

IN OUR WOODS IN WINTER.

WHEN the panes of the windows are gleaming with a fairyland of lace work; when Jack Frost has built up the most exquisite tracery of ice-castles and snow-caves; and all the world seems hushed to sleep, Nature is at rest, but she is not idle. Silent and unseen she is working towards her magnificent spring. Important changes are going on in the sap and juices of plants and trees. Weak, fragile parts are being secretly strengthened. Roots are preparing themselves for shooting up. The larvæ of beetles and the pupæ of moths are hiding beneath the bark. The woodpeckers are boring for them, loosening the tree bark, poking and raking for them among the rotten wood. Listen to his harsh note! He prefers dead trees. There is more food there for him. He knows when the tree is dead sooner than we do, and he sends his bill deep down for the authors of the mischief.

See how some trees are more riddled with holes than others! How many feasts this tree-scavenger has had. He renders good service by devouring the grubs, but we can ill spare the beautiful tree. See his feet for claspings the bark! The sharp-pointed tail to balance his body against the tree! The beak shaped like a wedge, and as strong as steel! The tongue like a pick-hook, with its wonderful mechanism of stretching itself out to probe in and draw out the victims!

There is the noisy, clattering, screaming blue jay, with his bright violet coat, his long tail, his pointed crest! Watch his ridiculous manners, as he parades his beauty before your admiring eyes. A very conceited fellow is the blue jay. You never find him taking a back seat, he must always be soaring among the tops of the trees.

The winter brings a new coat to the fur animals, and in the mild days of spring you will see it rubbing and dropping off again. In animals which give us fur a new layer of soft warm down grows next the skin in winter, and this is why the fur of cold climates is more valuable than others.

The evergreens appear much fresher in winter than in summer. There are no brighter greens about them to interfere with their colour, and the contrast of the browns and greys of the trunks of trees, and of the white of the snow is very pretty. That noise in the woods, like the report of a gun, is the trees expanding. Small crevices, perhaps the holes made by woodpeckers and maggots, get filled with water. This freezes and expands, and bursts the structure of the wood. Further and further down the water trickles and freezes, until a great gap is made in the tree.

HERE'S A LITTLE EXPERIMENT WITH SNOW

before we go home. Seek out a pile of snow. With a stick make a long, narrow, deep hole in it, having the entrance to the hole away from the light. The light passing through the snow into the hole will be of a bright blue colour—a pretty light blue if the pile is not very big, and a darker shade if the snow is deep.

AN OLD GRUB.

Peace is better than joy. Joy is an uneasy guest. It is always on the tip-toe to depart. It tires and wears us out. Peace is not so. It comes more quietly. It stays more contentedly, and it never exhausts our strength, nor gives us one anxious forecasting thought.

GOLDEN WORDS OF CANADIAN POETS.

THE SILVER FROST.

A breath from the tropics broke winter's spell
With an alien rain which froze as it fell,
And ere the Orient blushed with morn,
A beautiful crystal forest was born.

BARRY STRATTON.

RAMBLES.

I have often been puzzled to know why men need so many pockets, and women can do with so few, and why women, who have, perhaps, only one to their name (or to their mantle), will insist upon placing it where they cannot reach it without losing their temper. The formal search which takes place in a street car, for instance, among our prim and sim young ladies, or the fussy rustling and poking which our stout and well-taken-care-of dames indulge in before they can find a five cent piece for an exasperating conductor, will, however, soon be a thing of the past. Gloves are being made with a small pocket in the palm, wherein a car-ticket or small change can be easily stowed away, and as easily found.

To be sure there is the satchel, the catch-all for notes, handkerchief, pencil, purse, spectacles, and the infinite variety of sundries in shape of patterns to match with which our young women arm themselves when they go shopping. But why our sisters should be fettered all day long in crowded streets and shops by a general receptacle for things which our brothers usually distribute over a dozen pockets, is one of those matters of fashion which, like many another matter of fashion, is as the law of the Medes and Persians.

We talk of the law of the Medes and Persians as if we took afternoon tea with them every day of our lives. We forget that that law had no reason for its existence, except the fact of its existence. All that a Persian King did or said was deemed worthy of being recorded, and was recorded simply because it had been done or said by him. He was surrounded by men whose duty it was to take note of his actions and words. His word was law. It was "written in the king's name, and sealed with the king's seal; and the writing which is written in the king's name, and sealed with the king's ring, may no man reverse." And sometimes his majesty was led by his own word into what we should now call a fix, and a very undignified fix, too. One of these ancient despots bearing the awe-inspiring name of Aga Mohammed Vihan, while in camp with his soldiers, said he would not move till the snow went off the mountain in the neighbourhood. Dame Nature, whose laws, by the way, are above those of Persia, treated his majesty rather cavalierly. She made the winter cold. The king held on. She made it long. He held on still. She made it tell on the men. They sickened and died. Still the king held out. He had spoken and he would perform. Till the snow removed, he would not. At length multitudes of men were sent with shovels to clear away the snow. The king marched on. His subjects bowed before him. He was worshipped as a deity.

RAMBLER.