

Voices of the Night.

By C. W. NASH.

WHAT very different appearances well known places present at early morning, mid-day, twilight and after nightfall. With the various sights and sounds of nature during the first three parts of the day, people are more or less familiar; they have been in the habit of noting, unconsciously perhaps, the changes which take place between sunrise and sunset, and so the general aspect of the landscape under the changing light is not strange to them, and rarely excites comment. Natural sounds, too, are generally understood, and in a way, recognized; the creaking of trees, swayed by the wind; the ripple and wash of waters; the buzzing of insects, notes of birds and other animals fall upon accustomed ears and cause neither surprise nor alarm, but after darkness closes down conditions are altered, the path through the bush which is travelled with assurance earlier in the day, is now followed in doubt; well known trees have lost their identity and become merged in the general blackness; sight can no longer be relied upon as a perfect guide, and the senses of touch and hearing become painfully acute. A nervous person under these circumstances is apt to become fidgety and unhappy, to imagine all sorts of queer things, and at last develop a clear case of fright, should one of the unknown voices of the night break the solemn silence

with a cry, which it seems to the uninitiated, could only have been produced by some terrible creature in search of human prey or by an evil spirit in agony. It is said that a whole company of Highlanders were one night, during the war of 1812, awakened by the sepulchral notes of a Great Horned Owl and promptly fled from their camping ground, under the impression that the "auld deil" himself was after them. There is something uncanny about the voices of all the owls, but under certain conditions as to time and place, their notes have a charm which appeals strongly to me. One evening many years ago I heard an owl concert under most favorable circumstances. I was camped on the bank of the Assiniboine River at a spot where the timber was large on both sides. In front of this and along the border of the river was a belt of willows and alders, borne down and tangled by the ice of many winters, which had been carried through and over it by the spring freshets. The sun had gone down, but it was not dark, for the after glow had lighted up the water with golden reflections. There was absolute silence save for the splash of a muskrat playing under the bank or a fish rising at a fly. Silently as a shadow, a large bird floated over the tangle of willows and gently alighted on the top of a high snag almost in front of me. From this perch the great bird could see all around it, and, after careful scrutiny,