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## The People of the Hollow

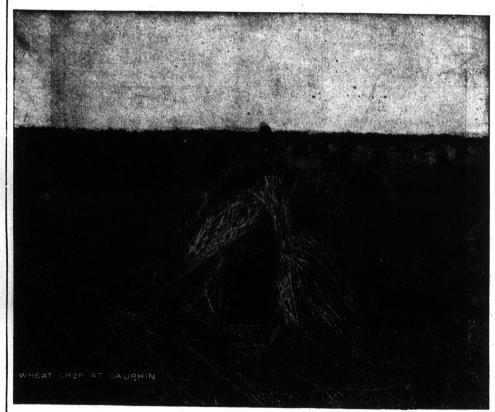
QUEAL! Flop! The baby raccoon fell a matter of eighteen feet from the hole in the great hollow oak to the ground below. This was purely an accident, be it understood, yet it was one of those accidents that Nature seems to have designed for the special training of her infant kindred.

For a little while the baby raccoon lay very still, blinking incredulously at the sunlit world around him. Already he had learnt one great lesson concerning itnamely, the world is hard; it is not pleasant to fall upon it from the oak tree. Then, having overcome his complete dismay at the unexpected turn of events, he proceeded to make known his predicament by loud whimpers of anguish.

Almost immediately the face of the mother coon appeared at the hole in the great gnarled oak above. It was a strangely rounded face with ears acock and pointed muzzle, a face which for the most part was of a dull grey, though about each eye was a patch of black which gave it a pathetic and lachrymose expression. Succeeding the face appeared the body of the animal—a body some thirty-three inches in length from tip to tip, and about the quietness of the place which of a dull grey color, though about the flanks seemed to whisper, "This is the time when

The oak tree was hollow to the root, though the one communication between its interior and the outside world was by way of the large hole some eighteen feet from the ground. A few yards to the north of the tree a clear brook trickled through the woods, its banks fragrant with sage and wild mint, while some hundred yards lower down this stream had been so dammed by beavers that it had widened out into a series of still lagoons. The forest was one of oak, birch, poplar and maple, while about the roots of the heavier timber the tangle of undergrowth was so dense that no animal larger than a lynx could have found a comfortable way through it.

One would have thought that the thrilling escapades of that June afternoon would have temporarily satisfied the young coons' thirst for adventure, but this was by no means the case. That night they became restless, while the world outside, no longer radiant with sunshine and gaudy insects, but peaceful and quiet in the radiance of the full moon, lcoked very enticing. There was something about the quietness of the place which



Good Wheat Yield at Dauphin, September 1, 1913

the hair was tipped with dark brown, or a deeper shade of yellow. The tail, long and bushy, was the most distinguishing feature, for it was ringed with black in so conspicuous a manner as to declare to all and sundry—"this slow-moving, black-eyed beast is a coon."

Slowly and cautiously, hanging head downwards, the old raccoon proceeded to descend the tree, her laborious manner suggesting that she would have made better progress had she attempted the feat tail foremost. But her gaze was fixed upon her little one, and reaching his side she sniffed him over to make sure no hurt had befallen him. Then grunting softly she led him back to the tree and began to ascend, looking round to see that he was

following.
Squeal! Flop!

A second baby raccoon fell from the heavens, and struck the ground with a sodden thud. With a whimper of terror this new arrival rushed towards his little brother, and the two disconcerted youngsters comforted themselves by tucking their heads out of sight beneath each other's stomachs.

At that moment a sharp scratching sounded overhead, and looking up the mother coon saw the third member of her family clinging desperately to the bark, and evidently in imminent peril of a fall. Taking in the situation the mother ran up the tree, took the stranded youngster by the scruff of the neck, and placing it between her forepaws conveyed it back to the nest. This done she returned for the other two, and escorted them in a similar manner back to safety.

the large grey beasts of the hollow oak should go a-hunting."

The young coons were nearly three weeks old, and since they had already shown a desire to leave the nest that night their mother conveyed them one by one to the ground. This completed she sat at the foot of the tree and uttered a soft "whoo-hoo," not unlike the call of an owl. Almost immediately a second raccoon appeared from nowhere in particular—a fierce and gnarled old male whose body bore the scars of many a rough encounter. He sniffed at the cubs suspi-ciously, then evidently deciding to ignore them henceforth slouched off in the direction of the beaver ponds, his wife and family following.

The journey was by no means uneventful. On the way they met a skunk, and the whole family stepped aside to allow this conspicuous brown and white freebooter full use of the runway. Not that the skunk would have attacked the coons, for he knew them to be fierce and terrible fighters, but it was part of his creed that he moved aside for no one, and the woodland folk, in due respect to his methods of warfare, never disputed the matter. Secondly the small member of the family—he who ha irst from the nest—found his proposed by a dead rampike one three in height, and being an interprising young person essayed to climb over the top of it instead of fellowing the trail. Unfortunately the rampile who has been a proposed by the trail. the rampike was hollow, and on reaching the summit he fell headfirst into the interior, and there remained.

Extracting him was no easy matter and led to a squabble between his parents.