

a big pine tree, and took a long time to cut it down ; just as the tree was ready to fall, and was wavering to and fro, the squirrel, who had kept on the topmost bough, sprang nimbly to the next tree, and then to another, and by the time the great pine had reached the ground, the squirrel was far away in his nest, among his little ones, safe from guns, hunters, and dogs."

"The black squirrel must have wondered, I think, nurse, why so many big men and dogs tried to kill such a little creature as he was. Do the black squirrels sleep in the winter as well as the flying squirrels and chitmunks?"

"No, Lady Mary, I have often seen them of a bright sunny day in winter, chasing each other over logs and brush-heaps, and running gaily up the pine trees. They are easily seen, from the contrast which their jetty black coats make with the sparkling white snow. These creatures feed a good deal on the kernels of the pines and hemlocks ; they also eat the buds of some trees. They lay up great stores of nuts, and grain for winter use. The flying squirrels lie heaped upon each other, for the sake of warmth. As many as seven, or eight, may be found in one nest asleep. They sometimes waken, if there comes a succession of warm days, as in the January thaw ; for I must tell you, my dear, that in this country we generally have rain and mild weather for a few days in the beginning of January, when the snow nearly disappears from the ground. About the 12th,* the weather sets in steadily cold again—then the little animals retire once more to sleep in their winter cradles, which they rarely leave till the intense cold weather is over."

"I suppose, nurse, when they awake, they are glad to eat some of the food they have laid up in their granaries?"

"Yes, my dear, it is for this that they gather it in the milder weather ; it also supports them during the spring months, and, possibly, even during the summer, till the grain and fruits are ripe again. I was walking one day in the harvest-field, where my brothers were cradling wheat. As I passed along the fence, I noticed a great many little heaps of wheat lying here and there on the rails, also upon the tops of the stumps in the

* This remark applies more particularly to the climate of the Upper Province, where the January thaw generally occurs.