

burrowed sand. They put their backs against the sandy wall, and faced the foe with valor worthy of a better cause, uttering hoarse croaks, and snapping their bills in impotent protest. But what avails it to prolong the agony?

Mother Scrubhard saw her opportunity when she was on the point of abandoning the chase, one more flump, and she was in the trench. Then, like a gladiator of the return class, throwing out a flap of her shawl, she enveloped the birds in its folds; and after a deal of clumsy manoeuvring, she succeeded in cramming first one, and then the other bird into her basket. She jammed down the lid, made it fast, caught up the basket, and set off for home.

There she arrived at last, wearied by the tedious march. The basket had proved a heavy burden, and she put it down with a peevish impetuosity, which must have caused an extra spasm of discomfort to the imprisoned birds. What did she care?

She would just take off her hat and shawl, and then she would ring their necks, and hang them up in her larder, and make Punchey pluck them when he came back from market.

Well, so she did—as concerned the hat and shawl. And she had every intention of performing the second part of the programme. But when she put a hand into the basket and pulled out a struggling bird, and brought the other hand to bear, to feel the bird and estimate its plumpness, she was staggered to find the wretched thing little more than “a bag of bones,” as she said. For truly, in spite of Harry Dawson’s daily doles of meat, the gulls had never enjoyed what might be called a square meal.

A gull’s appetite, as Dr. Porchester remarked, is voracious. In the wild state gulls like to gorge themselves with fish whole and wholesome. Odd scraps of mutton and beef make but a poor substitute for nature’s more generous and nutritious diet. Furthermore, it is probable that the gull, which flew so grandly on that blithe May day, being stronger than the others, had always managed to get the lion’s share of Harry’s meat. Anyhow, when Mother Scrubhard felt over her captured birds, she found them in as sick and sorry a condition as could badly be.

“You miserable critters!” she exclaimed, with withering disdain. “After giving me all that trouble! Call yourselves pigeons? Why, I’d be ashamed to stick you up as bogarts in a cornfield! You’re not worth wringing, let alone plucking! No—it ain’t no use struggling and making a fuss. Drop it, I say.—Would you?—You’re not going to get off so cheap, my young sea-crows. I’ve got you, and I’ll keep you. I’ll see if I can’t put some meat on your scraggy carcases before we think of pie. Come along!”

She bundled the birds once more into the basket, and took them off to the bit of back-garden behind the cottage, where there was a make-shift fowl-yard, put together with bits of board and wire netting. A fox had lately got in

and made havoc of her poultry stock, so the premises were to let, and that was the only bit of luck about the job, as she expressed it. She had a way of talking herself when alone, for company’s sake.

Mother Scrubhard accordingly turned the gulls loose in the fowl-yard, and at once took measures for the fattening. She tossed in a few decayed cabbage-stumps and ends of week-old bread, and a heap of odds and ends from the dust-hole, including tea-leaves, then ancient brews that had done service in cleaning her kitchen floor. And having wasted more time and trouble than the precious birds were worth, as she said, she returned indoors to bustle about her house-cleaning. There we may leave her.

Harry Dawson was much distressed on Sunday morning, as the gulls had not returned. He consulted Miss Pownester, who advised him to go and look for them. She said he might take a friend out in the afternoon—for, as a rule, Sunday walks were not allowed.

So, after dinner, Harry and a companion set forth on a search expedition. The companion was known among us at the time by the name, *Jemmy Jar-jar*. He was none other than *Jemmy Browser*, whose history has already been set forth at length. He once wrote to his uncle, *George Towser*, asking for a pot of jam. Uncle Towser responded with that large-hearted generosity so eminently characteristic of his nature.

He sent *Jemmy* a noble stone-ware jar that stood up two feet in height, with circumference in proportion—a regular mammoth of a jar, with a label inscribed in enormous capitals, *Household Jam, Strawberry, 12 lb. net*. We came in to tea, one evening, and there stood that gigantic monument before *Browser’s* plate. Such a hum of wonder and admiration ensued, that silence for “grace” was not easily obtained. Nothing short of a gravy-spoon was of any use in exploring the depths of *Browser’s* jam-jar, and its memory can never have faded from the mind of any Highland boy who tasted its contents. We may have forgotten our Greek verbs, or the gender of a Latin noun, but *Jemmy’s* jam-jar—never!

Harry and *Jemmy* went into the wood. They called at the white house by the sawmill, where the great chestnut trees grew—the famous “*Cheeser-land*” of October fame, where pocketfuls of sweet chestnuts were to be had for the picking-up. What boilings in old biscuit-tins, what roastings at the school-room fire on chill afternoons we had, between football and tea-time!

No news of the missing gulls was to be heard at the white house. *Farmer Cox* said it was a wild-goose chase they were after.

“If they were a dog we could whistle for them,” said *Jemmy*.

“We may whistle for them, though they ain’t,” said *Harry*; “but I doubt if we shall catch them. Pity we’ve forgotten the salt. It’s jolly being out here, anyhow. Let us go to the *Fritillary*