of waiting and went in search of other game.

He crossed the meadow and climbed a stone wall, close by an old apple-tree. At the foot of the tree he stopped and went carefully about it several times, sniffing critically. Then he went to another tree and still another, going through the same process, but finally came back to the first tree. He seemed to be trying to determine which one he wanted.

When he had satisfied himself that he was right he began cautiously climbing, going up a foot or two and then stopping to sniff and listen. Once there was a little squeak and a flutter. This made him stop and keep very still for several seconds. But finally he hitched a few feet higher toward a large limb.
About six inches below the limb was a round dark hole, three or four inches in diameter. Toward this hole the raccoon carefully wriggled, and with a sudden stealthy motion thrust his pointed nose into the old apple-tree.

There was a frightened squawk, and a furious beating inside, but the struggle was very brief, for in a few seconds the relentless hunter pulled out a golden winged woodpecker, and breaking her neck at a single bite, dropped her, still fluttering feebly, to the ground.

Then the inquisitive muzzle was again thrust into the woodpecker's hole, but the bottom of the nest was so deep that he could not reach it.

But he wished to know if there were fledglings, or eggs. So he thrust in his paw and easily reached the bottom of the nest. One by one he raked out the
eggs, dropping them to the ground. When he was sure that the nest was entirely empty, he hastily slid down the trunk of the tree to his late supper.

First he broke the eggs and licked up their contents. Then he stripped the gay coat from the yellowhammer and deliberately ate her, crunching the bones with keen relish.

As with the fish, he left the bird’s entrails, and also her feet and beak, as too coarse for the palate of a fastidious raccoon.

When the last morsel had been eaten, and he had carefully licked every trace of blood from his paw, he climbed the wall and went home to his hollow birch by a roundabout way.

It is merely upon circumstantial evidence that I charge Mr. Raccoon with the murder of Mrs. Golden-winged
Woodpecker, while sleeping safe and snug, as she thought, in her well-protected nest in the heart of the old apple-tree, but I will give you each link in the evidence and you can put it together for yourself.

I was fishing along the little brook, which was a favourite stream with me, as well as with the raccoon.

I first noticed the tracks in the mud along the brook and then the entrails of the sucker, whom I identified by his head, which the old epicurean had left. Through the tall meadow grass I tracked him as easily as though it had been in snow, to the empty woodcock’s nest, where the egg shells had not yet dried. Again the swale grass stood me in good stead, for it was still pressed down where he left a trail to the orchard. There at the foot of the old apple-tree was seen
the full measure of his crime, for golden and black and gray feathers were scattered about freely, and the two pathetic feet of the woodpecker told their sorrowful tale.

Still more incriminating was bark, torn from the tree, and claw marks where the raccoon had climbed. Also an occasional gray hair sticking in the bark added its testimony to the guilt of the accused.

This is the evidence upon which I charge Mr. Raccoon, living at the time in the old birch stub, in a neighbouring sugar orchard, of murdering Mrs. Golden Woodpecker, a peaceful tenant of the old apple-tree.

If there be any defence for the culprit, let us have it, that justice may be done.

"He was hungry and merely obeying a law of nature," you say. He considers
the fish of the stream and the fowls of
the air his lawful prey. To sustain life he
sharpens his wits and practises patience
and cunning. He did not kill for sport, as
man frequently does, but for meat.

"All other creatures do the same,"
you say.

The weaker animals are meat for the
stronger, and only the strongest of the
strong survive, in the battle for life.

Ah, Mr. Raccoon, we will have to
pronounce you not guilty of murder,
upon that score. You were merely
seeking your supper, like any other gen-
tleman. Go your way, but beware of
the trap at the edge of the corn-field, and
the hunters over the hill. A coon sup-
per may be planned in the autumn, and
he who dined upon Mrs. Golden-winged
Woodpecker may tickle the hunter's
palate.
PATTER, patter, little feet,
    In the morning cool and sweet,
Patter, patter on the wall,
    In the treetops green and tall.
Chatter, chatter on the fence,
    Just as though he was immense,
Chatter, chatter without scrimp,
    What a gleeful little imp.
VII

MUCH ADO ABOUT NOTHING

ONE warm May morning, when the tender green mantle of spring-time was being gently laid across the breast of the old earth, and all the birds were twittering softly to themselves because they were so glad, I heard a great commotion in the old elm near the house. It was not a song, although there were many voices, but the noisiest medley of squeaks, squawks, pipes, whistles, and other sounds too queer to have a name. All of the tones were very wheezy, and some sounded petulant and scolding.

"The grackles have come," I said to myself. "It must be a large flock. I will go out and see." I found the old
tree fairly black with them, a gay, noisy colony. There must have been at least five hundred in the flock, and as all were talking and scolding at the top of their voices, the din can easier be imagined than described. I crept cautiously out to the tree, and seating myself upon a root, was an uninvited member of the black-bird assembly.

The bright rays of the morning sun fell full upon them, and they were as gay a company as one would often see. Their wonderful bottle-green heads and necks shone like emeralds, and even their black was as shiny as a new hat. They seemed to be a very self-conscious crowd, for they prinked and perked as they scolded and chattered, until one could not have told whether toilet or conversation was the object of the meeting.

As I sat there under the old elm, with
the spring sunshine waking new joy in my blood, and the scent of lilacs in my nostrils, the spirit of birdland came upon me and I was able to see and hear as a bird. Then in an instant all the croaking and squawking above was plain to me and I was one of the gay company.

"Keep your old tail out of my face. There aren’t any cobwebs in my eyes, that I need my countenance dusted by you.”

"Take another limb then. There is room enough in the tree for us all.”

"Stop crowding I say. You’ll have me off. I’ve got as good a right as you. How bright the sun is! My, isn’t it nice to feel such beams again! How my muscles ache this morning. I’m getting pretty old for such long flights.”

"Hear grandpa. He says he’s getting old. His coat is rather dull. You’ll
have to brush up your coat this year, grandpa, if you want to get a mate."

"'Tis getting pretty shabby," piped the wheezy old grackle at the top of the tree. "I guess it don't make much difference whether I take a mate or not, I'm so old," and the aged grackle settled down into a dejected bunch of rusty black feathers and was quiet.

At this point in the wild medley of conversation a large and gorgeously dressed grackle took a commanding position in the tree, and cried, "Order, ladies and gentlemen, order." In a very few seconds it was as quiet in the tree as though there had only been five blackbirds there instead of five hundred. All the sound that was noticeable was the occasional flutter of a wing, as a bird balanced himself, when the wind swayed his branch, or a slight half-smothered squeak.
When this silence had been maintained for several seconds the splendid grackle, who had called order, began speaking. His voice was wheezy and asthmatic like the rest of the family, but what he said was quite plain.

"My friends," he continued, "by the authority vested in me for the past five years" (here he swelled out his breast and looked vain) "as chairman of this goodly company" (squawks of approval) "I call to order the tenth annual assembly of Division Eighteen of the North American Purple Grackles Society."

"Good, good," cried several birds in chorus.

"Order, gentlemen," piped the chairman. "Wait until I make a good point before you applaud. There will be plenty of chances later," and the magnificent
fellow spread one of his glossy wings in the sunlight.

"We have taken our northern flight very leisurely this spring and have arrived in fine condition, which is largely due to my judgment, I take it."

"And good weather," squawked an old grackle at the top of the tree.

"Don't interrupt me," snapped the chairman in his most rasping tones, and the offender looked very humble and did not open his bill again for the entire meeting.

"Three times upon the way have we seen the fruit-trees blossom. Once in New Jersey, once on Long Island, and once here."

"Where, where?" piped a score of birds at once.

"Look yonder," returned the chairman, scornfully. I looked in the direc-
tion indicated and saw that the pear-tree by the barn had just come out that morning. Even at that moment a puff of spring wind wafted its fragrance to us.

"Good, good," cried the score of birds who had cried, "Where," a moment before. "Don't interrupt our chairman," and they looked about accusingly at their neighbours.

"Now that our meeting is fairly open and I have congratulated you all on our safe arrival north, I call for our secretary's report."

A very grave old blackbird then hopped to the commanding limb occupied by the chairman and gave the following oral report.

"At our last meeting, which was held about six months ago in this neighbourhood, our roll call showed five hundred and twenty-seven members, in this divi-
sion of the North American Purple Grackles Society. Since then we have lost about fifty members. Some from stress of weather, some from sickness, while a few have strayed to other flocks. We have spent a most prosperous six months in Southern New Jersey, and are returning to the north, which is our breeding ground, with a firm determination to make our number one thousand strong before we fly south."

"Good, good," cried a number of voices. "We will," piped an old grandpa, at the top of the tree. "Little you'll do about it," squawked a dozen young and gallant grackles. "Order, gentlemen," piped the chairman. "Do not interrupt your secretary."

"It is the opinion of all of our company that the libelous charges made by many ornithologists, that the grackles steal
the eggs and even eat the young of other birds is hereby stoutly disputed as an infamous falsehood, that merely shows the ignorance of the learned gentlemen. If it is not too strong language, your secretary hereby characterizes ornithologists as red-nosed, goggle-eyed, old fools, who couldn’t fly if they had wings, and whose eggs would not hatch even if they were smart enough to lay them.”

This sally so pleased the female grackles that their piping and squawking drowned the voice of the secretary, and it was several seconds before the chairman could restore order.

“I appreciate your mirth, ladies,” he said, when he could make himself heard, “but please be quiet.”

“Although hardly a part of my report,” continued the secretary, “I can inform this assembly that our cousin redwing
arrived in this vicinity yesterday. He has taken up his quarters in the meadow near by. He told me that our gay cousins, Baltimore oriole and bobolink, told him before he left that they intended to start north in about two weeks if the weather held good, so we can expect them in about that time. This is the end of my report. Now do what you please with it."

On motion of the old grandpa at the top of the tree, the report was unanimously accepted, and the piping and croaking that recorded the vote were fairly deafening.

"I have a matter of grave importance," piped the old grackle when the noise had subsided. "It seems to me that it is most important that we go to some place that will help our phthisic."

"Can't you ever learn to call it asthma,
"Grandpa?" asked a chorus of impatient voices, "it sounds so much better."

"It was phthisic, when I was hatched," squawked the old grackle, "and I guess it is phthisic now. I don't see but we are just as wheezy now as we were then. For myself I want to see our voices improved. I would like to see the family ranked among the sweet singers. Why, I think I could be a lark if I had the voice."

This confession from the old grackle brought a shout of mirth from the tree.

"Get an oil-can and oil grandpa's throat," piped an old female grackle.

"Guess it would take more than that," said the chairman, gravely, when quiet reigned again. "I am afraid that the grackle family will never be called good singers. We must be content with our wonderful plumage, which I think I may
say without vanity is the finest in the land."

"What of scarlet tanager?" piped someone.

"His dress is too gay and gaudy," croaked the chairman with decision. "He is loud and not refined. The grackle is the only tasty dresser in the bird family. But I think we have discussed these and other topics quite fully, and I now declare the meeting adjourned and I will lead you for a martial flight. Now mind and don't crowd, and wheel when I give the word. Ready, fly."

There was a whir of wings that made the old elm fairly alive, as the black cloud that cast a shadow on the ground rose in air and flew away towards the meadow. About twenty rods away they wheeled suddenly to the right, and made for the river, then they wheeled again and in
a few seconds were back in the old elm.

"Bravo," cried their leader. "When we get our wind, we will be off for a longer flight. I think I will take you all up the river a mile or two to an island where there is always a good supply of weed seed this time of year. We can make a good meal there. Are you ready? This is a longer flight."

"Ready," piped a score of voices. "Fly," shrilled the leader, and the black cloud rose again, and with the whir of many wings was off.

I strained eyes and ears after the flying cloud, and as long as I could see them, could hear the discordant piping. It was a safe prediction that their chairman had made.

The voice of the grackle never would be musical. I was convinced of that.
THE Grackles are here and that is quite clear.

The morning is ringing, — not with their singing,
But with their talking, they’re piping and squawking
Some scandalous ditty, the more then’s the pity.
The Grackles are here, that’s plain to your ear
And also your eye, for under the sky
Their bottle-green throats and dark purple coats
Are as fair as you’ll find, to a tailor-bird’s mind. —
But song, — what commotion, they haven’t a notion.
Each harsh rasping note, it sticks in the throat,
For song we’ll go then to an old Guinea hen,
She’ll sing us Heydiddle to a broken-back fiddle,
But song do not tackle, you croaking old Grackle.
VIII

CHATTERBOX’S MISTAKE

CHE-atteratter-atter-chit-chee-e-e-e-e-
Who-o-o- Do-o-o-o- I see-e-e-e, under my tre-e-e-e-e-

The Chatterbox frisked frantically about in the top of the old maple under which I was sitting.

It always made him angry even to have me walk through the woods. I never molested him, or even returned the bad names that he called me, but this part of the woods was his particular property and all trespassing was forbidden on his premises. The red rascal’s domain consisted of about an acre of beech and maple woods at the edge of the forest, and also included the apple orchard near
by. He was a male squirrel, noisy and combative, and the title to his strip of woods had been gained by long occupation and many scirmmages with his fellow red-coats, not to mention the chipmunk who always ran at his approach.

So you see, according to the ethics of the woods, the Chatterbox was their rightful owner and his title was fully recognized as part of the unwritten by-laws of the forest. So I really had no right in his woods, although my neighbours had placed certain boundary stones and allotted to me the forest.

To-day I was doing more than trespassing, for I had presumed to sit under one of the red rascal's trees, and, to add to this great offence, was strumming on a banjo.

Now, if the Chatterbox had been a musician himself, like bobolink or oriole,
I should not have wondered at his rage, but being a very noisy fellow, fond of filling the woods with discordant sounds, he should have sympathized with me in my musical efforts; instead, however, he took them much amiss.

One moment he would dash down the trunk of the tree, within eight or ten feet of me, as though he had a mind to spring upon my head and eat me up; then he would frisk back into the top of the tree again, all the time scolding and barking at the top of his lungs. His tail twitched, his head bobbed, his eyes snapped, and altogether he was the angriest bit of fur that ever raved against the intrusions of man into the forest.

Finally his curiosity got the better of his rage, as it always does, and he came down to within a few feet of me, and sat
quietly watching and listening as I picked the strings.

Hymns and soft low melodies seemed to soothe him, and put him in a quiet mood, but the gayer tunes set his little feet to dancing and his tongue to scolding and barking in the liveliest manner. I imagine he thought the banjo was abusing him when the notes fell thick and fast, and so he scolded back, giving full measure for all he received.

When I stopped picking the strings and drummed on the head, and whistled in imitation of drum and fife he was all attention. He cocked his head on one side and hung intently on the notes, and when the strain was finished, rushed up the tree trunk, chattering gleefully. He was not angry any more, but just happy. There is all the difference in the world between the scolding of a squirrel, and
his gleeful chatter. His scolding is harsh and spiteful, while his chatter is noisy, but full of good feeling.

I took the banjo to the woods for several days and finally the red rogue got to like it better even than I did, for he would scold, when I stopped for too long a time.

I think that he considered me a sort of "Pied Piper" and thought my queer machine some kind of trap, for he was always watchful and rather suspicious. Maybe this was merely his wild instinct that considered all men and all devices of men harmful until they had been thoroughly tested.

The birds were never attracted by my playing, probably because they were musicians themselves, so the Chatterbox was my one regular listener during those pleasant summer afternoons.
I could always tell him from his fellows. He was larger than they, and his face was quite gray, which I took to indicate age, but wisdom and discretion I do not think he ever possessed.

Our acquaintance had continued off and on for nearly a month, when it was cut short in a most unexpected manner. At least, it was unexpected to me, but I suppose the unexpected and the tragical is the natural way of living and dying in the woods.

My friend the Chatterbox was late in coming to our trysting tree this day, but at last I saw him, running at the top of his speed. He was not racing along in the top of the trees, as he frequently did, but running on the ground, jumping from point to point in a rapid, zigzag flight.

At first I did not discover what made
him run in such a helter skelter manner, but presently I noticed a small creature of about his own size, following him closely. The second comer was brown, and from his swift gliding motion I knew he was a weasel, even before I saw his snakelike head. Although it was a life and death game for the Chatterbox, there was something in the gliding motion of the weasel that fascinated the red squirrel, for occasionally he would partly turn his head and watch his pursuer, and the weasel always gained upon him at these times.

Over logs and through bits of underbrush, into deep bunches of ferns and tangles of scrub hemlock they raced, the squirrel fleeing wildly, and the weasel following relentlessly.

At last they came to within three or four rods of where I sat, and the squirrel
fled up a tall maple, the weasel following ten or fifteen feet behind.

"Now you have lost him, you blood-thirsty little wretch," I thought, for I imagined that the Chatterbox would run to the top of the tree, and then out on a limb and jump to the ground.

The weasel would follow to the top of the tree, but would not take the jump. A red squirrel can spread himself out flat, and, using his tail as a rudder, come down easily and lightly from almost any height. The weasel who is more rotund falls heavily, and his tail is not bushy enough to make it of any use as a rudder.

This would all have been as "easy as rolling off a log" had not the Chatterbox lost his head just as he was at the point of escape, and holed in the tree. A second later the weasel flashed in after him.

There was a prolonged and frightened
"THE WEASEL APPEARED, BRINGING THE LIMP FORM OF THE CHATTERBOX WITH HIM."
chip-p-p- that ended in an agonized squeak and all was still.

After about five minutes the weasel appeared, bringing the limp form of the Chatterbox with him. He dropped the squirrel to the ground and then came cautiously down, moving his snakelike head from side to side whenever he stopped. His chops were red with blood, and his cruel glittering eyes were bloodshot.

At the foot of the tree he first noticed me, and after viewing me intently, he glided away into the ferns in search of other victims.

I picked up the Chatterbox and saw his throat had been slit, and his life blood drained. There was no other mark upon him.

But he was no longer the gay Chatterbox, frisking and scolding, only a limp little bunch of muscles and sinews. His
coat was still beautiful, but the one thing that made him interesting to me was gone. His life had been taken for a few drops of blood.
IT is such fun down in the grass to lie
   And feel the breezes as they gallop by,
And hear them stir the clover and the corn,—
It makes you feel real glad that you are born.
IX

THE LITTLE MOCKING BIRD

It was luxuriant lying in the tall meadow grass that enfolded one like the arms of his mother. The blue sky, in which there was no sadness, was above, and the great heart of the old earth was throbbing like a mighty engine under me. The grass was cool and many patterned, and in among its tangles was a very busy world of ants and insects, all working or eating as the mood seized them. But the deepest joy of all was the gleeful babble of the little brook that prattled like a very happy child.

It gurgled and cooed, dimpled, smiled and laughed, and suddenly, without the
slightest cause, fell into a fit of melancholy just under a dark tangle of willows. It was not a weeping willow, but one could hear half stifled sobs as the brook slipped beneath its roots.

Is it any wonder that water is so often used as the symbol of life and youth? De Leon spent a life-time searching for the fountain of life, that he might bathe in it, and put on abiding youth. We are also told in holy writ of the great white throne, and the fountain of eternal life. The little child dabbles his hands in the brook and laughs at the gentle lapping of its current. Even the old wrinkled-faced man cannot resist the childish inclination, and he needs must trail his hand in the water when the canoe glides smoothly down the stream. How pure is this symbol of life! How clearly it reflects the light of heaven! Men cannot defile
it for long. Though they fill its current with rubbish, the little stream will be as pure and untainted the following day, as though it had not been defiled. It cannot contain grossness any more than the spirit of love can entertain hate. All day long it cleanses its heart that the stars of night may behold their brightness in its bosom.

There was a soft twitter in a deep clump of alder bushes near by, and a moment later the full song of the hermit thrush, joy-laden as the breath of morning and sweet as the notes of the flute, floated out on the air. Again and again the song was repeated, while I listened breathlessly. I had never heard this rare songster so near before, and the experience thrilled me with a poet's delight. The song ceased and the very silence seemed to be calling for more, when the
tender notes of the Baltimore oriole, which is the true robin, stole out on the morning stillness. Louder and louder the song swelled, until I could imagine the heaving breast of the songster under his orange coat. For the space of thirty seconds there was absolute silence in the thicket, and then a song sparrow rattled out a shower of notes, like the patter of April rain, clear as a piccolo, and wonderfully phrased.

Had all the birds of the countryside congregated in this alder bush, just to give me a sample of their respective songs? I was quite agreeable, so held my breath and listened.

I could have tumbled into the brook with astonishment when the lightning crescendo of the bobolink, pure as the clink of crystal, and rich as love's own wordless ditty, fell like a rhapsody from
heaven upon my astonished ear. Up and down the scale he raced in mad ecstasy, almost tearing his little heart out in his vain attempt to express all that life, and light, and breath of morning were to him. It made me feel ashamed of my own shallowness, and wonder if there were not after all a world of joy in my very nostrils that I was blindly unconscious of.

When gay Robert Lincoln ceased it was as though a lamp of dazzling brightness had been removed from a scene dearly loved, and all was darkness.

I was too much entranced by this bird chorus from the clump of alder to consider its origin, but listened in stupid silence, like a spellbound child.

What was that! Could it be that here in broad daylight, the soft and unutterable evening prayer of the veery was falling in notes as pure as dew drops or the tears
of angels? This was no bird, but a spirit, the soul of some departed saint, praying in the bush. It was too pure for earth, too deep for words, and was the mirage of man's thought of God, his holy of holies. At a touch, a gross suggestion, it would vanish like the mists of morning.

Then there was a rustle and a flutter in the bush, and the leaves parted to disclose the gray coat of a catbird, who balanced himself upon a slender twig and eyed me curiously.

"Mew-e-e Pew-e-e, Mew-e-e," he called derisively. "Mew-e-e, Pew-e-e," again and again, as though he thought the joke too good to pass lightly by, and would din it into my cranium that he was just an ordinary catbird. Mew-e-e, Mew-e-e, Pew-e-e.
FLY high, fly low, the breezes blow,
The earth is green and sweet,
At the farmer's law we all say pshaw,
For corn was made to eat.

Law, law, law, pshaw, pshaw, pshaw,
Hoc, whoa, haw, caw, caw, caw.

Who gave the corn on earth's first morn,
Who brought the tassels out,
Who sheds the rain o'er mead and plain,
Until the stalks are stout?

At the farmer's law we all say pshaw,
Hoc, whoa, haw, caw, caw, caw.
A GENTLEMAN in black sat on the top of a hemlock-tree at the edge of the woods, watching a farmer who was ploughing in a near-by field. It was very pleasant for the old crow to behold the farmer's industry. "For," thought the crow, as he sat upon his lofty perch sunning, "ploughing means planting, and planting means pulling."

The thought of fresh green shoots of young corn so filled the black imp with mirth, that he arched his neck and flung his full-throated salutation across the fields.

The farmer stopped his team to see from what quarter so lusty a call came
and muttered, half angrily, when he saw the crow:

"You old rascal, I will bet a dollar you are watching me, merely to spy out where I plant my corn, that you may pull it. But have a care, I shall not let you off as easily this year, as I did last. If a scarecrow does not frighten you, I will see what virtue there is in a shotgun."

The old crow had been so intent on watching the farmer that he did not notice a very insignificant bird, who was perched on a scrub apple-tree in the field near by. Presently the little stranger set up a great chatter, and started for the hemlock where the crow was sitting. Now to fly away from a bird so much smaller than one's self was most cowardly, so the crow hitched about uneasily on his perch, but stayed where he was.

This just suited the chattering little
fury from the apple-tree and he flew straight at the dignified gentleman in black, picking at his eyes viciously.

"Keep off," squawked the old crow. "I don't want you. I have half a mind to kill you."

"That's what I'm here for," chattered the fury, and he flew at the crow again and again, striking him upon the head or back at each swoop.

Then the kingbird (or bee martin as he is also called) was joined by his mate, and they immediately made it so hot for the poor crow, that he flew away at his best pace and left the smaller birds masters of the field. This seemed to tickle them greatly, and with endless chatter they flew back to the apple-tree in the mowing.

There is more audacity and clear grit tucked away in that little bunch of
feathers that we call the kingbird, than in any other creature that flies.

I have frequently seen a kingbird, who looked like the merest speck in comparison, chasing the largest hen hawk across the fields at the hawk's liveliest pace. He would dart at the larger bird as viciously as a bee, and occasionally, as though to show his contempt for his great adversary, would light upon the hawk's back and peck away with might and main at his head and shoulders. That must have been a ride indeed, something to remember and be proud of,—to sit upon the back of a magnificent hawk and drive him at will, while the old earth dotted with farm-houses, and checkered with grain fields, slipped by under one at the rate of sixty or seventy miles an hour. I doubt not, if the largest eagle that ever spread wings should come his way, that
this little terror would go after him as fearlessly as he did after the hawk.

The discomfited crow who had been forced to leave his watch-tower at the top of the hemlock, by a pair of little kingbirds, felt that his dignity had been greatly hurt. His pride had been so humbled that he was in very bad spirits. But as good luck would have it, the very first light that he made was in a tall bushy-topped beech, where he discovered an owl’s nest. This at once put him in good spirits, and he flew away calling for his fellows at the top of his voice. The crow loves to torment a hawk or owl as well as the kingbird does a crow, and in a very short time the trees about the beech were black with them.

With his usual prudence, the sagacious old leader posted two or three alert crows as sentries in trees near by, that no one
might steal upon them at the height of their sport, and the fun began.

First, they amused themselves by merely circling about the tree, keeping up such a cawing that the noise was almost deafening. But by degrees they grew bolder, and occasionally a crow would dart into the tree, where two winking, blinking great horned owls sat, guarding their nest from this noisy horde.

They did not much fear the crows, but it was most annoying to have the quiet of their home so invaded by such a noisy company.

Finally the noisy gentleman in black perched on a limb within six or eight feet of the nest, and began deriding the two yellow-eyed creatures.

"Ca-a-t-t-s-s- Ca-a-t-t-s-s-" he called, his remark being intended to describe the catlike face of the owl.
“Who, who?” asked the owl, winking and blinking at the intruder.

“If I was an owl, with wings like a fowl,
And eyes like a bat, and a face like a cat,
I’d go to the brook; with my beak like a hook,
I’d tear out my eyes, and change my whole guise,
Law, law, law! Caw, caw, caw!”

screamed the crow.

“Who, who, if I were you, the same I’d do.
But as all men know, a noisy crow is but a blow.
You, you, you,"

hooted the owl.

This retort so angered the clan that a score of them settled on the beech and cawed themselves hoarse, but the two solemn owls made no reply.

At this point in the fun one of the sentinels gave the signal of alarm, and the entire clan flew away to another part
of the woods, the gentleman in black leading the way.

"What was it?" asked the leader, of the sentinel, when the clan was again quiet.

"A boy with a Thunder Stick," replied the crow. "I saw him just as he began to creep up on us and gave the cry. Perhaps he will find the owls' nest. He will know surely that something was up, for we don't have such a concert as that every day. He will think it was a hawk, or an owl if he isn't a fool. Guess he wanted one of us to hang in his cornfield."

A few days later, the old crow was again perched on his favourite limb in the hemlock at the edge of the woods, watching the farmer plant his corn.

It took two or three days to plant the entire field, and the crow was as much interested in the process as the farmer'
self. When it had been completed the gentleman in black flew away and told the clan, and there was a great rejoicing in the deep woods, the noise of which could have been heard for a quarter of a mile.

The following day the crow saw the farmer do some very queer things, which he did not quite understand.

He had brought a lot of small poles in the wagon, and these he stuck in the ground at regular intervals along the edge of the field. When the poles were all planted, he fastened string from one to another until the field was entirely fenced with string.

"O, ho," chuckled the crow. "Does he think it will keep us out? We can fly either over or under it, just as though nothing were there." But it looked quite queer to see a field fenced off with string
and the cautious leader was rather suspicious.

Then the farmer drove a stake about six feet high at one corner of the field, and nailed another shorter stake across it, about four feet from the ground.

Next he pulled some straw, and some black looking things from a bag, and almost before the crow had guessed what the farmer was doing, the cross-like stake had been changed into a queer-looking man, but his insides were nothing but straw.

When the farmer had stuffed out the man good and round, and had put a hat on his head, he looked quite like another farmer, whom the first farmer might have got to stand in the corner of the field, and keep the crows away. But the gentleman in black knew it was all a trick, for he had seen the man made.

When the farmer had gone home, the
crow flew down and critically examined all that he had done. He was quite cautious at first, but finally was so sure that the man was only a trick that he lit on one of his shoulders, and pecked at his straw face. If the farmer could have seen the old crow pecking the eyes out of his scarecrow an hour after he had set it up, he would have felt very cheap, and his respect for the crow would have been greatly increased.

After about ten days, the leader reported to the clan that the corn was up, and they settled on the field one morning, and made sad work with several rows. The farmer discovered it the same day, and the following morning was in waiting with the Thunder Stick.

He had often read that the crow could count, so thought he would test his power with figures.
Tenants of the Trees

He made what is called a blind. This was done by cutting three or four small pines or hemlocks, and sticking them up in the ground side by side. This made a screen behind which he could hide.

First he took one hired man with him, and both went into the blind. After a few moments the hired man went away to a different field, and left the farmer with the Thunder Stick.

The crows were watching them from the woods, and saw two men go into the blind and only one come out; so they knew that the other was waiting there to do them harm, and they did not go to the field.

The farmer knew by this that they could count two. So he got two hired men and the three went into the blind, two going away after a few minutes, as the one had done before; but the crows
still stayed at the edge of the woods, and the farmer knew that they could count three.

Then he took three men, and the four went into the blind with no better success. The crows could also count four.

Finally he took four men and the five went into the blind, four going away after a few minutes, as the three had done.

After a noisy consultation the old leader of the clan flopped down into the cornfield, and the farmer knew that they could not count five and he had tricked them at last.

"Bang," went the Thunder Stick, and its echo rolled away to the woods. The clan flew away in every direction, but not so the gentleman in black. He started to fly, but one of his wings crippled under him, and he flopped helplessly upon the ground.
"O, ho, my fine fellow," cried the farmer, "so you will pull my corn will you? I will teach you better."

At first he thought he would wring the crow's neck and hang him in the field, but a better thought came to him. So he fastened a piece of wire to the crow's leg, and then tethered him with a long string. This left the crow free to flop about for a rod or two, but he could not fly away to the woods with his fellows.

The farmer's plan worked like a charm, for whenever the captive crow saw the clan coming his way, he at once gave the danger call, and they always flew away.

A month dragged slowly by, and although the crow was still a captive, yet he was treated very well for a thief. The farmer occasionally threw him a handful of grain, and this, with what he could
"HE FELL UPON THE WOULD-BE LEADER, BEAK AND CLAW."
pick up within the length of his cord, kept him fairly well.

At the end of that time the corn was four or five inches high, and the farmer did not fear the crows any more.

So one morning he untied the cord from the captive's leg, and gave him a toss into the air.

The crow had been merely winged, and the broken end of the feathers had grown out enough during the month of his captivity, so that he could fly fairly well.

He made all haste to the woods, where he found the new leader of the clan sitting on his particular hemlock. At the sight of the one who had dispossessed him, a great fury seized the gentleman in black, and he fell upon the would-be leader, beak and claw; and clawing, pecking and cawing, the two went tumbling down
through the limbs of the hemlock, and landed in a black heap at the foot of the tree.

In the very first round of the scrimmage, the old crow picked out one of the eyes of the new leader, which disqualified him for leadership. So the indignant crow did not punish him further, but flew away to find his clan, well satisfied with the way things had turned out.

When it was learned how he had worsted his rival, he was at once reinstated as leader, and he led the clan wisely for many years; but his disgruntled rival was chased out of the vicinity and never allowed to return.

It is needless to say that the old crow gained wisdom during his month's captivity in the cornfield, and although he permitted the clan to pull corn, he would
never accompany them on any of these expeditions.

“My wings and tail feathers are too valuable to be pulled out by hailstones from the Thunder Stick,” he would say, when rallied about his fear of the farmer. “You gentlemen may all go, but don’t blame me if you do not come back.”
A LITTLE home within a tree,
And yet it held a world of joy,
Until there came a thoughtless boy
And left a trail of misery.
Little Peter lay in a snow-white cot in a long white ward of the children's hospital. His wan face was only a shade or two darker than the pillow upon which it lay. It was a thin little face pinched by want and suffering, and a mere shadow of what it should have been. His eyes were sunken, and one wondered as he gazed into their sad wistful depths, if they had ever danced with joy, in the child's whole life, which, judging from his size, was about seven years. It might have been more, however, for city children are often dwarfed by bad air, and poor nourishment, until
their age can not be accurately told by their size.

When they asked him at the hospital how old he was, he did not know. Father and mother he had none, and his home had been the city streets. Any old box or barrel that would hold a dog was good enough for him.

By rare good luck, Peter had been knocked down by a fashionable team the week before, and he now had a sweet clean bed to sleep in, and plenty of good food to eat.

He loved to lie quietly and watch the nurses, as they glided noiselessly up and down, ministering to the little sufferers. They had such kind faces that it made Peter's heart glow just to look at them. Somehow his idea of the world had greatly changed since he came to the hospital. Before he had thought it a
very cold hard place. The only people who had noticed him, were hurrying, bustling men and women, who told him to get out of the way, or burly policemen who advised him to move on. Like Dickens’s Joe, in "Bleak House," he had longed for some place where he would not have to move on, and he had found it at last, in the children’s hospital. Here he could lie very quietly, and be quite happy with his broken leg.

When the nurses or the doctor asked him how he was, he always said, "Very well indeed, ma’am," at which they smiled, and looked pityingly at his pinched face, and great sad eyes.

Six weeks went by, and although the leg was doing nicely, yet the patient little fellow that they called number seventeen still looked as though a good breath would blow him away. He was per-
fectly happy and contented, but he had no desire to move about like the other children who were getting better. Peter was certainly getting better, for he told the doctor and the nurses every day that he was.

But they thought differently, so one day they told Peter that he was to go into the country for the summer, and get some tan on his face and some roses in his cheeks.

He did not know what that meant, but as they were very good to him at the hospital, he thought it must be for his good, and quietly consented.

So one day after taking a heart-breaking farewell of his nurses, Peter was wrapped in a blanket, and strong arms bore him to a carriage in waiting, which rolled rapidly away, across the city to the depot. Here he was placed in
an easy position, where he soon fell asleep.

Peter never could tell just where he went, or how he got there. He was so tired that he slept nearly all the time, but finally he remembered being laid in a little bedroom, and the next thing he knew it was morning in the country, and a breeze, sweeter than anything he had ever smelled before, was blowing in through the open window.

He was just wondering where he was, and how long he had slept, when the door opened, and a motherly-looking woman, with a bright face, and a cheery voice, entered.

"How are you this morning, my little man?" she asked, laying her hand upon Peter's head. There was something in the touch that brought a great lump into the boy's throat; he had never felt a
hand like that before, but he cleared his throat and answered with his usual cheerfulness:

"Much better, ma'am. I think I will be well to-morrow."

The lady laughed and told Peter that she thought he would, either to-morrow or the next day, and they were the best of friends from that hour.

"Did you make them beautiful red things along the edge of the window?" asked Peter, pointing to the open window through which the morning sun was streaming.

"I don't see any red things," replied the lady. "Where, child?"

"Why, all along the edge of the window. Don't you see them flopping around when the breeze hits them?"

"Why, child, those are roses. Don't
you know what roses are? Didn’t you ever see any before?”

“Yes,” replied Peter, “I had some given to me one day by a beautiful lady who came into the hospital, and I thought she made them herself; but they didn’t have any bush to them.”

“No, they were broken off like this,” replied the lady, and she went to the window and pulled off the very largest one, which she gave Peter.

Peter caught it from her hand with a cry of delight, and buried his nose in the sweet petals.

Then a disturbed look came into his face.

“ Didn’t it hurt, when you took it? When I was first sick, the doctor used to pull my leg and it hurt awfully, and he didn’t pull it off either.”

“No, I guess it doesn’t hurt,” said the
lady smiling. "Anyway they would wither up, and die in a few days."

"What a pity," said Peter, "that anything so beautiful should die."

"I've brought you some milk to drink," said Peter's new friend. "I want you to drink lots of milk every day and get strong."

Peter took the mug, but looked doubtfully into its contents. "That ain't so blue looking as our milk," he said. "I guess it is a different kind."

"I guess it is too," replied the lady. "That is right from the cow."

"Then that's the reason," said Peter reassured. "Milk in the city all comes out of cans, and of course that would be different from milk out of a cow, but it is good."

You would have been surprised to have seen how the milk from the cow, and fresh
laid eggs, together with the sweet breath of the country air, put roses in Peter’s cheeks, but it was not until he got out of doors, that the tan of which the doctor had spoken appeared.

He was the happiest child imaginable when he could sit by the open window and look out. "Whew," he cried, half to himself and half to the good lady whom he had learned to call Aunt Ruth. "I guess you people must be awful rich. Richer’n any one in New York."

"Goodness, child," exclaimed the lady, "I guess you are mistaken in thinking that. We don’t owe any one, and that is a blessing, but we ain’t rich. Why, we would be called just comfortable in the country."

"How can you afford so much of it?" then asked Peter doubtfully.
"What, child? We don't own anything extravagant that I know of."

"Why, the grass," said Peter, "it's awful expensive. Why, the richest folks in New York don't have only a little piece as big as this room. They can't afford it."

Aunt Ruth laughed until her sides ached. "Grass don't cost much of anything in the country," she said; "it just grows, that's all."

"My, but that must be awful nice," cried Peter, taking a deep breath of the fragrant air. "If I ever get to be a man I am going to live in the country. Where does your cop live, Aunt Ruth?"

"Cop, child; are you flighty? See here, let me feel of your head. You are getting along fine and I don't want you to go to getting a fever. Your head is
cool as a cucumber, Peter. What put that cop notion into your head? It gave me an awful start.

"I didn't mean to scare you," returned Peter sorrowfully, "but I thought sure you would have to have a cop ter keep the people off the grass, you have got so much of it."

"Twould cost ten times more than 'twas worth," said Aunt Ruth. "Grass is just grass in the country, and it grows everywhere, and people don't think of telling people to keep off it, without it is newly seeded."

Peter did not know what that meant, but somehow he couldn't separate the idea of grass from great wealth, and he sat pondering in silence for several minutes. Then he happened to look out at the sun that was just peeping around the corner of the house. "I guess that's a
different sun from what we have down to New York, ain't it?” asked Peter.

“I never heard that you had a different one,” replied the lady. “I didn’t know that God had made more than one for these parts.”

“Well, it looks different, anyway,” said Peter stoutly. “This sun is a good deal bigger and brighter, and he looks jolly and laughing, and our sun looks sorter pale and as though he was going to go out.”

“I guess the New York sun has got about tired of trying to get through the smoke and dust,” said Aunt Ruth. “It must be mighty hard on him to have to send his beams way down in between them tall buildings.”

“Aunt Ruth,” said Peter the following day, “there is one thing that I want to do awful when I get out doors, but I
don't want to do anything to make Uncle Ephriam mad, he is so good. I think it would help to make me well."

"What is it, child?" asked Peter's new friend.

"Why," replied Peter hesitatingly, "I am afraid Uncle Ephraim wouldn't like it, but if I could just roll in the grass out in the lot here, when I get out, I know I should be well in a minute. It is so fresh and green, but I am afraid it would cost too much and you are so good to me."

Aunt Ruth turned away that Peter might not see the tears in her eyes and Peter's face fell. He had asked too much and the kind lady had turned her back on him.

"O, never mind, Aunt Ruth," he said quickly, "I guess if I just look at it that will be enough."

"Peter, child," said Aunt Ruth, laying
her hand on his head in that way that always made a lump come into the boy's throat, "when you get out doors you just take the ten acre lot and roll from one end to the other, and if you lop down every spear of grass in the whole lot, I sha'n't care a cent, and if Uncle Ephraim says anything about it, why I'll send him to bed without his supper."

They both had a good laugh at the idea of Uncle Ephraim's going to bed without his supper, and Peter looked forward more than ever to the day when he should get out of doors.

The following day he surprised Aunt Ruth even more than he had by asking about the cop.

"Aunt Ruth," he said, when she had made him comfortable for the morning on the porch, "do you and Uncle Ephraim keep angels?"
“Land of liberty,” said that good lady, dropping her dish-cloth in her excitement, “what funny ideas you do get into your head. Now what got you that silly notion?”

“Why, I can see some from right here where I am sitting,” replied Peter.

“Well, well, I guess I had better come and look right off. I haven’t ever seen an angel myself and I would like to know what they look like.”

Peter pointed with his finger to a distant hillside, and Aunt Ruth laughed merrily.

“Why, those are sheep,” she said. “Don’t you see they haven’t any wings?”

“That is so,” said Peter, “but they are white as snow and I thought perhaps their wings would grow; maybe they were just borned.”

Flowers were a passion with Peter and
he would talk to them for an hour at a time. He had quaint names by which he always called them.

Daisies were stars and pansies were faces. Morning-glories were trumpets and lilies were nice ladies. Dielytra was earrings and peonies were redheads. Dandelions were goldenheads and the buttercups were yellowfaces, while the queer Jack-in-the-pulpit was the little man in the box.

Birds and squirrels also filled him with unspeakable pleasure, and he would as soon have thought of throwing a stone at Aunt Ruth as at one of them.

The wind that whispered in the tree tops and the little brook that laughed through the meadows were his soul's delight.

"How clean and pure everything is in the country, Aunt Ruth," he said. "I
should think everybody would want to be good here so as not to spoil all the beautiful things that God has made. Seems so God must have spent a pile of time making the country. He made it a good deal better than he did New York."

"Man made the city, Peter, and God made the country; that is the difference," said Aunt Ruth, and Peter pondered on what she had said.

One day in midsummer, when the crutches had been thrown away and Peter was nearly well (although he still limped a little), Aunt Ruth proposed that he pick a box of flowers and send to the hospital, where there were still many little sufferers.

Peter at once set to work. He was glad enough to do anything for these children, whom he remembered well, although his new life in the country had
nearly driven all thoughts of the city from his mind.

There were six bouquets packed away in the box that was finally sent, and a little note from Peter went with each one. Aunt Ruth wrote the notes for him, and he was very proud when all was ready and Uncle Ephraim took the box to the depot.

The first was a bunch of buttercups and daisies with the following note: “For number eighteen, the little girl with a broken hip who was next to me. These are stars and yellowfaces. God made 'em and he made us all. I hope you will see the country before you go to heaven.”

The next was just dandelions with the following: “These are for the little baby who had his throat cut open and an iron put in. I thought he would like
them because they are bright. I wish he could hear the lambs bleat. I know it would make him well.”

Then there was a bunch of violets tied with a bit of pink ribbon and this message. “Little faces that grow down by the brook. It is an awful jolly brook, full of bright pebbles, and it is always laughing and singing. I wish it ran right through the hospital.”

Then there were two other bouquets with pleasant childlike greetings from Peter to the little sufferers, and finally a large bunch of lilies, which Peter described as fine ladies, for the nurses who are so good to poor little children in St. Luke’s Hospital.

“Now who shall I say it is from?” asked Aunt Ruth, when the box had been tied with a strong string and it was ready for the address.
“From Mr. Peter—” Peter’s face fell. The endearing names of father and mother he had never known. The alley had been his home, and a box or barrel his bed. Two great tears welled over his eyelids and rolled down his cheek. “Just Peter Nuthin’,” he sobbed.

Aunt Ruth put her arms about him and drew him into her maternal lap. “Don’t cry,” she said, “I didn’t think when I asked you.”

“Now I’ll just tell you what I am going to do. Ephraim and I have been talking it over and we are about decided. I am going to put it Peter White. That’s our name, and that means you are to stay right here and be our boy as long as you live.”

Peter thought his heart would burst with joy when he fully understood it all, but the lump in his throat was so large
that he could only hug Aunt Ruth and sob.

He was not Peter Nuthin' after all, but Peter White, and as he looked at his own name written on the box in large letters, he was the proudest and happiest boy in the whole world.
A LITTLE bird comes pecking at the pane,
His toes are cold out in the sleet and rain,
His coat is slight, though well it fits his form,
Poor little stranger in the driving storm.

There's but a pane of glass 'twixt him and you
And he is hungry, if you only knew,
A bit of bread, O such a tiny mite,
Would keep him warm all through the winter's night.

He's pecking still to make you look his way,
I'm hungry, sir, his manners plainly say,
He only asks the crumbs upon the floor,
You will not turn him hungry from your door.

When he has supped, perhaps he'll sing to you,
His song is slight, but it is brave and true,
He'd sing you more, but it is all he knows
And it is hard to sing with such cold toes.
XII

FUR THAT FLEW

WHEN I was a lad of some seven summers, I left my own home for a short time and went to spend a winter with my grandfather and grandmother, who lived in a neighbouring town.

My grandmother was a great lover of all small creatures, and it was her particular delight to feed the birds and squirrels in the winter time.

Some pieces of meat nailed to the piazza posts and a box of corn and grain in the wagon-shed gave me a rare opportunity to study the winter birds and the squirrels, who were only too glad to partake of grandmother’s bounty.

On warm days I went with my grand-
father into the woods where he was logging, and I shall never forget the spectral beauty of the snow-bound forest in the dead of winter.

Some days the fir-trees would be bowed down almost to breaking by a heavy fall of new snow. Great masses of blue-green needles would be capped and gowned with spotless ermine.

When the wind rustled through the branches, showers of tiny crystals would come sifting down, sparkling and glittering in the sunlight. You wondered what the mysterious mound of snow under the spruces was, until you saw a bunch of bright laurel leaves pricking through.

Everywhere there were tracks,—tracks large and small, some made by padded feet, and others scraggly and angular. The problem always arose as to just what animal or bird made the track; which
way he was going, and what his errand was.

In many cases there were unmistakable evidences of murder, which, by the way, is lawful in the woods, especially if one is hungry. All the way from the poles to the tropics the cottontail, who is one of the prettiest creatures in the woods, is food for other and larger animals. The lynx, the wildcat, the wolverine, the martin, the weasel, and many varieties of foxes, all prey on the poor cottontail, who thrives and multiplies in spite of his many enemies.

One day my grandfather came home from the woods bringing something in his mittens. He held each mitten by the wrist and there was a wiggling and squirming going on inside.

He told me to go to the attic for an old squirrel cage, and when it had been
made ready he pushed into the cage as pretty a pair of flying squirrels as ever made a boy's eyes dance. I did not even know what they were until I was told, for they were quite different from any squirrel that I had ever seen.

They were a little darker than the ordinary gray squirrel, with broad bushy tails. Their heads were rather small, with beautiful soft eyes that seemed made for twilight rather than day. But the queerest thing of all was a skinny membrane stretching from the fore to the hind leg. This membrane was spread out and very much in evidence when the squirrels flopped down off their wheel into the bottom of the cage. When they attempted this feat they looked very much like bats. I named them Dick and Dixy and guarded them as I did my eyes.
During the daytime my pets were very quiet little bunches of gray fur. The bright light was evidently too much for their dreamy eyes, so they kept them closed against it, and put in the time sleeping. But when twilight came, all their natural frolicsomeness was let loose, and for an hour or two they would make the cage fairly hum with their capers and pranks. But they did not like such close quarters, and could not show off in the cage to any advantage.

They were very fond of all kinds of nuts, especially peanuts. Corn and other grains were also to their liking, but when they could not get these they were quite content with a hard bread crust.

When spring came and the birds and squirrels outside were rejoicing with song and chatter, it seemed so cruel to keep these two frolicsome creatures captive that I let
them go into the maples that lined the roadway in front of the house.

I opened the cage door at the foot of a tree and Dick shot up the trunk like a flash. Dixy was not long in following, and then they gave me as pretty an exhibition of their powers of flying as one could well wish.

When nearly up to the top of the tree Dick ran out on a limb and sprang into the air, spreading his parachute as he fell. Down he came, as easily as a leaf, but much quicker. He struck upon the trunk of the next maple in the row, and almost before I had time to see how it was done was scurrying up the tree. He had barely alighted when Dixy came sailing after him, and she gave him a lively race to the top of the second tree.

I noticed that always, just before they struck, the forefeet were deflected up.
"DOWN HE CAME AS EASILY AS A LEAF."
This gave them a little upward motion and greatly broke the shock of the long swift slide from the top of one tree to the bottom of the next.

Each time they struck I could hear the pat of their feet. It was for all the world like sliding down hill, and a great deal easier it seemed to me. The tree was the hill which they climbed each time they coasted.

I watched them going from tree to tree until they were out of sight, and then heaved a deep sigh. They were gone, the deep woods would claim them, and I should see them no more. It was too bad.

But this time I was mistaken, for the graycoats cared more for their friends in the farm-house than I had thought. They were gone for two or three days, but you can imagine my astonishment
one evening, just at dusk, to see them coming back, chasing each other along the maples just as they had gone.

I got a generous supply of corn and placed it by the big maple in front of the house, and they repaid me for my kindness by making the tree their permanent home. The old maple was hollow near the top, and here they made their nest and rarely went further from home than the end of the row of trees.

I was never tired of watching their twilight game of tag, but rarely saw them during the day unless I knocked on their front door. If one drummed on the trunk of the tree with a stick the squirrels, who were quite curious, would always poke their heads out of the hole at the top of the tree to see who was knocking.

I used to call them out frequently this
way to show them to the boys in the neighbourhood and it was the knowledge of this peculiarity of the flyers that led to their undoing.

In April or May Dixy became very shy and was rarely seen in the tree-tops. By midsummer she explained her stay-at-home habit, by bringing out a family of young squirrels and exhibiting them for our special benefit. They were not encouraged to attempt flying until they were nearly grown, which was in the early autumn. Even then the cat got one unfortunate youngster who missed his aim and struck upon the ground. He tried hard to get back into the tree, but the cat was much quicker on the ground than he. She was also too quick for me, and escaped under the house with her victim. There had been seven young squirrels in all and this left an even half dozen.
When the entire squirrel family were playing in the maples at twilight it was a lively scene.

Just before Christmas, when the first snows had come, I went home for the holidays, and when I returned the gray-coats were all dead. They had been murdered in cold blood by a thoughtless boy with a new gun.

He had happened by the house with his new fowling-piece. As the birds had nearly all gone south, and most of the squirrels were in their winter quarters, there was not much to shoot at, and his finger fairly ached to pull the trigger. At least this is the only excuse I can make for such a wanton act. In an evil moment he remembered the squirrel family that I had shown him in the big maple the summer before. Seeing that my grandfather and grandmother were gone
and the house locked up, he got a stone and drummed on the trunk of the tree.

Hearing the knocking on his front door, and thinking that some one wished to see him, Dick ran to the opening and thrust out his head. "Bang," went the new gun and the father squirrel pitched out of the hole and fell at the boy's feet.

He picked up the dead squirrel and examined him. What a beauty he was. What a daisy the gun must be to kill him at the first shot. So he threw the squirrel down and drummed on the tree again.

Dixy was much surprised at the strange noise and the squirrel family had been greatly frightened. She also wondered where Dick had gone, so she ran to the hole and peeped out. "Bang," went the gun again and she fell at the feet of the young hunter. Both father and
mother were now dead, and the six young squirrels in the tree-top were orphans; but this was not all.

Again the cruel hunter drummed on the tree and one of the youngsters poked out his head to see where father and mother had gone. "Bang" went the gun and the youngster joined his parents at the foot of the tree.

"What sport it is," thought the young savage, and all the ferocity of the animal side of his nature was aroused. He did not stop to think that the squirrels were useless to him when he had killed them; his thought was simply to Kill! Kill! Kill! "Bang! Bang! Bang!" went the gun, until the entire squirrel family of eight members lay dead in the snow. The old maple was empty and the nest in the hollow tree was desolate.

The young savage then picked up the
dead squirrels and threw them over the wall out of sight, for he knew that I was fond of them and he did not want his deed known.

But "murder will out" and I found the squirrel family on my return and buried them in a little snow grave in the garden. My grief was too great for tears, but the wood nymph, — that gentle guardian of the wild things who watches the coming and going of the great moose and the tiny field-mouse, and who rejoices when they rejoice, and is pained when they are cold and hungry, — this sweet custodian of the wood folks must have wept bitter tears over that little snow grave in the garden.

There is a belief among the wise people of the Orient that keeps them from such deeds as that of our thoughtless young hunter, and if we had something of their
spirit, it would be well for our wild brothers. They believe each human being lives to endure all the pain that he has caused other creatures to suffer. This is his punishment and the justice of the supreme judge.

If the boy had thought that some day he might be a helpless squirrel in the tree-top, while the squirrel was a boy with a new gun eager to take his life, his finger would have paused ere it pressed the trigger.
Friends in Need
THERE'S a song on the fragrant breeze
From every bird that sings,
And the rapture of their melodies
Through all the welkin rings.

For 'tis to nest that the birds are here,
In every breast is song,
And each Troubadour to his lady dear,
Is singing all day long.
XIII
FRIENDS IN NEED

WHEN the fields were still bleak and cheerless with the unbroken snow, and the skies were still dark from the scowl of winter; bluebird, the sweet harbinger of spring, brought us the good tidings of great joy.

In the same manner, when the old earth is naked and forsaken, and the tall trees, bereft of all their green gladness, stand shivering and complaining, certain sweet little heralds bring us the news of approaching winter.

It may be a flock of twenty snow-birds, or only a solitary black-capped titmouse perched in the old apple-tree near the house, but either are reliable messen-
Tenants of the Trees

gers, and both prophesy the first snow-fall.

There is also a look in the sky, a feeling in the air, and a minor song in the tree-tops that make you turn up your coat collar and say, "Well, I guess you were right, little prophets. We will wait and see what the morning will bring."

How chaste and pure is the first fall of snow. We dreaded its coming, but now it is here we are all glad. How it covers the naked scarred spots in the green-sward, until you would not know that the breast of nature bore a single wound.

Before this snow came it seemed bitterly cold and cheerless, but this warm white blanket has put all things right. Even the dead weeds, whose seared heads show above the spotless purity, look contented. There is lace-work upon every
weed and bramble this morning; all have been dressed in their winter robes.

Let us put on our overshoes and be off to the deep woods, for there is always something doing in the forest after the first snowfall.

Ah, here is the jaunty little fellow who told me yesterday that this was coming. He sits upon a twig with his head cocked upon one side, eyeing me in the most confidential manner. What a tasteful dress he wears. Could anything be more comfortable than that black cap on his little head? How well his black necktie matches the cap, and his blue-gray overcoat is as neat and pretty as one could well wish.

Who is this jaunty little friend who meets us at the very forest's edge with a welcome? What is your name, little fellow?
Clear as crystal comes the answer. "Chick-a-dee-dee. Why, don't you see, I am the herald of winter. Chick-a-dee-dee—Chick-a-dee-dee."

Well done, little chap; but I see you are not alone, for the woods are full of your mates, all pecking away on limbs and tree trunks and calling "Chick-a-dee-dee" in the blithest manner.

Down in the bark of every tree in the forest as well as on its surface the borer and the bark louse are at work, and this army of pest hunters have come to the rescue. If the army of chickadees and creepers were to be exterminated our forests would soon suffer.

Here is another busy little fellow, but he is not so tastefully dressed as chickadee.

This is the nuthatch, perhaps the most remarkable of all the creepers. See him hang head-downward, while with his
Clear as crystal comes the answer. "Chick-a-dee-dee. Why, don't you see, I am the herald of winter. Chick-a-dee-dee—Chick-a-dee-dee."

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Here is another busy little fellow, but he is not so tastefully dressed as chickadee.

This is the nuthatch, perhaps the most remarkable of all the creepers. See him hang head-downward, while with his
stout beak shaped very much like that of a small woodpecker he rattles down the bark. How excited he is getting. Look, there comes a long borer who has done the last of his destructive work. How this nuthatch in his gray-blue overcoat and his white necktie creeps over the bark, darting his sharp bill into every crack and crevice. He can walk straight up the trunk, or out sideways, or hang head down as we have seen. Always busy, always seeking a louse or a borer.

Whir-r-r, whistle, flutter; here come a flock of snow-birds. Junco is his real name. They have lighted in the snow, almost under your nose, but you can not see one of them. The snow blinds one, and they are so nearly white. Wait until they move, then you will see the gray upon their backs. There they go. Weed seeds were not plenty here, so they are
off for another feeding ground. They are seed eaters and they save the farmer more weed pulling than he imagines.

Later on in the winter, when it is colder, you will see other white birds in flocks. These are snow buntings, who have brought their greeting over thousands of miles of frozen ice and glittering snow, almost from the pole itself. You marvel, as the white forms flash by, how they could have come so far, for they are really as much a part of the polar fauna as the blue fox and the musk ox.

Another more gaily dressed visitor from the frozen north who is occasionally seen during extremely cold winters is the pine grosbeak. He is a beautiful carmine and black fellow, about the size of the robin, but he only visits us during an extreme winter. A great many times when people say they have seen robins in midwinter,
what they have really seen is the pine grosbeak.

The thought that I would leave with you as you close these pages is this.

If the winter is cold for you who are warmly cloaked and hooded, gloved and mittened, what must it be for the birds, who are scantily clad and unsheltered from the elements? If you draw close to the fire and shiver on a winter's night when the winds bellow down the chimney, and the frost creeps high on the window-pane, what must it be for the chickadee and the snow-bird who are perching side by side in the cedar-tree near the house? The wind rocks the tree so that they can scarcely keep their perch; the snow sifts in upon them, and the bitter cold bites their bare toes. When the piazza floor groans and cries aloud against the numbing frost as you
step upon it, what must it be for bare toes clinging to frost-covered limbs?

If you shiver in your warm bed with plenty of clothes piled upon you, and a soapstone at your feet, what think you of the quail and the partridge who make their bed this night in the snowbank, all unmindful of the fox who may dig them out and eat them before morning, or the sudden freeze that may lock them under the crust where they may die miserably of slow starvation?

If your own cosy parlour is cold during the great blizzard, how fares it with the jay and the crow who roost at night in the top of a hemlock in the deep woods where the trees are loaded with snow and gemmed with frost? There the wind howls in the naked tree-tops like a thousand demons and the strong trees thrash their mighty arms and groan and shriek
for mercy, crying out against the elements.

A friend of mine while snow-shoeing in the woods near here noticed a black object under the crust at his feet. He kicked away the snow and pulled out a crow who was frozen stiff. He took off his snow-shoes and began digging, and in a space of twenty or thirty square feet uncovered nearly fifty crows, all dead like the first.

They had plunged under the snow to keep warm on a winter's night, and to escape a blinding snowstorm. The snow had turned to rain, and this had frozen making a stiff crust, and the whole flock had perished.

Within thirty feet of the window where I am writing, this very day crows have been shaking frozen pears from a tree and then lighting on the snow to eat a
cold meal. Their fear of man is great, but their fear of starvation is greater.

A piece of pork rind or a bit of suet nailed to a conspicuous post or tree has saved many a chickadee or snow-bird from starvation. A handful of grain thrown upon the snow has sent many a flock of buntings on their way rejoicing, and it did not cost the giver a cent.

A box of corn at the corner of the barn may keep alive the spark of life under the coat of some improvident squirrel whose winter store has run low.

The crow and the jay will also find your bounty, and the sight of the blue-coated and black-frocked rogues is enough to repay one for his trouble.

Besides, the corn and the golden grain are the bounty of the God of harvest who fashioned the jay and the squirrel and also the face of man after his own image.
Friends in Need

All creatures he has given into our keeping, and the fear of man is upon all things. Let us show mercy and good will, for with what measure we mete kindness unto the lesser creatures, the same shall be meted unto us by the great Father.

There is sweet companionship, too, in the confidence of these little friends who come pecking at our windows, and they will repay us with gleeful chirps and twitters and wise nods of their dainty little heads.

Do you know the ruby kinglet, a mite of a bird only four or five inches in length? Think of this little creature pitting his small wit and his smaller strength against midwinter and all its terrors, before which deer and elk and even the strong moose frequently succumb.
Then cast your bread upon the waters. The handful of grain and the pork rind mean so little to you and so much to the birds. It will save life that is a precious and holy thing. Let us be friends indeed to these little friends in need, and their companionship and confidence and dainty manners as they partake of our bounty will be its own rich reward.

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