

TWO PET SQUIRRELS

by Ethelwyn Wetherald

ONE day last April a squirrel made its way through a hole in the woodhouse roof and skittered down the rough sides and rafters till it reached the table on which stood a pail of apple parings and a pan of chicken feed. The family in the adjacent kitchen held differing views regarding this occurrence. One declared the intruder should be shot, because "squirrels are destructive little brutes." The second maintained that it should be encouraged, because "squirrels are adorable little loves." The third, who was indifferent, sided with the second, because the shortest footpath to peace is to side with the one who is most in earnest. The family numbering only three, the matter was settled.

So far so good. The would-be destroyer simmered down, the determined preserver bubbled over with joy and pride, little dreaming that the hot water into which she has a rare gift for getting was also bubbling over in the near future. Or to change the figure to the words of the poet:

"I made the cross myself whose weight
Was later laid on me."

Or, as Lyman Abbott reminds us, "Men gather with their own hands the fuel to feed the flame that is not quenched." The appropriateness of this reference to fuel to the woodhouse which is the scene of my story, will at once be appreciated by the discerning reader.

Not that anything very dreadful happened; merely the cares and responsibilities connected with the raising of a young and wholly unexpected family. On the floor, not far from the woodhouse table, is a small collection of old iron—the grate and other paraphernalia belonging to a disused coal range. On the rafters above reposes a box originally built to convey a typewriter from Toronto, but for years used as a receptacle for those unlucky manuscripts which are neither lost nor gone before. Evidently the prospective mother found them well suited to her present requirements. What a pity squirrels cannot be editors!

A month or two later, while loafing and inviting my soul in the old rocking chair that is waiting with the pathetic patience of age to be split up into kindlings, my attention was attracted to a tiny, tawny object, rudely thrust from its nest by the maternal paw, and coming kerplunk on the iron below. It was followed almost instantly by a second and a third. Thus early did my baby squirrels matriculate from the far-famed University of Hard Knocks. Each righted himself with an appearance of polite unconcern, moved a few steps into the sunshine at the open door, and stood there apparently enjoying the view. It must have been a great surprise to them to find that the world is not entirely made up of such unenlivening objects as returned manuscripts and cold hard spiky iron.

But now their progenitress, wearing the slightly worried responsible air pardonable in the mother of triplets, came among them. Turning one of them over till it assumed a nearly circular shape, she picked it up as a cat does a kitten, and with long leaps fled to some region behind the belt of evergreens. The remaining little fellows nestled into my palm with an air of confidence and contentment that was irresistible. Their eyes were large, full and beautifully shaped, their ears small and worn close to the head, the tail bushy and long, the tiny paws of patrician narrowness, and the entire little figure captivating. Their very diminutive teeth, which they rubbed softly against a convenient finger nail, were "in the velvet," if such a phrase is allowable about teeth. They felt like grains of wheat when the harvest field is said to be "in the milk."

Reflecting that their mother might have plans of her own regarding their care and training, I left them in the doorway and returned to the house. A few hours later, chancing to pass that way, two little forms emerged from the catnip and pennyroyal that adorns the entrance, and ran to me with the unfeigned pleasure with which one greets an old friend. That perfidious parent had not returned!

What is more, she has not returned to this day! This supreme mark of her confidence was not appreciated by me as keenly as by the cat, which I could see quickening her pace as she approached me. Putting a helpless orphan on each shoulder, where they dug in their little claws and hung on squirrelfully, I sought the cyclopaedia to learn what infant red squirrels should be fed. Of course the cyclopaedia was silent on that point and overflowing with needless information on allied topics. One might as well consult a dream book as a cyclopaedia when knowledge of a specific kind is badly wanted. Not knowing what better to do, I warmed two teaspoonfuls of milk and emptied one into each little interior. After that they curled up on a cushion and slept for fifteen consecutive hours. Evidently milk is a powerful narcotic.

The next day they nibbled oatmeal flakes and curd, and the day following they fought in a picturesque manner over half a ripe strawberry. Running up a dress skirt to the waist, jumping thence to the table, where strawberries were in process of being stemmed, helping himself to a juicy specimen and sitting up with the berry between his paws, the tail curled up behind and the saucy little face all animation and pleasure, is a pretty sight. But they are not always frisking. About the middle of the afternoon their energies perceptibly wane. Heaviness overcomes them; they want to snuggle down to sleep. Nothing would induce them to show off before callers after 4 p.m. To crawl up to a familiar shoulder and hide their drowsy heads against a warm neck is all that can be expected of them then. Probably one reason for their excessive

weariness is that they are obliged to hear, day after day, the same old query, "Do they bite?"

No, they never bite except under extreme provocation. One of them having run down cellar I snatched him by the hind leg from the edge of a custard that was cooling on the floor, and he turned quickly with a protesting squeak and "nipped" the restraining finger. But it was too gentle to be called a bite.

They are the most captivating of pets, making pictures in every posture, but I seriously question whether it was wise to be the indirect cause of their existence. Had their mother been shot last April I would not now be overloading the stomach of the family cat with fried ham and eggs, roast chicken and Irish stew, so as to prevent any possible desire for fresh squirrel. That pampered feline now lies lazily in the shade, as indifferent to the baby squirrels as to the syringa blooms that fall from above. But even yet my fears are not ended. The pitter-patter of little feet racing across the kitchen floor would be pleasant enough were it not for the danger of stepping on several of them. Their teeth are evidently growing stronger, for there is a long rent in the heavy curtains between dining-room and parlor, on which they love to swing. Yesterday I had to separate one of them from a sheet of sticky fly-paper, to which he was strongly attached, and to-day the other one jumped out of a cut glass ancestral cream ewer when the sideboard door was opened. Put them outside and keep the screen door closed? By all means. But you see they have gnawed a hole near the lower edge of the screen, just large enough to admit a small squirrel. The minister and his wife are coming to mid-day dinner to-morrow. I am afraid the squirrels are coming, too. They will chatter and scold, and probably jump on the table and snatch at the nuts and raisins. It is clear I shall have to go to the trouble of serving the meal in the summer-house, where these animated sylvan accompaniments will not jar too plainly on cultured nerves. Verily Lyman Abbot spake truly when he intimated that we gather with our own hands the fuel to feed the flame that consumes us.

HERE AND THERE

OUR Miss MacMurchy, President of the Canadian Women's Press Club, who went over to write up the Coronation for the Publishers' Press, is being much entertained. The last report brings the news that the Society of Women Journalists gave a Coronation dinner in her honour, at the Criterion Restaurant. Miss MacMurchy sat to the left of the President, Mrs. Bedford Fenwick, who occupied the chair, and directly to the left of Mrs. Katherine Cecil Thurston.

She later responded to the toast of the society, proposed by Mr. Israel Zangwill, the well-known playwright.

Many of the guests came in costume, going from the dinner to the Shakespeare Ball, at Albert Hall, later the same evening. A brilliant spectacle was here presented, there being four thousand dancers who took part, among whom were such notables as Ellen Terry, who came as Beatrice, the Duchess of Westminster, as Queen of France, Viscountess Curzon as Margaret of England, Mr. F. E. Smith, K.C., as the melancholy Dane. There were different parties arranged by different women, one of these, the Twelfth Night party, arranged by Mrs. Cornwallis West, was quite dazzling in its distinction. Mrs. West was Olivia, and Earl Craven the Malvolio, while the Duchess of Beaufort, the Duchess of Manchester, the Countess of Craven, the Marchioness of Ripon and Lady Sarah Wilson were ladies of the court.

At a recent meeting of the Montreal Women's Club, the members discussed the falling birth-rate, and the needlessly high death-rate, due, greatly, to slum life and unsanitary conditions. Mrs. Muldrew, who gave the address of the meeting, explained that it was the place of the women in the home to see that the conditions are favourable to health. Whereas the man is the main producer, woman does the managing of the household, and if she demanded purer milk and proper handling of it, much more good would be done. Particular attention was drawn to the work done by Dr. Helen MacMurchy, of Toronto, who inspects cows, milk and milkers,

and visits many dairies unexpectedly, in order to become acquainted with conditions as they are.

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At the big Empire dinner, given at the Lyceum Club, in London, early in June, Dr. J. A. Macdonald replied to the toast, "The Empire," and Miss Agnes Deans Cameron proposed "Links of the Empire." Miss Marjory MacMurchy, President of the Canadian Women's Press Club, is over there, and Mrs. Clare Fitzgibbon, also Mrs. Simpson Hayes, a well-known writer of the West.

Quite a striking procession of suffragettes traversed the streets of London, on the evening of June 17th, prior to their meeting in Albert Hall. Everything was done to attract the attention of the crowds, some of the leaders being dressed to represent famous characters in history, such as Boadicea, Mary Queen of Scots, Catherine of Arragon, and Queen Victoria. There were over fifty thousand of them altogether, all classes being represented, from prominent actresses and women writers down to humble factory women. Some prominent members included Miss Bryce, a daughter of John A. Bryce, of the House of Commons; Sarah Grand, the novelist; Annie Besant, President of the Theosophical Society; Lady Frances Balfour, Princess D'Huilett Singh, Mrs. Emmeline Pankhurst and Miss Sylvia Pankhurst. One of the brigades was made up of women pipers in Highland costume.

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I wonder what next? Really women are funny creatures, almost as funny as men, which is saying a good deal. The latest from the wire comes the news of two handsome members of the delicate sex, who have adopted masculine costume, as much as the law will allow. They are in Toronto, and wear men's hats, collars and cuffs and shirts. Their hair is cut short, and the dashing hat bands match their ties. Everywhere they are creating a furore, even detracting from the performance when they go to the theatre. For they invariably occupy seats in the front row. I wonder what will happen next month, in the way of feminine thrillers?