

glade or patch of browning meadow the field-mice and the savage little shrews went scurrying in throngs. The whirring coveys of the partridge went volleying down the aisles of golden birch, their strong brown wings making a cheerful but sometimes startling noise; and the sombre tops of the fir groves along the edges of the lower fields were loud with crows. In this populous world Red Fox found hunting so easy that he had time for more investigating and gathering of experience.

At this time his curiosity was particularly excited by men and their ways; and he spent a great deal of his time around the skirts of the farmsteads, watching and considering. But certain precautions his sagacious young brain never forgot. No trail of his led between the valley fields and his burrow on the hillside. Before descending toward the lowlands he would always climb the hill, cross a spur of the ridge, and traverse a wide, stony gulch where his trail was quickly and irretrievably lost. Descending from the other side of this gulch, his track seemed always as if it came over from the other valley, below Ringwaak. Moreover, when he reached the farms he resolutely ignored ducks, turkeys, chickens, — and, indeed, in the extremity of his wisdom, the very rats and mice which frequented