

The boys noticed that their gold-fish changed color three times,—the young ones being black, then gradually turning to a crimson gold color, then becoming white or pearl-color, and, lastly, becoming white all over. Some, however, did not change at all, but retained their original black. They proved themselves to be extremely hardy, living and multiplying whether the water became very warm in summer, or whether frozen over in winter. In process of time the pond fairly swarmed with them, until the boys enlarged its dimensions, by scooping it out to twice the original size. They frequently amused themselves with feeding them, until the fish became perfectly tame. Bill Spangler, who seemed to be more fond of pets than the others, taught them to rise to the surface of the water by drumming on a piece of board. On such occasions their great broad sides, on a bright summer day, could be seen glistening in the sun all over the pond. They took food readily as it was thrown to them, such as crumbs of bread or crackers, dough, worms, or grasshoppers.

Their pond of gold-fish became so great a curiosity that the neighbors came from far and near to see it, though it never was a source of much profit. Uncle Benny considered it a recreation as well as a study, and about the cheapest amusement that could have been devised. It cost only a little labor to establish it, and was a permanent object of interest.

But their amusements were not always exempt from accidents. One day when the boys were waiting near the barn for the first music of the dinner-horn, Bill Spangler thought he would amuse himself a few minutes, by way of filling up time, with currying up the pigs. Taking up his long stick with the old curry-comb on one end of it, he reached over the side of the pen to begin operations. But he had scarcely begun to scratch among his pets, when his eye lighted on a strange animal squatting down in a corner of the pen. Bill had never before seen such a creature, and did not know what it was. He thought it a beautiful little thing,—about a foot long, of dark color, with whitish stripes running down its back, a bushy tail, and snort legs. Bill gazed and wondered, and stopped currying the pigs. It presently occurred to him that he would stir up the strange animal with his curry-comb, to learn a little more about what it was. So, reaching over to where it lay, he began poking at it quite vigorously.

The beautiful little stranger was very far from relishing this unceremonious kind of treatment, and, making a sudden jump round, presented his tail to Bill instead of his head. This so amused bill that he poked a little harder, expecting another equally funny movement. But, in place of any-

thing to laugh at, the animal suddenly discharged at Bill a stream of something worse than any brimstone he had ever smelt. It seemed to have taken direct aim at his face. The poor boy was half stifled. He thought, at the moment, that at some time or other he had encountered all kinds of loud smells, but was now satisfied that this was the loudest and most terrible of all. Everything around him seemed to turn blue,—his eyes were half blinded, and he began to feel like vomiting. What became of the animal he neither knew nor cared, having worse things to think of. In his terrible distress he set off for the house. The horn had blown for dinner, but Bill had not heard it; and, as to appetite, it had vanished.

He entered the door with his hands over his face, sobbing and crying, and found the family at dinner. Instantly every one dropped his knife, and began snuffing. Then a sudden puff of wind came in at the door, and the whole dinner-party started up as as if they also had had brimstone put under their noses, at the same time uttering all sorts of cries. The girls ran out of doors with their aprons over their faces, and Mrs. Spangler screamed out,—

"Where have you been? What's the matter with you?"

"O, I don't know," replied Bill, crying louder than before.

"Get out of the house!" exclaimed his mother. "What on earth ails you?"

"Not much, I guess," replied the father, quietly, "Fighting with something, I reckon."

"Yes," added Uncle Benny, "fighting a skunk!" and the old man, in spite of the smothering atmosphere that now filled all that part of the house, sat down, and laughed so heartily as to rouse the anger of Mrs. Spangler even to telling him he had better clear out also.

The fact was, every one was glad to get out into the open air without waiting to be told. It was also too true that Bill had been amusing himself with that most dangerous rural plaything, a skunk, and had suffered the terrible baptism which invariably follows the indulgence of such a recreation.—Severe as it is, it somehow never fails to draw forth the ridicule of all witnesses, while it but rarely excites the sympathy of any.

But an onslaught of this kind is experienced by many country boys at some period of their lives. Those who courageously creep under barns in search of eggs are often driven out upon the double quick, feet foremost, by attacks of this kind, getting so much more than they bargained for as never to have pluck enough to risk a second skirmish with such an enemy. Then at night, when walking along a narrow path, or in the open yard around the house, the unseen enemy lies in wait, and instead of get-