

STORIES
POETRY

The Inglenook

SKETCHES
TRAVEL

DONALD'S TOAD.

"I mean to be a naturalist," announced Donald Weed.

"Good!" exclaimed his sister Dortha, "right here is a subject for you," and she pointed to a toad that had just hopped out from under the doorstep. "See how those jewels in his head are regarding you. I wouldn't wonder if he was studying you."

"And here is another subject for you. Tell me, if you can, how that soft worm over there can bore into the hard ground. Mr. Naturalist, you are in luck! It isn't every student can have his lessons put before him as easily as this."

"But I don't intend to spend my time on toads and worms," Donald answered. "When the time comes I am going to distant countries to learn about strange and unknown creatures or to dig for the bones of those now extinct."

"I know of a great naturalist who thought it worth his while to spend much time studying the earthworms in his garden," said Donald's Uncle Roger looking up from his paper. The world isn't in the habit of revealing its secrets to those who do not first show themselves worthy in the places where they are put. Come, I will give you till the end of summer to learn what you can of this little neighbor who lives under your own doorstep. If your report is worthy of your subject, I agree to give you that Natural History I heard you wishing for this morning."

"Jupiter! Uncle Roger, I'll do it—if I get warts all over my hands!" exclaimed Donald.

During the summer the family were made aware of various stages in Donald's investigations, and Dortha declared that Don was back with old Pharaoh and had toads in his bed chamber.

At length there came a day when winter looked fast with a key of frost all the dwellings of the little people that burrowed in the earth and lived under doorsteps. Then it was that Donald came to his uncle and said:

"Well, Uncle Roger, Warty and I have to part company for a while; and I am ready to report what I have learned about him and his relatives:

"I find toads very interesting; in fact, one summer isn't long enough to master my subject. I have studied living specimens mostly, but I have had help from other sources, for I have read everything I could find with the word 'toad' in it."

"Wise men had thought toads of so much importance that they have given them a long name. But my particular specimen has learned to answer to the name of Warty. The name is appropriate, and he likes it. The proof of this is that he has learned to come when called by that name."

"Early in our acquaintance Warty disappeared. I feared I had lost him, but I learned from books that it is the habit of toads to make trips in early spring to some pond or river where their eggs are laid. I went to our pond to see the eggs for myself. At first they look like strings of jelly-like substance. The masses and strings increase in size and in egg-like appearance, until at last young tadpoles are hatched. The tadpoles of toads I found to be blacker and smaller than those of their green, long-legged cousins, with whom they live until their tails and gills are lost. When they really become toads, they leave the water and seem to forget that it was ever their home."

"I had known Warty for some time before I learned that he could make a sound. One night in June I heard a low, happy trill that seemed to come from down near the end of the doorstep; but when I brought a light to investigate,

the sound stopped. I suspected Warty, though, and made up my mind if he had anything to say I'd hear it."

"Not many nights after I was paid for all my listening. But this time I heard a wild, clanging little hiccupping kind of a noise. It sounded like an outcry of alarm or distress, repeated so fast as to give the little thing no time to breathe. I hurried to bring a light. There was my toad. He was too excited to notice the light; in its glare he never so much as winked, but his poor little inflated throat throbbled fast with his cries of terror. There was Dortha's black kitten, with an unmistakable grin on his face as he kept striking Warty with none too velvety paws. The puffy body of the frightened toad looked like a bag of wind, and with my light on the off side I didn't need the X-rays to make visible Warty's backbone and some other things that were in the wind bag."

"I took the toad's part pretty quick, and dismissed the cat. Little by little the throbbing throat and the puffy body grew natural, and soon Warty ventured away in the darkness."

"The next step in my education came when I surprised Warty taking his early breakfast. A light shower had softened the ground and brought earthworms to the surface, and he was attempting to swallow a long angle-worm. The worm didn't mean to be swallowed, and as it wriggled and twisted I reckoned Warty would have to get something else for his breakfast. But by quick jerky motions of his neckless head the toad gained on the worm; his little 'hands' were handy in catching and holding it and pushing it into his big mouth. So Warty had his breakfast and the worm was 'taken in.'"

"For closer watching I brought Warty into the house and put him in a high window box. At first he seemed disturbed at being handled and his rough and clammy skin grew damp and sticky. This exudation, I have heard, serves as a defense against his enemies, and has given rise to the stories about a toad's spitting poison, etc. But kindness reassured Warty and he soon grew quiet and confident."

"Not long after being brought into polite society Warty proceeded to undress, or rather to take off his old suit and come out in a span new one. He used his 'hands' rubbing and pulling until the old skin was worked off and the new skin was seen shining and fresh with wart and spot. He got rid of the old skin by swallowing it."

"While I was obliged to furnish his three meals a day, I found his appetite and digestion rather remarkable, and I do not wonder that English gardeners have offered twenty-five dollars a hundred for toads to rid their gardens of insect pests."

"Instead of toads being poison-spitting, wart-producing and evil-eyed, I find them shy, gentle, inoffensive, even affectionate and useful. In winter they bury themselves in the ground and lie in a dormant state. Some toads have been known to live for nearly half a century. I suppose Warty has now begun on his five or six months' nap, and I hope no black cat may disturb his dreams."

Donald paused, extended his hand and exclaimed, "And I haven't a single wart, air!"

"Very good, Donald!" said his uncle. "All summer I have watched your investigations with an interest equal to your own. You have learned many things, and one is that we do not need to travel far to find subjects that repay careful study. You deserve your book, and here it is."

The Congregationalist and Christian World.

PERSONAL DEALING.

Many years ago Mr. Gladstone heard of two young men in the village who had become notorious for their drinking habits, and he determined to make an effort to save them. He invited them to see him at the castle, and there, in "the Temple of Peace," as his motory was called, he impressively appealed to them to change their ways, and then knelt with them and fervently asked God to sustain and strengthen them in their resolve to abstain from that which had hitherto done them so much harm. The sequel can not be told better than in the language of one of the men concerned, who says: "Never can I forget the scene, and as long as I live the memory of it will be indelibly impressed on my mind. The Grand Old Man was profoundly moved by the intensity of his solicitation. My companion is now a prominent Baptist minister, and neither of us has touched a drop of intoxicating drink since, nor are we ever likely to violate an undertaking so impressively ratified in Mr. Gladstone's library."

THE NATURAL WAY.

"Why is it that your girls know all about housework, baking, cooking, cleaning, etc., and seem interested in everything that pertains to the home, the church, their wants and necessities, etc? asked one mother of another."

"Well, I have always let my children work with me, was the mother's answer. "From the time they were babies and sat in a high chair beside me while I baked pies or mixed bread, they have always been at my heels. Of course they bothered me in my work and teased me for 'tough,' but that was the way they learned everything. And that is where mothers generally fail in this respect—they put the children off in another room, or send them out to play, out of the way; whereas these little ones might be learning right along. My little girls learned how to make pies in this way: They had little pretins, and also rolling-pins and tny mixing bowl, and their pies were made in exact imitation of mine. When I made bread they also made little loaves in their pans, and the tiny biscuits were as cute as could be! When I ironed they also ironed on a chair beside my ironing table, and their small flat-irons were put to good use on ironing day. So it was with all of my work. They worked along with me, and it often was as much fun for me as for them, and they were always lively company. Among their toys for Christmas or birthday presents were these tiny imitations of my culinary tools as mentioned above; also little brooms, sweepers, tny tubs, wringers, wash-boards and the like. And the nearer they were like the real article the better the little girls were suited."

"When I made a pudding they had to watch the proceeding; when I cooked anything or canned or pickled they helped do what they could. When I dressed a fowl or a rabbit, they always were at my elbow. As I said before, they were 'lots of bother' many times; when I was in a dreadful hurry it took patience to answer their numerous questions and wait on them, but it paid in the end, for my girls can do everything in the domestic line, and I'm proud of it. Many a time when 'mother' is late in getting home from some meeting or call, or when she is very tired or indisposed, what a comfort it is to know that these little girls, not yet in their teens, can get a meal as quickly and neatly and deftly and as cheerfully as the most experienced and capable housekeeper of forty or fifty."—Ex.